Spring 2026

rite now

THE MAGAZINE OF THE **VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH**



Spes Mea in Deo Est

valleyofpittsburgh.org

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riteNow
Vol. XXXIIV, No. 3
Spring 2026

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RiteNow magazine is the official publication of the Valley of Pittsburgh, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, District of Pennsylvania, Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, USA. Opinions expressed are those of the individual author(s). Information is obtained from correspondence, press releases, Masonic publications and miscellaneous sources, which in many cases, cannot be verified. ***RiteNow*** magazine is published four times a year. © 2026, Valley of Pittsburgh, 3579 Masonic Way, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15237. Phone: 412-939-3579. Email: secretary@valleyofpittsburgh.org

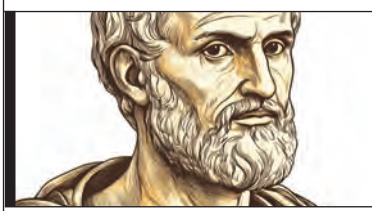
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about this issue

Most Scottish Rite Masons are familiar with the battle cry, *Spes Mea in Deo Est*, My Hope is in God.

In this issue of *RiteNow*, we examine the idea of hope. What does it mean to have hope, to place your hope in God? How does hope differ from faith? How does it inform our decisions and shape our lives? What happens if we lose it?

It is my sincere hope that you find inspiration in these pages.



The Active

A message from the Supreme Council Active for Pennsylvania

SUPREME COUNCIL

This Is Tough, But I Can Do It

By Paul J. Roup, 33°

"The new cultural belief that everything should be fun, fast, and easy is inconsistent with hopeful thinking. It also sets us up for hopelessness. When we experience something that is difficult and requires significant time and effort, we are quick to think, *This is supposed to be easy; it's not worth the effort,* or, *This should be easier: it's only hard and slow because I'm not good at it.* Hopeful self-talk sounds more like, *This is tough, but I can do it."*

—Brené Brown



Paul J. Roup, 33°
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How many times have you put off a task because it seemed daunting, time-consuming, or complex? Unless you are a very special Type A *getterdunner,* probably a lot. I will say for the record that I greatly admire those who approach each and every task as if it were as simple as loading the dishwasher.

I am not one of those people. If it's out of my comfort zone, it gets into my head. That's not to say I never try new things. On the contrary, I'm always ready to learn something new. I've said many times, and I firmly believe it, that the magic happens beyond the comfort zone, so I am always willing to explore. In fact, I have also said many times that I sometimes jump into things I have no business trying because I'm too dumb to know I shouldn't try it. Many of my best experiences have come from that attitude.

> If it's out of my comfort zone, it gets into my head.

Our Scottish Rite gives you so many places to challenge yourself. Some of the things we do are fun, fast, and easy, such as the Water Buffalo degree. Other things – things of great value – may be more challenging: Pathfinder, HGA, acting, and serving as an officer, just to name a few.

Not every one of those things will speak to every member, but I bet if you do a little digging, there is something here at the Valley for you. Do you like acting, building sets, or working backstage? We have a place for you. Are you a classic car buff? We have a club for that. How about a history aficionado? Pathfinder will help you understand the way the Supreme Council and Valley function, and the Hauts Grades Academy will let you take a deep dive into the symbolism, values, and stories that we tell on the stage in our degrees. Doing so will also help you apply those lessons in your own life and become a better man and Mason.

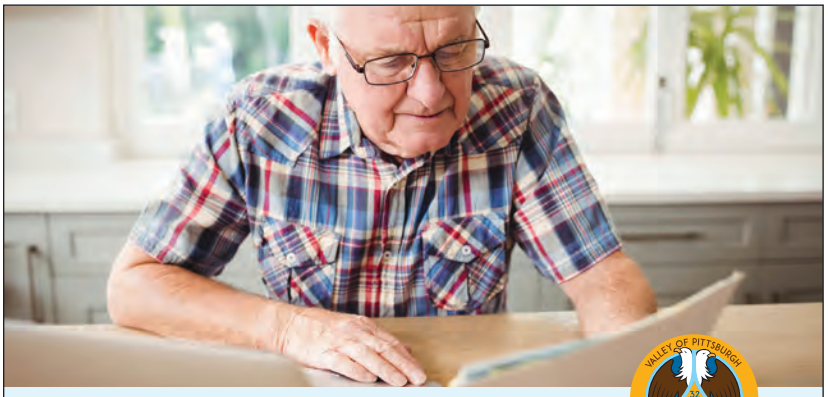
All of the things I mentioned above can be a little difficult and may require time and effort, but I can promise you that they will be rewarding. So, what do you say? Are you willing to try something new this year? How about trying that hopeful self-talk that Brené Brown talked about?

Repeat after me: This is tough, but I can do it. □



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.

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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 Chief

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

CONSISTORY

Following the Plan

By Joshua S. Freeman, 33°

Spes Mea in Deo Est. My Hope is in God: The motto of Scottish Rite Masonry, draped in a banner under the double-headed eagle. The central message of our penultimate but most important degree, loudly proclaimed by our exemplar. But what does it mean? How do we apply this critical element of our teachings to our daily lives?

To me, our relationship with God is very personal. One of the fundamental tenets of Freemasonry is belief in a Supreme Being, along with acceptance of all religions and a refusal to propagate any specific set of religious teachings. We each worship the Supreme Being we believe in in our own ways, and as a Fraternity, we don't suffer religious discussions or disputes within the lodge. Our relationship with our God is our own, and this fundamental principle is one of the main reasons Freemasonry has enjoyed the longevity it has. So many other organizations and communities have been destroyed by religious strife.

Personally, My Hope is in God means there is a plan. I have hope that God has laid out a plan for me to achieve the goal he has set before me. This goal, as I understand it, is to take me from the rough ashlar that I was born and convert me to the perfect stone, so that I may better fit into the house God is building for all of us. Like any plan, though, there must be a detailed description of the steps to be taken to achieve the goal. A trestle board must be provided on how I get from step to step, remove the rough corners, and work to make myself a better man. Luckily, my hope has been rewarded in that God provided me the plan, laid out the details of the process to achieve the goal, and even provided me a community of like-minded men to help me along the way. No matter how detailed the plans are, how intricate the explanation of how to achieve the goal, none of us can accomplish the herculean task of getting where God wants us to be alone. My hope in God has been rewarded in that he has provided me a Fraternity to help me accomplish his goal.

> God has provided us with the plan and laid out the trestle board.

My Blue Lodge provided me with the initial plans, the first steps needed to put me on the path to completion. In the lodge, I found fundamental tenets that illuminated the path and started me in the right direction. My hope in God was rewarded even further when he led me to the Scottish Rite. In the Valley, I found even more detailed plans further clarifying the expectations. These explanations come in the form of the allegorical lessons of 29 degrees but can really be broken down into our six Core



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My Hope is in God means there is a plan.

Values: Reverence for God, Integrity, Justice, Tolerance, Devotion to Country, and Service to Humanity. In his article in *The Northern Light* titled "True to the Core," Ill. Brother James L. Tungate, 33°, noted that, "Core Values are not descriptions of what men do; they describe how to be. Core Values are not strategies or maneuvers to achieve selfish goals. Core Values are not the tools by which to get an advantage in business, relationships, or life. They should guide men in making decisions, predominate in personal relationships, reveal humanity, and show what it stands for."

Our Core Values guide us along the path God has laid for us. They are the rumble strips on the side of the road, the left and right limits of the path we must follow. While our degrees lay out the turn-by-turn directions, the specific actions in our plan, our Core Values are the bumpers to keep us moving in the right direction. If all our actions are in keeping with and are in service to our Core Values, then we will continue along the path God has set and eventually meet his goal. Our Core Values are more important today than ever before. In this time of divisiveness, when no one can seem to agree on anything, when the rhetoric we hear daily on the news and on social media is so vitriolic, our Core Values show us the way. If we focus on Reverence for God, Integrity, Justice, Tolerance, Devotion to Country, and Service to Humanity, then we, as Scottish Rite Masons, can truly help the world move forward. In our closing charge, we are reminded that "we have the truth that makes men free." That truth is embodied in our Core Values. Again, as we are admonished in the charge, "let us live, act, and speak in such a way that all may know the high ideals for which we stand."

> Our Core Values guide us along the path God has laid for us.

Each of us has placed our faith in God. All of us as members of the Valley have been rewarded in our faith. God has provided us with the plan and laid out the trestle board. It is now up to us to follow through, to meet the intent, to achieve the goal. We don't have to do it alone; our Brothers are here to help. But it is up to us, individually as Scottish Rite Masons, to provide the willingness to learn the steps and the will to follow the path. I have faith in God that he will help each of us achieve our ends. □



The Potent

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

LODGE OF PERFECTION

Another Angle

By David C. Allison, 32°

What Does Freemasonry Mean to You?

We should ask ourselves this question periodically, as we tend to get lax, disappointed, frustrated, or overwhelmed at times. I believe that Freemasonry, when applied, can and will make a difference in the world, and each of us has sworn to be committed to that goal. If you take the time to think about it from a different angle, instead of focusing on the downside, it can really bolster your spirits and give you newfound energy.



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I recently caught myself lamenting the fact that I had helped to bring ten members into a body and, despite my efforts, only three were coming to meetings and events. Then one night, while in thought, it occurred to me that I should be thankful for the three active members that I had, and I was doing them a disservice by always complaining instead of helping their spirits and energy.

> Freemasonry, when applied, can and will make a difference in the world.

While we cannot give up on trying to encourage the members to get involved, we should perhaps stop and think, do we really know this man, or in our efforts to gain and keep membership numbers up, did we just push him into the organization? I believe that no one has knowingly signed a petition for anyone that he did not think would be a good Mason. So, if we have brought in men we did not really know who are now inactive, we have a mission. Instead of complaining or being disappointed, we must take the time now to get to know them and determine the issue. We can help them get interested and active, or wait patiently until whatever is preventing them from doing so resolves. If we don't take the time to get to know a man and his situation in life, how can we ever expect him to care as we do? If we all take the time to get to know one or two of these men, I think that they would come to realize what they are missing.

Sometimes I think we place too much emphasis on titles and advancement that we forget our real mission: to make a difference in the world. We should all live, act, and speak in such a manner that all will know the high ideals we stand for. World affairs and the current state of morality can tend to wear all of us down. We might wonder what difference our relatively small group (compared to all of the people in the world) can make, but again, if we take the time to look at it from a different angle, we may see something new. Remember that our Lord and Savior was only one man, though a very special one, who gave his best to change the world, and look at what he achieved.

So, when you are down, I ask: Have you taken the time to step back and look at it from another angle? You might be surprised by what you see. □

The Sovereign

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

PRINCES OF JERUSALEM

Hope Is a Rope

By Robert B. McGinnis, 32°

in a higher power. It further shows our reliance on a higher power and our commitment to the spiritual and moral lessons of the degrees.

In biblical terms, hope can mean rope. In Jeremiah 29:11, we read, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope as a future." This means that God has plans for each of us, and knowing this truth ties us, ropes us, anchors us to our future. Hope is not a feeling, but a rope held by our God. (credit to: Fireplacefaith.com).

Believing that our hope is in God truly anchors us in our daily life and struggles.

Believing that our hope is in God truly anchors us in our daily life and struggles. We may not think of this every day or all the time, but we as people of faith do relate to this hope. It drives us through our everyday lives to stay on the right course and to prosper as men. As we pursue the endeavors of our lives, we show others what Hope has given us: true meaning in the primary principles of Freemasonry.

How does this pertain to us, and how does it affect our lives in the 21st century?

I am sure that each of you has had that moment when someone has come to you and stated something to the nature of "Tell me about being a Mason". I have had this happen, and what each has said is that they have seen how I am with others or in certain circumstances. They see my actions, or my hope, and how it translates to my everyday life. Their curiosity has led them to ask me questions, and then I have handed them a petition to join the Lodge.

I believe that this all starts with, "My Hope is in God."

By living and showing this to others, we engage those who may not know it at the time but share the same interests in good and in expanding their horizons through new ventures such as the Fraternity.

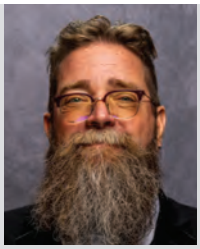
Look at who you have brought into the Fraternity. Do you see common interests, interactions, or friendships you may have never made without Freemasonry?

I am sure you do.

We see a clear path. We know what is right and how to act. That path is not always the easy one. There may be problems and struggles along the way, but with hope in God, we will prevail. Be what is good and others will follow. □

Where does the motto *Spes Mea in Deo Est* come from?

It refers to the faith and trust members of the Scottish Rite place



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The Wise

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

ROSE CROIX

Understanding Hope

By Benjamin J. Douglas, 32°

The 18th Degree, Knight of Rose Croix, cites "hope" as one of the key virtues of all Knights of Rose Croix. It also contains the following definition, which, I, as well as every other Past Most Wise Master, can attest, is perhaps one of the most difficult lines to exemplify eloquently:

> *Master of Ceremonies:* Hope is the desire for a better life.
>
> *Senior Warden:* "We are saved by hope. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

While I could very likely have written multiple articles deciphering the varying, nuanced interpretations of this dialogue, I think understanding the use of hope is far more important. In the lexicon of human emotions, few words are as heavily trafficked yet as poorly understood as "hope." We use it casually to express minor preference – *I hope it doesn't rain,* or *I hope the meal at tonight's meeting is good* – stripping the concept of its profound psychological weight. We often mistake it for a passive form of waiting, a gentle wish that the universe will align in our favor. We need look no further for a wonderful example of this.

However, when we examine the true nature of hope, we find that it is not a passive sentiment at all. It is a dynamic force. It is not merely the belief that things will get better; it is the resolve to make them so.

> To understand hope, we must first distinguish it from its closely aligned cousin, optimism.

To understand hope, we must first distinguish it from its closely aligned cousin, optimism. While the two are related, they operate differently. Optimism is usually a disposition, a general expectation that things will turn out well in the end. It is often described as looking at the glass as half-full. Optimism can be a wonderful trait, but it has a potential flaw: it can sometimes detach us from reality, encouraging us to assume that everything will be fine without our intervention.

Hope, by contrast, does not require a positive forecast. Václav Havel, the playwright and dissident who, via the Velvet Revolution, later became the first president of Czechoslovakia (now Czechia and Slovakia), noted that hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes



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"We are saved by hope. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

sense, regardless of how it turns out. Hope can exist in the direst of circumstances where optimism would be delusional. Hope looks at the wreckage, acknowledges the devastation, and still decides to take a step forward.



Dr. Charles R. Snyder

Within his book, *The Psychology of Hope,* Dr. Charles R. Snyder posits that hope is not an emotion, but a cognitive process made up of three components: **Goals** (knowing what you want), **Pathways** (seeing a way to get there), and **Agency** (believing you can make it happen).

This framework reveals the crucial role hope plays in our everyday lives: it is the primary engine of problem-solving.

- **It clarifies our vision:** In the daily grind, it is easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. Hope is the mental act of visualizing a future that is distinct from, and superior to, the present.

- **It fuels resilience:** When we face obstacles – a lost job, a health crisis, a fractured relationship – those without hope tend to see the barrier as a wall. Those with hope see it as a hurdle. They may have to change their route (Pathways), but they do not abandon the journey.

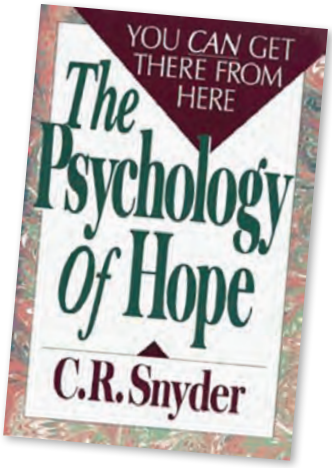
In our daily lives, hope functions as an anchor. The metaphor is apt not because an anchor holds a ship back, but because it stabilizes it. In a storm, the anchor prevents the vessel from drifting into the rocks, allowing the crew to ride out the turbulence until the weather clears.

We see this played out in small, everyday acts of courage. The student studying late into the night for an exam is fueled by hope. The parent tirelessly advocating for a child with special needs is sustained by hope. The entrepreneur rebuilding after a bankruptcy is driven by hope. In each instance, the individual is not ignoring the difficulty of the moment; they are engaging with it, using the vision of a future outcome to endure present discomfort.

Ultimately, hope is a discipline. It is a muscle that must be exercised. In a world that often feeds us a diet of cynicism and despair, maintaining hope is an act of defiance. It requires us to look at the imperfections of our lives and the world, and rather than surrendering to apathy, choose to believe that our actions matter.

Ultimately, hope is a discipline. It is a muscle that must be exercised.

Hope tells us that we are not leaves blowing in the wind, but captains of our own souls. It bridges the gap between where we are and where we want to be, reminding us that while we cannot always control the wind, we can always adjust our sails. □



The Venerable

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

Knights of St. Andrew

Hope and Faith

By Thomas J. Anke, 32°

"My hope is in God!" We all know those words, but do we all know what they really mean? Referring to hope, Psalm 121:2 says, "My hope is in the Lord who made heaven and earth." I am pretty sure that we can all be grateful for providence… and everything that we have is a piece of that "heaven and earth." Allegedly, King David penned those words, but why? It would seem that the speaker's hope and source of help are rooted in the G-d who created the universe, highlighting His power and sovereignty. This verse is a declaration of reliance on G-d, emphasizing that true help comes only from Him, not from earthly sources or human efforts. That is a truth, but that is not the truth about why a Scottish Rite Mason's "hope is in G-d."

The missing element in that viewpoint is agenda. We, as Masons, are not in the business of waiting for an outer force to fix the world for us. We are charged to change our world, improve our lives (and those of others), and leave the world a better place than we were born into. Yes, it is good to hope, but it is better to act on our values and help the process. I have, on occasion, bought a Powerball ticket and hoped that I would win. Getting my MS Ed required a plan, effort, and expense. Logic and reality dictate that I pay my bills with money that I earn using those degrees, and not from a winning Powerball ticket. The active (for most of us) trumps the passive. That is not to say that Hope is not valuable, because it is. Perhaps the problem is that many do not understand what the word means, or conflate and confuse it with faith. Faith, in its simplest form, is a strong belief or trust in something or someone without proof or evidence. It can also refer to a specific system of religious beliefs or complete confidence in a person, remedy, or idea. There is nothing wrong with Faith, but Faith is not the same as Hope.

We are charged to change our world, improve our lives (and those of others), and leave the world a better place than we were born into.

As Masons, and specifically Scottish Rite Masons, we are not taught to wait for the unlikely benefit of a winning Powerball ticket. We are taught to make things happen. I don't often quote anti-heroes from Martin Scorsese movies, but I think



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that Jack Nicholson summed it up in *The Departed* with the following: "No one gives it to you. You have to take it. When you decide to be something, you can be it. That's what they don't tell you." Admittedly, that was the fictional mobster Frank Costello (based on the real-life mobster Whitey Bulger) discussing the need for agenda rather than hope, but his point is also applicable to non-nefarious pursuits. We are not gifted with life, free will, and time on task in order to wait for things to happen **FOR** us; we are gifted with the blessing of being able to make the right things happen if we choose to exercise the gift that we have been given. Sadly, most people do not take advantage of that gift.

I quoted a psalm earlier, but now I feel the need to dig up a prophet. The psalm is good and provides a surface-level reference to hope… in fact, David may have played fast and loose with words in the psalm and used "hope" when he was relying on people to read it as "faith". Isaiah, according to scripture, was less subtle when challenging the beliefs of others than the Psalmist. He took the word of G-d given to him, and when pressed to explain, he did so in the fewest words possible. He also embodied the values of the Scottish Rite because he recognized and encouraged righteous acts rather than righteous acting. The King James Bible recounts this in Isaiah 6:8, "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me." G-d was asking for a volunteer to carry out a mission. That is what the AASR is at its core: a mission to DO good and leave the world a better place than we found it.

> We say that we are devoted to our Core Values, but if we are passive Masons, we are not acting on our beliefs as charged.

Hope is often wrongly conflated with faith… In psychology, hope is a dynamic, cognitive motivational system that involves setting and pursuing goals. It is a belief in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes, encompassing both the willpower to pursue goals and the identification of routes to achieve them. Hope is considered a crucial factor in well-being, resilience, and navigating challenges. Faith and hope, while related, have distinct meanings. Faith is a strong belief or trust in something unseen or unproven, while hope is a feeling of expectation and desire for something to happen in the future. Faith is about a present state of belief, while hope is directed toward future outcomes. Hope is a universal human experience, understood and expressed differently depending on culture.

> Faith and hope, while related, have distinct meanings.

The biggest differences are how people in that culture pursue those hopes and what they draw on for strength. Some cultures emphasize agency and goal-oriented hope, while others focus on collective well-being and hope rooted in faith or community.

What is our culture, and where does that leave us in the Rite? As much as I love the psalms, it was a well-placed bunt, but Isaiah hit that one over the fence. We say that we are devoted to our Core Values, but if we are passive Masons, we are not acting on our beliefs as charged. There is nothing wrong with passivity if you are a Buddhist monk. Live a life without attachment, offend none, and do no harm… then Nirvana. I doubt that there are any reading this that are Buddhist monks, so to you who are reading this, I want to remind you that "hope" without "action" is not really hope. The time is always right now, and there are only so many grains of sand in our hourglass. True hope depends on actions. When someone charges into battle because their city is under attack, even though they know it means sacrificing their future, they are exercising HOPE in the Scottish Rite sense. Wishing for something is not hope… doing something with the expectation of a better future is.

Act. □

UniontownUpdate

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

VALLEY OF UNIONTOWN

Spes Mea in Deo Est: **How Faith Shapes Our Relationships**

By Matthew M. Brockman, 32°

The Scottish Rite motto, *My hope is in God* is more than just words we say in ceremony. For those who truly live by this principle, it changes how they treat others, from their closest family members to complete strangers. Placing your hope in God shapes how you connect with people every day.

When you place your hope in God, you stop expecting other people to be perfect or to make you happy all the time. This might sound small, but it changes everything. In marriage, it means you can love your spouse without trying to control them. You can care deeply about their happiness without feeling like a failure when they have a bad day.

When you place your hope in God, you stop expecting other people to be perfect or to make you happy all the time.

This doesn't mean you stop trying or stop caring. Instead, it means you're free to love without the constant anxiety that everything depends on you. You can be a good partner without carrying the impossible weight of being someone's entire source of joy and security.

Being a Better Parent

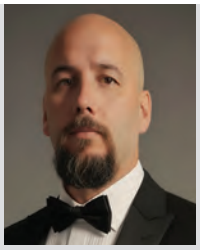
Parenting tests this principle like nothing else. Every parent wants to protect their children and make sure they turn out okay. But when your hope is in God, you can do your best while accepting that you can't control everything.

You can guide your children, teach them, and love them completely, but you don't have to pretend you have all the answers. When your teenager makes mistakes or your adult child struggles, you can be there for them without falling apart. You can set boundaries without guilt and offer support without trying to fix everything. This is especially important during real crises like addiction or serious illness, when you're reminded that your power as a parent has limits.

Being Real with Friends

This motto also changes friendships. When you're not looking to friends to prove your worth or make you feel important, you can be honest with them. You can admit when you're struggling, say when you don't know something, and show your real self, flaws and all.

And you become a better friend to others. You can sit with someone who's hurting without rushing to make it better or offering empty reassurances. You understand that



Matthew M. Brockman, 32°

Putting your hope in God changes how you see people you don't know

sometimes people just need you to be there, and that true comfort doesn't always come with easy answers.

Treating Strangers with Respect

Putting your hope in God changes how you see people you don't know. When your sense of worth doesn't come from being better than others or having more than they do, you start seeing strangers differently. The person behind the cash register, the homeless man on the corner, the driver who cut you off: they're all people who matter, regardless of their circumstances.

This doesn't mean pretending everyone's situation is the same or ignoring real problems. It means treating people with basic dignity, no matter who they are. It means looking the cashier in the eye and saying thank you. It means seeing the homeless person as someone with a story, not just a problem to avoid. It means giving people the benefit of the doubt when you can.

Finding Common Ground

In groups like the Scottish Rite, this shared belief creates strong bonds between men who might otherwise have nothing in common. Brothers from different backgrounds, with different jobs and different political views, come together recognizing that none of them has everything figured out and that all of them depend on something bigger than themselves.

This doesn't mean everyone agrees about everything. People still have different opinions and different perspectives. But it means those differences don't have to divide them, because no one person thinks they have all the answers.

Living with Hope and Responsibility

Some people misunderstand this motto. They think putting hope in God means sitting back and not trying. That's not it at all. You still work hard, still plan ahead, still take responsibility for your actions. The difference is in how you handle things when they don't go as planned.

When you fail at something, you can learn and try again without feeling worthless. When a relationship struggles, you can work on it without panicking. When life throws something unexpected at you, you can face it without falling apart because your deepest sense of security isn't tied to having everything go right.

The Freedom to Love Better

My hope is in God gives you freedom. Freedom to love people without needing them to be perfect. Freedom to try things without the fear of failure destroying you. Freedom to admit you're wrong. Freedom to ask for help. Freedom to be human.

This freedom makes you better at relationships. You can be more patient with your spouse because you're not desperate for them to complete you. You can be more honest with friends because you're not performing for their approval. You can be kinder to strangers because you're not competing with them. You can let your children grow up because you trust they're not just in your hands.

In conclusion, the motto "My hope is in God" isn't about checking out of life or avoiding responsibility. It's about recognizing that we're limited, imperfect people who need something solid to stand on. When we find that solid ground in God rather than in our own abilities or other people's approval, we become free to love others better, fail without shame, and keep going when things get hard. We can care deeply about everyone in our lives, family, friends, and strangers, while knowing that we're not alone in carrying the weight. □



Our Youth

News and information about the Masonic Youth in our Valley

The Journey Continues

by J. Michael Larkin, Executive Officer, Pennsylvania DeMolay

One of the greatest rewards of serving Pennsylvania DeMolay is witnessing young men develop – not only in years, but in character, self-confidence, and a genuine dedication to the values we strive to teach. From time to time, an experience comes along that clearly demonstrates why DeMolay is so impactful for young men and why its close relationship with Freemasonry remains essential. One such moment will stay with me for a long time.

Mason Derosky, State Senior Councilor; Emery Sellaro, Master Councilor of Steel City; and Cameron McMahon



Cameron, Emery, and Mason



DeMolay group at their Master Mason's degree

were raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. What made the occasion especially powerful was that Coraopolis Lodge is the very place where all three young men stood only a few years ago when they joined Steel City Chapter. In that same room where they first promised to live by the seven cardinal virtues, they now committed themselves to the timeless principles of Freemasonry.

DeMolay is not merely an activity for teenage years; it is a foundation. It prepares young men for life by teaching them leadership, responsibility, service, and brotherhood. Seeing Mason, Emery, and Cameron take this next step was witnessing the natural continuation of a journey that began when they first knocked on the Chapter door. "My dad and my DeMolay friends are Masons. Becoming a Mason was the next step in my journey," said Mason.

"Today was an important day for me to become a Freemason because now I know that I will have a real and true sense of what brotherhood, loyalty, and purpose really are," Cameron reflected.

Emery noted, "It was important for me to become a Mason because my great-grandfather was a Mason, and I have always looked up to him and wanted to make him proud."

Adding to the significance of the evening, Senior DeMolays assisted with the ceremony, standing shoulder to shoulder with these new Brothers. This is what the DeMolay journey looks like when it comes full circle. From obligation to obligation, from Chapter to Lodge, these young men exemplify the promise of DeMolay and the bright future of Freemasonry. □

DeMolay Pennsylvania

pademolay.org

We Believe!

by Helen Snedden,
Supreme Inspector in Pennsylvania

A belief in a Supreme Being is part of all the meetings of a Rainbow Girl. It starts when a young lady fills out an application for membership to a local Assembly. "The Applicant respectfully states that she offers herself as a candidate for membership in The International Order of the Rainbow for Girls. She is a believer in one true and living God (Supreme Being)."

During the opening of every ritualistic meeting, Sister of Hope is instructed to open the Holy Bible on the Altar. The Bible represents the "White Light of promise that penetrates the heart of every member of the Assembly." Sister of Hope then places a Rainbow emblem on the open pages and gives a Rainbow sign to the Bible before returning to her station. Sister Chaplain offers an opening prayer, and all then respond, "Lord, help us to keep our promise."

During an Initiation, the candidate is led through the ceremony by the guiding hand of Faith. The seven colors of the Rainbow each represent a different life lesson. Red, Love; Orange, Religion; Yellow, Nature; Green, Immortality; Blue, Fidelity; Indigo, Patriotism; and Violet, Service.

The second color in the Bow is orange and teaches Religion as Love and Service. This lesson impresses upon us the beauties of Religion as exemplified by its Great Author, whose life was one of gentleness and kindness. We are reminded to be religious and to identify with a Church. We cannot fight the battles and win the victories unless we heed the lesson of Religion.



After the business of a Stated Meeting, there is a Ritualistic closing. Again, there is a prayer given by Sister Chaplain. Sister of Hope is instructed to close the Holy Bible, symbol of White Light, after removing the Rainbow emblem from the open pages and giving the sign of the Rainbow.

As part of the floorwork either at the beginning or the end of a meeting, the officers form a cross with the Holy Altar as the center and sing "The Old Rugged Cross." God is very much reflected in all we say and do in Rainbow. Every prayer ends with "Lord, help us to keep our promise." □

parainbowgirls.org

The Word

A Message from the Grand Chaplain

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

Learning to Trust

By David A. Eichelberger, 32°

In the 32nd degree, we encounter a man who aspired to become a knight. He was tested on his abilities to fight and observe knightly customs, and was on the cusp of being knighted. The attack on his city, however, interrupted his vigil, and he had a decision to make: did he keep the vigil and be knighted in the morning, allowing others to suffer and die, or did he break his vigil and offer his services as a knight aspirant and hopefully rescue those who might otherwise perish? It was a very difficult decision for him because he had given much effort in training himself to become a knight. At length, he put his hope in God and went forth to protect his city, demonstrating to all that he had indeed been worthy of knighthood.



David A. Eichelberger, 32°

You and I are unlikely to be placed in a situation like Constans was, and yet there will be times when we must indeed put our hope in God. I have had many health challenges in my 75+ years. I have learned that putting my trust and hope in God is not just a mental exercise or an affirmation of my belief in God. Instead, it is allowing ourselves to trust that God is with us all the time and in all circumstances. A metaphor might help us to understand. A person who has never been in a body of water might intellectually know that water conveys a buoyancy to the human body, but unless one allows oneself to relax into the water and trust it, one can flail about and even drown. It is one of the first lessons one gets when learning to swim.

> The results were not always what I had hoped for; instead, they were often even better.

We all know that it can take time to learn this trust. Similarly, putting our hope in God requires practice and awareness. I have written before about the practice of watching out to see where God has been present in our lives. Have we spotted these "holy coincidences?" Have there not been occasions when just the right thing happened to help us in a way or at a time that we didn't expect? By training ourselves to be perceptive to these occasions of God's grace, we can strengthen our confidence in our relationship with God.

When I was five years old, I was scheduled to undergo a serious operation. My church family was holding a prayer meeting to pray for my well-being and a successful outcome to the operation. Just as the surgeon was supposed to begin

Have there not been occasions when just the right thing happened to help us in a way or at a time that we didn't expect?

to cut, the phone in the operating room rang, and my personal physician was on the line, urging him to stop the operation. That very morning, he had happened to read a report in a medical journal which told him that children undergoing that type of operation often went into shock and died if they had not been previously put on a particular medication before the surgery. The surgery was stopped, and I was put on that medication. The surgery was rescheduled and successfully took place a day or so later. I survived! Some would say that was all a lucky coincidence, but it taught me to put my hope in God. God has been faithful in my life in many other situations, too. The results were not always what I had hoped for; instead, they were often even better.

Today, I am putting my hope in God for our nation to survive this present turmoil. I ask you to join me in trusting in God and allowing God to resolve the many important issues before us both as a Valley and as a nation. God can do more for us than we can do ourselves. My hope is in God, and it can be for you, too. □



God's Freedom



by David W. Morgans, 33°

In the Christian Bible, the book of Galatians 5:13-17 ESV says,

> For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.
>
> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

As we stand on the threshold of the 250th anniversary of our nation's birth, it seems that freedom is an appropriate topic to address. Freedom is a word that we hear often in this country. Freedom is the cornerstone of the great American experiment. We pride ourselves on being the "land of the free." Our founding fathers built into the very fabric of our national identity the idea that its citizens are guaranteed certain freedoms.

Among those freedoms are:

Freedom of speech and self-expression.

Freedom to bear arms and protect ourselves and our loved ones.

Freedom to assemble openly.

Freedom to elect our representatives and hold them accountable.

Freedom to defend ourselves in criminal and civil disputes and expect to be treated justly.

Freedom of privacy and protection from unlawful search and seizure.

Freedom of religion to worship when and where we please.

We are truly blessed to meet openly with others and to worship God as our consciences dictate. Our country is made up of faithful people who hold different religious beliefs. That type of freedom does not exist in every country. We should be thankful for the Divine guidance given our founding fathers to bring this nation to life and for the countless men and women who have served this country, many of whom laid down their lives, to protect America's freedom.



The passages above were written around 50 A.D. to a church in the region of Galatia, now modern-day Turkey, by a man named Paul, who was an Apostle or Ambassador of Jesus Christ. He wrote the letter to the church he founded there to give them counsel on some issues they were struggling with. One issue was the problem of having too many stumbling blocks to true worship, in the form of laws and ceremonies. It was Paul's contention that people do not find favor in God's eyes by simply following certain customs.

Paul maintains that when people come to true faith in God, they are freed from the trappings of earthly-made rules and regulations. He also understood people's predilection to misuse that freedom, which he addressed in the passage from Galatians.

Freedom is a tricky thing. One definition of the word is "the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint." However, freedom without hindrance or restraint can lead to chaos. Freedom in any individual life or society needs some sort of fence to ensure healthy lives and relationships. Paul says that the fence we are to use to properly exercise our freedom is found in the whole Law of God, which is summed up by loving our neighbor as we would love ourselves.

This is a universal teaching found in most religions. Whether it is Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, all of them teach loving one's neighbors or living by the Golden Rule. They also have many other similar teachings, such as honoring mother and father, judging not, loving enemies, forgiving others, being slow to anger, speaking gently, the blessing of charity and prayer, living peacefully, and the importance of living by the spirit of sacred scriptures. If freedom is the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint, the natural tendency of most human beings would be to do the opposite of the above list unless doing so would somehow profit the doer.

Paul was aware of that tendency. When he wrote that people of faith are called to freedom, he also added that our freedom was not an opportunity to go crazy doing whatever we wanted. He likened a life lived without restraint to that of biting and devouring each other. That sounds more like something out of a zombie apocalypse than a life of true freedom.

Freedom is a tricky thing.

Freedom can be divided into three categories: inward, outward, and upward. Inward freedom is regulated by what's going on in our own heads and is highly influenced by our desires. With no restraints, it is when we think and act only in our own best interests, with no regard for others and no accountability for our actions. Left unfenced, it leads to behaviors such as immorality, impurity, greed, lust, and anger, to name a few.

In 1978, there was an in-depth, critically acclaimed movie released that exemplified this concept of unshackled inward freedom. The name of the film is *Animal House.* It's a silly movie about the members of the Delta Tau Chi fraternity who literally do whatever they want. Their list of vices is too long to go into. When they are finally held accountable for some of their actions and are expelled from school, instead of learning a lesson, they take revenge against the town in which the college is located by completely disrupting the town's parade. Inward freedom unfenced brings chaos.

Outward freedom is regulated by what is going on around us, the things we see and hear. This is when we put our personal standards and morals to work in our interactions with the world. Unfenced, it manifests as people becoming judgmental, speaking unkindly to others, and using the term "my truth" as a battle cry to tear others down. Examples of unchecked outward freedom include hurtful, unsolicited advice, angry disputes between family members or neighbors, road-rage incidents, and violent protests. People will use their own truth to justify their actions, even if their truth has little to do with reality.

Upward freedom is the sweet spot in which to live. This is what Paul is talking about in the above scripture. Upward freedom is seeking the Divine to find absolute truth. The type of truth that doesn't change and doesn't waiver. In upward freedom,


IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to

we use God's standards to distinguish between the freedom to selfishly sin and the freedom to unselfishly serve with a loving spirit. Seeking God's will through prayer and through His word enables us to gain God's perspective on the world. As we gain Godly wisdom, our use of inward and outward freedom changes to be more in line with what our Creator desires for us, and that's when we become the best we can be.

Those who would argue that living by God's standards is restrictive and causes us to have no fun of any kind are missing the freedom and the peace of mind that comes from submitting to God's will. When we submit to God's will, we no longer need to try to control the world in our own minds, which can be exhausting and ultimately unsatisfying. Instead, we can relax and thrive inside the Godly fences of truth, hope, love, joy, and peace.

For freedom to work, it needs fences. Those fences can either be man-made or God-made. Man-made laws can be great, but they can also be fickle and change over time or in response to circumstances. God-made laws take us to a higher plane and do not change. God's love for his creation remains constant, and the spirit of His laws is written on our hearts whether we acknowledge them or not. His laws call us to love others, to be concerned for the common welfare of our communities, and to be kind as we live in his freedom. It is our job to seek to understand and practice these principles of life.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Those who expect to be both ignorant and free, expect what never was and never will be." Ignorance of God's will and word will never bring us true freedom.

The first two sentences of the Declaration of Independence are amazing and are pertinent to the topic of freedom. It says:

> **"When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.**
>
> **We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."**

The writers and signers of the declaration were from diverse religious traditions, but they all acknowledged a Creator God and the natural law he wrote into this world. The freedom they sought from England to govern themselves was established upon the freedoms they believed God had given the world. Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness are the three legs that support this idea of freedom.

Life refers to the freedom to live and exist without undue interference from others or the government. Liberty is the freedom to act, speak, and think as one chooses, as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others. The Pursuit of Happiness goes beyond mere pleasure or material wealth. It implies the right to seek fulfilment and well-being in various aspects of life, including personal, religious, social, and economic dimensions. Laws have been enacted to guarantee that these rights will remain intact, but none of these three legs will work well without the citizenry exercising its combined inward, outward, and upward freedom.

The new Pennsylvania license plate features "Let Freedom Ring" at the bottom. This should serve as a good reminder for us as we travel the roads of this great state and beyond to remember to let freedom echo through the land like a ringing bell.

Let us go forth in this life exercising our inward freedom inside the Godly fences of love, forgiveness, and peace. Let us go forth exercising our outward freedom inside the Godly fences of living by the Golden Rule, not unfairly judging others, being slow to anger, and speaking gently while being charitable to both friend and foe. Let us go forth exercising our upward freedom to continue to seek God's truth, to live by his standards found in scripture, and to prayerfully and obediently live each day wrapped in his wisdom and love.

If we seek to do these things, we will demonstrate to the world what true freedom looks like. Then, the sweet sound of freedom will ring from the very core of our souls as we walk in the spirit of God, and everyone within earshot will be witness to a life that's truly free. □











Yabba Dabba Do!

by Thomas Ruch

On November 22, the **Stone City Quarry of Pittsrock** was chartered with **139** founding members. In 2023, my wife surprised me with a trip to NYC. I'd been talking about wanting to see the **Water Buffalo** degree, and she found an ad for the Valley of Rockville Centre. As soon as I saw the degree, I knew I wanted to bring it home so more people could experience it.

Finally, the stars aligned, and a date became available. After several months of planning and coordination with Valley officers, we had a plan. Once we got the word out about this fun degree coming to our Valley, tickets started selling fast, ending just shy of 150. A couple from Florida even extended their trip to Pittsburgh by a week to attend the event!

The official degree team from the Valley of Rockville Centre, NY, came down and helped establish our quarry as Dino took his rightful place at the altar. They all did a fantastic job, and



the degree was well-received. Their store was also well-received, with many unique pieces of Masonic memorabilia.

It was great to see the members and their ladies come together for an afternoon of fellowship and laughs. Everyone had a great time and left with wonderful memories and their own Water Buffalo hat. In the end, we donated just under **$6,000** to the **CDC-Pittsburgh** during the Night of Charity event.

Thank you to the Valley for their support in bringing this interactive degree to Pittsburgh. If you enjoyed the degree and want to help us bring in the next class, let me or the Director of Work know. We're planning to host the degree again in 2027 and need actors and props. □

PITTSBURGH Children's Dyslexia Center

READY TO FOLLOW





THERE WAS ONCE A MAN OF GREAT FAITH WHO FOUND HIMSELF IN A DIRE PREDICAMENT. HIS HOUSE SAT ON THE BANK OF A MIGHTY RIVER, AND DURING A HEAVY STORM, HE NOTICED THAT THE WATERS HAD BEGUN TO RISE. *THE ROADS ARE STILL PASSABLE,* HE THOUGHT TO HIMSELF. *THE LORD WILL NOT GIVE ME ANYTHING I CANNOT HANDLE.*

THE rain kept coming,
and the river kept rising.

Soon, a police car arrived. The officer knocked on the man's door. "We are strongly advising you to evacuate," the officer told him. "Things are going to get pretty bad."

"Thank you, officer, but I'll ride out the storm here. I have faith that the Lord will protect me."

The officer tried once again to convince the man, but he remained steadfast.

The rain kept coming, and the river kept rising.

The river had breached its banks and was at the man's porch. A rescue boat pulled up, and the captain shouted, straining to be heard over the wind and the rain.

"Sir," she implored, "You really need to come with me. This storm shows no sign of stopping, and we cannot guarantee your safety if you stay."

Calmly, the man answered. "I have faith that the Lord will not give me more than I can handle. Thank you for your concern, but I will be fine." With that, he closed his door.

The rain kept coming, and the river kept rising.

The man's faith was unshakable. As the water encroached on his home, he calmly made his way to the roof. He clung to the chimney, buffeted by wind, pummeled by rain. A helicopter approached and hovered overhead, its great spotlight shining down on the man. A voice over the loudspeaker said, "Sir, this is your last chance. There is no way to escape this storm. Take hold of the ladder, and we will airlift you to safety. If you stay, you will surely die."

The man waved the helicopter off. *Another test of my faith,* he thought.

The rain kept coming, and the river kept rising.

Eventually, the rushing water swept him into the torrent.



He struggled in vain to keep his head above water. As he reached what he knew was the end of his life, he thought, *My hope has always been in God. Why would he abandon me in my hour of need?*

AS THE WATER ENCROACHED ON HIS HOME, HE CALMLY MADE HIS WAY TO THE ROOF.

The man stood before God, confused. "I have always put my hope in God. Why did you abandon one as faithful as me in my hour of need?"

"Abandon you?" asked God. "I sent you a car, a boat, and a helicopter. You turned them all away."



How often have you been in a place where things seemed hopeless, and you prayed for help? How often have you, like the man in the story above, questioned the answer that came from the prayer?

The concept of placing our hope, faith, or trust in God is simple, right? If you're having health issues, trust God. If you're going through difficulties at work, put your faith in Him. Struggling with a relationship? God will help you through. I believe all of those things are true, but while the concept of trusting God may be simple, putting it into practice is another thing entirely.

Getting the risky surgery, moving to another city for a job, confronting a friend or family member about a problem are all difficult decisions, and not to be made lightly. Sometimes, though, they may be signs that you should take the leap of faith.

I can think of times in my own life where now, with the benefit of hindsight, I can cleary see that God was giving me signs: work issues that forced me out of my comfort zone and led me to better things, friends who appeared at just the right time in my life, even this great Fraternity which has had such a positive impact on who I am.

God might not always give you what you ask for, but He will always give you what you need. I know that sounds trite, but I believe it with all my heart. Your assignment, Modern Vitruvians, is an easy one. Put your hope in God – just be ready to follow where he leads you. □

The Office

A message from the Secretary of the Valley of Pittsburgh

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

Our Battle Cry

By David W. Morgans, 33°

Spes Mea In Deo Est! I can honestly say I've never heard anyone running around the Valley office calling out, "My hope is in God!" in either Latin or English. Onstage, sure, but the Valley office, never. Perhaps it would be a good thing to start the workday at the office by shouting that out. I am fairly sure that Karen, Valley Administrative Assistant, would think I would be a little crazy to introduce that as the protocol for the beginning of each workday. Maybe, on our individual breaks, we could each run through the hallways of the Greater Pittsburgh Masonic Center, repeating that over and over again.



David W. Morgans, 33°
secretary@valleyofpittsburgh.org

Most non-Scottish Rite Masons would probably raise an eyebrow or two if they saw a spectacle such as that. It would probably have a negative impact on attracting outside renters to the building, but to the Scottish Rite Mason, it means something special. That phrase, "My hope is in God!" brings to mind the Knight Aspirant, Constans, making the choice between being safe and risking it all by serving for a greater good.

> Maybe starting any day with the cry of "My hope is in God!" isn't such a bad idea.

The office staff certainly does not risk it all to come into the office to do our jobs. We do have to deal with some cranky people from time to time, but we don't generally have to fight off marauding armies. The office staff, however, does try to serve the Valley members for their greater good and for the greater good of the Fraternity. To do anything for the greater good, in my opinion, needs to be guided by a greater power than humans can muster for themselves.

Claiming "My hope is in God" leads to a life where doing the right thing is motivated not by rules, regulations, customs, or enhancing one's image but instead is motivated by living in a right relationship with God. Trust is integrally tied to hope. "My hope is in God!" could easily be translated to "My trust is in God!" Those who make this cry their own expect with confidence that God will accompany them on their journey through life, whether it be in battle, in the day-to-day grind, in the quiet times of contemplation, or in the office doing all those things to serve the membership.

Maybe starting any day with the cry of "My hope is in God!" isn't such a bad idea. Maybe repeating it throughout the day could bring some peace into the lives of those who do it. Shouted, spoken, whispered, or even said silently could be enough to ground ourselves in the Divine so that we would speak, act, and think for the greater good of all mankind. The world would certainly be a better place.

Spes Mea In Deo Est! □

PS – *I had to work some sort of "officey" message into the article, so if you haven't paid your dues yet or need some assistance, please contact the Office. We are there to serve.*

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

The Man With the Bag

On December 12, the Big Guy – **Santa Claus** himself – made a stop at the Valley of Pittsburgh's annual **Children's Santa Party.** According to his report, none of the boys and girls made the naughty list, so they all got a treat straight from the North Pole.

Valley officers and members cooked pizzas for the crowd, and **Magician Ray Lucas** treated all in attendance to a very special magic show. The event was hosted by the **Princes of Jerusalem** line.

Ho, ho, hope you can join us next year. Check the website or *RiteNow* for the date and time once Santa shares his schedule with us. □






























U-HAUL



Part 1

Theosophy

Those who have followed my writing over this past decade-plus will have noticed that on several occasions I have referenced a school of thought known as Theosophy – particularly in the context of the Masonic principle of religious tolerance – and may have wondered what the platform of this movement is.

Theosophy is a spiritual and intellectual movement that proposes that the study of comparative religion can reveal profound and transcendent truths at the intersection of them all. Some of the early proponents of the movement include Helena Blavatsky, Annie Besant, and CW Leadbeater.

Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) was born to a Russian aristocratic family and developed an interest in mysticism as a teen. She moved to New York in 1873, where she founded the Theosophical Society in 1875 with the help of Henry Steel Olcott, a Civil War veteran and Freemason who had converted to Buddhism. Although critics called her claims of world travel and spiritual phenomena into question, her influence persists to this day.

Annie Besant (1847-1933) was a prominent social activist who became President of the Theosophical Society in 1907, championing Indian independence and expanding Theosophy with Leadbeater.

CW Leadbeater (1854-1934) was a former Anglican priest and co-Mason who collaborated extensively with Besant, investigating spiritual phenomena and developing Theosophical concepts.



I believe a few quotes from each of these founders from early in the movement help emphasize the importance of the notion of the confluence of religions to Theosophy.

From the intro to Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine:*

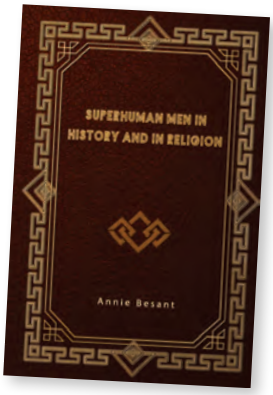
"… it is perhaps desirable to state unequivocally that the teachings, however fragmentary and incomplete, contained in these volumes, belong neither to the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Chaldean, nor the Egyptian religion, neither to Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, nor Christianity exclusively. The secret doctrine is the essence of all these. Sprung from it in their origins, the various religious schemes are now made to merge back into their original element, out of which every mystery and dogma has grown, developed, and become materialized."



Austin R. Shifrin, 33°

by Austin Shifrin, 33°

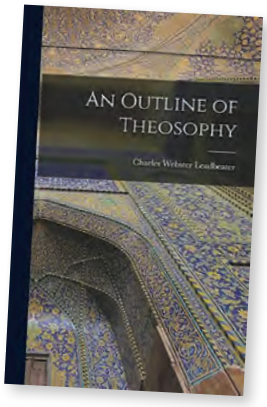
From Annie Besant's *Superhuman Men in History and Religion:*



"To every man according to his own tongue; to every man according to his own faith. There is but one religion with many facets; and the perfection of religion is to see the unity in diversity among them all, and that comes from this great teaching of Brotherhood - always one Teacher for all the world's faiths through thousands and thousands of years."

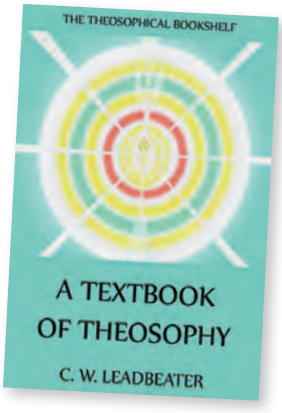
The secret doctrine is the essence of all these.

From CW Leadbeater's *An Outline of Theosophy:*



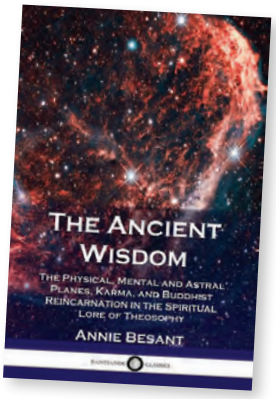
"It holds that truth on all these most important points is attainable – that there is a great body of knowledge about them already existing. It considers all the various religions as statements of that truth from different points of view; since, though they differ much as to nomenclature and as to articles of belief, they all agree as to the only matter which are of real importance – the kind of life which a good man should lead, the qualities which he must develop, the vices which he must avoid. On these practical points the teaching is identical in Hinduism and Buddhism, in Zoroastrianism and Muhammadanism, in Judaism and Christianity."

Theosophists not only proclaim that this common ground exists among the religions of the world, but that this confluence also implies the pursuit and practice of certain virtues is therefore not the exclusive province of any one of them. For example, CW Leadbeater goes on to say in another work, *A Textbook of Theosophy:*



"The object of the whole previous evolution has been to produce the ego as a manifestation of the Monad. Then the ego in its turn evolves by putting itself down into a succession of personalities. Men who do not understand this look upon the personality as the self, and consequently live for it alone, and try to regulate their lives for what appears to be its temporary advantage… Experience soon teaches him that nothing can ever be really good for him, or for any one, which is not good for all, and so presently he learns to forget himself altogether, and to ask only what will be best for humanity as a whole."

Annie Besant had this to say, regarding the eventual disappointment in pursuit and even successful attainment of material goods and worldly pleasures, in her work, *The Ancient Wisdom:*



"These joys are illusions, as bubbles on a stream, fairy-coloured, rainbow-hued, but bursting at a touch. I am athirst for realities; I have had enough of shadows; I pant for the eternal and the true, for freedom from the limitations that hem me in, that keep me prisoner amid these changing shows."

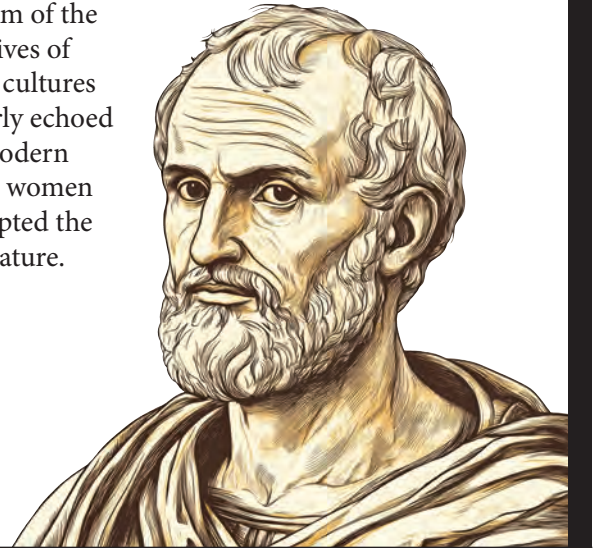
While these individuals were some of the early advocates who also helped found Theosophical institutions in the US in the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, they also asserted that their central tenets hearkened back to a much earlier era. The word *theosophia* – literally translated as "divine wisdom" – was originally coined by Ammonius Saccas to describe his philosophy of synthesizing Greek thought with Eastern wisdom. From his biography at "The Philosophy Room" blog:

"Ammonius Saccas, an enigmatic figure of the 3rd century AD, remains shrouded in mystery despite his profound influence on the intellectual landscape of his time. Born in Alexandria, Egypt, around the year 175 AD, Ammonius emerged as a prominent thinker within the vibrant cultural milieu of his era… Central to Ammonius' philosophical vision was his conception of a unifying metaphysical framework that transcended the boundaries of individual philosophical systems. Embracing elements of Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Neoplatonism, he sought to discern the underlying unity that pervaded the diversity of philosophical discourse."



Theosophy is a spiritual and intellectual movement that proposes that the study of comparative religion can reveal profound and transcendent truths at the intersection of them all.

Today, we have none of his original works, as he left none behind; we know of his teachings only through his disciples, Origen and Plotinus. Although there isn't a direct lineage from the Neoplatonists of ancient Greece to the 19th and 20th century Theosophists, Saccas' emphasis on the synthesis and syncretism of the perspectives of different cultures was clearly echoed by the modern men and women who adopted the nomenclature.



The Center

A message from the Children's Dyslexia Center-Pittsburgh

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

With Hope as Our Guide

Greetings from the Children's Dyslexia Center-Pittsburgh!

The Latin *Spes Mea in Deo Est* (My Hope is in God) is experienced by the students, families, tutors, and Board of Governors of the Pittsburgh center. With every new skill that they acquire in tutoring, the children must believe in themselves and their tutor. Parents must trust that the program will work as they hope it will. Tutors hope that their hours of coursework, lesson planning preparation, and note-taking will meet their students' needs. The Children's Dyslexia Center's staff and Board of Governors dive into decision-making, event planning, and fundraising with that hope as their guide. Spes Mea in Deo Est undergirds our efforts..



Upcoming events:
at the CDC-Pittsburgh:

- **March Candy Fundraiser**
- **Spring Popcorn Sale**
- **June 15th Picnic and Graduation**

If you attend an event raising funds for the Children's Dyslexia Center-Pittsburgh, buy flowers or goodies at a fundraiser, or make a direct donation, your financial support helps children improve their reading and writing. From the staff and families of the Children's Dyslexia Center-Pittsburgh, thank you!

childrensdyslexiacenters.org. □

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

PITTSBURGH
Children's Dyslexia Center

Watch That First Step



by D. Todd Ballenger, 33°

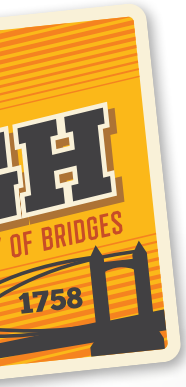


D. Todd Ballenger, 33°

Now, God be praised, that to believing souls gives light in darkness, comfort in despair.—William Shakespeare

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.—Martin Luther King Jr.

I got to have faith.—George Michael



The saying goes, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," and it's true. Every path we travel has a beginning, and that beginning is a single step forward in a particular direction. I've had quite a few beginnings myself. Some were down paths I wanted to travel, and others were not. Stepping out on these roads, I've shouldered emotions such as excitement, curiosity, trepidation, and even outright fear. At times, the emotions I carried with me made that first step, that thoughtful beginning, something more than just a step along the road. They added weight to it. Gravity. Purpose. There have been times when starting down the new path required something more than just a first step forward. It required a leap of faith.



George Michael

I remember packing everything I owned into my car and towing a U-Haul trailer behind me, leaving South Carolina, where I had grown up and gone to college. I was bound for the big city – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was my first solo move. I didn't have a job. I didn't have a place to live. I did have some college friends and a couch to crash on for a short time, but that was it. Oh, and it was snowing, and there was ice – not just on the roads, but in the rivers. Whoa. I didn't have a plan, but I did have a starting point. And I had faith. I had faith that I would find a job (I did – it took 10 days). I had faith that I would find an apartment (I did – that took a couple of weeks). I had faith that this was the place for me, and 37 years later, I'm still here.

> Stepping out on these roads, I've shouldered emotions such as excitement, curiosity, trepidation, and even outright fear.

I suppose most of us have had a similar experience when we first stepped into a Lodge room on some weekday evening. We sat outside the doors and watched the parade of other men go into the room, knowing that soon we would be embarking on a journey that, at that moment, remained shrouded in mystery. On that evening, being guided into that Lodge was so much more

On that evening, being guided into that Lodge was so much more than a first step. It was a leap of faith.

than a first step. It was a leap of faith. I knew little of the requirements or what I would be asked to do, but I was willing to try. Risking failure is the only way we learn our limitations. Putting our faith in God and not being afraid to do the work is the only way we conquer them. Difficult times? Faith. Dangerous encounters? Faith. Ready to give up? Faith. It really is the answer to all of these questions.

Putting your faith and hope into something unknown or unseen is never the easiest thing to do.

I have friends who have a severely handicapped child. When he was born, the doctors didn't give them much hope. But these brand-new parents – they had faith. It wasn't the faith that their son would miraculously shake off his illness and go home laughing. It was the faith that even though they, as parents, couldn't predict the impact of a neuromuscular disease on their son and family, they were going to make every opportunity that came their way count and take every advantage to love and cherish each moment they had together. I've heard my friend say several times, "Anything is possible with God." And as what was initially predicted to be a very short road continues to stretch on, the love and strength of this family stand as a testament to the belief that every new day is itself a leap of faith.



William Shakespeare



Martin Luther King Jr.

No, life isn't always easy. The choices aren't simple, and sometimes none of our options are appealing. But having faith, choosing to believe in the possibilities that arise from facing your challenges and overcoming your insecurities, is the light that allows us to see one more step ahead. It gives us courage, hope, and confidence. There was a time in the hospital when I couldn't sit up to get out of bed or bend to get into one. That was hard. The mental aspect of that fight tested me. But alone in the hospital, in the middle of the night, I decided to take a leap of faith. From that point, I have found hope and guidance in the form of nurses and trainers and friends, all willingly given because I chose to have faith.

Putting your faith and hope into something unknown or unseen is never the easiest thing to do. But what in this world is so unerringly predictable as to deliver guaranteed results each and every time besides doing nothing at all? Do not allow yourself to be paralyzed from taking the first step. Decisions are hard. They're supposed to be. Be confident, make the best choice, and have faith. Have trust and hope that God will guide you and protect you, even if that first step turns into a giant leap. You can do it. You've got this. Each of us as Freemasons has contemplated the question of whom to trust in the most critical times of our lives. As Scottish Rite Masons, we are saying the quiet part out loud.

Spes Mea in Deo Est.

My hope is in God. □

Salute to Veterans

A message for Military Veterans of the Valley of Pittsburgh

VALLEY OF PITTSBURGH

The Legion of Honor

By Ed Hanke, 32°

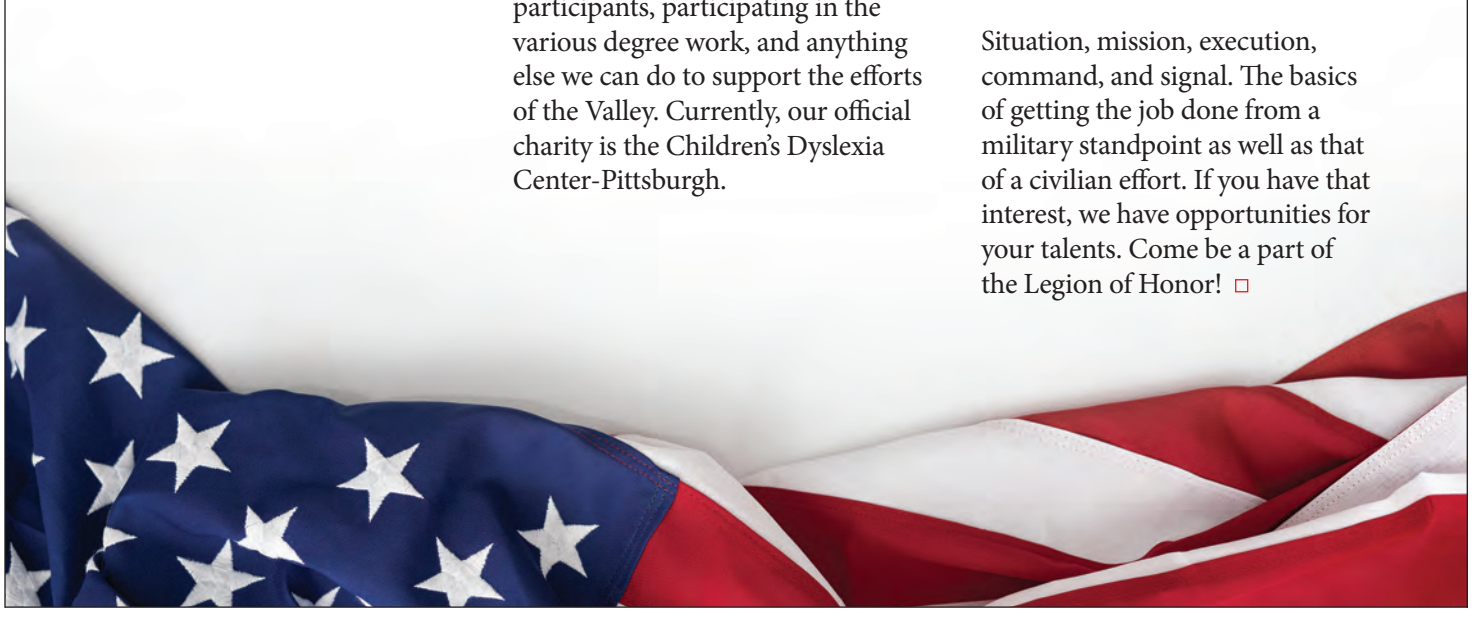
Veterans, by their very nature, are a subset of the civilian population and, likewise, an even smaller subset of the Masonic Fraternity. We have a group of Scottish Rite veterans who are members of the Legion of Honor. If you are a current member, that means that at some point in your Scottish Rite journey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

> Come be a part of the Legion of Honor!

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 DD214 and a petition.

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! □



TheLatest

Important happenings coming soon to the Valley of Pittsburgh

MAY 1

Reservations are not required.
For more information, please contact the Valley Office at: Secretary@ValleyofPittsburgh.org 412-939-3579 or view our Website at www.ValleyofPittsburgh.org

CigaRite

CigaRite is back! Mark your calendars and come out to enjoy great fellowship. You need not be a cigar smoker to attend. Light refreshments are provided. See sidebar for more dates.

TIME: 6:00-11:00PM
LOCATION: GPMC
COST: None
RSVP: Not required

MAY 16

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

2026 Spring Class

See the 4°, 7°, 8°, 17°, 19°, 24°, 27°, and 32°. If interested in taking part onstage, backstage, or any other area, please get in touch with the Valley Office.

TIME: 8:00AM-6:00PM Saturday
LOCATION: GPMC
COST: None
RSVP: May 12

JUN 27

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

Rite on the Road

Come out for a complimentary breakfast beginning at 9:00 a.m. and then stay for a live production of the 18th Degree presented by the officers of the Rose Croix line. This will be a wonderful opportunity to get your Masonic friends to join. The dress code is business casual.

TIME: 10:30AM
LOCATION: GPMC
COST: None
RSVP: June 23

JUL 12

Reservations are not required.
For more information, please contact the Valley Office at: Secretary@ValleyofPittsburgh.org 412-939-3579 or view our Website at www.ValleyofPittsburgh.org

Car Cruise

Bring friends and family alike to the unbelievable free antique and classic car show. And, if you're proud of your vehicle, bring that, too! Food and raffle baskets will be available. Proceeds benefit the Children's Dyslexia Center-Pittsburgh.

TIME: 11:00AM-3:00PM
LOCATION: GPMC
COST: None
RSVP: Not required

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: $9/person (all you can eat)
RSVP: None required

APR 25

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

JUN 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

June Stated Meeting

Join us in June as we welcome a new class of officers to serve the Valley for the coming year. In addition to a fantastic meal and entertainment, we will also recognize men who have been members for 50, 55, 60, 65, and 70 years. Ladies and family are welcome.

TIME: 6:00PM Dinner, 7:00PM Meeting
LOCATION: GPMC
COST: $20 per person for Dinner
RSVP: June 2

JUL 25

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

Wild Things Baseball Game

Come out to root the Washington Wild Things as they take on the Brockton Rox. The Valley will host a picnic in the Passalaqua Pavilion in the back of the parking lot. Tickets available through the Office or website. The event sold out last year, so don't wait!

TIME: 4:00PM Picnic, 7:00PM Game
LOCATION: Consol Stadium, Washington, PA
COST: $15
RSVP: ASAP - First come, first served

MAY 30 | JUN 27 | JUL 25

Looking Ahead

JUN 5 | JUL 3 | AUG 7 | SEP 4 | OCT 2

CigaRite
FRIDAY, JUNE 5, JULY 3, AUGUST 7, SEPTEMER 4, and OCTOBER 2
6:00PM
GPMC

JUL 11

Council of Deliberation
SATURDAY, JULY 11

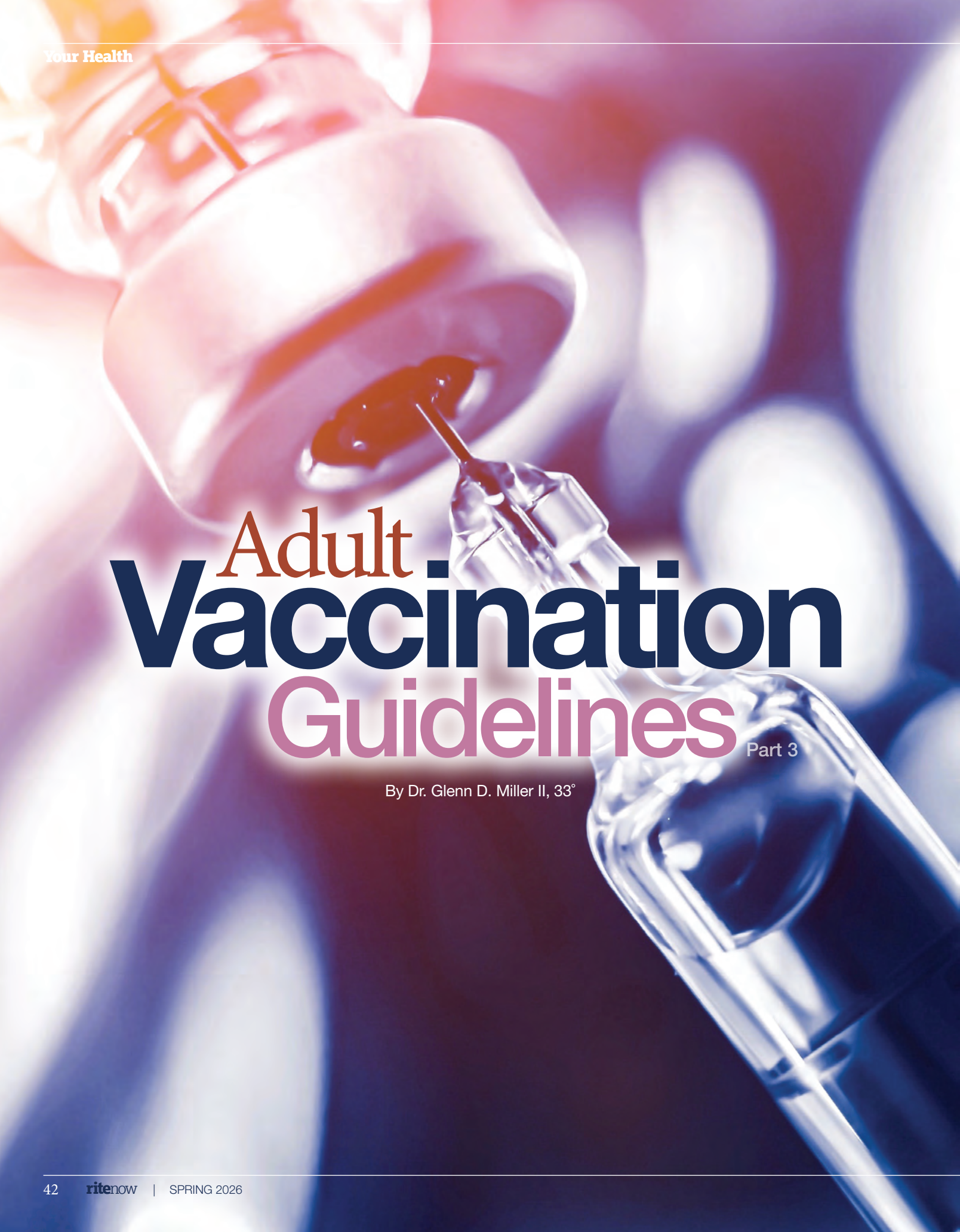
OCT 3

CDC Walkathon
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3
GPMC

SEP 3

Stated Meeting
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3
6:00PM Dinner, 7:00PM Meeting
GPMC

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



Adult Vaccination Guidelines

Part 3

By Dr. Glenn D. Miller II, 33°



Dr. Glenn D. Miller II, 33°

In this issue of *RiteNow,* we will continue our discussion of the current CDC adult vaccination guidelines by addressing the guidelines for measles, mumps, and German measles. As a reminder, these vaccination guidelines are available on the CDC website (www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults).

Rubeola, or measles, is caused by the Morbillivirus hominis RNA virus. This airborne virus is highly contagious and spreads via respiratory droplets when an infected individual breathes, sneezes, coughs, or even talks. The virus can survive for up to two hours in the air or on surfaces, and can also be spread via hand-to-mouth if someone touches an infected surface. Rubeola is one of the most contagious diseases known to man – an infected individual can infect roughly 90% of their close contacts if those contacts are unvaccinated. Humans are the only known natural hosts for the virus, although mountain gorillas may be susceptible to developing the disease.

Measles evolved from a viral disease of cattle called Rinderpest, or cattle plague. A measles precursor started to infect humans as early as the 4th century BC, and the first description of measles was recorded in Persia at the end of the 9th century AD. Measles can infect anyone, but it is most common in children. Symptoms typically start to appear 7-14 days after infection with the virus and usually last 7-10 days. Infected individuals are typically contagious from about 4 days before the development of the "typical measles rash" to about 4 days after the development of that rash. Initial symptoms include cough, runny nose, red/watery eyes, and high fevers. Tiny white spots may appear inside the mouth 2-3 days after the initial symptoms. The rash usually appears 3-5 days after the initial symptoms and typically starts as flat red spots on the face and hairline. These red spots usually spread downward, eventually encompassing the rest of the body.

In some cases, small raised bumps may form on the top of the flat red spots. Common potential complications from measles include middle ear infections and diarrhea. Each of these complications occurs at a rate of 10% or less. Rarer complications include severe pneumonia, seizures, inflammation of the brain, which can lead to deafness and/or intellectual disability, and severe eye inflammation, which can lead to corneal damage and blindness. If a pregnant female contracts measles, it can result in complications such as severe pneumonia in the mother, resulting in increased mortality, miscarriage, premature birth, and/or low birth weight, and increased neonatal death rates.

Measles can infect anyone, but it is most common in children.

One extremely rare, but fatal, potential complication of measles is subacute sclerosing panencephalitis, which is inflammation of the brain that does not resolve and may last for years. This complication typically develops 7-10 years after a person has had measles. The risk of developing this complication appears to be greater in children who contract measles before age 2. The most common cause of death in young children who have measles is pneumonia. All age groups are susceptible to contracting measles, especially if unvaccinated, and to suffering the aforementioned complications.

There are currently two vaccines used to protect against measles: the MMR (measles/mumps/Rubella) and the MMRV (measles/mumps/Rubella/varicella), both of which typically provide lifelong immunity. The first

MMR vaccine in the United States became available in 1971. There are two different versions of the MMR vaccine currently approved in the United States, and they are equally effective and provide lifelong immunity to measles. The current CDC recommendations are to give two doses of these vaccines, with the first dose given to children at age 12-18 months and the second dose given at age 4-6 years. Older children, adolescents, and adults should also receive two doses of the vaccine if they have not been previously vaccinated or have no evidence of immunity. Of note is that the aforementioned MMRV vaccine is only currently approved for use in children aged 12 months through 12 years and is recommended to be administered with the first dose at age 12-18 months and the second dose at age 4-6 years. However, the second dose may be given 3 months after the first dose. Females who are, or may be, pregnant should not receive the MMR vaccine and should wait until they are no longer pregnant. Additionally, females should wait at least one month after receiving the MMR vaccine to become pregnant. People who should either not receive or wait to receive the MMR vaccine include those who are immunocompromised, those with severe life-threatening allergies, those who have received a blood transfusion within the past 3 months (or possibly longer), those with an active tuberculosis infection, those with seizure disorders, and those taking salicylates (aspirin).

Common potential complications from measles include middle ear infections and diarrhea.

The next vaccine that we will discuss is the Mumps vaccine. Mumps is caused by the airborne RNA virus Rubulavirus, a member of the Paramyxoviridae family. Humans are the only known natural hosts for the mumps virus. The mumps virus was discovered in 1934, although written accounts of the disease date back to Hippocrates in the 5th century BC. Mumps is a highly contagious disease that spreads through direct contact with saliva or respiratory droplets from an infected individual's upper respiratory tract. The mumps virus is typically spread via airborne respiratory droplets



produced during breathing, coughing, sneezing, or even talking. The virus can also be spread through close contact, such as kissing, dancing, and playing sports, as well as through the sharing of saliva-containing items, such as drinkware, eating utensils, or food. Infected individuals can become contagious 1-2 days before symptoms appear and remain contagious for up to 5 days after symptoms (swollen salivary glands) appear. Symptoms typically begin 2-4 weeks after infection and last for approximately 10-14 days. Common initial symptoms include flu-like fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, decreased or loss of appetite, sore throat, and low-grade fevers. These symptoms typically last a few days before salivary gland swelling develops, with associated tenderness and/or pain. The most commonly affected salivary glands are the parotid glands (parotitis), located in front of and below the ears. The sublingual (under tongue) and submandibular (under floor of mouth) salivary glands are less commonly affected. The swelling of the parotid glands results in the well-known swollen/puffy facial features and associated difficulty with talking, chewing, and swallowing. Other possible associated symptoms include earaches, stomach pain, and nausea/vomiting. It should also be noted that approximately 20-40% of infected individuals are either asymptomatic or experience only mild respiratory symptoms.

Severe complications associated with mumps infection are now uncommon, but were common (25-50%) prior to the development of vaccines. These severe complications include orchitis (inflammation of

testicles) with possible reduced fertility or sterility, epididymitis, pancreatitis, hepatitis, hearing loss/deafness with possible associated vertigo and uncontrolled eye movements, encephalitis, meningitis, inflammation of ovaries, mastitis, nephritis, myocarditis, pericarditis, arthritis, thyroiditis, retinitis, corneal endotheliitis (inflammation of the corneal endothelium), polyneuritis (inflammation of the peripheral nerves), hydrocephalus (fluid buildup in the brain), seizures, onset of type 1 diabetes, paralysis, pneumonia, cerebellar ataxia (balance and gait impairment), Guillain-Barre syndrome, rare hematologic disorders, miscarriage during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and possible death. Symptoms and potential complications are more prevalent in males, potentially being more severe in the adolescent and adult age groups.

The mumps virus is typically spread via airborne respiratory droplets produced during breathing, coughing, sneezing, or even talking.

All age groups are susceptible to mumps, though some people are at increased risk of infection. These groups include people who are not vaccinated, people suffering from autoimmune disorders, people who are immunocompromised, people who travel internationally to regions where mumps infections are common and/or vaccination rates are low, healthcare workers, and people who are regularly in close contact with other people such as school-aged children, college students, contact sports participants, and residents of care facilities.

The first experimental mumps vaccine became available in 1948 after the United States targeted research because of the effect mumps had on soldiers during World War II. However, this vaccine only provided short-term immunity. The first effective mumps vaccine became available in 1967. The current MMR vaccine became available in 1971 and is the same vaccine that was outlined in the aforementioned discussion for measles vaccination. Given the fact that this is a combination vaccine, the dosing schedule, indications, and contraindications are essentially the same as those outlined for the measles vaccine. However, while the MMR and MMRV vaccines are approximately 97% effective in preventing measles and German measles after two doses, these vaccines are only 86-88% effective in preventing mumps after two doses. However, mumps symptoms are generally milder in vaccinated individuals. Additionally, these vaccines are generally regarded as providing lifelong immunity to measles, whereas immunity to mumps is generally regarded as decreasing with time.

The last vaccine we will discuss is the German measles vaccine. Rubella, also known as German measles or the 3-day measles, is caused by the RNA Rubivirus, a member of the family of viruses Matonaviridae. Humans are the only natural hosts for the Rubella virus. Rubella was first described in the medical literature by two German physicians in the mid-1700's, who believed it was a variant of Rubeola/measles or possibly scarlet fever. Rubella was first recognized as being a separate entity from Rubeola/measles in 1814 by the German physician George Maton, who described it as a mild disease characterized by a rash, very mild or absent fever, and adenopathy. British Army surgeon, Dr. Henry Veale, officially named the disease "Rubella" in 1866. Rubella is a Latin word that means "reddish thing." Rubella is contagious but not as contagious as measles. However, like measles and mumps, it is spread through direct contact or via airborne respiratory droplets produced during talking, breathing, coughing, or sneezing.

Infected individuals typically develop symptoms 2-3 weeks after exposure to the virus and remain contagious for 14 days, from roughly 7 days before to 7 days after the rash develops. Symptoms are generally mild and can include a mild fever, red/itchy eyes, headache, stuffy/runny nose, sore throat, enlarged and tender lymph nodes behind the ears and at the back of the neck, and joint pain (more common in adult females). The classic symptom is a fine,

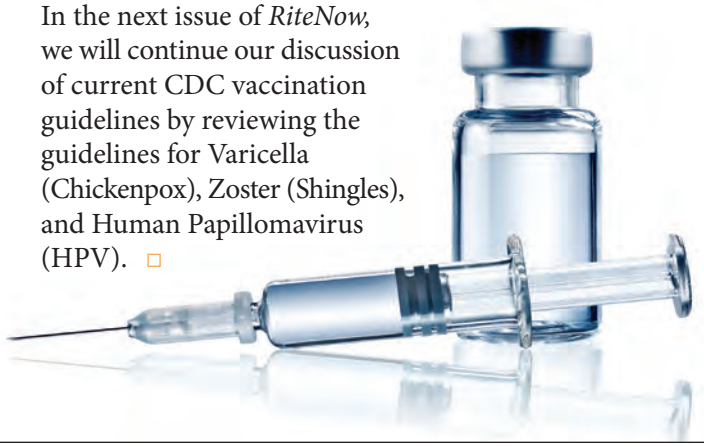


pinkish-red rash that begins on the face and spreads downward to the torso, then to the arms and legs. This rash then resolves in the reverse order. Symptoms typically last 1-5 days, and many people (25-50%) do not experience any symptoms. The major potential complication of German measles infection is Congenital Rubella Syndrome, which can affect the babies of pregnant females who contract the disease during pregnancy, with the highest risk occurring during the first trimester of pregnancy (up to 85% of babies). The virus can cross the placenta from the mother to the baby. This infection can cause miscarriages as well as babies to be born with severe birth defects such as low birth weight, microcephaly (small head), enlarged liver and spleen, jaundice, cataracts/retinopathy/glaucoma/blindness, hearing loss/deafness, congenital heart defects including pulmonary artery stenosis/patent ductus arteriosus, seizures, excessive sleepiness, meningoencephalitis (serious inflammation of the brain and its protective membranes), osteitis (inflammation of the bones), anemia, and low platelet count. In the future, these children can develop other complications such as chronic infections, either hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism, Type 1 diabetes, developmental delays, and intellectual disabilities/learning difficulties.

As with measles and mumps, people of all ages are susceptible to contracting the disease, especially if they are not vaccinated. Similarly, additional risk factors for contracting German Measles include those with autoimmune disorders, people who are immunocompromised, people who travel internationally to areas where German Measles infections are common and/or vaccination rates are low, healthcare workers, and people who are regularly in close contact with other people such as school-aged children, college students, contact sports participants, and residents of care facilities.

The first Rubella/German Measles vaccines became available in the United States in 1969 in response to a major Rubella epidemic that occurred in 1964-1965, which caused many fetal deaths. Three vaccines were approved that year. One of these vaccines was developed by Maurice Hilleman PhD., one of the greatest microbiologists/vaccinologists the world has ever seen. He and his staff at Merck & Company Pharmaceuticals were responsible for developing roughly 13 vaccines over his 47-year career, including the aforementioned Rubeola/measles vaccine (1963), Rubulavirus/mumps vaccine (1967), and the MMR combination vaccine (1971), which is still in use. Given that this is a combination vaccine, the dosing schedule, indications, and contraindications are essentially the same as outlined for the measles and mumps vaccines.

In the next issue of *RiteNow,* we will continue our discussion of current CDC vaccination guidelines by reviewing the guidelines for Varicella (Chickenpox), Zoster (Shingles), and Human Papillomavirus (HPV). □



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