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GENERAL GRAND CHAPTER
Order of the Eastern Star
Established November 1876

Sisters, Brothers and Friends:

In recent weeks, there has been much discussion regarding the passage of Resolution 42 during the General Grand Chapter Triennial Assembly held in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Unfortunately, there has also been misinformation spread about what changes the adoption of this new qualification for Eastern Star membership means for the relationship of our Order to the Masonic fraternity.

The delegates of the 51st Triennial Assembly overwhelmingly voted to expand our membership qualifications; it required a two-thirds majority to change our law, and this threshold was easily met. There was discussion, for and against, during the debate, but no attempt was made to amend or alter the course of the resolution prior to its passage. Our Constitution and Bylaws reserve only a few powers exclusively for the General Grand Chapter, allowing Grand Chapters and Subordinate Chapters to establish and enforce many of the laws pertaining to their own governance. However, one area where the General Grand Chapter has complete authority is granted in Article VII (d) of the Constitution: "It shall be the exclusive judge of the qualifications of its own members..." As a result, concurrence with any change in membership qualifications is not required or allowed on the jurisdictional or subordinate chapter level.

Prior to the adoption of this legislation in October 2024, those eligible to membership in the Order of the Eastern Star included:

- Affiliated Master Masons in good standing and any female relatives who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption to Affiliated Master Masons in good standing, or if deceased were in good standing at the time of their death; as well as
- Members – either active for three (3) years or majority – in the International Order of the Rainbow for Girls or in the Job's Daughters International, each of whom having attained the age of eighteen (18) years.

Resolution 42 added the following:

- Women sponsored by a sister and brother who are members of the Order

Please be aware that one important qualification did not change—any man wishing to join the Order of the Eastern Star must be a Master Mason in good standing. If a male petitioner is not a Master Mason, he cannot join Eastern Star. And if a male member of Eastern Star is suspended from his Lodge (whether for non-payment of dues or otherwise), then he is also automatically

suspended from Eastern Star. In other words, membership in Freemasonry is a prerequisite for any man wishing to join Eastern Star.

The change that was made to the membership qualifications applies strictly to female petitioners for the degrees in Eastern Star and adds only a category for sponsored membership. The gist of sponsored membership is that any woman who wants to join the Order of the Eastern Star and who does not meet the standard requirements for membership can nevertheless petition for membership if she presents with her petition two letters of recommendation, one of which is signed by a female member of the Order in good standing, and the other is signed by a male member of the Order in good standing. In other words, if a woman wants to join Eastern Star as a sponsored petitioner, she must first be vouched for by a Master Mason who is in good standing.

We understand the concern over the foregoing change, especially that it has eliminated the prerequisite Masonic connection for female petitioners. We ask those espousing this belief to remember that before sponsored membership was enacted, the connections between some of our petitioners and their Masonic relations were spotty at best. For example, a young woman who never or barely knew her grandfather but could prove that he was a Master Mason in good standing when he died was eligible to join Eastern Star—but the woman who has been a constant companion to her Master Mason boyfriend for decades could not.

In fact, we see sponsored membership as requiring a much stronger Masonic connection than Eastern Star previously required. While the young woman who never or barely knew her Master Mason grandfather, uncle or stepbrother is still eligible to join, a woman who wants to join but who is not related to a Master Mason must present a letter, signed by a living Master Mason in good standing, in which that Brother vouches for the woman's character. In our opinion, this demonstrates that not only does the Order of the Eastern Star remain deeply connected to Freemasonry, but no sponsored member may join without the express approval of a Mason. In other words, unlike a woman who can prove a direct relationship in her past, Master Masons in the present essentially have direct authority over which women are eligible to join.

There have also been well-meaning suggestions offered that permission to ignore this new membership qualification should be offered or even that the leadership of General Grand Chapter should declare the adopted resolution void due to potential actions that could be taken at the Grand Lodge level affecting Eastern Star within a Grand Jurisdiction. Our Most Worthy Grand Matron is the widow of a Past Grand Master, and as such we are aware of some of the differences between the authority enjoyed by a Grand Master of a Masonic jurisdiction and the authority that she has as the Most Worthy Grand Matron of the General Grand Chapter. For example, her husband Bob, as the Grand Master of Arizona, had the authority to make a man a Freemason on sight. As the Most Worthy Grand Matron she does not have the authority to make someone a member of Eastern Star. As another example, Bob, as Grand Master of Arizona, had the authority to suspend an Arizona Masonic rule or statute that he felt undermined the purposes of Freemasonry. As the Most Worthy Grand Matron, she does not have the authority to suspend any of the Constitution, By-Laws, rules and regulations of the General Grand Chapter of Eastern Star. So even though the Constitution states that "the Most Worthy Grand Matron is the highest Officer in the General Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star," she does not enjoy the same authorities as a Grand Master.

The directives and edicts issued or being contemplated in the various Masonic jurisdictions have had a major impact, as we have been inundated with calls, emails, and letters of concern from Eastern Star members both in North America and all around the world. Our hearts break for these Sisters and Brothers whose membership may be impacted because for many of our members, particularly those who are in the golden years of their lives, Eastern Star is one of their few opportunities for social interaction and camaraderie.

In closing, we want you to know that Eastern Star always has and always will honor its tradition of giving practical effect to one of the beneficent purposes of Freemasonry, which is to provide for the welfare of the wives, daughters, mothers, widows, and sisters of Master Masons. We will also continue to share with our Masonic Brothers in promulgating the principles of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. As leaders of the General Grand Chapter, we respect the authority of those who govern the Masonic order in the various jurisdictions and stand willing to work with them to address the concerns being currently debated. What we do ask is that our communication as Eastern Star members be civil and held in appropriate places, not solely on social media and in public forums. As Most Worthy Grand Matron (whose husband was a Past Grand Master of Arizona) and Most Worthy Grand Patron (a proud Kentucky Master Mason for over 42 years), we believe that the principles of Freemasonry are integral to the continued success of Eastern Star. We will do everything in our power to honor that tradition through the remainder of our term of office while we serve our world-wide membership.

Sincerely.



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This letter is endorsed by:

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