Fall 2026

riteNOW

THE MAGAZINE OF THE **VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH**



ON THE LEVEL

valleyofpittsburgh.org

In Memoriam

Since our last issue, the following members of the Valley of Pittsburgh have been called home:

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Ill.˙. Donald M. Murphy, 33°
Bro. Donald R. Elsbury, 32°, MSA

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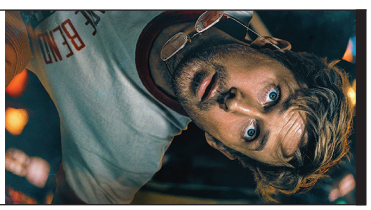
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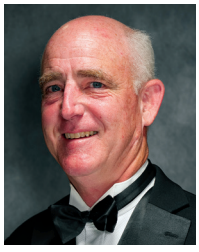
Meeting on the level is a phrase familiar to all Freemasons. Of course, we all strive for the ideal of meeting as equals, leaving our judgments, quarrels, and piques at the door. It takes forgiveness, trust, and a willingness to meet people where they are rather than where we wish they were. We hope you take something away from this issue's examination of just what it means to meet on the level.



VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH – 2026-2027

Meet Your Valley Officers

Gourgas Lodge of Perfection



Erich W. Gumto, 33°
Thrice Potent Master



David E. Thumm Jr., 32°
Deputy Master



Robert W. Lovic, 32°
Senior Warden



Thomas E. Ruch, 32°
Junior Warden

Pennsylvania Council of Princes of Jerusalem



Thomas J. Anke, 32°
Sovereign Prince



Thomas B. Baker, 32°
High Priest



Sean M. Tomasic, 32°
Senior Warden



Brian E. Peters, 32°
Junior Warden

Pittsburgh Chapter of Rose Croix



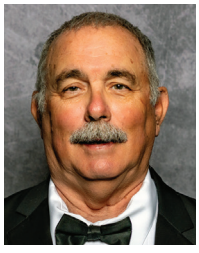
Michael R. Bahney, 32°
Most Wise Master



Christopher J. Cooper, 32°, HGA
Senior Warden



Abram C. Hayes, 33°
Junior Warden



David L. Brady Jr., 33°
Orator

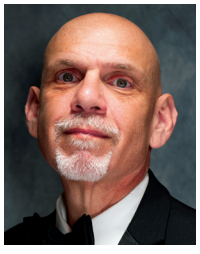
Pennsylvania Consistory



David L. Moore, 33°
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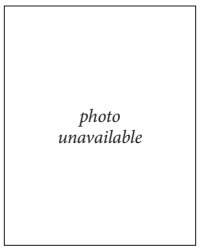
Peter A. Leary, 33°, MSA
1st Lieutenant Commander



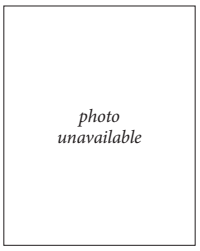
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Treasurer



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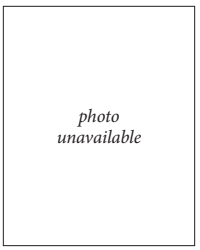
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Master of Ceremonies



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August 1, 2026 - July 31, 2027

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Robert W. Lovic, 32° . . . . . Senior Warden
Thomas E. Ruch, 32°. . . . . Junior Warden
William J. McNeal Jr., 32° . . . . . Orator
Guido A. DeAngelis, 33° . . . . . Master of Ceremonies
David W. Marconi, 32° .. . . . . Guard
Wayne J. Carothers Jr., 32° . . . . . Guard

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Thomas J. Anke, 32° . . . . . Sovereign Prince
Thomas B. Baker, 32° . . . . . High Priest
Sean M. Tomasic, 32° . . . . . Senior Warden
Brian E. Peters, 32° . . . . . Junior Warden
Scott D. Delval, 32° . . . . . Master of Ceremonies
. . . . . Captain of the Guard
Matthew P. Sinclair, 32° . . . . . Master of Entrances

Pittsburgh Chapter of Rose Croix

Michael R. Bahney, 32° . . . . . Most Wise Master
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Abram C. Hayes, 33°. . . . . Junior Warden
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Pennsylvania Consistory

David L. Moore, 33°. . . . . Commander-in-Chief
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Jordan L. Frei, 32°, MSA . . . . . 2nd Lieutenant Commander
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Robert F. Dunkle, 33° . . . . . MFS Representative (Alt)

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Peter A. Leary, 33°, MSA. . . . . Jordan L. Frei, 32°, MSA
Erich W. Gumto, 33° . . . . . Thomas J. Anke, 32°
Michael R. Bahney, 32° . . . . . David E Thumm Jr., 32°
Thomas B. Baker, 32° . . . . Christopher J. Cooper, 32°, HGA
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Thomas J. Anke, 32° . . . . . Michael R. Bahney, 32°

Deputy's Representatives

Vincent G. Monardo, 33°, MSA. . . . . Valley of Pittsburgh
Neil V. Reddington, 32° . . . . . Valley of Uniontown

Allegiance

The bodies of the Scottish Rite, sitting in the Valley of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, acknowledge and yield allegiance to the Supreme Council, 33°, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry for the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States of America whose Grand East is in Lexington, Massachusetts, and whose Officers are: Ill.·.Walter F. Wheeler, 33°, Sovereign Grand Commander, Ill.·.Keith E. Parkinson, 33°, Deputy for Pennsylvania. Other Active members for Pennsylvania are: Ill.·.Stephen Gardner, 33°, Ill.·.Mark A. Haines, 33°, Ill.·.Thomas R. Labagh, 33°, and Ill.·.Paul J. Roup, 33°.

The Active

A message from the Supreme Council Active for Pennsylvania

SUPREME COUNCIL

A Rising Tide

By Paul J. Roup, 33°

Throughout the pages of this issue of RiteNow, you will read stories about meeting on the level. Most of those focus on the idea that we meet as equals, no one above or below another, except for their stations within the lodge or body. The idea that we meet as equals is an essential tenet of Freemasonry, after all. It is what allows men of different vocations, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation to come together harmoniously to improve themselves and their communities.

While we typically think of meeting on the level as a sort of setting aside of things that might otherwise divide us, it can also be something more. We are all familiar with the saying, "A rising tide lifts all ships." Through our charitable works, Masons help individuals who, often through no fault of their own, have fallen on hard times. We give our time to civic projects. We donate to local charities. And through our many Masonic and Scottish Rite charities, we improve the lives of our friends and neighbors.



Paul J. Roup, 33°
proup@srnmj.org

> The idea that we meet as equals is an essential tenet of Freemasonry, after all.

Our Children's Dyslexia Centers provide much-needed tutoring to help struggling children read at or above grade level. The Abbott Scholarships (determined by our Valley's contribution to the Blue Envelope Appeal) provide higher education assistance. The Valley Hospitaler and the Grand Almoner's Fund are there to provide aid when our Brothers and their families need it most. The White Flower Society takes care of the widows of our deceased Brothers. The Membership Education Fund provides resources to help our members more fully understand the beautiful lessons of our Fraternity. And the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library preserves our written and physical history through its collections of books, regalia, and other artifacts of the Craft. Donating to any of these charities not only elevates the individuals benefiting from the assistance, but also enriches the community as a whole.

A rising tide lifts all ships.

The Scottish Rite, NMJ Vision statement reads, *"We will strive to be a fraternity that fulfills our Masonic obligation to care for our Brothers."* That's more than talk. It's a charge. And it does not mean that the governing body is responsible. The "we" in that vision statement is you, and it is me. Each of us must do what we can to ease the path for our fellows and our Brothers.

A rising tide lifts all ships.

As we approach the holiday season and the end of the year, please consider donating to any one of our Scottish Rite charities. Give what you can to help a child read, enable a young adult go to school, preserve our history, assist our widows, or educate our members.

This year's Night of Charity will take place on December 1 at 7:00 p.m. Tune it to learn more about the impact your donations can have. If you can't watch the livestream, visit ScottishRiteNMJ.org/charities or scan the QR code to learn more. □

The Potent

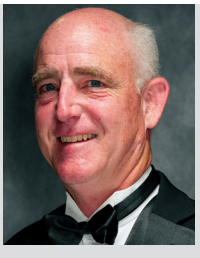
A message from the Thrice Potent Master of the Gourgas Lodge of Perfection

LODGE OF PERFECTION

Level Up

By Erich W. Gumto, 33°

As Masons, we meet on the Level. The phrase has become an idiom in the English language and, yes, Freemasonry is generally credited with its origin. By definition, an idiom is an expression whose total meaning cannot be understood from the literal definition of its individual words (e.g. 'Break a leg' means good luck not a wish of bodily harm). So, we meet on the level and in so doing set our group apart from society. Taking it one step further, are we suggesting that society is *un-level?*



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Maybe another word would work better, perhaps *uneven, rough, bumpy,* or *slanted.* Those words work for describing moments of life recently experienced. What is it about our meetings that offer such a contrast to the rest of the world? The regular business of the lodge, paying the bills, and hearing from the various committees is part of daily life in a sense. Pausing to pray with others is possibly unique for some – at least on a weeknight. Perhaps the ritual. Or is it the principles that we as Masons attempt to live up to? Is that the bedrock that makes the lodge room feel sturdy and resilient in a world that at times seems upside down?

> Use the principles of Freemasonry to stay true.

And why the level? There are certainly many tools in the Masons toolbox to pick from. A quick search online will reveal the transformation of this seemingly simple tool over the last five thousand years – from the laser levels of today back through the spirit levels developed in France in the sixteenth century. In Roman days, troughs of water were used to build highly efficient aqueducts that carried millions of gallons of fresh water over large distances on a daily basis. The first level was an A-frame level developed by the Ancient Egyptians. Used along with the excavation of ditches that would be filled with water to determine level, the Great Pyramid of Giza's thirteen-acre base varies in elevation less than an inch. Amazing, but how is it possible? What one principle makes all these tools work? Need a hint? It's invisible. You use it every day. It has remained remarkably stable for billions of years. It is gravity.

Gravity makes the water settle and find its own level. Gravity makes the plumb bob indicate level on the A-frame level. It makes the bubble find the center of the glass tube and even makes the pendulum (or gimbal) inside the laser level stay true.

So, the gravity of the Fraternity is its principles. Feeling un-level navigating through the world today? LEVEL up! Use the principles of Freemasonry to stay true. Our core tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth are the principles we meet upon and the gravity that holds us together. □

The Chief

A message from the Commander-in-Chief of the Valley of Pittsburgh

CONSISTORY

Meeting on the Level: **A Masonic Principle in the Founding of America**

By David L. Moore, 33°

As our nation celebrates America250, we're reminded not only of the events that shaped the United States, but of the principles that made those events possible. One of those principles is deeply familiar to Freemasons: meeting on the level. In recognition of this historic milestone, I chose to reflect on how this foundational Masonic idea helped guide the men who built our nation – and how it continues to guide us today. The 250th anniversary encourages us to consider how equality, brotherhood, and shared purpose formed the bedrock of America's founding, and how those same values remain essential to our work as Masons.

> The level teaches us that leadership is not about standing above others, but standing with them.

In Freemasonry, *meeting on the level* expresses one of our most enduring teachings. The level reminds us that all people possess the same inherent dignity and worth, regardless of wealth, occupation, education, or social standing. Inside the lodge, distinctions of class and status fall away. A merchant, farmer, soldier, or statesman stands not above or below another, but beside him as a Brother. This principle of equality and mutual respect carried special weight during the founding of the United States, when unity among diverse individuals was essential to achieving independence and establishing a new nation.

The American colonies were a mosaic of different regions, religions, professions, and economic circumstances. People who might never have interacted socially in everyday life found themselves living under the same Crown, facing the same political pressures, and wrestling with the same questions about liberty and self-governance. Many of the men who would guide the Revolution and shape the new nation found common ground in the ideals of Freemasonry. Lodges offered a rare environment where social distinctions were set aside, and men could meet on equal footing. The Fraternity's emphasis on moral character, reason, tolerance, and brotherhood aligned closely with the ideals that inspired the American quest for independence.

George Washington stands as one of the clearest examples of this principle in action. Initiated into Freemasonry at the age of 20, Washington understood the importance of uniting people from diverse backgrounds behind a shared



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A merchant, farmer, soldier, or statesman stands not above or below another, but beside him as a Brother.

cause. During the Revolutionary War, he commanded soldiers from different colonies, cultures, and economic circumstances. His ability to bring these men together in pursuit of liberty reflected the Masonic ideal of meeting on the level and working for the common good. Washington's leadership was rooted not only in authority, but in his capacity to inspire trust, respect, and cooperation – qualities nurtured within the lodge.

Benjamin Franklin offers another powerful illustration. As a printer, scientist, diplomat, inventor, and statesman, Franklin moved comfortably among people of every social class. Through Freemasonry, he helped strengthen networks of friendship and cooperation across the colonies and abroad. His gift for building relationships and finding common ground proved instrumental in uniting the colonies during critical moments in American history. Franklin's diplomatic work in France, his efforts to encourage intercolonial cooperation, and his role in shaping foundational documents all reflect a mindset rooted in equality, reason, and mutual respect – principles central to Masonic teaching.

Other patriots, including Paul Revere and several signers of the Declaration of Independence, were also Freemasons. Lodges brought together merchants, craftsmen, lawyers, military officers, and political leaders who might otherwise have remained separated by class or geography. These networks helped nurture the idea of a shared American identity at a time when the colonies were still learning to see themselves as one people. In many ways, the lodge served as a microcosm of the nation the Founders hoped to build: a place where individuals could rise not through birth or privilege, but through merit, character, and dedication to the common good.

The success of the American founding was not achieved by individuals acting alone. It required men who could look past differences, respect one another, and unite around shared principles. Meeting on the level made cooperation possible and helped transform thirteen separate colonies into a single nation. The Founders demonstrated that great achievements become possible when people treat one another as equals and work toward a purpose greater than themselves.

Our own success, whether in lodge, business, family, or community, depends on practicing the same principle. When we meet others on the level, we build trust instead of division, cooperation instead of competition, and unity instead of discord. The level teaches us that leadership is not about standing above others, but standing with them. It reminds us that progress is made not through dominance, but through understanding; not through pride, but through humility; not through isolation, but through brotherhood. The same principle that helped unite the founders of America can continue to guide us today, reminding us that our greatest accomplishments are achieved when we stand together as equals, committed to a higher cause than ourselves.

As I begin my term serving the Valley of Pittsburgh, I carry this lesson with me. It is a profound privilege to stand on the level with each of you – our officers, our members, and our dedicated Brethren who give life to this Valley through their commitment and service. I am deeply grateful for the confidence you have placed in me. This message resonates even more strongly as we celebrate the **175th Anniversary of the Valley of Pittsburgh,** a milestone that reminds us of the generations of Masons who have upheld these principles before us. Their legacy challenges us to continue meeting on the level, strengthening our bonds of brotherhood, and ensuring that the Valley remains a place where equality, unity, and shared purpose guide all we do. Together, as equals and as Brothers, we will honor our heritage while building a future worthy of the Valley's long and distinguished history. □

The Sovereign

A message from the Sovereign Prince of the Pennsylvania Council of Princes of Jerusalem

PRINCES OF JERUSALEM

On the Level: **Frequently Stated, Less Frequently Analyzed**

By Thomas J. Anke, 32°

"Meeting on the level" is one of the more widely recognized and frequently heard aphorisms in Freemasonry. In the exoteric and public sense, it serves as a declaration of equality among members. Within our tiled lodges, worldly titles, wealth, and social distinctions are *supposed* to be cast aside; a millionaire and a blue-collar worker are treated as equals, or at least that is how it is supposed to be. However, beneath this moral and social construct, there lies a profound esoteric current. When viewed through speculative Masonry, Hermetic philosophy, and historical texts, the "level" is no longer merely a tool for eliminating social differences. Instead, it becomes a symbol of equilibrium, the neutralization of the ego, and the alignment of humankind with the Divine.



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To appreciate the esoteric depth of the level's meaning, we must first explore its symbolism in operative historical contexts. In medieval operative masonry, the level was an instrument used to prove horizontals and lay accurate foundations. The earliest written records of our Craft emphasize the moral application of architectural tools. The *Regius Poem* (or *Halliwell Manuscript*), dating to approximately 1390, outlines the duties of Masons to treat one another fairly and with parity, hinting at the foundational equality that would later define the speculative Masonic tradition. When operative Masonry influenced speculative Freemasonry during the 17th and 18th centuries, the tools of the builder were repurposed as means to define right action. In the *Cooke Manuscript* (c. 1410) and subsequent William Watson Manuscripts, we see the historical transition where geometry is heralded as the root of all science and spiritual wisdom. By the time James Anderson published his *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* in 1723, the concept of the Lodge as a place for egalitarian brotherhood was codified. Anderson noted that Masonry brings together men who would have otherwise remained at a perpetual distance in the profane world. Historically, this was a revolutionary concept. In an era of monarchies and rigid class structures, the Masonic Lodge created a unique egalitarian space based on meritocracy. Within our Fraternity, the social hierarchy of the profane world was "flattened" by the symbolic lesson of the Level.

> By meeting on the level, our Fraternity encourages us to seek a sacred space of mildness and balance.

Consider the following and reflect on it: Do we as Masons create a hierarchy within the Craft that mirrors the Profane world or, do we **really** leave titles and ego behind? Could we be better about this? Do we really act on the Level?

In speculative Masonry, the level is rarely viewed in isolation; it operates in tandem with the plumb. The plumb not only represents the *axis mundi,* the descent of divine spirit into matter, but also rectitude of conduct and the aspiration of the soul to ascend to be in the presence of the Great Architect of the Universe. The level, conversely, represents the plane of material existence, time, and Creation as we perceive it. It is

the earthly platform upon which human life is experienced. When the vertical plumb intersects the horizontal level, they form a perfect right angle, creating the Square. This intersection carries esoteric significance, echoing the Hermetic maxim found in the *Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus: "As above, so below." To "meet on the level" is to consciously strive to find the intersection of the divine with the terrestrial. Albert Pike, in his 1871 masterwork *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite,* frequently discussed this balancing act. Pike stated that the tools of the Craft represent cosmic forces. Their union represents the equilibrium of the universe, anchoring the spiritual aspirations of the plumb with the practical, earthly, and moral duties of everyday life represented by the Level.

In the esoteric traditions which heavily influenced Enlightenment Masonry (notably Alchemy and Kabbalah), the universe is understood to operate via the interplay of opposing forces. In many Jurisdictions, this is explicitly represented by the Mosaic Pavement, with its alternating black and white tiles symbolizing light and darkness, joy and sorrow, and the polarity of life and death. The profane world is a place of constant fluctuation between those dualities, where people are routinely led away from true wisdom due to emotion, politics, or pride. To meet on the level is to rise above that polarization. The level represents a baseline of absolute equilibrium, like an alchemist's crucible where opposing elements are made into alloys. In Kabbalistic terms, the level can be equated to the middle path of the Tree of Life, while the left-hand path (*Boaz*) represents severity and force, and the right-hand path (*Jachin*) represents mercy and expansion. Humans are meant to stand in the center where there is harmony between force and passivity. By meeting on the level, our Fraternity encourages us to seek a sacred space of mildness and balance. Within that space, the destructive tensions of the external world can be avoided. Brothers do not erase their unique identities; rather, they bring their disparate energies into a state of constructive harmony, silencing the ego to allow the subtle frequency of the soul to emerge.

> In speculative Masonry, the level is rarely viewed in isolation; it operates in tandem with the plumb.

Every Mason is charged with remembering that we are each a temporary, imperfect, and fleshy version of a temple still under construction; a spiritual house "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Under this interpretation, the level is the tool used to lay a foundation capable of supporting higher spiritual wisdom. Without a level foundation, any structure built by an operative mason will eventually collapse under the force of gravity. For the speculative Mason, if the psyche is uneven, marred by unchecked passions or intellectual arrogance, any spiritual "light" received will be distorted by the effects of building upon an unsure foundation. Meeting on the level requires profound internal humility. It demands that the Brother erode the mountains of his own pride, transforming the rough ashlar of the self into a perfect ashlar that can fit seamlessly in the wall next to his Brethren. William Hutchinson, in his 1775 classic *The Spirit of Masonry,* noted that the level reminds Masons that they are all traveling on the same horizontal line of time toward the same final revelation. This horizontal line also represents the "Eternal Present." When Masons gather in Lodge, they enter liminal space, a condition existing outside the linear temporal constraints of the profane world. On the level, the past (what a man was before he entered) and the future (his worldly ambitions) are flattened. The only reality is the immediate, living present shared with the Craft, allowing genuine spiritual transformation to occur. The time is always "Right Now", as any 32nd Degree Mason will tell you.

Ultimately, the most profound mystery of the level is its relationship with mortality. Masonry frequently reminds its initiates of our transience through symbols such as the hourglass and the scythe. Death is the ultimate leveler. In the grave, all earthly honors, wealth, and distinctions are completely gone, and all that is left on earth are the memory of the deeds and work that the Brother accomplished. By choosing to meet on the level during our lives, Masons voluntarily practice the existence that we hope awaits us in eternity. We willingly divest ourselves of the illusions of the material world even while we still inhabit it. We learn to step away from the hollow acceptance of earthly competition against others. We seek to enter a sacred geometry where truth is law and the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of G-d is realized as an absolute fact. □

The Wise

A message from the Most Wise Master of the Pittsburgh Chapter Rose Croix

ROSE CROIX

On the Level: A Masonic Journey with Both of My Fathers

By Michael R. Bahney, 32°

In Masonry, we are taught to meet upon the level. It is a simple phrase, but one filled with meaning. To meet upon the level is to recognize the worth of every man, to act with honesty and fairness, and to live in a way that reflects integrity, humility, and brotherly love. When I think about my own Masonic journey, I realize that the first lesson I received about being "on the level" did not come in a lodge room. It came from my father.



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Everything started with my father, who was asked by his best friend, a Mason, to consider having his son Tom, my older brother, join DeMolay. At the time, none of us knew how important that invitation would become. It was not simply a suggestion about an activity for a young man. It was the beginning of a path that would help shape my brother's life, my life, and eventually the course of our family's connection to the Masonic Fraternity.

Although my father never became a Mason, he continued to support us in our involvement. That support mattered. He did not need to belong to the Fraternity to recognize the value of what it offered. He saw that DeMolay placed young men around positive influences and taught lessons that would last far beyond our youth. In his own way, he opened the door and trusted that the lessons beyond it would be worthwhile.

My brother Tom joined DeMolay on May 14, 1985. I was younger, watching from the outside, and I could see the enjoyment, friendship, and sense of purpose he found there. I saw the fun he was having, but I also saw something deeper. There was a bond among those young men. There was structure, respect, and a sense that they were being encouraged to become better versions of themselves. I wanted to be part of that as well, and on December 22, 1987, I too joined.

> On July 19, 2026, my father – the man who helped start it all – passed away.

Life, however, does not always follow a straight line. My parents divorced in 1985, the same year my brother joined DeMolay. About a year later, a man named Jeff Wonderling entered our lives when he began a relationship with my mother. He became a steady and supportive presence, and one of the ways he helped was by taking Tom (and me when I joined) to DeMolay meetings and activities. His willingness to do that kept us connected to the chapter and gave us the opportunity to remain involved in something positive while our family was adjusting to a new chapter.

Even with that support, Tom and I eventually drifted away from DeMolay, as many young men do. Our interests and responsibilities began to move in different directions, and the regular involvement we once had slowly faded. Still, the foundation had already been laid. The values, friendships, and lessons from DeMolay stayed with us, waiting for the right time to become part of our lives again. Jeff and my mother married in 1988, and when he joined the Masonic Fraternity in December of 1993, he helped reconnect our family to Masonry in a new and meaningful way. If my father opened the door to DeMolay, Jeff helped keep that door open for the next transition.

My brother joined the Masons in 1996 after moving back from

Florida. Around that same period, I moved to Virginia. In 1997, I became part of a one-day class when Jeff and my brother conferred degrees. That experience connected several parts of my life at once: family, fraternity, and the lessons first introduced to us through DeMolay. It was a meaningful step, not only because of the degrees themselves, but because of the men who were involved and the family connection that surrounded the moment.

In 1999, I became a dual member of a lodge in Virginia while helping a friend begin his own journey into Masonry. That experience introduced me to many new friendships and gave me another opportunity to serve. During that time, I also became an advisor for a local DeMolay chapter, where I was able to give back some of the experience and knowledge I had gained to young men beginning a journey much like my own.

In 2008, I joined the Scottish Rite, which added another meaningful dimension to my Masonic journey. It deepened my appreciation for the lessons of the Craft and gave me new opportunities for reflection, service, and fellowship. It also reminded me that Masonry is not defined by a single moment, title, or organization. It is a lifelong journey of learning, growing, and striving to live by the principles we profess.

My mother's journey also became part of our family's Masonic story. She joined the Order of the Eastern Star in 1995 and the Order of the Amaranth in 2000, creating her own path within Masonic-sponsored organizations. Through those experiences, she formed lasting friendships, found fellowship with many dedicated ladies, and continued to live out the same spirit of being "on the level." To this day, she remains very active in Eastern Star.

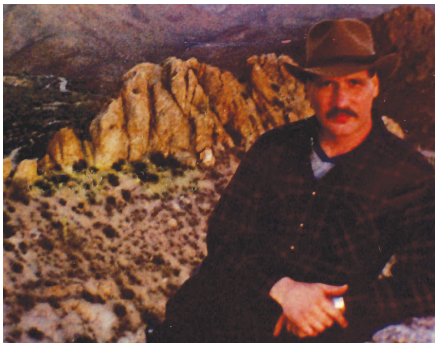
As the years went on, I branched into other Masonic bodies, including the Amaranth, York Rite, Shriners, and Eastern Star. Each brought its own lessons, traditions, and friendships. Each also reinforced the same central idea: that the work we do as Masons is not meant to remain inside the walls of a lodge. It is meant to shape how we live, how we treat others, and how we carry ourselves in the world.

One of the most remarkable moments in our family's Masonic journey came when Jeff became Right Worshipful Grand Master of Masons in Pennsylvania. During that time in 2023, I was appointed Grand Pursuivant, my brother Tom was appointed as Senior Grand Deacon, and my nephew Dylan (who was also in DeMolay) was appointed Grand Sword Bearer. It was an honor that I deeply appreciated, and one that carried special meaning because of the path that had brought us there. In 2023, I was also asked to be on the Rose Croix line, continuing my service within the Scottish Rite and adding another meaningful chapter to the journey.

On July 19, 2026, my father – the man who helped start it all – passed away. He was never a Mason. He never sat in lodge, never wore the apron, and never took the obligations that we hold dear. While he was not a perfect man, and while honesty was not always one of his strongest qualities, he still played an important role in setting my Masonic journey in motion, opening a door that would shape our family for generations.

When I reflect on my journey, I see two important men standing at its beginning and along its path. My father started the journey by allowing DeMolay into our lives. My stepfather helped continue it by bringing Masonry back into our family and guiding that connection forward. Together, their influence helped shape the man and Mason I became.

To be on the level is more than a phrase we hear in lodge. It is a way of living. It is found in a father's trust, a stepfather's example, a brother's encouragement, and the steady influence of men who believe in making good men better. My journey began because one Mason asked a friend to consider DeMolay for his son. Decades later, that simple beginning continues to shape my life. And as I remember my father, I do so with gratitude, knowing that though he was never a Mason, he helped place me on a path where I learned what it truly means to meet, act, and live on the level. □



Thomas E. Bahney (father)



Mike, Jeff (stepfather), Dylan (nephew), and Tom (brother)

The Venerable

A message from the Venerable Master of the Knights of St. Andrew

Knights of St. Andrew

On the Level: The Foundation of Masonic Brotherhood

By A.J. Antimary, 32°

Greeting Brothers. It's hard to believe that another new Scottish Rite year is upon us. New leaders and new faces in the ranks make it a great time to be involved in the Valley of Pittsburgh. In this article, I'd like to take a deep dive into the concept of meeting on the level.

Freemasonry teaches many lessons through symbols, words, and actions, but few are more important than the simple instruction to meet upon the level. The level is more than a working tool or an emblem of equality. It reminds us that every Brother who enters the lodge does so on equal ground. We may come from different families, professions, communities, and circumstances, but within the lodge we are called to recognize one another first as Brothers. Meeting on the level challenges us to set aside status, wealth, occupation, education, and personal differences so that we can practice genuine brotherhood.



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To meet on the level means recognizing the inherent dignity of every Brother. It does not mean that every Mason has the same talents, responsibilities, experience, or station in life. One Brother may be a business owner, another may work with his hands, another may be retired, and another may be just beginning his career. One may have served for decades while another has only recently received his degrees. These differences remain real, but they should not determine how we value one another. In the lodge, the lesson of the level asks us to remember that titles and accomplishments do not make one Brother more worthy of respect than another.

> To meet on the level means recognizing the inherent dignity of every Brother.

Our interactions change when we truly treat one another as equals. Conversation becomes less about proving ourselves and more about listening. Leadership becomes less about authority and more about service. Disagreement becomes an opportunity to understand, not an excuse to divide. When a Brother speaks, we should listen because his voice has value, not because of his office or reputation. When a new Mason asks a question, we should answer with patience rather than make him feel embarrassed for not knowing. When an experienced Mason offers guidance, we should receive it with humility while remembering that experience does not make him infallible.

The level also teaches us something important about leadership. A Worshipful Master sits in the East and carries responsibilities that other Brethren do not, but his office does not place him above the Craft in worth. His authority exists to guide the lodge and serve its members. The same is true of every officer. Positions are temporary, but brotherhood endures. A Mason who remembers this can lead firmly without becoming arrogant and can follow respectfully without surrendering his own judgment.

Yet we must honestly ask whether we actually achieve this goal. The answer, if we are truthful with ourselves, is probably not completely. Freemasonry is made up of human beings, and human beings bring their habits, opinions, experiences, and prejudices with them wherever they go. We may enter through the lodge doors intending to leave the

outside world behind, but we do not magically leave our assumptions at the door. Sometimes we judge a Brother because of his political opinions, income, education, age, occupation, personality, or the people with whom he associates. Sometimes these judgments are subtle and never spoken aloud. Nevertheless, they can affect how we treat one another.

Prejudice does not always announce itself loudly. It can appear in whom we choose to sit beside, whose ideas we dismiss, whom we invite into conversations, or whose mistakes we forgive. It can appear when we give greater weight to the words of a prominent Brother than to those of a quiet Mason who rarely speaks. It can appear when a newer member feels invisible because established friendships have already formed. These situations may seem minor, but repeated over time, they can determine whether a Brother feels that he truly belongs.

If we are serious about meeting on the level, we must be willing to examine ourselves. It is easy to say that Freemasonry welcomes all good men, but the real test is how we behave when someone does not think, speak, worship, work, or live as we do. Brotherhood is not demonstrated when we agree with one another. It is demonstrated when we disagree and still choose respect. The challenge is not simply to tolerate differences, but to recognize that our differences can strengthen the lodge by giving us opportunities to practice patience, understanding, and charity.

Meeting on the level also requires humility. Every Mason has something to learn from another Brother. The newest Mason may possess an insight that an older Mason has never considered. A Brother who has struggled may understand compassion in a way that another has not. A Brother whose life experience differs from our own may help us see the world from another perspective. When we approach one another with humility, we stop asking, "What can this Brother do for me?" and begin asking, "What can I learn from him, and how can I help him?" That change in attitude can transform a lodge's character.

The level, therefore, should not remain merely a symbol displayed during our meetings. It should also become a standard for our conduct outside the lodge. If we speak respectfully in lodge but ridicule a Brother afterward, we have missed the lesson. If we call one another Brother but refuse to help when help is needed, we have missed the lesson. If we claim equality while allowing personal prejudice to determine who receives our friendship or attention, we have missed the lesson. The teachings of Masonry have value only when they are reflected in our actions.

> We enter the lodge from different paths, but we meet upon the same ground.

Perhaps the greatest measure of whether we meet on the level is found in how the least confident person in the room feels. Does a new Mason feel welcome? Does a Brother who is struggling feel supported? Does a quiet Brother feel that his contribution matters? Can a Brother disagree respectfully without fearing exclusion? Can a Mason admit that he does not know something without embarrassment? If the answer to these questions is yes, then the lodge is doing more than teaching equality – it is practicing it.

Ultimately, meeting on the level requires continual effort. We may never eliminate prejudice or personal bias, but we can become more aware of them and choose not to let them control our behavior. Every lodge meeting gives us another opportunity to practice the lesson. We can greet the Brother we do not know, listen to the opinion we do not share, encourage the Mason who needs confidence, and extend charity without asking whether the recipient is someone we would ordinarily choose as a friend.

The level reminds us that Masonry does not ask us to pretend we are identical. Instead, it asks us to recognize our common humanity and common obligations as Brothers. We enter the lodge from different paths, but we meet upon the same ground. We may leave the lodge with different opinions, but we should leave with the same commitment to brotherhood. The real question is not whether we have completely achieved equality, but whether we are sincerely striving toward it. If we examine our prejudices, challenge our assumptions, practice respect, and treat every Brother with dignity, we put the lesson of the level into action. In doing so, we make the lodge not merely a place where equality is taught, but a place where equality is lived.

So the next time you go to a Masonic meeting, remember that when we say we meet on the level, it has both literal and figurative meanings. Take it to heart, and it will make us all better Masons, better Brothers, and better men. I look forward to serving the Valley this year and seeing everyone at the various Valley events. Here's to a great year for all! □

UniontownUpdate

A message from the Thrice Potent Master of the Valley of Uniontown

VALLEY OF UNIONTOWN

Serving With Humility

By Neil V. Reddington, 32°

In the book of Ruth, Boaz took as a wife a daughter from the Moab tribe, descendants of Lot from the Sodom and Gomorrah saga. In doing so, Boaz proved he was not above someone seen as a pariah at the time. Ruth was a Moabite (a tribe that was treated as inferior to their Jewish counterparts), so when Boaz took her as his wife, it was a significant act of humility, of putting himself on the level with a Moabite. Ruth was also a widow and, therefore, would have been treated differently. Because of this, a covenant was made between Boaz and the close relative of Ruth's deceased husband, where Boaz took off his shoe and gave it to his neighbor as a promise. Boaz and Ruth would go on to become the great-grandparents of none other than King David and directly influence the building of the Temple by King Solomon.

To meet someone *on the level* requires the humility to understand that God is God and that we are not. We are not always aware of the big picture and how our interactions with others that may seem insignificant at the time, become essential later. We are all sinners and grace is required, in that we all fall short of the Glory of God. We are finite beings with limited time to accomplish goals and build relationships. This requires empathy to help us relate to another's circumstances, which improves our ability to solve problems together.

> We should view elected positions as serving the members of the Lodge, rather than being served by the members.

We should bring this same attitude to our interactions within the Lodge. If we have a desire to accomplish any great undertaking and go hand in hand with unanimity, we must meet on the level with humility. It is often said that two heads are better than one. When we treat others as equals, we value their contributions more and seek out and welcome others' opinions. A strong Fraternity requires all hands on deck, working toward a common goal. There is the chain of command to consider. We have the Worshipful Master and Senior and Junior Wardens placed in positions to lead the lodge business, but these are more positions of assigned responsibilities to maintain order, much like if the Worshipful Master would assign a member to lead a Committee of Inquiry – or any committee for that matter, or to perform a task, that member would be serving the Lodge and not himself. This method creates order out of chaos and allows the Lodge to run smoothly. We should

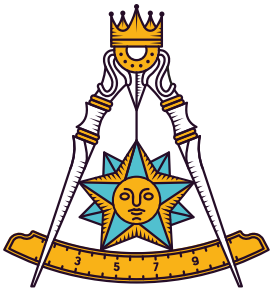


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We must meet on the level with humility.

view elected positions as serving the members of the Lodge, rather than being served by the members. Too often, when someone is put in a position of authority, they will take advantage of the situation and use it to serve their own purpose. It is human nature to take the path of least resistance, and often it may not even be intentional. We need to be aware of our situation through diligent, daily self-assessment to stay on the level. It is also a benefit for members to be accountable to one another and be open to constructive criticism; by doing so, we strengthen the body and keep everyone engaged for improvement.

Aristotle said, "It is the mark of an educated mind to entertain an idea without accepting it." It is part of the human condition to possess some level of prejudice. Because we are all limited in our understanding, we arrive at certain conclusions through sheer ignorance. It would be easy to say that we should leave it at the door, but I don't believe it to be entirely possible. After all, our experience gives us the ability to assess a situation and choose a direction that best serves us at the time. I believe a better approach is to be aware of our limited understanding and to be open to always growing. To be the men we strive to be and practice the Masonic virtues that we took an oath to uphold, we must meet others on the level of our current position, time, and condition. By doing so, we can face difficulties and dangers, however great, that will not deter the true and faithful Brother from progressing onward toward Perfection. □







A Look Back



David E. Thumm Jr., 32°

Brethren, allow me to introduce myself. I am Dave Thumm Jr. I have recently been elected as Deputy Master of the Lodge of Perfection and have also been appointed to Chair the committee for our 175th Anniversary in 2027.

Over the months to come, we will be looking for input, helping hands, and general involvement as we move to celebrate our Dodransbicentennial. With that being said, I would like to provide you with a brief retrospective of our storied and historic Valley, with more detailed information in the months to come. One of the best ways you can help is to assist us in finding any significant artifacts, photos, etc., that may not have been saved by the Valley itself, so that we may provide a visual display of our long and rich history.

Over the last 175 years, the Valley of Pittsburgh, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, has shaped western Pennsylvania's civic, moral, and architectural landscape. From its modest mid-19th-century beginnings through industrial booms, world wars, and modern digital adaptations, the Valley stands as a testament to Fraternal endurance.

Operating under the Supreme Council of the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, the Valley has anchored its legacy in self-discovery, community fellowship, and civic virtue.

1852–1902: Forging the Foundation

The Early Years: The inception of Scottish Rite Freemasonry in Pittsburgh occurred in 1852, when the Gourgas Lodge of Perfection was officially instituted. During this foundational half-century, the United States was rapidly transforming from an agrarian republic into an industrial powerhouse, and Pittsburgh was at the epicenter of this crucible of iron and coal.

Humble Beginnings and the rise of the Coordinate Bodies: operations began with a small, dedicated group of Brethren meeting in modest downtown rooms. The Gourgas Lodge of Perfection was chartered on May 14th, 1852, holding its first meeting on June 16th of that same year. Five Years later, the Gourgas Lodge of Perfection, Pennsylvania Council of the Princes of Jerusalem, Pittsburgh Chapter of Rose Croix, and Pennsylvania Consistory were chartered as coordinate bodies of the Valley.

Industrial Boomtown: As Pittsburgh produced the steel that built the modern world, earning the city the fierce title of the smoky Iron City, the Valley swelled in numbers, beginning with a modest number of 10 members, drawing leadership and additional members from the region's prominent civic and business figures.

1902–1916: The Industrial Era and Expansion

Membership Surge: Fueled by Pittsburgh's booming steel and manufacturing economy, the Valley experienced a dramatic influx of candidates seeking higher Masonic degrees.

Reunion Scale: Reunions transformed from modest gatherings into elaborate multi-day conferences conferring the 4th through the 32nd degrees with intricate stagecraft and costumes.

Infrastructure Needs: The sheer volume of candidates strained existing Pittsburgh meeting spaces, planting the logistical seeds for permanent, dedicated space resulting in the construction of a new Masonic Temple in the Oakland section of the city, opening in 1915.

1917–1929: The Crucible of War and Boom

World War I impact: Scores of local Scottish Rite Masons answered the mobilization call, prompting the Valley to establish relief and correspondence frameworks for Brethren overseas.

The Roaring Twenties Classes: The post-war decade saw record-breaking class sizes, reflecting a broader national surge in fraternal organization participation.

1930–1952: Depression, Resilience, and the Centennial

Economic Hardship: The Great Depression tested the Valley's financial resources, shifting primary focus toward Masonic charity, almoner support, and membership retention.

World War II Mobilization: Activities adapted once more to wartime realities in the 1940s, with members engaging heavily in home-front defense and community relief.

The 1952 Centennial: The era culminated in a massive 100-year milestone celebration (1852–1952), marked by commemorative items and a renewed dedication to the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction.

1952–1979: Mid-Century Growth and Post-War Peaks

High Membership Numbers: Post-war civic engagement drove high numbers into the coordinate bodies: the Gourgas Lodge of Perfection (14°), Pennsylvania Council of Princes of Jerusalem (16°), Pittsburgh Chapter of Rose Croix (18°), and Pennsylvania Consistory (32°).

Active Reunions: Spring and fall reunions featured extensive cast, crew, and costume logistics, engaging hundreds of local members in theatrical degree work.

1980–2026: Modernization and Structural Reform

Administrative Shifts: Facing changing social habits and declining postwar application rates, leadership moved away from rigid historical routines toward streamlined management.

Empowering Leadership: By the late 1990s, structural changes shifted power to the Executive Committee and active line officers to modernize operations and financial investments.

Relocation to the North Hills: In the late 20th century, the Valley transitioned out of the historic downtown Scottish Rite Cathedral to a modern, adaptable space at the Greater Pittsburgh Masonic Center in the North Hills, where it makes its home today.

The Children's Dyslexia Center: Solidifying its commitment to public charity, the Valley continues to champion the Children's Dyslexia Center, providing free, highly specialized Orton-Gillingham tutoring to local children.

Vibrant Fraternal Life: The Valley expanded its cultural footprint by encouraging clubs like the Ghost Light Productions (for theater and film), the Antique/Classic Car Club, and CigaRite Cigar Club.

2026 and Beyond: The Path Forward

Today, the Valley remains a "graduate course in Masonry," continuing to confer the 29 degrees of the Rite to help men find a deeper sense of purpose and self-development. As it looks toward 2027 and the future, the organization balances its rich, 175-year tradition with active community outreach, hosting staple events like the CigaRite Smokers and fellowship breakfasts at the Masonic Center. □

The Office

A message from the Secretary of the Valley of Pittsburgh

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

Lasting Benefits

By David W. Morgans, 33°

"On the level" can take on different meanings in Freemasonry. In one sense, it means being completely honest, above-board, sincere, trustworthy, or genuine and not trying to deceive anyone. The phrase comes from the carpenter's or mason's tool – the level – which checks if a surface is flat, even, and true. Just as a balanced physical surface is flat and even, a person's words or actions are considered "on the level" when they are fair and balanced by truth.



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As Masons, we meet "on the level" when we gather, which adds another meaning to the term. It means that all members meet and treat each other as absolute equals, leaving outside social status, wealth, titles, and ranks at the lodge door. Derived from the physical building tool used to establish a horizontal plane, the level symbolizes that no person is inherently superior to another within the Fraternity.

We see it also in the term "on the level of time," which has a very different meaning. This term combines the physical tool (the level) with time. It teaches that human lives pass quickly and equally on a shared foundation before God. Time itself, especially when we enter the years beyond middle age, often rivals quicksilver in the speed with which it runs through our fingers. Years can sometimes click by in the wink of an eye. Once we leave this earth, we will lay down our tools, and our work here will be done.

That being said, there is a way for us to continue to support the philanthropy of the Scottish Rite when our days are no more. The Scottish Rite Benevolent Foundation, which includes the Grand Almoner's Fund, the White Flower Society, the Blue Envelope, and the Membership Education Fund, is a wonderful place to donate money that will continue to earn interest to keep these valuable programs funded to keep serving our members and their families.

There is a way for us to continue to support the philanthropy of the Scottish Rite when our days are no more.

The Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library benefits our members and the community. The Education and Charity Fund (Abbott Scholarships) assists students of our Scottish Rite Brothers with school costs. The Children's Dyslexia Center also has the Builder's Council program, which builds investments to fund the learning center here in Pittsburgh.

Please consider supporting one or more of these programs. Donations can be made via check, bank transfer, stock transfer, investment account transfer, wire transfer, Crypto, etc. For more information on how you can support the Scottish Rite charities, contact Supreme Council at (800) 814-1432 or go to the website scottishritenmj.org

Your generosity today will continue even after you have completed your travels "upon the level of time toward that 'undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns.'" □

Our Youth

News and information about the Masonic Youth in our Valley

The Sun Rises in the West – Leadership and Change Are Coming

by Louis GrowMiller, Senior Deputy Executive Officer, Pennsylvania DeMolay

Freemasonry teaches us that we meet "on the level," a phrase that carries far more meaning than its simplicity suggests. To meet on the level is to approach one another without prejudice, without ego, and without the invisible hierarchies that shape so much of our daily lives. It is an ideal that calls us to see each person as possessing inherent worth, regardless of background, station, or circumstance. Yet ideals are easy to recite and harder to live. Do we truly treat each other as equals? Do we leave our biases at the door, or do they follow us into the lodge room and into our youth organizations?

For Pennsylvania DeMolay, meeting on the level is not just a ritual phrase – it is the foundation of how we lead, how we serve, and how we grow.

In July 2026, Pennsylvania DeMolay installed its 92nd State Master Councilor, Brother **Logan Johnston,** a dedicated member of Steel City Chapter. Logan's journey in DeMolay began in 2018. Since then, he has earned the Chevalier, the PMC-MSA, and the Founder's Membership Award. His Masonic journey includes membership in Coraopolis Lodge No. 674, Zerubbabel-Duquesne Chapter No. 162, and Pittsburgh Commandery No. 1. Outside of the Fraternity, Logan enjoys traveling, attending concerts with friends, and credits both Scouting – where he earned the rank of Eagle Scout – and DeMolay for shaping his leadership style and lifelong friendships.

Logan's approach to leadership is steady, intentional, and grounded in humility. He is not the loudest voice in the room, but often the most thoughtful. His installation represents not a regional shift, but a reaffirmation of DeMolay's core belief: leadership emerges wherever young men commit themselves to service, brotherhood, and personal growth.

Supporting Logan is Brother **Mason Derosky,** elected Deputy State Master Councilor and set to be installed as the 93rd State Master Councilor in July 2027. Logan and Mason's friendship began in the third grade, long before either wore a state officer collar. They joined DeMolay together at age 13, graduated together, and today continue to strengthen their bond through DeMolay and Freemasonry.

Their friendship is not defined by rank or title. It is defined by shared experience, mutual respect, and the understanding that leadership is not about standing above others – it is about standing with them. In a world that often rewards competition, their story reminds us that true leadership grows from cooperation, humility, and the willingness to lift others up. □



Logan Johnston



Mason Derosky

DeMolay Pennsylvania

pademolay.org

PA Rainbow on the Move

by Helen Snedden,
Supreme Inspector in Pennsylvania

PA Rainbow had a very busy summer! July 8-12, 2026, PA Rainbow held its annual convention, Grand Assembly, at the Jaffa Shrine Center in Altoona, PA. The 2025-2026 Grand Worthy Advisor, **Sarah Hamm,** led the meetings. Her theme was "Friendship Takes Flight." Grand Assembly showcased how, throughout the entire year, our Rainbow Girls tried new and different ways to introduce Rainbow to others while having FUN and FELLOWSHIP. All the Grand Officers presented the ritual beautifully and entertained us with wonderful marching drills. During the Grand Representatives Cavalcade of State Flags, they showcased our newly purchased flags. Nine girls were initiated on Friday morning. After this meeting, PA Rainbow moved up to 12th in international membership growth for 2026. We are GROWING PA RAINBOW … TOGETHER!

Grand Worthy Advisor Sarah chose the **Miracle Network** as her charity. Hershey Medical Center had a representative present to receive a check and talk a little about how our donation will help support their mission. Our Grand Charity, Victoria, raised over $12,000 for our state charity, the My Stuff Bags Foundation. This charity provides items of comfort for children in the foster care system or who are in a dangerous and/or unsafe situation.

At the Grand Assembly Installation, **Piper Anke,** of Irwin Assembly, was installed as the 85th Grand Worthy Advisor of Pennsylvania Rainbow. Her theme this upcoming year is "Sisters Are Forever." Her charity is the **National PKU Alliance (Phenylketonuria).** A little-known disease with little support for finding assistance for those who are affected by the disease and research for a cure in the future.

July 24-28, 2026, Supreme Assembly held its biennial session in Tucson, AZ. PA Rainbow's delegation of 20 included six active Rainbow. Sarah Hamm served as Supreme Page; Past Grand Worthy Advisor Jeanette Remaly carried the Pennsylvania Flag in the Cavalcade of Flags; and Rylie Moore was recognized for serving on the Youth Incentive Team for the past two years. Our Supreme Inspector, Mrs. Helen Snedden, was honored with the appointment as Supreme Love by the Supreme Worthy Advisor. The term is for two years.

There are nine (9) active Assemblies in Western PA (New Castle, Washington, Franklin, Butler, Irwin, Pitcairn, Coraopolis, Bridgewater, and Wexford). If you would like more information about how to join or visit any of these assemblies, or to ask about a program presentation, please contact **Mrs. Helen Snedden,** Supreme Love and Supreme Inspector in PA Rainbow, at **hsnedden@aol.com** or **412-953-9455.** □



parainbowgirls.org

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

Cruising for a Cause

This year's **Car Cruise** took place on July 12 under a clear, sunny sky. More than 200 cars and even more spectators crowded the parking lot of the Greater Pittsburgh Masonic Center. Proceeds from the event go to the **Children's Dyslexia Center – Pittsburgh.**

Thanks to **Franklin-St. John-Trinity Lodge No. 221** for donating the raffle tickets and to **Schrim Auto Body** for donating the dash plaques. A lot of work goes into making this event run smoothly. Look for more information on just what it takes to make it happen in a future issue of *RiteNow.*



PITTSBURGH Children's Dyslexia Center

















The Word

A message from the Grand Chaplain

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

To Meet and to Part

By David A. Eichelberger, 32°

One of the first Masonic sayings I was taught when I first became a Freemason was that we should meet on the level and depart on the square. Perhaps you have heard that expression as well.

I was raised a Master Mason in Raven Lodge No. 303 in Oswego, Illinois, on March 17, 2008. My home lodge was situated in a small suburban town on a short downtown business street with a Fellowship Hall on the first floor and the Lodge Room up a steep set of stairs above it. Adjacent to the Fellowship Hall was a diner that was technically a renter of space from our Lodge. There was a nice bench out in front of the Fellowship Hall along the sidewalk where the Brethren would meet and chat before the building was unlocked for the meeting. It was there that I asked the men gathered if I could join their Lodge. They were delighted that I had taken the initiative to look them up, and in no time at all I was assigned a mentor who prepared me for my reception into Freemasonry.

I was struck by the camaraderie among the men I met. There was respect paid to those who had served the Lodge as Past Masters or as the men who gave the long symbolic lectures in the different degrees. Everyone else was on the same level of acceptance. I never knew who was a business owner or a factory worker, a judge or a doctor. We were all treated the same. Frequently we had visiting Brethren from other Lodges in our District. This was especially true on degree conferral evenings. Each time we met, part of our closing charge reminded us all that we are to meet on the level as Brothers in the Craft. No one should feel privileged to lord it over anyone else in the lodge.

> If disagreements arose during the meeting, we were to leave the matter at the door and maintain the harmony that we cherished.

We were also encouraged to part on the square – to treat others as we would want to be treated ourselves. If disagreements arose during the meeting, we were to leave the matter at the door and maintain the harmony that we cherished. Sometimes that was difficult, as we had several members who had volatile personalities. Disagreements did occur, even between members of the same family. Nevertheless, the admonition was given: Leave the matter of contention at the lodge and remember we are Brothers here with everyone.

Since my retirement and relocation to Pittsburgh, I have had occasion



David A. Eichelberger, 32°

I was struck by the camaraderie among the men I met.

to revisit my home lodge. I have been warmly greeted by the few who remember who I am and by those who have become newer members since I left. I have also been delighted to see that the lodge is welcoming the Latino population that has settled in that region in recent years. On my last visit, the Worshipful Master was a man of Latino heritage. He was treated with all the respect that is due his position.

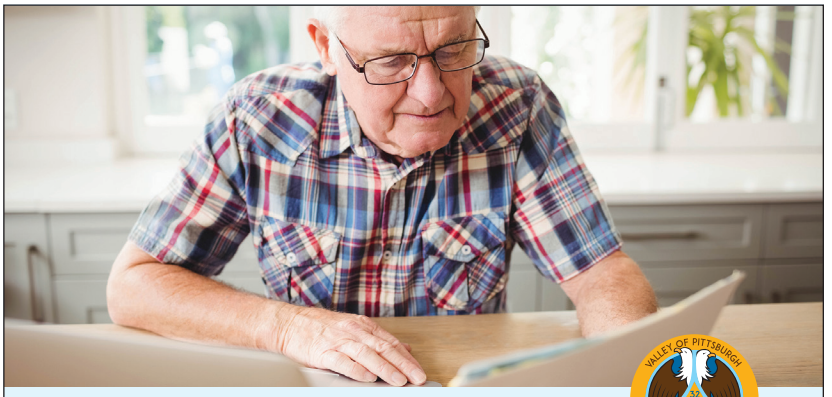
I hope our Valley of Pittsburgh and the Lodges in our region will be equally welcoming to the diversity of people in our region. I am happy to see that a number of lodges are indeed giving evidence of that welcoming attitude. I also know that we need the help of our Brothers from other cultures and traditions to teach us how we can become more skilled at living into our calling to be on the level with one another across some of the prejudices that may still distort or limit that welcome. Our goal as Princes of the Royal Secret is to bring all men together into universal brotherhood. May we be diligent in removing any impediments to that lofty goal in each of our own lives. □





Need Assistance?

No one likes to find themselves in financial hardship. No one likes to ask for help. However, many Brothers would rather be suspended than ask for the help that we all promised to render to a Brother when we joined the Fraternity. If you need to have your dues remitted this year, please, please, please contact the Office by phone (412-939-3579), by letter (Valley of Pittsburgh, 3579 Masonic Way, Pittsburgh, PA 15237), or by email (secretary@valleyofpittsburgh.org). Your request will be kept confidential, and you will continue to be a vital part of our Valley.



Senior Member Status

If you are 80-years old or older or are a 50-year plus member, I would like to remind you that the Scottish Rite does not automatically remit your dues. The Scottish Rite has a program for senior members. The Senior Member Program was implemented to ensure that NO member over the age of 80 (or over 75 with 50 years of membership in the Scottish Rite, NMJ) having financial hardship would be suspended for non-payment. If you qualify for Senior Membership, you will no longer have to pay dues.

If you think you qualify for Senior Member status, please contact the Office by phone (412-939-3579), by letter (Valley of Pittsburgh, 3579 Masonic Way, Pittsburgh, PA 15237), or by email (secretary@valleyofpittsburgh.org).

If you are a caregiver for someone who may qualify, please contact us and let us know of the need. We are ready, willing, and able to help but can only do so if we are aware of the need.



by Christopher A. Galarza, 32°, HGA

Meeting on the Level Begins When We Admit We Don't

I have to admit something.

When I first heard the phrase *"meet on the level,"* I thought I understood it.

It seemed simple enough. Treat everyone equally. Respect one another. Don't let titles or accomplishments get in the way. I remember thinking, *Yeah, that makes sense,* in almost a flippant manner.

Then I started my journey of living it.

The release of this magazine marks three years since I joined the Scottish Rite, and I've come to realize that meeting on the level is one of those lessons that gets deeper every time you think you've figured it out.

The truth is, none of us walks into the lodge empty-handed.

We carry our successes, our disappointments, our opinions, our life experiences, and whether we'd like to admit it or not, our biases. Some of them are obvious. Others are so deeply ingrained that we don't even realize they're there until someone challenges them.

So, when I think about what it really means to meet on the level, my honest answer is… I don't think we leave those things at the door. I think we bring them with us. Not because we're *bad* people. If we were, I don't think we would've become Masons. But because we *are* people.

I've never believed that walking through the doors of a lodge somehow erases everything we've experienced or every assumption we've made. If it did, becoming a better man would be easy. Instead, I think the lodge gives us something much more valuable.

Whether we choose to accept it or not, the lodge gives us a place to notice those things. To work on them. To become a little better than we were the last time we met.

The truth is, none of us walks into the lodge empty-handed.

After all, isn't that the true work of a Mason? To labor on the rough ashlar that is ourselves and pursue betterment through our Craft. With that realization, the term "meeting on the level" takes on a very different meaning… at least it does to me.

Outside the lodge, we're constantly encouraged to size one another up. What do they do for a living? How much money do they make? What political party do they belong to? What god do they pray to? We become experts at putting people into categories before we've ever taken the time to know them.

Inside the lodge, those categories begin to lose their grip. The Brother sitting next to me might own a company, drive a truck, teach school, or be retired. Honestly, after a while, it stops mattering. What starts to matter is whether he's kind. Whether he's dependable. Whether he's there when another Brother needs him.

I've found myself thinking more than once, *"I never would've expected we'd become friends."*

Maybe that's the whole point.

What starts to matter is whether he's kind. Whether he's dependable. Whether he's there when another Brother needs him.

In my own career, I've spent years bringing together chefs, architects, engineers, contractors, and business leaders to solve difficult problems. They don't always agree. In fact, sometimes they couldn't be more different.

What I've learned is that progress rarely starts with agreement. It starts with a basic level of respect. You don't have to think like someone to value what they have to say. That lesson didn't begin in Masonry – most of our lessons don't – but Masonry has certainly deepened it and opened my eyes to its importance.

The older I get, the more convinced I become that "meeting on the level" isn't asking us to pretend our differences don't exist. It's asking us to decide whether or not our differences determine how we treat one another. It wouldn't seem like it, but if you reflect on that, I'm sure you'll agree that it's much harder. And much more worthwhile.

Will we ever get it completely right? Probably not. I know I won't.

There are still days when I catch myself making assumptions. There are still moments when my first impression turns out to be completely wrong. There are still opportunities to listen more carefully, to be more patient, and to extend more grace.

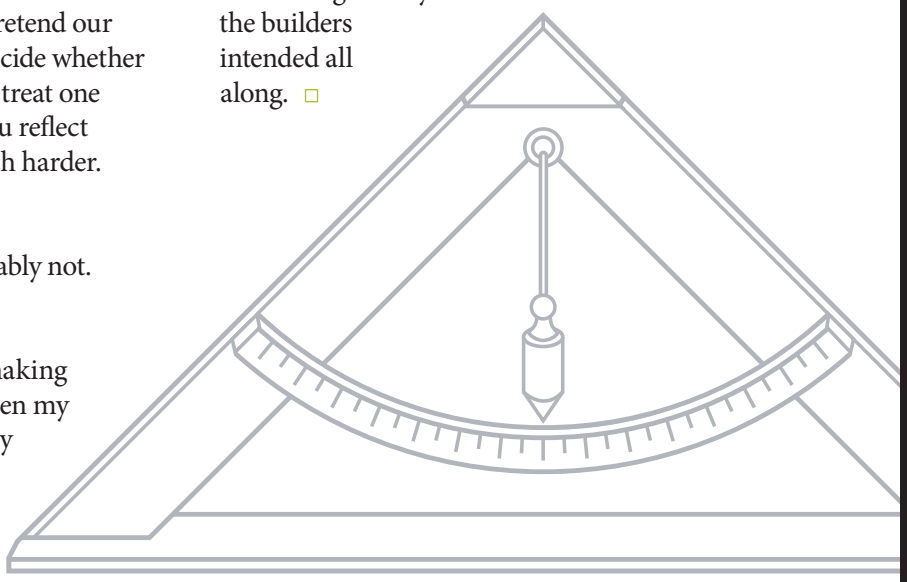
Maybe that's why we keep coming back. Not because we've mastered the lessons, but because the lessons are still shaping us.

As I approach my fourth year in the Scottish Rite, I'm grateful that no one expected me to arrive as a finished product. They simply invited me to continue the work that began way before I ever entered into a blue lodge.

What I've learned is that progress rarely starts with agreement. It starts with a basic level of respect.

For me, that's what meeting on the level has come to mean, not that we've overcome every prejudice. Not that we've reached perfection. But that every time we gather, we choose to see the man before the title, the Brother before the difference, and the shared humanity that binds us together.

And if we can carry that lesson beyond the lodge room and into the rest of our lives, then perhaps we're doing exactly what the builders intended all along. □



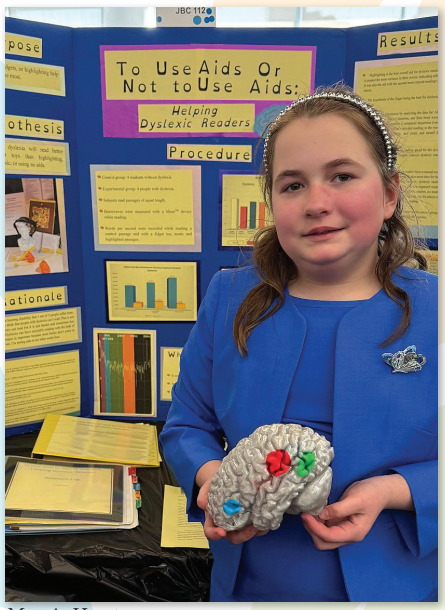
The Center

A message from the Children's Dyslexia Center-Pittsburgh

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

To Use Aids or Not to Use Aids: **Helping Dyslexic Readers**

By Maggie Hurst,
Former Student, CDC-Pittsburgh,
Sister of Current Student



Maggie Hurst

Dyslexia is a learning disability that one out of five people suffer from. Most people think that people with dyslexia can't read. That is not true.

Dyslexics can read, but it is just harder and sometimes less enjoyable. Dyslexics can have enjoyable reading with the help of aids. My project is important because most books don't come in Dyslexia Font. I'm finding aids and testing them to see what works best.

My results show that highlighting is the best aid for dyslexic readers, which proves that my hypothesis of the fidget being the best for dyslexic readers is incorrect.

I came to this conclusion by analyzing the data for Alpha brain waves, which means relaxed, and Beta brain waves, which mean active, external attention. I used the percentile of the variance, the movement of brain waves, to find the movement in the data for fidgets, highlighting, and music, compared to control. If the percentile of the variance was less than 100 percentile, the movement was less than control. I also examined the words per second and, when looking at the words per second for people with dyslexia, fidgets, was at the 75th percentile, which compared to control was less, so the fidget was slowing them down.

My research shows that it makes sense that highlighting is the best aid because dyslexic readers have a manual system, not an automatic one like typical readers, which means that it takes more time for them to process words. This happens because, unlike the non-impaired readers, dyslexic readers have activated areas on both sides of the brain when non-impaired readers only have it on one. This happens for all dyslexic readers, no matter what language they speak or read. Highlighting connects the places on both sides of the brain better than just normal reading. This is why it makes sense.

Conclusions

Subjects with dyslexia read the fastest without the use of the aids. Subjects without dyslexia read the fastest with music. Subjects with dyslexia were more relaxed with music but more focused with highlighting. Highlighting was the fastest aid for dyslexic readers.

Highlighting is likely best for dyslexic readers as it is relatively fast and improves focus. This seems to demonstrate that highlighting connected the activated parts on both sides of dyslexic brains. □

Bibliography available on request.

PITTSBURGH Children's Dyslexia Center

For more information:
412-931-3181
pittsburgh@cdcinc.org



To Think and to Know

Part 1



Austin R. Shifrin, 33°

by Austin R. Shifrin, 33°

The following is an excerpt from a new work in progress, entitled "To Think and to Know." It explores perspectives from science and philosophy regarding thought and linguistics, and will eventually also touch on the new frontier of Artificial Intelligence, and the similarities and differences that technology bears with our historical understanding of "thinking" and the search for knowledge.

For three reasons, I consider this project I want to pursue as having something Masonic about it. First, because of the claim that "useful knowledge is the great object of our desire." Also because of the injunction that Freemasons ought to study the Seven Liberal Arts, considered a curriculum which would establish a man as knowledgeable and well-rounded. Finally, because of the Masonic philosophy of Jacob Ernst, which asserts that the crux of Freemasonry is that its members ought to grow in intellect and the practice of virtue. However, I would also argue that this investigation ought to be of interest to us regardless of whether it is particularly Masonic, because it gets to the heart of what makes us human, and thus also gets into questions we will soon confront in the future as technologists claim to engineer "thinking" machines: What does it truly mean to *think* or to *know?*

DeNicola points out, however, that enlightenment, revelation, and epiphany can result in real discomfort.

One notion from Classical (that is to say Western or Greco-Roman) Philosophy that is familiar to some cross-section of the general public is the thought experiment known as "Plato's cave," an imaginary scenario in which prisoners in a cave are shackled in such a position as to only be able to see shadows cast upon a wall, and mistake those shadows for the whole of reality.

Daniel DeNicola, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Gettysburg College, writes in his article "Plato's Cave and the Stubborn Persistence of Ignorance" that there may be a more insidious problem lurking than ignorance – which is the ignorance of our ignorance. DeNicola explains for us the grave injustice it would be to impose such conditions, because of the priceless options, liberties, freedom of choice, and self-determination of which it would deprive the prisoners. Having made clear the wretchedness of these circumstances, he goes on to state:

> This account of their predicament is not, of course, one that the prisoners themselves would – or could – offer. They do not and cannot understand their situation, since all of life's experiences are but shifting shadows and echoes. Plato says that the 'prisoners would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows.' Indeed they would not suspect that the things they see are but shadows, nor even have the concept of a shadow. They pass the time in trivial games of shadow-prediction, unaware of their keepers, the fire, or the parade of objects behind them. Though they are troglodytes in extremis, they do not feel claustrophobic or deprived. The actual circumstances of their confinement in the dark cavern, the possibility of a way up and out, and indeed the notion that there may be an incandescent world of wonders to ascend to, are unknown and unsuspected. Life is what it is, what it has always been; they do what they do and feel what they feel because they know nothing else.

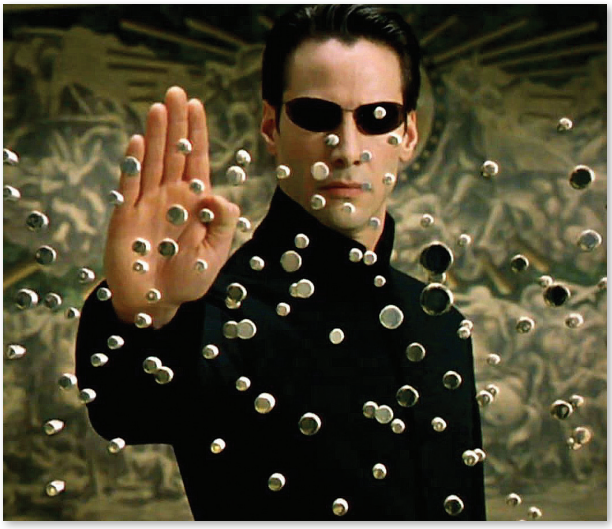
> They are ignorant. But we know … and it is terrifying. Because Plato has, through his narrative, given us privileged knowledge of their situation, we know what they do not; we can affirm their ignorance.
>
> The Cave is a fiction, of course. With a shudder, we gratefully distance ourselves and our lives from that bizarre place and its 'strange prisoners.' We breathe deeply the air of the sunlit world. But then, almost off-handedly, comes Plato's stark and chilling statement: 'They're like us.'

Whether or not we're prepared to concur with Plato's grim pronouncement there, we might agree our own clarity of vision or perspective could be called into question (if Plato's cave is too "old school" for you, feel free to think of Edwin Abbott's "Flatland" from 1884 or the Wachowskis' 1999 film, *The Matrix,* for the sake of this exercise).

But DeNicola proposes a different approach than that taken by Plato to researching the problem – rather than attempting to identify how we can ever know the truth, to instead establish how we can recognize ignorance.

What does it truly mean to *think* or to *know?*

The example he poses in his article concerns one party posing a question to another about a factoid in a specific knowledge base – say, the engineering of a particular old model of car. When the questioner has asked, the other party may have a well- or poorly-formed notion of how to even begin searching for the answer, based on their familiarity with the vocabulary of this subject matter (Was this word a brand name? Was that other word the name of a mechanical part? And so forth). In other words, if you have some general knowledge in the field, you can better delineate and define what the gap in your knowledge is, and recognize what might be an accurate answer contrasted with a nonsensical one. DeNicola phrases the conclusion this way: "Ignorance may be recognized and ascribed only from the perspective of knowledge, and the knowledge we possess determines the degree of specificity of the ignorance we recognize".



Because the hypothetical prisoner not only cannot identify what he does not know, he cannot even identify that he does not know, the necessary learning to escape the circumstances can only come through a fortunate accident, negating his bondage, or the intervention of an outside person or force. DeNicola points out, however, that enlightenment, revelation, and epiphany can result in real discomfort; and humans tend to prefer cognitive comfort and resist such liberation. While he lingers briefly on the hopeful observation that the definition of ignorance as a mental state carries with it the implication of a capacity for future knowledge, he lands on a much more sobering conclusion: "We too are haunted by things we do not know we do not know; and we cannot imagine how drastically those unknowns would alter our lives and our view of the world."

We will continue our discussion of what it means to think and to know in the next issue of *RiteNow.* □

Salute to Veterans

A message for Military Veterans of the Valley of Pittsburgh

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

The Legion of Honor

By Edward L. Hanke, 32°

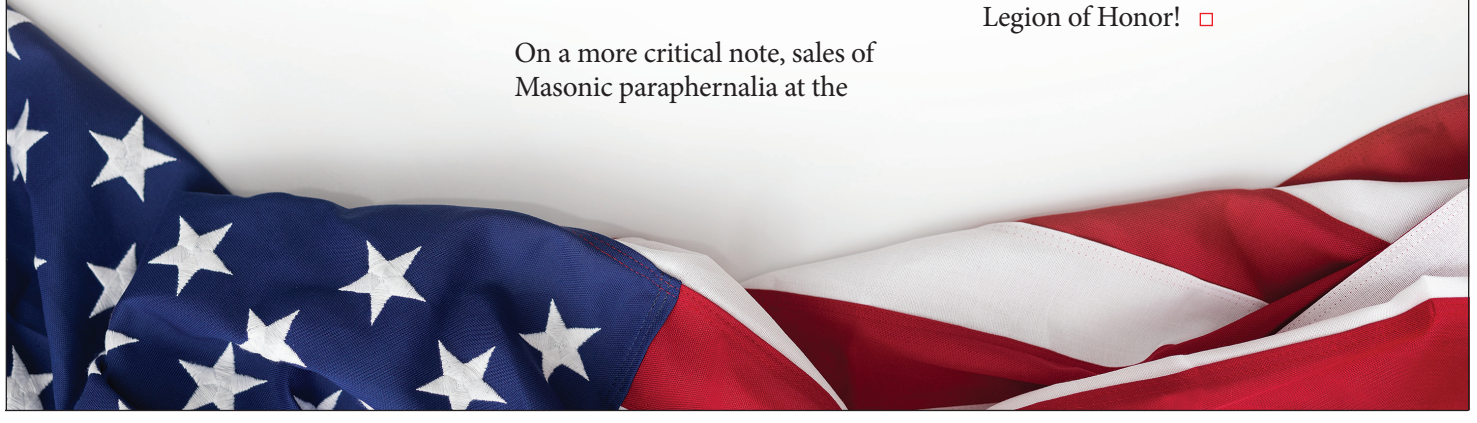
Veterans, by their very nature, are a subset of the civilian population and, likewise, an even smaller subset of the Masonic Fraternity. We have a group of Scottish Rite veterans who are members of the Legion of Honor. If you are a current member, that means that at some point in your Scottish Rite journey at the Valley of Pittsburgh, your name was added to our roster.

So what does this membership mean? First, veteran members are added by word of mouth. At present, there are a couple of hundred of us so designated here in the Valley. Our functions include supporting the various reunion classes, attending stated meetings, recruiting class participants, participating in the various degree work, and anything else we can do to support the efforts of the Valley. Currently, our official charity is the Children's Dyslexia Center, Pittsburgh.

On a more critical note, sales of Masonic paraphernalia at the Reunions and other appropriate occasions provide a small contribution to our tiny budget. We currently have no one to man the table to provide the various pins, badges, belt buckles, gewgaws, gimcracks, and whatnots that every Mason wants and needs. If you are interested in devoting some time to hawking these items, we would like to speak with you. Sales is a great way to get over bashfulness, and it's for a good cause. There are also other opportunities to serve our veteran community at the VA or the S.W. Vets Living Center. We can guide you to the proper channels for that mission. To become a member, all we need is a copy of your DD 214 and a petition.

So what does this membership mean?

Situation, mission, execution, command, and signal. The basics of getting the job done from a military standpoint as well as that of a civilian effort. If you have that interest, we have opportunities for your talents. Come be a part of the Legion of Honor! □





Spoiler Alert!

by D. Todd Ballenger, 33°



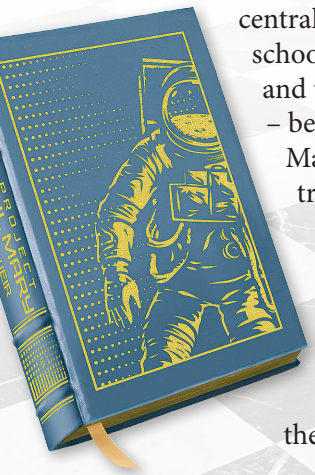
D. Todd Ballenger, 33°

Of all the modern science fiction writers who abound in current literature, I confess that I prefer Andy Weir over many who are more prolific and have been around much longer. Yes, I read *The Martian* before the movie came out, and I've also read *Artemis,* as well as the story I'm about to ruin for everyone, again before the movie premiered. In this case, I will be directly referencing *Project Hail Mary,* and if you haven't seen the film, then please invest a couple hours of your time to do so. If you don't like science fiction per se or just think space movies are dumb (gasp), then I ask for a bit of trust in saying, "Give it a chance. I think you'll be surprised at what you find." Which, oddly enough, is precisely the point of this article.

That being said, be forewarned, my friends. There are spoilers ahead.
—Author's Note

In Freemasonry, few principles are as foundational – or as quietly radical – as the idea of meeting "on the level." It is a call to set aside rank, ego, and earthly distinctions so that two people may stand together in mutual respect and shared humanity. But what happens when one of those people isn't human at all?

Andy Weir's *Project Hail Mary* offers a vivid, imaginative answer. Beneath its hard-science puzzles and interstellar stakes lies a story that beautifully illustrates how cooperation grounded in equality can transcend races, cultures, and even solar systems. The movie's central partnership – between middle-school science teacher Ryland Grace and the alien engineer known as Rocky – becomes a striking metaphor for the Masonic ideal of leveling the field so true brotherhood can flourish.



The premise of the story is a mission built on desperation and isolation. Ryland Grace wakes onboard the starship *Hail Mary* with no memory of who he is or why he's there. Slowly, he recalls the crisis that launched him into space: Earth's sun is being drained by a strange organism which threatening global extinction within decades. Humanity's last hope is a desperate mission to the only nearby star, Tau Ceti, mysteriously unaffected by the phenomenon.

> In Freemasonry, few principles are as foundational – or as quietly radical – as the idea of meeting "on the level."

Grace's situation is bleak. His crewmates are dead; his mission is one-way; and he is alone – until he isn't.

One of the film's most compelling moments occurs when Grace encounters another ship near Tau Ceti. Its occupant is an alien (later named Rocky) whose species faces the same crisis as Earth. Rocky is a brilliant engineer, cautious but curious, and utterly committed to saving his people.

Their first interactions are awkward, tense, and filled with uncertainty. Yet something remarkable happens: both beings choose curiosity over suspicion. They choose to meet "on the level."

This "leveling" is not metaphorical. It is literal. Grace and Rocky must physically construct environments where they can safely meet, communicate, and work together. Their differences are such that individually, they cannot exist in one another's atmosphere. But the deeper leveling is moral and philosophic. They approach one another as equals in purpose, intellect, and dignity.

> They become, in every meaningful sense, brothers.

As a primary example of Masonic symbolism, the level represents equality – an insistence that no man stands above another in the Lodge. It is a tool that reminds us that shared labor, shared truth, and shared humanity are the foundations of fraternity. In *Project Hail Mary,* Grace and Rocky embody this principle instinctively. They share knowledge freely, as Grace teaches Rocky human mathematics and physics. In turn, Rocky teaches Grace his planet's engineering and chemistry. Their interaction is not transactional – it is fraternal.

Similarly, they trust one another with vulnerability. Grace confesses that he is fearful and has doubts as well as guilt (he never volunteered for this mission). Rocky admits his own limitations and asks for help in finding a solution that might help both of their worlds. Each reveals weakness without losing dignity. In this way, they labor together toward a common good. Their joint mission is not for personal glory but for the survival of both worlds. This, to me, seems to be an illustration of the level at its purest: two beings, vastly different, working side-by-side without hierarchy to reach a common goal.

One of the more touching elements of *Project Hail Mary* is the genuine affection that grows between Grace and Rocky. Their friendship is not sentimental, but instead built on shared work, shared danger, and shared success. They become, in every meaningful sense, brothers. From a Masonic standpoint, it is impossible to deny how this resonates with the lessons taught in the lodge. Brotherhood is not created by similarity. It is created by shared commitment to moral labor. Grace and Rocky do not look alike, think alike, or live alike. Yet, intentionally or not, they embody the Masonic belief that brotherhood is a choice – an act of will. Their relationship in the book (and film) also challenges us to consider how practicing this Masonic principle can expand beyond "human" boundaries. From the film's point of view, if two beings separated by biology, culture, and physics can meet on the level, what excuse do humans have for failing to do the same with one another?

As the story intensifies, so does the Masonic message of working on the level. When Grace discovers that







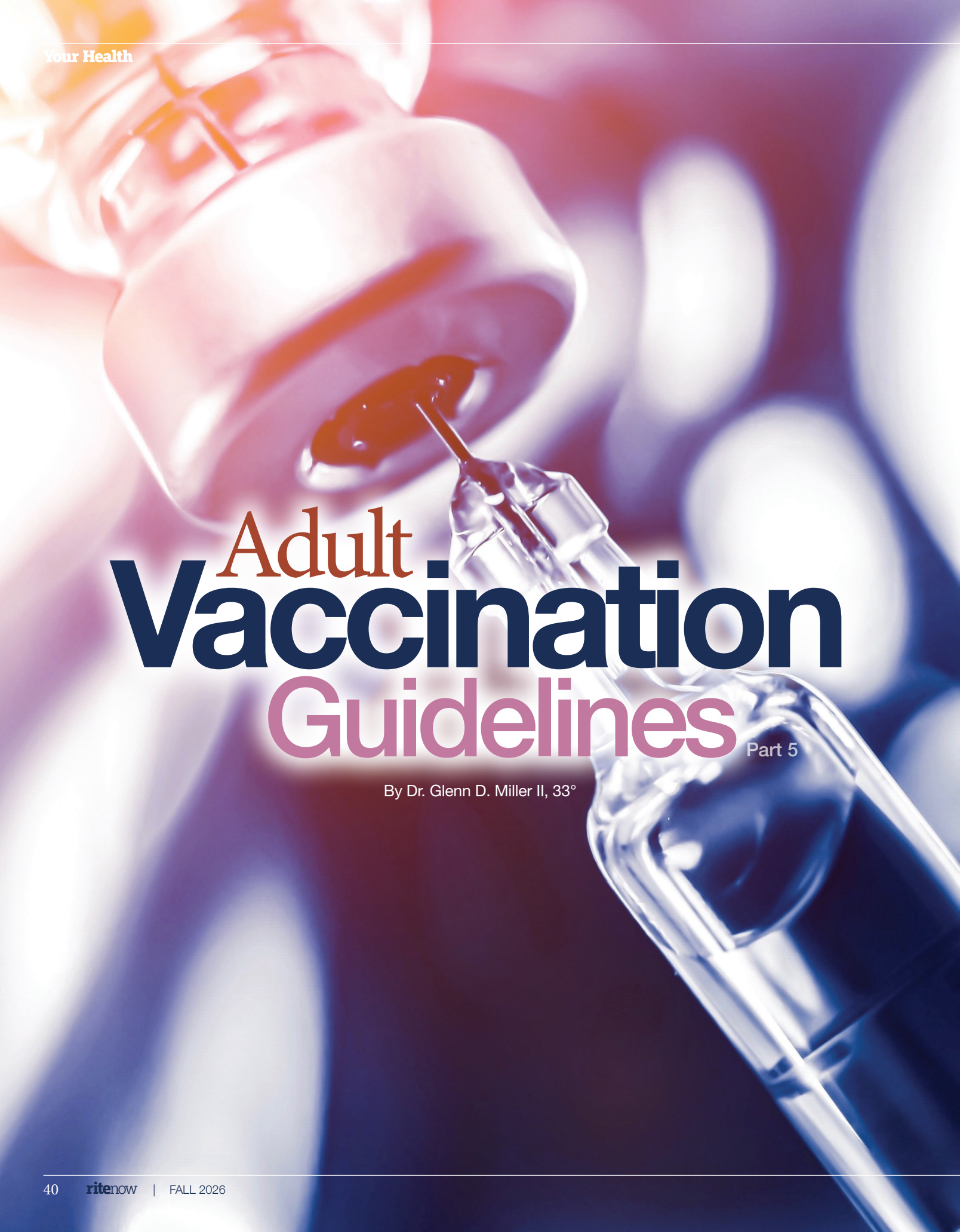
Rocky's ship cannot return home without help, he faces a moral crossroads. He can return to Earth with the data needed to save humanity, or he can risk everything to save Rocky and his planet.

Grace chooses to act on the level.

He chooses brotherhood over nationalism, compassion over self-preservation, and duty over fear. His decision reflects the Masonic tradition that true equality demands action, not just sentiment. To meet someone on the level is to recognize their life as equal in value to your own and to act accordingly. This is not a small choice. It is a cosmic one.

His decision reflects the Masonic tradition that true equality demands action, not just sentiment.

No, *Project Hail Mary* is not a Masonic text, but I choose to see it as a Masonic story. In an age where division often feels easier than unity, Grace and Rocky remind us that being "on the level" is not passive. It is an active, disciplined choice. It requires curiosity, patience, and the willingness to see beyond surface differences. It demands that we approach others not as strangers or threats, but as potential partners in the great work of improving the world. The main characters show us that meeting "on the level" is not merely a ritualistic gesture that we put into practice for stated meetings and lodge occasions. It is a transformative act that can save worlds. And perhaps, in our own small way as men and Scottish Rite Masons, it can save ours, too. □



Adult Vaccination Guidelines

Part 5

By Dr. Glenn D. Miller II, 33°



Dr. Glenn D. Miller II, 33°

In this issue of *RiteNow,* we continue our discussion of current CDC adult vaccination guidelines by covering hepatitis A, the hepatitis A vaccine, and the CDC's vaccination recommendations.

As previously noted, these guidelines are available on the CDC website. Also, as previously noted, all the vaccines we have discussed and will discuss remain available regardless of any changes to what the government considers a "recommended vaccine." I encourage each individual to discuss their vaccination needs with their personal physician.

The first vaccine we will discuss is for hepatitis A. Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV), one of five known hepatitis viruses (A, B, C, D, and E). HAV is a human RNA enterovirus in the Picornaviridae family, a group of viruses dating back approximately 2,000-3,000 years; the current variant is believed to share a common ancestor from roughly 1,500 years ago. Diseases with symptoms similar to hepatitis A, however, were described as far back as 5,000 years ago in China and by Hippocrates (c460-c370 BC) in Greece.

The first recorded hepatitis A outbreak in the United States occurred in 1812 in Norfolk, Virginia. The disease was common among Union troops during the Civil War, and outbreaks affected both Allied and Axis troops, as well as civilian populations, during both World War I and World War II. It was not until 1973 that the hepatitis A virus was isolated and identified, when NIH researchers Stephen Feinstone, Robert Purcell, and Albert Kapikian found it in stool samples using electron microscopy.

One outbreak many of us remember occurred at a Chi-Chi's restaurant at the Beaver Valley Mall in Monaca, Pennsylvania, in November 2003, traced to contaminated green onions from three Mexican farms. It remains the largest single-restaurant outbreak in U.S. history, infecting roughly 650 people and causing four deaths. That outbreak, combined with Chi-Chi's bankruptcy filing the previous month, led the chain to close all its remaining U.S. restaurants by September 2004.

HAV is found in the blood and stool of infected individuals. It primarily affects humans, although nonhuman primates can also become infected after contact with infected humans or other infected primates. Great apes, chimpanzees, Old World monkeys such as rhesus, patas, and cynomolgus monkeys, and New World monkeys such as owl monkeys and marmosets have all been documented to be susceptible to hepatitis A infection from humans, as well as capable of transmitting it back to humans.

The first recorded hepatitis A outbreak in the United States occurred in 1812 in Norfolk, Virginia.

Hepatitis A is an extremely contagious virus. Throughout most of the world, it is most commonly spread via fecal-oral transmission, by ingesting food or water contaminated with feces from an infected individual or by ingesting raw or undercooked shellfish. Examples include drinking contaminated water or drinks made with it, using ice made from contaminated water, eating food grown, washed, or prepared with contaminated water, eating food handled by an infected person who didn't follow acceptable hygiene standards, and eating raw or undercooked shellfish harvested from sewage-contaminated waters.

In the United States, however, "person to person" spread is the most common route of transmission. Hepatitis A can be spread during any sexual activity with an infected individual, through the sharing of needles between

people who inject drugs, and by touching the mouth after touching a surface contaminated with the virus, which can survive on surfaces for several months. Hepatitis A does not spread via casual contact, sneezing, or coughing, although it can spread via prolonged close contact with an infected individual. Infected individuals can spread the virus to others for approximately 10 days before they develop any symptoms.

One outbreak many of us remember occurred at a Chi-Chi's restaurant at the Beaver Valley Mall in Monaca, Pennsylvania, in November 2003, traced to contaminated green onions from three Mexican farms.

Risk factors for contracting hepatitis A include living in or traveling to areas with poor sanitation, working in a laboratory where the virus is studied, having sex with an infected individual, living with someone who has an active infection, using illicit or recreational drugs (oral and IV), being homeless, being immunocompromised (due to HIV, anti-rejection medications, corticosteroids, leukemia, chemotherapy, genetic disorders, or conditions such as MS, rheumatoid arthritis, or lupus), advanced age, working with primates, as well as teacher and children in daycare centers.

Approximately 90% of children with an active hepatitis A infection are totally asymptomatic, and a significant percentage of adults remain asymptomatic as well. When symptoms do develop, they typically appear 2 to 6 or 7 weeks (average 28 days) after exposure and can last anywhere from 2 months or less to 6 months. Young children, however, typically have milder symptoms lasting only 1 to 3 weeks. A small percentage of individuals (10-15%) experience a recurrence of symptoms within the first 6 months of the initial infection.

Typical symptoms include jaundice, itchy skin, fever, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, loss of appetite, dark amber-colored urine, light clay-colored stools, joint pain, enlarged lymph nodes, and abdominal pain often localized to the upper right abdominal quadrant. In the vast majority of infected individuals, hepatitis A does not result in a chronic infection or permanent liver damage; full recovery within 3 months occurs in approximately 85% of cases, and lifelong immunity is conferred after recovery. In rare instances, however, an acute infection can lead to acute liver failure, pancreatitis, kidney failure, or pericarditis. Acute liver failure typically occurs in people 65 and older, and those with pre-existing liver conditions.

There is currently no specific treatment or cure for an acute hepatitis A infection. Treatment is aimed at supportive care to reduce symptoms: adequate rest, a well-balanced diet, avoidance of fatty foods and alcohol, avoidance of addictive substances, adequate hydration, and cautious use, or avoidance, of medications that are metabolized in or can damage the liver. Hospitalization for IV fluid administration and other supportive measures may be required in more severe cases, and in rare cases of acute liver failure, transfer to a tertiary care center capable of liver transplantation may be necessary.

There is currently no specific treatment or cure for an acute hepatitis A infection.

For individuals recently exposed to the hepatitis A virus who are unvaccinated or have never had a previous infection, administration of hepatitis A immunoglobulin (passive immunization), alone or in conjunction with a hepatitis A vaccine, within 2 weeks of exposure can prevent an active infection. Hepatitis A immunoglobulin can also be given, alone or alongside vaccination, to previously unvaccinated individuals traveling to high-risk regions of the world. It is effective in preventing hepatitis A infection for 1 to 2 months.

The best way to prevent hepatitis A infection is vaccination. The hepatitis A vaccines used in the United States are "inactivated" vaccines, meaning they use a "killed" version of the virus that is incapable of causing an active infection but still elicits an immune response. The

first prototype inactivated vaccine in the United States was developed at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in 1986. There are currently three vaccines approved in the United States for hepatitis A immunization: HAVRIX, VAQTA, and TWINRIX. GlaxoSmithKline received FDA approval for HAVRIX in 1995, and Merck received approval for VAQTA in 1996; GlaxoSmithKline received FDA approval for TWINRIX in 2001. HAVRIX and VAQTA are "univalent" vaccines, providing immunization against hepatitis A only. TWINRIX is a "bivalent" vaccine, providing immunization against both hepatitis A and hepatitis B by combining the HAVRIX hepatitis A vaccine with the ENGERIX-B hepatitis B vaccine.

Current CDC recommendations call for hepatitis A vaccination with HAVRIX or VAQTA for all children aged 12-23 months as part of the routine childhood vaccination series, as well as for unvaccinated children and adolescents aged 2-18 years. All adults are essentially eligible to receive a hepatitis A vaccine, though certain groups should definitely consider it. These include people at increased risk of contracting hepatitis A: those who travel internationally, those with an occupational risk of exposure, those in close personal contact with someone who has an active infection or with international adoptees from regions where hepatitis A is common, people who are homeless, people who use illicit drugs (especially IV drugs), and men who have sex with men.

Another group who should strongly consider immunization are those at increased risk of developing severe disease or complications from hepatitis A, including people with chronic liver disease and those who are immunocompromised for any reason, as previously outlined. Others who should strongly consider immunization include pregnant individuals at increased risk of contracting hepatitis A or of developing severe disease or complications, previously unvaccinated individuals exposed to hepatitis A within the previous 2 weeks, and unvaccinated individuals in an area experiencing an outbreak who are at risk of infection.

HAVRIX and VAQTA are generally administered as a 2-dose series, with 6 months between the first and second doses. TWINRIX is approved only for adults aged 18 and older and is typically administered as a 3-dose series over 6 months, with the second dose given 1 month after the first and the third given at 6 months. An accelerated schedule, consisting of 3 doses given over 30 days with a booster at 12 months, is used for individuals preparing for travel or those with potential exposure to the virus.

The most common side effects of vaccination are mild and include fever, rash, headache, and injection-site reactions.

The most common side effects of vaccination are mild and include fever, rash, headache, and injection-site reactions. Severe side effects, such as Guillain-Barre syndrome, immune thrombocytopenia (a low platelet count secondary to an autoimmune disorder), and elevated liver enzymes have been reported but are extremely rare. These vaccines are highly effective at preventing hepatitis A infection, with 95% of healthy vaccinated adults maintaining measurable antibodies more than 20 years after vaccination, and more than 85% of children maintaining measurable antibodies 15-20 years after vaccination.

In the next issue of *RiteNow,* wwe will discuss hepatitis B, the hepatitis B vaccines, and the current CDC guidelines for hepatitis B vaccination. □



The Latest

Important happenings coming soon to the Valley of Pittsburgh

NOV 5

Reservations are required for dinner only!
Please contact the Valley Office at: Secretary@ValleyofPittsburgh.org 412-939-3579 or view our Website at www.ValleyofPittsburgh.org

November Stated Meeting

We will honor our veterans, so please wear your business casual red, white, or blue. Following the meeting, there will be a turkey carving demonstration, wine pairing, and a turkey dinner.

TIME: 7:00PM meeting, dinner follows
LOCATION: GPMC
COST: None
RSVP: November 3

NOV 6 **NOV 7**

Reservations are not required.
For more information, please contact Jason Craig, Secretary, at uniontownlodgeofperfection@gmail.com

Uniontown Reunion

Come out to see the 4th thru the 14th degrees as only the Valley of Uniontown can present. It's a great weekend of fellowship and a good opportunity to fill in your Passport.

TIME: 6:00PM Friday, 8:00AM Saturday
LOCATION: Valley of Uniontown
COST: None
RSVP: Not required

DEC 19

Reservations are required!
Please contact the Valley Office at: Secretary@ValleyofPittsburgh.org 412-939-3579 or view our Website at www.ValleyofPittsburgh.org

Valley Holiday Luncheon

Join us for the annual Valley Holiday Luncheon at the beautiful Shannopin Country Club. This is a great opportunity to share holiday cheer with your friends and Scottish Rite Brothers and ladies. There will be music and wonderful fellowship. Valet parking available and the cash bar opens at 11:00AM.

TIME: 11:00AM
LOCATION: Shannopin Country Club
COST: $50 per person
RSVP: December 11

FEB 4

Reservations are required for dinner only!
Please contact the Valley Office at: Secretary@ValleyofPittsburgh.org 412-939-3579 or view our Website at www.ValleyofPittsburgh.org

February Stated Meeting

Shake off the winter blues by spending a night with your Scottish Rite Brothers. Dinner and entertainment details will be posted on the website and the next issue of *RiteNow.*

TIME: 6:00PM dinner, 7:00PM meeting
LOCATION: GPMC
COST: $20 per person for dinner
RSVP: February 2

Fellowship Breakfast

You can't find a better breakfast with better company that supports a better cause. The breakfast is cooked and served by our local DeMolay and Rainbow and the proceeds benefit those organizations.

TIME: 9AM to 10:30AM
LOCATION: GPMC
COST: $11/person (all you can eat)
RSVP: None required

OCT 31

To have an event listed in future issues, please contact the Valley Office at 412-939-3579, or by email at secretary@valleyofpittsburgh.org

DEC 12

Reservations are required!
Please contact the Valley Office at:
Secretary@ValleyofPittsburgh.org
412-939-3579 or view our Website at www.ValleyofPittsburgh.org

Santa Party

Bring young and old alike to the Valley Santa Party. There will be presents for each child, pizza & desserts for everyone, and all will be entertained by Magician Ray Lucas. Reservations are a must and there is no charge for all the festivities.

TIME: **10:30AM**
LOCATION: **GPMC**
COST: **None**
RSVP: **December 8**

MAR 13

Reservations are required!
Please contact the Valley Office at:
Secretary@ValleyofPittsburgh.org
412-939-3579 or view our Website at www.ValleyofPittsburgh.org

Monte Carlo Night

Calling all high rollers. You won't want to miss this year's Monte Carlo night. All proceeds benefit the Children's Dyslexia Center-Pittsburgh. Watch coming issues of *RiteNow* for more details.

TIME: **6:00PM**
LOCATION: **GPMC**
COST: **$100 per person**
RSVP: **March 9**

NOV 28 **DEC 26** **JAN 30**

Looking Ahead

APR 1
April Stated Meeting
THURSDAY, APRIL 1
GPMC

MAY 7 **JUN 4**
CigaRite
FRIDAY, MAY 7 and JUNE 4
GPMC

MAY 14
175th Anniversary Celebration
FRIDAY, MAY 14
TBA

MAY 15
Spring Class
SATURDAY, MAY 15
GPMC

JUN 3
June Stated Meeting
THURSDAY, JUNE 3
GPMC

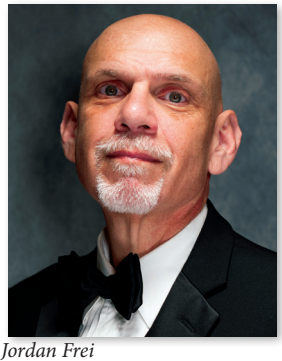
Scan this QR code for the most up-to-date information on all Valley events:

ValleyNews

A collection of recent happenings in the Valley of Pittsburgh

Brother Elected to Honorary Membership

At the 2026 Annual Meeting of the Supreme Council, Brother **Jordan Frei** was elected to receive the 33rd degree and become an Honorary Member of the Supreme Council. He will join Brothers **AJ Antimary, Brian Maxwell** *(not shown)*, **Matthew Brockman** (Uniontown), and **Neil Reddington** (Uniontown) *(not shown)* in Boston for the conferral on August 31, 2027.



Jordan Frei



AJ Antimary



Matthew Brockman

Congratulations to the Class of 2027!

DeMolay Rose Croix Class

On Saturday, September 26, PA DeMolay held its **Rose Croix Induction Class** at the Greater Pittsburgh Masonic Center where state and local DeMolay officers welcomed eight new members. Brothers **Chris Cooper, Sean Tomasic,** and **Joe Carothers** were on hand to represent the Valley of Pittsburgh at this annual event.







Fraternal Services Directory

These listed businesses subscribe to providing high quality customer service, delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, respect, honesty, and the fraternal spirit.

ACCOUNTING & TAXATION

Richard A. Reynolds, CPA 412-795-4194
www.RichReynoldsCPA.com
richreynolds@MSN.com

ADVERTISING SPECIALTIES

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Eddie & Sandy Grimes goodadv@comcast.net
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Americanclassics@windstream.net
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Flynn's Tire & Auto Service 724-346-3701
18 Locations
Jeff Wonderling www.FlynnsTire.com

BEARINGS & POWER TRANSMISSION

Gipson Bearing & Supply Co. 412-462-7960
Craig Gipson www.gipsonbearing.com

CATERING

Party Line Catering, Deli & Bakery 412-882-7110
Custer Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15227
Brian Meador www.partylinecatering.net

CHIMNEY REPOINTING & REBUILDING

Coffey Contracting Co. Inc. 412-341-1127
thomas.coffey3@verizon.net Pittsburgh, PA
Tom Coffey www.coffeycontracting.com

FINANCIAL SERVICES / WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Fayette Legacy Partners of Janney Montgomery Scott, LLC
Michael Tetteris, MBA, AWMA 724-425-1021
mtetteris@janney.com

FUNERAL SERVICES

George Irvin Green Funeral Home
www.georgeigreenfuneralhome.com
Munhall, PA Donald Green 412-461-6394

Jefferson Memorial Cemetery & Funeral Home
Pleasant Hills Harry C. Neel 412-655-4500
www.jeffersonmemorial.biz

Warco-Falvo Funeral Home 724-225-1500
Washington, PA S. Timothy Warco
www.warcofalvofuneralhome.com

Young Funeral Home Ltd 724-283-3333
William F. Young III
127 W. Jefferson St., Butler, PA 16003
www.youngfuneralhomes.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN / CREATIVE SERVICES

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Rodney E. Boyce www.squarepegdesign.com
rboyce@squarepegdesign.com

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License #PA069933
Paul M. Unglo II Bethel Park, PA
Building, Renovation & Remodeling

INSURANCE

Rodgers Insurance Group 412-922-1651
James M. Wehar
Pittsburgh, PA jwehar@rodgersgrp.com

REAL ESTATE

Keller Williams Realty 412-882-9002
Mac McIlrath, Assoc. Broker Mac13@kw.com
4710 Clairton Blvd, Pittsburgh, PA 15236

ROOFING

Coffey Contracting Co. Inc. 412-341-1127
Tom Coffey www.coffeycontracting.com
thomas.coffey3@verizon.net

STUMP REMOVAL

R&R Tree & Stump Service 724-880-8247
Don't Mow Around It, Remove It!
Brian Ritenour

TREE SERVICE

R&R Tree & Stump Service 724-880-8247
Tree Removal Tree Trimming
Brian Ritenour

VIDEOGRAPHY

Dreamscape Productions 412-965-1860
P.J. Roup pjroup@gmail.com

For advertising rates and information, please contact the Valley Office at 412-939-3579 or by email at secretary@valleyofpittsburgh.org

Valley of Pittsburgh
Gourgas Lodge of Perfection
Greater Pittsburgh Masonic Center
3579 Masonic Way
Pittsburgh, PA 15237-2700

2027 Spring Class

Saturday, May 15
GPMC

175th Anniversary Celebration
Friday, May 14

A very special celebration event will be announced soon. The Right Worshipful Grand Master and the Sovereign Grand Commander will be in attendance.

Plan now to join us for this special evening!

valleyofpittsburgh.org