

**GRAND LODGE of A. F. & A. M.
of
MARYLAND**



**A Guide to Reducing Suspensions for Dues
Delinquencies**

PREFACE

Membership, being critical to the health and success of our Lodges, must be more than names and numbers on a roster. Dues and fees are the financial means by which we support Freemasonry and enable the Lodges to perform its mission of making good men better. All Maryland Lodges must take proactive measures to offset the historical losses in membership, which they have experienced over the last 50 years.

Loss of membership can be attributed to death, suspension for non-payment of dues (SNPD) and demit. Our annual attrition from these approximates 720 of which 180 (25%) are from SNPD.

We have no control when a Brother is “called from labor”, but we do have ways to assist them from being suspended for non-payment of dues.

Every brother and his Lodge have invested time and resources in his membership. Membership is the Lodge’s greatest asset, and it is the duty of every Mason to safeguard and protect the assets of his Lodge.

This publication furnishes guidance in developing a structured approach in retaining membership. It offers recommendations on how to reduce losses from SNPD’s.

THE APPROACH (Things to do)

Committee– Appoint a retention committee to address NPD’s. Its members should:

- Through personal contact - Personally contact every delinquent Brother by telephone or face to face.
- Determine the reason – Find out why he has not paid his dues and share this information with the Worshipful Master.
- Offer assistance. – Depending on the Brothers circumstances, you may remit his entire dues or the lodge’s portion thereof on a year-to-year basis.
- Explain Demits - If the Brother is no longer interested in the Fraternity, explain and suggest the process of demit. This is the appropriate method to discontinue active status in Freemasonry.

MEMBERSHIP RETENTION COMMITTEES

Lodge Secretaries have many duties. In the area of membership, they issue the dues notices, collect the dues, and issue notification of intent to suspend members. To help maintain a sustaining membership base, Maryland Lodges are required to have a membership retention committee to investigate situations involving members who are in arrears.

PROMPT AND PERSONAL ATTENTION

Successful reduction of SNDP's requires a careful approach. The present procedure of sending out dues statements, notice of arrearage and suspension has not proven as effective as we envisioned.

Approaching each case with a personal touch is the best way to manage a potentially delicate situation.

When a member is in arrears, prompt communication by telephone may convince him to remit his payment.

If you know a Brother close to the delinquent Brother, approach him in confidence to find out if he is willing to make contact and encourage his friend to keep his financial obligation to his lodge. Through this contact, other information may come forth, which when confidentially shared with the committee, could prove helpful in retaining his membership.

When a phone call is not possible, a well-written letter to the Brother may be an effective alternative. The subject and content of the letter should be concise and express a tone of concern. The Appendix contains a sample letter offered for a reference guide. Regardless of the method of contact, always remind the member that one of the principal benefits of staying current with his dues is the extremely low cost which will provide him and/or his immediate family access into the Maryland Masonic Homes, if ever needed.

Due to extenuating circumstances, a member may not be able to afford the dues. Personal health problems, loss of income, catastrophic medical expenses are just some of the challenges our Brother may be facing. He may not be inclined to share this information unless asked. Therefore, it is up to the Lodge to contact the individual and determine if he wishes to continue being a member. If he does, the Worshipful Master should assign a committee to investigate the situation and report their findings and recommendation.

Regardless of the circumstances, we should not approach our Brothers with the attitude of a bill collector. We should not lecture, demand, coerce or threaten. The best approach is from one Brother to another, to help resolve our mutual problem.

REASONS FOR NON-PAYMENT OF DUES

There are myriad reasons for failing to pay dues including financial hardship, relocation, inability to manage personal affairs and failing health.

It is essential that Lodges maintain current contact information for each member. Sometimes a Brother will relocate without him or his guardians notifying his Lodge. **“Address Services Requested”** printed under your return address on Lodge mailings and staying in contact with a member’s guardians are excellent methods of keeping informed of a change in a Brother’s address.

If a Brother desires to terminate his membership, the lodge should determine the reasons for his decision.

Experience has shown the reasons may include:

1. Masonry is not what he thought it would be.
2. Meetings do not hold his interest.
3. There may be personal differences with other members.

This kind of information can be useful in managing membership retention.

SUGGESTED PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS

To reduce losses due to SNPD, Worshipful Masters must create vibrant and exciting programs along with motivating his line of officers to establish an environment that creates interest and excitement in Lodge members.

Each Lodge has its own personality based on its history and leadership. Over time, some of our Lodges have developed creative ways to encourage member participation by providing various programs. Programs with Masonic education, dinners, speakers, family involvement, themes, activities, interesting and creative communications, games and prizes have been effective in increasing attendance and retaining membership

There are a number of useful resources available to help with program planning. For example:

- The Grand Master's Award Program offers Lodges ideas on activities, which can inspire and hold members' interest.
- The annual Grand Lodge Leadership Conference covers many excellent approaches on how to generate interest among members and keep them actively involved.
- Masonic instruction and mentoring programs are effective ways of building the bonds of goodwill and fostering the development of true friendships.

CONCLUSION

Contained herein are an array of tools and methods on how to retain members. Unless they are used, they serve no purpose.

The execution and accomplishment of reducing SNPD using these tools and methods require leadership and teamwork. It is not a one-person job. All Lodge members must be a part of the membership retention efforts. A simple handshake, a smile, compliment, pat on the back, or just a phone call to say "Hello Brother _____, this is _____. How are you?" will make our Lodges stronger and make each Brother a better man by his participation.

Should a member in arrears express his desire to terminate his Lodge membership, the committee should suggest he separate via the demit process. This is the proper way for a Brother to withdraw his membership from his Lodge in good standing. Should he later reconsider, having obtained a "Demit" will facilitate his reinstatement in the Lodge.

Regretfully, there will be instances when after all due diligence is expended there is little more the Secretary can do than send the requisite correspondence as required by the Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Maryland.

Lodge leaders should create an atmosphere so compelling that our Brothers will look forward to attending their Lodge regardless of the evening's activity. The Lodge must be a haven so satisfying and fulfilling that voluntarily leaving the fraternity never enters their mind.

APPENDIX

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Brother _____,

I am writing to you out of concern because our Lodge records indicate that you have not yet paid your membership dues for 20XX.

While this may be merely an oversight on your part and you do not want your membership to lapse, we want to help if needed. Should there be any circumstance that does not allow you to pay your dues at this time, be it financial, health or other reasons please contact me: phone number _____ or e-mail _____ as soon as possible and I will do my best to help you in any way I can.

We, the Brethren of _____ Lodge No. ____, do not wish to lose you as a member. It is our sincere hope that you will avoid that possibility by sending a check for \$_____ for the current year's annual dues so that you may remain in good standing.

*May I remind you that should you be suspended from your Blue Lodge you will also be suspended from all rights and privileges that are associated with Masonic membership, including membership in all Collateral Bodies of Masonry, such as the Scottish Rite, York Rite, Shrine, Tall Cedars, Eastern Star, etc. **Perhaps more important** you also relinquish your right of entry for you and your family members into the Maryland Masonic Homes.*

We value your membership in the fraternity, and trust that this brotherly reminder will result in your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely and fraternally,

XXXXX X. XXXXXX

Chair- Membership Retention Committee