

# HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR LODGE

Adapted from:

## “HOW 2 DRESS 4 LODGE”

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As leaders of the Masonic Fraternity in this district, you often are called upon to answer questions about Lodge practices and protocol. One question that sometimes has provoked discussion concerns what attire is deemed proper to wear when attending Lodge. In Virginia, the only guidance found in the Methodical Digest is in Section 3.01 titled, “How Brother Must be Clothed in Lodge,” and states quite simply “Every Brother must always appear in his Lodge properly clothed and in clean and decent apparel.”

This leaves a great deal of room for interpretation. Clearly outrageous and provocative attire should not be accepted, but other differences should not lead to impolite or unkind behavior on the part of one Mason to another. In this regard, the views expressed by a Minnesota Mason – one who is quite an accomplished Masonic scholar and author – are shared with you.

Which attire to wear that is deemed as proper when attending Lodge, is a hot topic in many Lodges. There are times when one Brother thinks another isn’t dressed properly for Lodge, and says so to him or others. Of

course, once words have been voiced, it's not possible to retrieve them. This behavior has caused stress to some Brothers and stress isn't a good thing: it can cause real problems – from strained relations to illness.

Looking for actual instructions on how a Mason ought to be dressed is tough to find in Grand Lodge Regulations. In my jurisdiction, however, a hint on what to do when dressing for Lodge can be found in the Grand Lodge of Minnesota Quest Book, which has the very first instructions the newly elected petitioner for the degrees receives from the Master and the Lodge. The instructions on how to dress are good for a candidate to know, and, I think, also good for all Masons to keep in mind, as they prepare to attend Lodge.

Here they are:

“Lustration, or the washing with water, was a rite practiced by our ancient Brethren, before any act of devotion. It symbolized the dissolution of past error and transgression, in preparation for the beginning of a new life phase.” “As you bathe, cleansing your body before you come to your initiation, think of the laving water as a symbol of such purification. Put on your freshest linen. Come as a suppliant.”

“Search your heart before you go to your investiture. Is there aught of hate, envy, meanness of spirit there? If so, do all that lies within your power to be rid of it. If you have any misunderstanding with any man, which can be corrected, do what you can to set this aright before you enter the Lodge.”

There is much to think about and learn in those two short paragraphs. To me, it seems reasonable to do our best to come to Lodge with a clean heart and body, to come with a pleasant outlook, eager and happy to spend time with our Lodge Brothers, to do our best to leave the work-a-day world outside of the Lodge building, and certainly outside of the Lodge room. Also, we should be dressed in our freshest linen. “Freshest Linen” is what a Mason should wear to Lodge.

Freemasonry does not dictate a certain kind of clothes to wear. It simply says we should wear our freshest linen. There are some Lodges where the custom, or possibly the Lodge by-laws, will dictate that members and visitors dress according to a certain “dress code”; if that’s the case, that’s just fine. I personally know of only one Lodge in my jurisdiction where there is a custom or a certain “dress code.” I like attending that Lodge; I have such a fine time there; it’s a Traditional Observance Lodge, and everyone attending wears either a tux or a dark suit. All visitors are informed of the dress code before they arrive, so it’s not a surprise to anyone.

In the other Lodges I’m familiar with, Masons come dressed as they prefer. Most Lodges are eclectic in attire, as is the male population, so it’s natural to see the Masons wearing a variety of clothing when they attend their Lodges. Getting back to “fresh linen,” the natural question to ask ourselves is, how fresh is the linen or clothing I’m intending to wear to Lodge?

One of the complaints I have heard voiced quite a bit is that there are Masons who come to Lodge still wearing their work clothes. Some “work

clothes” are easier to spot than others. Some men don’t own a suit or a tux, or if they have them, they prefer not to wear that kind of clothing, and do so only when they must.

One Mason, as a result of an illness, could no longer wear his “good” clothes, so he came to Lodge in clean bib overalls with a clean shirt: Contrast this with another Mason; one who did not have the same physical problem, and wore a suit and a tie to Lodge, but he also wore that suit and tie to work, and would be working right up to the time he got into the car to drive to Lodge: If comments were made on how each of them were attired when they arrived at Lodge, who should the favorable or unfavorable comments likely be about? Who was wearing their work clothes? Who actually wore the “freshest linen”?

As I mentioned earlier, when Masons comment – verbally or non-verbally – about how another Mason should dress for Lodge, it may cause stress, and a Mason should not experience stress when he attends his Lodge. In this regard, keep in mind another thing mentioned in Quest Book #1 is, “To a Mason, his Lodge is his Masonic home.” Being his home and the home of his Brothers, he and they should all dress in their “freshest linen,” and come into the Lodge with an open, accepting mind to enjoy the fellowship afforded by Masons assembling for enjoyment and for the learning that can and ought to be a part of every Masonic communication.

I guess the lesson here is that, within reason, tolerating variations in dress is more Masonic than embarrassing a Brother.