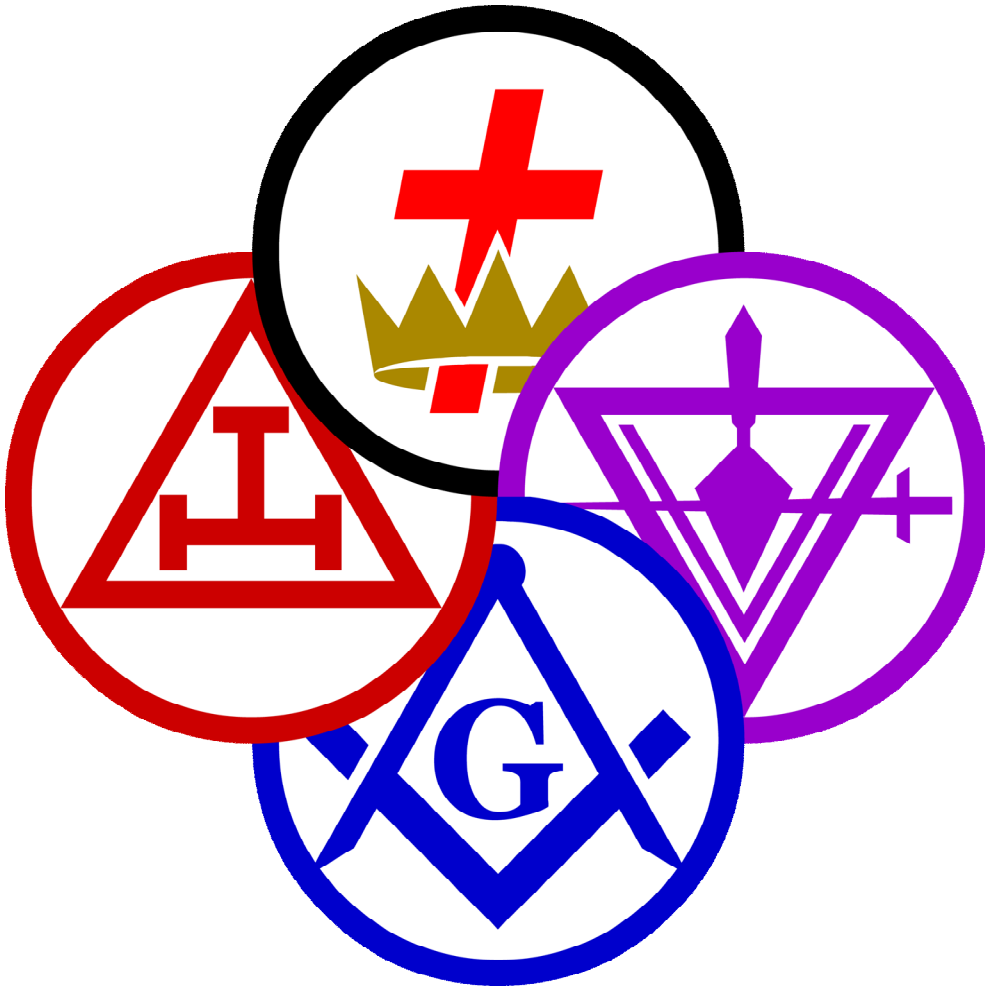


The Grand York Rite Bodies of Mississippi



Long Range Plan

as adopted by the Joint Long Range Planning Committee

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Introduction

York Rite Masonry has a wonderful story to tell and a tremendous history to share. Unfortunately, somewhere along the line, we decided that the story would tell itself and that we need do no more than exist and they would join. Remember the baseball movie where it was said, “build it and they will come.” Well, that only works in Hollywood. In real life, membership takes a concerted effort and must be worked like a garden. Our goal now is to provide the tools with which to work that garden where the crop will be “new members” who share our enthusiasm for York Rite Masonry.

At the 2014 Annual Meeting in Meridian, Mississippi, it was reported that if the Grand York Rite Bodies continue to lose members at the rate we were currently losing them, the York Rite in Mississippi could be a thing of the past in as little as 15 years. That was a sobering fact and should call all of us to action.

No York Rite Body can rest on its past laurels and/or accomplishments. We are living in a different world today where time is the essential ingredient for the younger man. He has to know that trading his time from one item to another will bring him dividends. The organization for which he gives up time at home with his family must be a vibrant, well-oiled machine and must be something for which he will gladly say, “I belong.”

It is imperative that every York Rite Mason take a personal interest in our growth. The invitation to become a York Rite Mason should come from York Rite Masons themselves. We need to be active in our Blue Lodges and speak often of York Rite. We must lead by example. We should be the ones who initiate the invitation to our Blue Lodge Brothers. A campaign will be successful only because each of us is willing to be a positive and proactive contributor to each and every step of the program.

It is no longer valid to say, “But we have always done it that way,” or “We have never done it that way.” The whole scheme of life has changed and we have to adapt to the fast paced age in which we live. Let it be said here that we must never sacrifice any of our principles, but we must change our methods if we intend to attract new recruits and grow.

There is a sense of urgency about all of this. Remember the 15 years stated earlier? In these times of boundless choice, men must be continually “sold” on the discretionary items in life. It is, therefore, imperative that we modernize our thinking in recruiting members for the York Rite. Now is the time to promote a membership effort that reaches recruits, current members, and those members we may have opportunity to “re-up.”

It is the intention of this program and the Long Range Planning Committee to promote a carefully planned, energetic, and dignified campaign that will strengthen and build our ranks. The future of York Rite Masonry is in all of our hands.*

“We have come up thus far to help, aid, and assist in the building of our city and the House of the Lord, without the hope of fee or reward.”

* The Committee wishes to thank Brother Kenneth E. Dyer, PGHP, PIGM, PGC for his ground breaking efforts in forming the Long Range Planning Committee and work on this plan.

Organized Accountability

Grand Heads of the Bodies

Formalized mechanisms of accountability facility efficiency and productivity. To affect the Rite's goals of membership recruitment and retention, it is important for leadership values to flow from the top down. The success of our local bodies is essential for the success of our organization. Adoption of certain expectations and duties of key York Rite officers helps facility trickle-down leadership on a continuing basis.

The following plan is designed as a two fold process. To assist with the workload, six (6) Regional Representative positions, explained below, have been created. However, ultimate responsibility of this plan falls upon the three heads of the bodies.

First, the heads of the bodies, through the Regional Representatives, are responsible for assessing each local body every year. Each Regional Representative shall visit each York Rite Body within their Region at least once per year (once between each annual York Rite Grand Lodge). The Regional Representatives will assess the bodies using Appendix 1 and report their findings to each of the three heads of the bodies. The Regional Representatives shall meet at least once per year collectively with the heads of the bodies and their anticipated successors (presumable at Grand York Rite). The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the status of York Rite in Mississippi and determine what is working and not working among the local bodies. The heads of the bodies shall provide additional oversight and resources to any struggling local body, as deemed necessary in such meeting. Long term or permanent suggestions may be referred to the Long Range Planning Committee for additional consideration.

Second, the local bodies shall be provided, through the Regional Representative, with specific ideas, tools and resources to aid in their success, including this plan. These resources should also include, but are not limited to, Ambassador Packets, consisting of an official invitation and petitions. Regional Representatives will assist the local bodies in any additional way delegated by any the heads of the bodies.

Regional Representatives

Mississippi is divided into the six Regions identified in Appendix 2. Each Region shall have one Regional Representative. The head of each Grand York Rite body shall appoint two Representatives per year. Representatives shall serve a one year term, and they may be reappointed no more than twice, for a total consecutive term of service not to exceed three years. A past Regional Representative is eligible for appointment again after one year of not serving. Appointments shall be made on a revolving basis between the heads of the bodies and the Regions. (ex: Year 1- Chapter appoints Regions 1 and 2; Council appoints Regions 3 and 4; and Commandery appoints Regions 5 and 6. Year 2 – Chapter appoints Regions 3 and 4; Council appoints Regions 5 and 6; and Commandery appoints Regions 1 and 2. Year 3 – Chapter appoints Regions 5 and 6; Council appoints Regions 1 and 2; and Commandery Appoints Regions 2 and 3.).

The 3 R's of Membership: **Recruitment, Recognition and Retention**

The three R's of any campaign are recruitment, recognition, and retention. They are the foundation upon which any campaign must be built. Each York Rite body needs separate committees for recruitment, recognition and retention, with each to have a chairman. These teams need to consist of men who are active and will work. Make appointments part of your annual committee appointments, with reports for the chairman to be given at stated meetings.

Recruitment: The lifeline of any organization is built upon new members. Without a new base of membership, we cannot reach the heights that our wonderful York Rite so richly deserves. The information contained herein will form a workable, viable recruitment program that is a time tested.

Recognition: Many of our Companions accomplish awards worthy of being recognized at our monthly convocations. Make a concerted effort to learn both the recipient and the award. Then, insure that this individual attends your next Convocation and have a knowledgeable member make a presentation to him West of the Altar. Folks love hearing their names. Find a way to accommodate this phenomenon to add value.

Retention: Often, the only thing a wavering brother needs is encouragement. We can turn the tide of NPD's with a friendly call or visit, informing the member of the importance of his remaining with the York Rite. E-mails and phone trees can do wonders in keeping members informed and teaching them that the York Rite had value for them. This is simply too large a task for any one person, and certainly should not be tasked to our secretaries alone.

Membership Committees

Essential to the success of any membership program is the selection of chairmen. They must be a men who possesses people skills and who are willing to assume the helm. They must have the time, possess organizational, planning, and sales abilities and have the respect of their peers. The Chairmen are, in the long run, the most critical decisions your York Rite Body will make. Their selection, as well as his acceptance, should be based upon the answer of the most vital question, "Can he lead us to success in our membership drive?"

Before the work of the committees begin, much planning must be done. The committees must determine the names, numbers and locations of the Blue Lodges in the area. They must know the meeting night of each Lodge, its Secretary and Master.

The committees should then establish an "Ambassador" program and pick an Ambassador for each Blue Lodge. An annual planning meeting of the Ambassadors is recommended. Dates of festivals, activities, etc. should be covered in this meeting, as well as providing each Ambassador with a roster of York Rite Members in his Blue Lodge. The membership recruitment committee is responsible for ensuring the Ambassadors are adequately equipped with petitions and a personal, written invitation from the heads of the York Rite Bodies.

Realizing that membership is an on-going process, the committees will want to be in contact with its Ambassadors (via e-mail) on a regular basis. All information brought to the attention of the Blue Lodge concerning the York Rite rests within the hands of the Ambassadors.

The primary ingredient in the recipe for a successful membership committees is the establishment of an organizational structure with clearly defined areas of responsibility and an obvious reporting system.

Organized Launch of a Membership Program

A membership campaign requires careful planning before it is launched. Any York Rite Body that rushes into a membership program without a careful, deliberate, detailed and well thought out plan is likely to fail.

The first consideration you will want to do is evaluate your situation by asking the following:

1. How many members do we have now?
2. How many of our members are active?
3. How many Blue Lodges do we service?
4. How many members do they have?
5. Who are our members that participate in local Blue Lodges?
6. Who is willing to share the workload?
7. Which of our members are willing to help with ritual work?
8. Would new members be excited about what we do?

You will want to evaluate your own situation prior to asking Blue Lodge members to join your Bodies. But most of all, you must be willing to hear everything your members have to say – positive or negative. Sometimes the truth hurts, but we can only begin from where we are, and not from where we think we are.

You must make a plan and then follow the plan. It does not matter which way the wind blows when the ship has lost its sail. Your plan must be accepted by the loyal and dependable members of your York Rite Bodies. Otherwise, no one will want to work on the plan. The plan must be placed into the hands of those who will give it the time and effort until conclusion.

A word about goals. Goals must be high enough to be challenging, but low enough to achieve. Be sure to set you goals for new members at an acceptable rate.

“The fields are great to harvest, but the laborers are few.”

Recruiting Master Masons to the York Rite

One of the best ways to reach a goal is to approach it from a variety of angles. In doing so, each York Rite Body offers even more members the opportunity to become engaged themselves in the recruitment process and create value in their own membership.

The Recruitment Chairman should notify, by mail, each Blue Lodge within the jurisdiction of that York Rite Body in October of each year that the York Rite will be willing to attend a Blue Lodge meeting and present an educational program on the York Rite of Freemasonry.

When a Blue Lodge allows a program, three knowledgeable active York Rite members should attend the Lodge and present the York Rite story in five (5) parts. The Chapter man should wear a red coat, the Council man should wear a purple coat, and the Commandery man should wear his uniform without chapeau and sword.

The program might be presented as follows:

1. **Introduction** – This part short and sweet to inform the Blue Lodge how the program will be presented and to assure them the program will take no longer than twenty (20) minutes.
2. **Chapter** – The first part should cover the Chapter. It must be presented by a Royal Arch Mason (red coat and chapter jewelry – including apron and jewel). He should cover Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, Royal Arch Mason and R.A.R.A. This part of the program should not dwell simply on ritual, but should place emphasis on the understanding that without the Royal Arch, a Mason's education is incomplete.
3. **Council** – The second part should cover the Council. The companion should be dressed in purple and wearing his apron and jewel. He should cover Royal and Select Master and mention the Super Excellent Master. He should close with Cryptic Masons Medical Research.
4. **Commandery** – The third part should cover the Commandery. The presenter should wear a full uniform and a Blue Lodge apron. He should cover the Orders of the Commandery and finish with Knight Templar Eye Foundation.
5. **Conclusion** – A question and answer session should follow and should always conclude with a big thank you to the Master and the Lodge for allowing a York Rite program to be presented in their Lodge.

It is always appropriate to leave the Blue Lodge Secretary with a packet of information on the York Rite, with several petitions for his members. Always remember to be enthusiastic and personable.

Other forms of communications with non-members include:

- The personal (one on one) touch. Lead by example.
- Wear the appropriate dress relative to a York Rite Body whenever possible.
- Participate in parades.
- Hold open houses and open meetings (installation).
- Mail personal letters to newly made Master Masons.
- Have a specific honoree for your festivals.
- Form a speaker's bureau from your gifted speakers and make the list available to Blue Lodges, Scottish Rite Valleys, and the Shrine.
- Mailing each member of your York Rite Bodies a personal letter soliciting his support and asking for membership recommendations.
- Secure a commitment from each officer in your bodies to attain a petition for the next Festival.
- Write a letter to each newly made Master Mason in each of the Blue Lodges your Bodies serve, including in the mailing a packet of materials about the York Rite. In this letter, you will want to encourage these men to feel free to contact your Membership team with any questions they may have. By all means, include a petition in the mailing.
- Consider rewarding the member of your Bodies who gain the most new members during a calendar year.
- Spread the leadership around by using some inactive members on York Rite committees.
- Enlist the cooperation of all your past presiding officers. Include them in your plans.
- Have the committees meet together regularly to increase cooperation and further the common goal.
- Assign those officers and members who have speaking skills to a "Speakers Bureau." Make this list available to Blue Lodges for their Masonic Education programs.
- Develop a membership packet for new members. Include booklets and pertinent information that a new member would want and need.

It is very important that our members know as much as possible about the York Rite. Having Masonic education, sharing knowledge on an informal basis, reading, and attendance do much to make our members literate. Inform them of the benefits of the York Rite, including:

- We improve York Rite Masons in every walk of life through their work and study of our craft.
- We stand for the noblest principles in the lives of men and the highest standards of conduct.
- We let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify their Supreme Being.
- We share character building through a liberal education that may be shared with one another.

- We provide a rich sense of fellowship, freedom of mind and an understanding of that which is right to live harmoniously with God and man.
- We learn through participation in our Degrees, thereby advancing our understanding – up to and including the finding of the lost word.
- We share our wonderful history and heritage through participation with other Companions.
- We meet and learn to know fine men who otherwise might have remained at a perpetual distance.

Membership Development

As your committees form, assess and plan, consider:

This is not the York Rite of the 1960's. It is true that the numbers may not be as large as they once were, but because of the actions of the Shrine a few years ago, the new members we now get are as sold out to the mission as we are and they are willing and ready to go to work when they complete the Degrees and Orders of the York Rite. They come in all ages and sizes. They bring with them new ideas and an opportunity to help us grow. They bring a most welcomed energy transfusion, and it is up to us to take advantage of it.

Membership value is critical. Our new members are busy people and they need to be convinced that the dollars they spend with us are returning a value to them in ways other than carrying another membership card. Our members are interested in family activities, guest speakers, community involvement, and an opportunity of being of service. They need to know that by committing their time and talents that they are making a positive contribution to a worthwhile organization.

Becoming an internet fraternity. More and more of our members are becoming “connected.” Many of our Bodies are on the internet. Rest assured that younger prospects check you out on the internet before they invest their hard earned money to become a part of this Body. Websites promote our Bodies and our mission and are a big seller for younger men. Facebook groups are an easy, simply way to stay connected and update members on meetings and events. Routine reminders, like stated meeting announcements by e-mail is a proven tactic to increase participation.

Dangling the carrot. Many York Rite Bodies have instituted incentives to reward members who have excelled, be it top-line signing or contributions in other areas of our fraternity. Consider incentives for these men who walk the extra mile, be it dues credit, gift certificates, or recognition in York Rite meetings through creation of a “York Rite Mason of the Year.”

Festivals. A festival is both an opportunity to gain new members and renew acquaintances. Make sure that your entire membership knows of your festivals and feel welcome to come and enjoy both the ritual and fellowship.

Perception is reality. What others see in you is what they perceive to be the truth about the organization. Remember the old axiom that the chain is only as strong as its weakest link? Often insiders know very little. With a majority of our members not ever gracing the door of our meetings, what is the perception of those who do not know better? Are our inactive members our dissatisfied customers? What value can we give them? Our product may need to be tweaked to met the needs of those inactive men. Implementation of the tools contained herein will rejuvenate enthusiasm and provide and opportunity for serve for everyone.

Engaging New Initiates

Bringing every new member into the active fold begins immediately upon his election into the Bodies. Notification of his election should be given to him in the form of a congratulatory letter. He will need to be assured that he made the right decision and that his Masonic Education will continue and would be incomplete without his taking this step. He should be given the dates of the stated meetings, festivals and what is expected of him.

The degrees and orders should be performed in such a manner as will allow the candidate to treasure and never forget. The ritualistic work requires your best and most talented ritualists. It will certainly be more impressive if members of his Lodge who belong to the York Rite Bodies are there to encourage and congratulate him. Try to never read parts or read to the candidates during degrees. Every candidate deserves our best effort.

The performance of the degrees and time in between should be as efficient as possible to minimize down time. The stage manager should insure that everything flows and all are rowing in the same direction.

After the degrees and orders have been completed, each candidate should be greeted warmly and allowed to express his thoughts. Each man should be given a job, regardless of how small. We need to get every new companion and sir knight involved. Right here and there. Each candidate should be assigned a mentor (preferably his first line signer) who should give him instructions about the customs, traditions, and history of the York Rite. The mentor will need to take his new York Rite Mason under his wing until the new man is thoroughly oriented and comfortable.

The membership committee will want to follow up on each candidate to insure continued interest and activity. In addition to degree work, put them to work on a committee that works toward recruitment or retention so that he can work with other brothers immediately.

It is important to remember that men vote with their feet. That is to say, that with so many organizations and activities pressing each of us for a part of our time, we select those things which interest us and gravitate toward them, often to the exclusion of another activity or Body. We vote with our feet. We travel the direction that most interests us. We must never forget that we are competing for the time of men. We must succeed if our gentle craft is to continue on for our successors. Contact and interest are essential if we want our new members to feel needed and important.

We live in the information age. Men are busy and they mostly live in the fast lane. They are pressed for time. They want to know that they are trading that valuable commodity of time for something worthwhile. The moment they feel an activity is not worthwhile, they will vote with their feet. They must gain a feeling of belonging to sense fulfillment.

We need to get past the trap of "titles" and just be ourselves. Very few men care about all the regalia we wear and the initials each of us could place behind our names. They only care that we care.

Give it the most careful thought and attention. In order to assimilate new men into our beloved York Rite, we must make that all important first impression. Display the leadership needed to get the job done and make it happen.

Retention and NPD

Equally important to attaining new members to the York Rite is retaining those we already have. In the past several years, we have witnessed a mass exodus from our rolls, both in demits and NPD's. This trend is a strong indicator that we are failing to pay the price of doing the work and are content in "playing" the game. We talk the talk, but do we really walk the walk? A letter asking for a demit and/or unpaid dues are cries for help. They are signals that we need to wake up and take notice. Somewhere, in someone's life, a decision has been made that a man is not receiving value for his investment.

It is the responsibility of the Retention Chairman to personally contact each of these men and inquire as to the reason(s) for this action. It cannot be overemphasized that the Retention Chairman plays a key role in the health and welfare of each York Rite body. Each contact will bring a new challenge for him, but he must make the call. Sometimes a member may be moving, other times his health may prevent his activity, and sometimes, he may simply no longer feel the need of belonging. Each case must be handled with love and care and individuality.

Each request for demit and/or NPD has assumed the same vows each of us has, and he must be treated with the same dignity and respect that will effectively and firmly remind him of his commitment and allegiance. Should he be ill or financially unable to keep up with his dues, ways and means can be taken to assist our member.

Care must be taken with NPD's that each man is still a current dues paying member of his Blue Lodge. If not, then your Body has no option but to release him.

Otherwise, any man in jeopardy of going out of the York Rite as an NPD, needs to be contacted about his situation. The Secretary/Recorder can do much to help the membership retention team in this area. Use his talents, understanding and information wisely. Have a plan of implementation and follow it. Remind each man that he is needed and he will be leaving behind a great deal of fellowship, masonic education, and opportunities for service should he opt out. Be proactive and work hard to retain each member.

Statistics tell us that the majority of NPDs come from members less than three years after initiation. One of the best ways to avoid NPDs is to engage new members as soon as possible.

Restorations and Affiliations

When a member is suspended, there is still a chance that he may be restored into the fold. Often, his situation is traceable to finances, as opposed to dissatisfaction on his part. In recent history, many York Rite Bodies have lost members due to the new Shrine membership recruitment, and some are now beginning to want to return to the York Rite. Both the retention committee and recruiting committee chairmans should frequently review lost members to determine whether they may wish to return to active status again.

The same holds true for demitted members. Do not ignore the fact that he may be ready, willing and able to re-affiliate. The Bodies must be aware of the reason for demit. Bodies should review the inactive rolls annually to determine if there are any who might be ready to petition for active membership.

We must not suffer from the belief that once lost, always lost. It is time to open our eyes to the fact, that in our economy, financial conditions may change at any moment. The committees must take the initiative to seek out those who can and will restore and affiliate.

No one knows how many members could have been returned to the folds over the years. That, however, is no reason to “bite the bullet” and start now to contact these men. How many would be receptive to a kind word or deed? We must show that we care enough to be gracious to these men. The rewards of reinstatement far outweigh the efforts it will take to get in contact with the wonderful men. We must show our concern for the lost.

Stimulating Interest and Attendance

Value is the one thing men are looking to receive. Are we offering our members value for the hard earned dollars they pay in dues? Do we offer Masonic Education at our Convocations?

Leadership is very important in all our activities, but never more than in offering stimulating meetings and activities for our members. Good leaders find ways of interesting men to work for the Bodies. There are countless ways of stimulating their interest. Each man must be made to feel that he is a vital part of the team, not spectators.

Opportunities for service include:

- Committee assignments
- Ritual work
- Festival work
- Stage manager
- Costuming
- Meal preparation
- Speakers bureau
- Monthly newsletters
- Facebook and media
- Organizing honors

A little thought will reveal many more ways to utilize the talents of the memberships. Men will respond to an opportunity to serve. They will attend the stated meetings and be an active part of them. Ways to stimulate attendance include the following:

- Monthly e-mail and Facebook reminders
- Honoring Companions on the month of their Birthday Awarding of Service pins and certificates Recognizing achievement for Masonic or civic service
- Having a past presider's night
- Receiving and honoring outstanding
- Masons Celebrating the anniversary date of your Chapter
- Food at meetings

By a little creative thinking, the leadership of your York Rite Body can significantly improve attendance and participation in your local meetings. Be bold, get out of the box and try them.

Conclusion

This plan is a merely a tool to help the Mississippi York Rite Bodies improve the membership base. It must be realized that no work can be accomplished in this world with exertion. It is therefore imperative that each local Body give the ideas in this plan a try and the our Grand Body leaders encourage (strongly) the local Bodies.

York Rite will not sustain itself. The time has come to utilize the talents, enthusiasms, and energies of those men who have plans and ideas to offer. We have too many companions who are more interested in rank, pomp, circumstance, and title than they are in serving the craft. Men who seek power, prestige, are stubborn to change, read their parts, insist on having their way, never offer anything for the good of York Rite Masonry, and/or encumber the progress of this beloved fraternity, and they must be lovingly set aside. We need to gently encourage rejuvenation and entrust rolls in the hands of energetic men that are willing to boldly step out in faith and take risks to turn the tides.

We must now find the men who will take a personal interest in membership and growth. We must return value for the investment of our members. We must be willing to change.

Your Long Range Planning Committee is both grateful and indebted to all that provided input to this booklet and for the ideas regarding membership programs and campaigns, from which much was adopted. This is an evolving process, and your input is greatly appreciated.



Grand York Rite of Mississippi Visitation Report for the Grand Lecturer - Inspector - Instructor

Date _____

YR Chapter _____ Council _____ Commandery _____

Address _____ street _____ city _____ Mississippi _____ zip code _____

Present: Officers

Chapter _____

Council _____

Commandery _____

Visitors _____

Total _____

Description of the Building and its' Condition _____

Condition of Costumes and degree paraphernalia _____

Current Membership _____ Average Attendance _____

No. of Suspensions for NPb _____

What is being done to reduce Suspensions? _____

Number of Meetings held in the last 12 Months: Chapter _____ Council _____ Commandery _____

Festivals hosted in the last 12 Months _____

Open Meetings in the last 12 Months _____

Quality of Work

Opening and Closing: Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

De{lree Work: Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Active Committees and Their Responsibility _____

How Active is the Membership in their Lodge: Very _____ Somewhat _____ Not at All _____

Signature of Auditor _____

