

THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE

Freemasonry is a great organization and we want to offer the advantages of membership to deserving men. But, while we seek to attract men to Freemasonry and increase our membership, we must not lower our standards. Thus, we take on a serious responsibility when we decide to give someone a petition or when we sign a petition. Fortunately, we are assisted in our efforts to guard the West Gate by an Investigating Committee.

CHOOSING THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE

The Virginia Methodical Digest provides the basic details about establishing the Investigating Committee. The Worshipful Master refers the petition to an Investigating Committee of not less than three members of the Lodge, no one of whom shall have been a voucher on the petition. The Investigating Committee makes an investigation and reports to the Master, or to the Lodge, on the moral and physical qualifications of the petitioner no later than the first stated communication after the expiration of eight weeks from the date the petition was presented in the Lodge. A Lodge may request another Virginia Lodge to conduct a supplementary investigation; the requested Lodge may comply as a matter of courtesy. [§Sec 2.95]

But there is much more to know about appointing an effective Investigating Committee. The Worshipful Master should appoint members who are both knowledgeable and personable and, in order to avoid bias, it is desirable for the Worshipful Master to select members who do not know the candidate. More specifically, the Worshipful Master should consider brethren who:

- Have a good understanding of Freemasonry, and can explain it clearly and coherently;
- Are active in the Lodge, and able to speak enthusiastically about Lodge activities;
- Are diplomatic and prudent, and convey a feeling of warmth and understanding to the potential new member;
- Are dedicated to doing a careful and thorough job;
- Are careful observers who will present an accurate and unbiased report to the Lodge; and,

- It is a good idea to ensure that at least one member of the Committee is of approximately the same age as the petitioner.
- It also is a good idea to include a newer member, so he can learn the proper way to conduct an investigation.

All of these factors are important because the members of the Committee will make a lasting impression on the petitioner and his family, and we want them to project a favorable image of our Lodge and Fraternity. They are also important because the Lodge will rely heavily upon the recommendation of the Committee.

WHAT THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE IS EXPECTED TO DO

The primary job of the Committee is to report on the moral and physical qualifications of the candidate, and whether he has a belief in a Supreme Being, but it also should determine that the petitioner understands what the Fraternity is all about and that he is joining for the right reasons.

As a minimum, the Committee is expected to conduct an interview in the petitioner's home to get a better sense of the person, his family, and lifestyle. If he is married, the interview should include his wife.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

The Committee should begin preparations for the interview by talking with the vouchers to determine how they know the petitioner and to find out additional details about him. This advance preparation will be of use when the Committee meets with the petitioner. The vouchers also may be able to suggest additional persons the Committee might interview in an effort to learn more about the petitioner.

The Committee chairman should get a copy of the petition from the Worshipful Master or the Secretary, and each member of the Committee should prepare for the interview by becoming familiar with the information supplied on the petition, taking particular note of:

- The petitioner's occupation and place of employment;
- Marital status;
- Number and ages of children;

- Health and physical status;
- Personal history; and,
- Whether he stands convicted of an offense in a civil, federal, or military court trial, other than minor traffic offenses.

The Committee chairman should call the petitioner to schedule a convenient time for the visit. If the petitioner is married, be sure to pick a time when the wife can be present. And it is a good idea to call the petitioner the night before the interview to confirm the appointment.

THE PERSONAL INTERVIEW

We only have one chance to make a good first impression so the appearance of the Committee members is important. Although a jacket and tie isn't mandatory, it is strongly recommended. Be sure to arrive on time, remembering that being too early is just as discourteous as being late. And refuse an alcoholic drink if it is offered; you are making an official visit – not a social call.

The Committee should start with introductions and a few pleasantries to break the ice and build rapport. Convey the regards and good wishes of your Worshipful Master and then give a very brief explanation about Freemasonry, the nature of the Lodge and what it does. Make it clear that a Lodge generally meets one or twice a month and that Freemasonry is family-friendly with activities for the whole family such as picnics and other social events. Finally, explain that because we take on obligations to help each other, we want to know a bit about the people we will be obligated to help. Moreover, since we are the kind of organization that you can be proud to join and one that our wives are proud to have us be members of, we have to be certain that the people who become a part of our organization are moral and upstanding individuals.

With this as background, the Committee can then begin the conversation with the petitioner. At the meeting the Committee should:

- Review the petition with the petitioner to determine that it is accurate and that nothing important has been omitted.
- Inquire about the petitioner's occupation, as well as his religious and community involvement to get a sense of the

person and family and to determine that he believes in a Supreme Being and is not an atheist.

- Establish that the petitioner is of high moral character.
- Ask why he petitioned in order to determine that his motives for joining are proper.
- Inquire if the petitioner has any serious physical disabilities – so we can seek a waiver from Grand Lodge.
- Explain that while the Lodge only meets once or twice a month, there is a larger commitment of time during the degree process to learn about the organization and complete the required memory work.

Naturally, as the conversation unfolds, follow up questions should be asked.

The Committee should not only be attentive to the reactions of his wife and family, but also ask whether the petitioner or his wife have any questions, and then be ready to answer those questions. The Committee should determine if the wife is supportive of her husband joining the Fraternity, and may wish to discuss the Order of the Eastern Star, DeMolay, Rainbow, and Job's Daughters, as these organizations may be of interest to the family.

The Committee should focus on the fraternal and social, the moral and philosophical, and the charitable aspects of Freemasonry. It should explain that Freemasonry is not a religion, but open to men of all religions, with a philosophy that is in keeping with religious devotion and good morals. The Committee also should explain that Freemasonry is not a political organization. Freemasonry endorses no candidates or political party, and permits no partisan political discussions within its Lodges. It does, however, instill patriotism and foster good citizenship. In all matters, Freemasonry teaches men to think for themselves.

Before you leave, ensure that the petitioner is informed of the:

- Meeting dates of the Lodge;
- Cost of yearly dues and assessments;
- Cost to receive the three Degrees;
- Commitment he must make when receiving the degrees and doing the required memory work.

Make the meeting as brief as possible; don't overstay your welcome, but make sure all questions are answered satisfactorily before you leave. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it. Write the question down; find the answer; and, provide it to the petitioner as soon as you can.

If possible, invite the petitioner and members of his family to a suitable Lodge function in order to introduce him to the Master and other Lodge members.

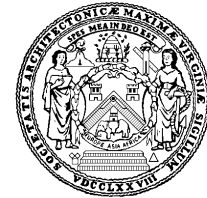
AFTER THE INTERVIEW

It is not a good idea to take written notes during the meeting. This practice is a distraction, does not help to build rapport or develop a relationship, and can impede the conversation. However, because memories fade and recollections become dim, it is important that the committee meet for just a few minutes right after the interview to compare notes. One of the members should serve as scribe and record the observations and opinions of the Committee in preparation for the report to the Master and the Lodge.

If during the investigation process, the Committee discovers a major character flaw or an effort to deceive by providing false information on the petition, there should be no hesitation to recommend rejection. And, if, as a result of what you have learned, you are unable to favorably endorse the petitioner, it is appropriate to give the Brethren who signed the petition the courtesy of a factual, private explanation. An unfavorable recommendation can be presented to the Master and he can report to the Lodge that the Committee did not offer a favorable recommendation. If the recommendation is favorable, the Committee should be prepared to present its findings in Lodge before the vote is taken.

Finally, the members of the Committee, along with the vouchers, should make every effort to be present when the candidate is receiving his Degrees. This ensures that the candidate sees some people in Lodge that he already knows and, thus, feels more comfortable. The vouchers and the Investigating Committee members also can make him feel welcome by introducing him to the other Lodge members.

For the Investigating Committee



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