

RULING ON VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE AT GRANGE MEETINGS

March 25, 2016

I have been asked to make a ruling on the ability of Grange members to participate, and specifically to be allowed to cast votes, in meetings of Subordinate/Community Granges without being physically present; i.e. via telephone, audio or electronic video means such as computer.

After studying the National Grange Digest of Laws, I find no mandate that members must be physically present in the room to participate and/or to cast a vote in a Grange meeting. I also find that Grange members who personally cast their vote via electronic participation in a regular Grange meeting are not casting a proxy vote, as that term is generally understood. Proxy voting is the assignment of a right to vote by one person to another. Proxy voting is clearly prohibited by the Digest of Laws. Participating in a Grange meeting via electronic means is not assigning one's right to vote to another person. It is exercising one's right to vote via a different medium of communication and participation.

In today's world, people are much more mobile than in 1867 or even 1967. Grangers are required to travel for their employment or even move to another part of the country or world. Grange members proudly serve in the armed forces or the Peace Corps, far away from their communities. Some Grangers temporarily relocate to warmer climates for several months of the year. Our youth may live at college for 8 months out of the year. Grangers may be nursing home residents or may be temporarily home-bound. Many of these members would like to remain connected to their home Grange while they may be unable to attend in person, and certainly their home Granges would appreciate their participation and input.

Today's technology has improved so that there is little chance of someone fraudulently attempting to participate in a meeting as a nonmember or pretending to be someone else using telephone or other audio and/or audio and video technology. Our meetings are no longer secret; we encourage future members to visit meetings in order to learn what the Grange is about. Virtual attendance at a Grange meeting could provide another means of interesting prospective members in a non-threatening manner.

The Grange for many years has allowed committee meetings in which members conduct the business of the Order via telephone or computer with no negative consequences. Even portions of the National Grange Session are broadcast via computer to members far and near.

I am not saying that virtual meetings should take the place of members meeting together for fellowship and activities in a Grange hall or meeting place. This is still the mainstay of our Order. I also rule that the Digest does not require any local, county or State Grange chapter to invest in and employ the technology necessary to allow remote participation at every meeting or any meeting, for that matter. Therefore, the scope of this ruling clearly allows each Grange to determine the method and means of remote participation in their meetings as necessary to accommodate the technological comfort level and traditions of their local Grange. However, members who are separated by distance or disability should not be prohibited, as a matter of Grange Law, from fully participating in Grange meetings by electronic means to keep them part of our family.

Betsy E. Huber
Master
The National Grange