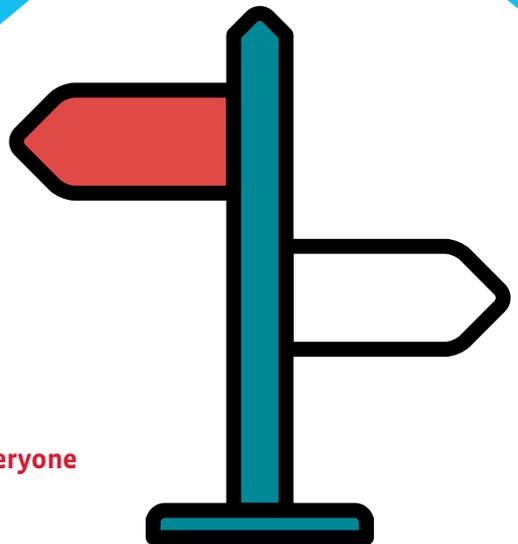




Masonic
Charitable Foundation

GUIDE

The Almoner's Guide



For Freemasons, for families, for everyone

www.mcf.org.uk

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Introduction

One of the core values of Freemasonry is to look after the welfare of Freemasons and their family members.

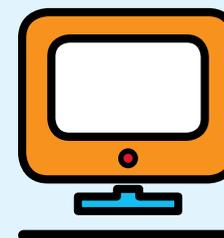
This guide is intended to assist Almoners in fulfilling their role, namely carrying out the ‘pastoral’ duties expected from them in support of Brethren and their immediate family. It is hoped that this guide will be of particular use to those who are newly appointed, whilst also serving as a continuous reference document for Almoners experienced in providing excellent pastoral care within their communities and Provinces.

The guide has been produced by the Masonic Charitable Foundation (MCF) and a group of Provincial Grand Almoners (PGAs).

What is **pastoral care**?

Throughout this guide you will find references to ‘pastoral care’.

For the purposes of this guide we are defining this as ‘maintaining support and contact with Brethren and their immediate family’.



Further support available

This guide is one of a number of resources for Almoners which are available from the MCF’s website: www.mcf.org.uk/almoner



1. Role of the Almoner

Tasks

Typically, your role will comprise of the duties below. This list is not exhaustive and individual Lodges may ask you to take on other tasks.

- Maintaining the pastoral care of Brethren and their families by keeping in regular contact – this ensures they know where to turn in times of need and feel comfortable doing so.
- Listening carefully to the needs of Brethren and their dependants whilst also managing their expectations.
- Highlighting the support available from the state, charities and other organisations.
- Signposting the help available from the Masonic Charitable Foundation and local Masonic charities.
- Recognising and fighting loneliness to resolve the problem before it gets out of control. This includes maintaining contact with widowed partners and signposting to local support groups.
- Making all new members welcome in conjunction with the Proposer, Secunder and Lodge Mentor.
- Working closely with the Lodge Charity Steward and Lodge Mentor.
- Noting the non-attendance of Lodge members and following up as necessary.
- Keeping in touch with Brethren who have resigned or have been 'lost', whenever possible.
- Identifying the contact details of a friend or relative of a vulnerable person who can be contacted in emergencies.
- Encouraging other members of the Lodge to share the duties of the Almoner (e.g. assisting with visits to widowed partners).
- Keeping the Lodge updated on a Brethren or dependant's circumstances at frequent intervals.
- Keeping Almoners Accounts (if required by the Lodge).
- Ensuring a smooth and detailed handover is made to your successor.



2. Essential qualities and skills

To be a successful Almoner you will need a sympathetic and empathetic approach, a commitment to helping people and the time and energy to devote to the benefit of Brethren and their dependants.

You will also need to be proactive, a good and attentive listener and a 'people person'. The role benefits greatly from continuity so it is suggested you commit to the role for around five years.

Building strong relationships

Maintaining good relationships is core to your role as an Almoner. The following information highlights some simple tips to assist you in developing and nurturing relationships.

Actively listening

Listening is a vital skill for an Almoner and becoming an 'active' listener is essential. To listen actively, you must make a conscious effort to both hear the words that another person says and, more importantly, to try to understand the complete message being communicated. In order to do this you must pay careful attention to the other person.

If you're finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, try repeating their words in your mind as they say them – this will reinforce their message and help you stay focused. Using body language and other signs to acknowledge you are listening also reminds you to pay attention and not let your mind wander.

Gathering information

Encouraging an individual to open up and share information about their life can be a daunting task for both parties. By using the '**LEAPS**' method outlined below, you can approach information gathering in a logical manner and help to put people at ease:

- L – Listen:** Show good and attentive listening skills through nodding of the head, occasional gap fillers such as 'OK' or 'I see', steady eye contact and open body language (leaning forward and keeping arms uncrossed).
- E – Empathise:** Try to understand how the person feels by using phrases like "How did you feel about that?" or "What were you feeling when that happened?"
- A – Ask questions:** Ask open questions rather than questions that invite a closed 'yes' or 'no' answer. Use leading statements such as "Please tell me more" and repeat the person's language i.e. "You say you feel concerned..."
- P – Paraphrase:** Paraphrasing information back to the person shows you have listened and understood their situation.
- S – Summarise:** Summarise what has been said and agree the next steps to be taken by you and the person.

If you embed this method in your mind when carrying out pastoral visits, you won't go far wrong!



Establishing a rapport

You can quickly begin to build a rapport with someone by identifying similarities between your experiences and theirs. When you first speak to them keep your eyes and ears open for clues about them and their interests. If you are meeting them at their house, do you notice any pictures of grandchildren or other relatives? Do they have a pet? Have they mentioned an interest in a particular sport or gardening? In many cases, a good starting point will be shared experiences of Freemasonry.

Managing expectations

A perceived failure to deliver 'what was promised' can be extremely detrimental to a relationship. In extreme cases it can lead to an individual breaking off all contact. Try to identify the expectations an individual has of how you are able to help them. This will allow you to provide a realistic view of what might be achievable. Avoid making promises about the outcome of applications for support as there is no guarantee that help will be awarded.

Keeping in touch

Whilst it may be possible to re-establish contact with those that have been 'lost', it is more realistic and cost-effective to minimise any future losses by establishing systems for keeping in touch. By maintaining strong links underpinned by trust and confidentiality, you will find it easier to successfully identify cases of difficulty with widowed partners and dependants. You will also be better placed to encourage Brethren to confide their need for assistance.

Updating the Lodge

It is important that you are proactive and provide regular reports to your Lodge. You may be asked to provide an update on the health or circumstances of a member, widowed partner or other dependant, and the action you have taken to assist them. Care must be taken not to divulge sensitive information – you must always ascertain what information the person is happy for you to share about them during Lodge meetings.

Record keeping

Keeping good records of Brethren, widowed partners and dependants is essential.

Here are some examples of information such records should include:

- Details of all Brethren, including those who have resigned or have been excluded, giving their name, address, telephone number, email address (if available) and any other relevant information.
- Names and addresses of all Lodge widowed partners and other dependants, including those who are living in residential accommodation, with any other important relevant information.
- The dates and details of all visits to widowed partners, sick Brethren and non-attendees.

If asked to manage funds by your Lodge, financial records will be essential and care must be taken to ensure that all payments and receipts are carefully recorded together with any supporting paperwork.

Almoner record cards can be downloaded and used at:

 www.mcf.org.uk/almoner



Using Information Technology (IT)

You will find your role much easier if you are confident using a computer. Communication via email is increasingly common and it is likely that your predecessor will pass on records held in electronic format.

Handing over

When you step down as Almoner, it is very important that you hand over the following to your successor:

- The names, addresses and contact details of any person you are currently helping. These should be accurately recorded and handed over – continuity is critical.
- All support materials you have collected such as this guide, the ‘Alternative Sources of Support Guide: For Almoners’ and the ‘Guide to Government and NHS Benefits: For Almoners’.

It is recommended that a Deputy Almoner is in place, although this is at the discretion of the Lodge. When stepping down, you should ensure that everyone involved knows that you have handed over your duties. This is especially important for the Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner (MetGA/PGA) and any widowed partners or dependants you are supporting.

If you do not let people know the details for the new Almoner, beneficiaries can miss out, Lodge members and widowed partners in need can be overlooked and information from the MetGA/PGA can be sent to the wrong person.



3. Visiting Lodge members and their families

You should be constantly watching out for cases of need or difficulty amongst Brethren and their dependants.

Whilst regular phone contact is great, taking the time to visit someone shows you really care and can provide a valuable insight into their circumstances which might not otherwise have been revealed.



Face-to-face visits to the following individuals can be particularly beneficial:

- Sick Brethren
- Members who have recently experienced a significant life event (e.g. redundancy or bereavement)
- Widowed partners and single Brethren
- Members missing meetings, socials or Festive Boards

3 Having conversations

You can learn a lot about a person's circumstances and what support they may need through having an in depth conversation.

The following suggestions will help you start the right conversations:

- How have you been feeling?
- Have your friends or family visited recently?
- What are your neighbours like? How often do you see or hear from them?
- How do you keep in touch with friends, relatives or loved ones?
- Do you have a spouse or partner? How are they keeping?
- When was the last time you left the house and where did you go?
- Do you belong to any clubs or groups?
- Do you have a pet? How is it?
- Do you have any special interests or hobbies such as reading, baking or gardening?
- How is your health?
- Has anything been troubling you recently?

To understand their circumstances in more detail, ask the following:

- Are you managing with everyday chores such as laundry, ironing and cleaning?
- Are you managing with climbing the staircase?
- Are you on medication? If so, have you been taking it regularly or have there been any changes with your prescription?
- Are you receiving care at home from a registered provider? Is it continuing to meet your needs?
- Have you been eating well or suffering from loss of appetite?
- Do you prepare meals for yourselves or do you rely on help (e.g. meals on wheels)?
- Are you in employment? What's your job like and what are your hopes for the future?
- Do you have any children or grandchildren? How are they?
- Are you having issues paying household bills?
- (For those living in sheltered accommodation) How is it and do you feel safe and looked after?

Things to look out for

As well as listening to the person, you should be observing their home and surroundings for signs that help or support may be needed.

If you notice or hear something, it may not mean there is a problem but it should be a prompt to sensitively explore their circumstances further. For example, a cold house may simply be because the person is most comfortable at that temperature rather than meaning the person is unable to afford heating bills. It is important to remember that things are not always as they seem.



Noticing possible signs of financial difficulty

- Property in poor state of repair
- Evidence of damp or infestations inside the property
- Garden overgrown
- Little or no heat in the property
- Poor or limited use of electrical lighting
- Telephone or internet disconnected
- Car off the road or in a state of disrepair
- Empty fridge or kitchen cupboards
- Worn carpets, wallpaper or curtains
- Neglected or sick pets
- Unkempt appearance

Noticing possible signs of ill-health, including anxiety and depression

- Weight-loss or irregular eating patterns
- Medicines laying around
- Use of or lack of mobility aids
- Memory loss – especially problems remembering recent events such as messages, routes or names
- Becoming confused or experiencing difficulty finding the right words
- Tearfulness, headaches and sudden changes in emotions or mood
- Hoarding of particular items and belongings
- Considerable or large amounts of unopened post
- Increased or decreased levels of energy
- Rapid or rambling speech

Other issues

- **Security risks** – doors and windows not fitted with locks or closed properly
- **Safety risks** – trip hazards and items not within easy reach
- **Fire hazards** – too many plugs in one socket, items too close to a fire or heater

Loneliness

Loneliness and social isolation affect a significant number of people. You can play a vital role in relieving loneliness through regular contact and visits, and by helping to bring individuals into the Masonic support network. Loneliness can be hidden, but it is important to be alert for the signs. You can help by talking to people about their situation and understanding the support they may need – the following questions are a good place to start:

- Have you had any other visitors in the last few days?
- When was the last time you visited friends and family? When was the last time they visited you?
- When was the last time you left the house? Where did you go?
- Do you belong to any clubs or groups?



Quick tips for successful conversations

Face-to-face

- Arrive on time
- Introduce yourself and take some official ID (e.g. driving license) if you have not met before
- Switch off or mute your mobile phone or device
- Shake hands and say how nice it is to see them
- Wait to be invited in but if they don't, then ask
- Ask before you sit down
- Ask open questions and be observant of your surroundings
- Listen attentively
- Leave them with a smile and a promise of making contact to visit again

On the phone

- Make sure you are speaking to the right person
- Introduce yourself and give the name and number of your Lodge
- Explain why you are calling
- Speak clearly and confidently
- Listen attentively
- Think about the right questions in advance
- Promise to call them again by suggesting a suitable date and time
- If agreeing a meeting, repeat the date, time and place back to them



4. How to help

Your role is not just to identify an issue, but also to do what you can to support a person and see them through their situation.

To do this effectively you will need to have a basic knowledge of the many sources of support and assistance available from other organisations and charities, as well as state benefits.

Speak to your Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner (MetGA/PGA)

Your MetGA/PGA is a good first point of contact for guidance and support when you are unsure what to do next. They may also be able to signpost you to local organisations and agencies who can assist.



In some Provinces, the MetGA/PGA will be part of a larger team and together they will have many years of experience of supporting people through a wide range of issues and difficulties – do not be afraid to ask for their help.

Your Province may also have its own charity or funds which can be used to help individuals. Speak to your MetGA/PGA for more information.

How the Masonic Charitable Foundation (MCF) can help

The MCF builds better lives by encouraging opportunity, promoting independence and improving wellbeing for Freemasons, their married, life or widowed partners, children, stepchildren and grandchildren who have a financial, health, family or care need.

In addition to the millions of pounds of support we provide to Freemasons and their families, the MCF awards millions of pounds each year to local and national charities that help vulnerable or disadvantaged people, advance medical research and provide opportunities for young people.

Funded entirely through the generosity of Freemasons and their families, the Foundation is one of the largest charities in the UK.

Support available

Practical assistance

The Advice and Support Team (AST) at the MCF offers advice, guidance and support on a range of issues that can affect those within the Masonic community. Operating across England and Wales, the Team provides a free, independent and confidential service for those seeking support.

The advice and support available includes:

- Assisting with completing applications for individual support
- Talking about financial difficulties
- Recommending the best approach to meet care needs
- Helping to plan and access effective medical and dental treatment
- Supporting children with practical advice and guidance on education and wellbeing
- Discussing the extensive range of financial, health and family help available from the MCF
- Signposting to benefits and services available from the government and other organisations

Financial

Essential daily living costs: Grants can be considered where there is a need for ongoing financial support. Support is aimed at increasing household income to improve everyday living standards to an acceptable level.

Help through an accident, bereavement, redundancy, or other personal crisis: Grants for everyday living costs and other essential expenses resulting from short-term or unexpected financial difficulty. Although the MCF will not repay debts, they may be able to offer ongoing support with expenses to avoid further debt building up or to help provide a basic standard of everyday living during the period when the debts are being repaid.

Funeral bills: Essential costs relating to the provision of a basic funeral where no other funds are available.



Health

Medical treatment: Grants for medical treatment or surgery are available when there is a wait of 12 weeks or more for general NHS treatments or 8 weeks or more for cardiac treatment. Cancer treatment or treatment for Macular Degeneration have no specific wait threshold and are considered on a case by case basis.

Mobility Aids: To help applicants retain their independence, grants are available for a range of mobility aids including power chairs, stairlifts and car hoists.

Home adaptations: Grants can be considered for home adaptations for people living with disabilities or mobility problems. Examples include widening doorways and installing ramps for accessibility.

Consultation and Assessment: Grants are available to cover the costs of consultations or assessments where individuals are facing a wait of longer than eight weeks. Follow up consultations and second opinions are not funded.

Counselling: Up to six telephone or face-to-face sessions can be arranged with a qualified and experienced counsellor based within 15 miles of an applicant's home or place of work.

Children in full-time education

Essential costs for education or training: Specific grants for one-off items such as IT equipment, course materials, school uniforms and travel.

Scholarship travel grants and student accommodation: Financial support for those in further, higher or postgraduate education.

Supporting exceptional talent: Financial support to provide equipment or training for those with the potential to develop a career in music, sports or the performing arts.

Care

Masonic care homes: Masonic care homes operated by the RMBI Care Co offer a range of nursing, residential and dementia care to meet the needs of older people at 17 locations across England and Wales.

Respite care: Grants can fund the cost of respite care for family carers who provide vital support for a loved one. Grants can support short-term residential care breaks, domiciliary care in an individual's own home or day centre care.

UK holidays: Fully-financed and part-funded trips to locations within the UK.

Who is eligible for support from the MCF?

A Masonic connection

Those seeking support must be a Freemason or have a strong family connection to a Freemason under the United Grand Lodge of England. The Freemason does not necessarily need to be a subscribing member, but he must have joined before the need arose.

A financial, health, family or care need

Many needs follow a decrease in household income, or they may arise because of a life-changing event such as a medical diagnosis, changing care needs, family breakdown or the death of a family member.

Any support awarded is in addition to available state benefits and applicants should be claiming all support available.



Requesting assistance

To request assistance for a Brother or their family, contact your Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner (MetGA/PGA) in the first instance or call the MCF direct on freephone:

☎ 0800 035 60 90 for advice.

You can also email: **✉ help@mcf.org.uk**

If an application is appropriate, arrangements will be made for someone to visit and complete the relevant application form and report.

An applicant or the person completing the form may invite you as an Almoner to be present when the application form is completed. You may also be contacted about individuals who have not previously reached out to you but who would benefit from ongoing pastoral care.

RMBI Care Co

The RMBI Care Co (Company no. 1293566, Charity no. 1163245), a subsidiary of the MCF, is a major provider of high-quality care services for older Freemasons and their family members as well as other people in the community. Many of the RMBI's 17 Homes are registered for both residential and nursing care.

All the Homes can accommodate people with dementia following an assessment of their needs, but where more specialist care is needed, a Dementia Support House has been created.

The RMBI also offers limited sheltered and independent living accommodation for people who prefer to live more independently, but with the support of staff where required.

Residents who choose an RMBI Home have the security of knowing that they have a home for life regardless of any changes to their financial circumstances, as long as the RMBI can meet their care needs.

How to apply for a place at an RMBI Home

Applications for permanent and temporary admission or enquiries for details about a specific Home should be made to the relevant Home Manager. General enquiries should be made to:

RMBI Care Co

60 Great Queen Street

London

WC2B 5AZ

☎ 0207 596 2400

✉ enquiries@rmbi.org.uk

RMBI Care Co services are available to people with either private or public funding. All applicants to an RMBI Home are assessed on an individual basis and advised of their weekly fee before moving into the Home. The weekly fee covers provision of accommodation, meals and care, and may change as care needs change.

Home Managers are always delighted to welcome visitors from a Lodge. Arrangements should be made direct with the Home concerned.



Other sources of support

State benefits

You do not need to have a detailed understanding of state benefits but a basic knowledge can be beneficial when signposting members or dependants.

The Government's website (www.gov.uk) provides the most up-to-date information and guidance on state benefits. Age UK (www.ageuk.org.uk) and Citizens Advice (www.citizensadvice.org.uk) also provide a range of useful and 'user friendly' information on benefits for people of all ages. The MCF has also produced a helpful reference guide:

- 'Guide to Government and NHS Benefits: For Almoners'

 www.mcf.org.uk/guide-to-benefits

Support from other charities and organisations

Brethren or their families may also be eligible for help from other sources. Visit our Almoner page to download the reference guide:

- 'Alternative Sources of Support: A resource for Almoners'

 www.mcf.org.uk/alternative-support



Common life events

To complement this guide, the MCF has produced a series of simple factsheets to help Almoners understand and respond to some 'common life events'. Topics covered include bereavement, loneliness and respite care. You can read and print the factsheets here www.mcf.org.uk/almoner



5. Keeping yourself and other people safe

Safeguarding

When meeting with an individual or family, it is important that some very basic rules are followed to ensure everyone's safety. You should consider the following in these circumstances:

Never exchange communications or engage with beneficiaries or potential applicants on social networking sites.

Do not visit vulnerable adults or children alone – an appropriate adult should always be present.



Recognising the types of abuse

There are many forms of abuse that you should be aware of and it is important that you can recognise the signs.

Physical

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing significant harm to a child or adult.

Sexual

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or adult to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not they are aware of what is happening.

Emotional

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child or adult such as to cause severe and ongoing adverse effects on their emotional development. It may involve conveying that they are

worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving them opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child or adult's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of their health or development. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, their basic emotional needs.

Responding to concerns on the welfare of vulnerable people

If you believe someone is being abused or have concerns about the welfare of a child or adult, it is important that you do not ignore them.

In summary:

- Listen but do not comment or give an opinion should a child or adult confide in you.
- Take notes at the time or shortly afterwards and don't forget to date and sign them.
- Do not undertake any investigations.
- If a child or adult is at serious risk, and if the case is urgent, **inform the local social services family team or police immediately**.
- Do not promise the child or adult that you won't share the information they give you.
- Take advice from a Designated Safeguarding **Lead** as soon as possible.
- A good rule of thumb is **"if in doubt, shout"** and if it looks or feels wrong then it probably is.

The MCF safeguarding policy follows good practice and is a useful reference point for Almoners. These policies and more can be found on the Almoner's page on the MCF website:

 www.mcf.org.uk/almoner



Loneworking

Almoners will often visit Lodge members and their families alone. Although such occurrences are rare, the lack of immediate support places you at greater risk of injury through aggression or violence.

It is important to remember that you are entering someone else's territory and there are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risks you encounter.

- Trust your instincts. If you feel uneasy about anything – whether when first speaking on the phone or when at the person's home – take immediate action to improve your safety. If in doubt, do not visit.
- Be aware of your exits and have a pre-planned excuse to get away. For example, you could say you have left something in your car.
- Tell someone where you are going, when you expect to return and what to do in an emergency. Check in with them if your visit goes on longer than expected.
- Always carry a charged mobile phone so you can summon help quickly in an emergency.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust provides lots of personal safety tips and information at:

 www.suzylamplugh.org

6. Data protection

What is data protection and why does it matter?

Every organisation or group that holds and uses information about individuals must comply with data protection laws or risk costly fines. Ensuring personal information is accurate, up-to-date, kept securely and only shared with those who have permission helps to maintain trust in the office of Almoner and the important work linked to the role.

Some simple steps to follow

- Let people know what you intend to do with their personal information: they should know why you need their personal information, how long you will keep it and who it is going to be shared with. This information can be given verbally or in writing.
- Only collect the information you need. Don't collect extra information 'just in case'.
- Let people know they have the right to correct any information if it's wrong and inform them how to get in touch if they decide they don't want you to use the information anymore.
- Share the information you hold about an individual with them if they request a copy.
- Only keep information for as long as it is needed. Have a schedule for reviewing and deleting information – and follow it.
- Ensure the information you have is kept up-to-date.



