

The CORNERSTONE

OCTOBER 2026 · TORONTO WEST DISTRICT



Ionic Lodge sets a lasting standard

Cornerstone recognition celebrates a continuing commitment to excellence



Ionic Lodge's Cornerstone Certificate presentation, September 8, 2026. Left to right: Bro. Peter Villamor (SW), W. Bro. Vinesh Lala, W. Bro. Oliver Payawal, R.W. Bro. John Dorris (DDGM) and Bro. Ric Amergo (JW).

On September 8, 2026, Ionic Lodge marked a proud milestone as District Cornerstone Chairman W. Bro. Vinesh Lala presented the Cornerstone Certificate to Worshipful Master W. Bro. Oliver Payawal, alongside District Deputy Grand Master R.W. Bro. John Dorris.

The presentation recognised more than the completion of a qualification cycle. It celebrated the care, leadership and shared effort that have helped Ionic Lodge maintain its Cornerstone standard over successive years.

Cornerstone brings the whole life of a lodge into view: sound administration, meaningful fellowship, member engagement and a willingness to improve. Its value becomes

clearest when those practices continue after the certificate has been placed on the wall.

During the presentation, W. Bro. Lala highlighted the quality of leadership and brotherhood reflected in that sustained commitment. By continuing to offer its brethren a rich and fulfilling Masonic experience, Ionic Lodge provides an encouraging example for the District.

Congratulations to W. Bro. Payawal, the officers and all the brethren of Ionic Lodge. Their achievement reminds us that a strong lodge is built through the work its members return to, together, year after year.

RECOGNITION	
Cornerstone Lodges	
<i>Recognising the commitment and shared work of our designated lodges.</i>	
Ionic Lodge	No. 229
Flower City Lodge	No. 689
Unity Lodge	No. 710
West Gate Lodge	No. 734
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01 / QUALITY IN LODGE LIFE

The ISO 9001 of Freemasonry

Why the Cornerstone designation matters

By W. Bro. Vinesh Lala | District Cornerstone Chairman

Early in my career, I worked with companies seeking ISO 9001 certification. The experience taught me that an organisation’s strength is found in the way it works every day: how responsibilities are understood, how progress is recorded and how problems are addressed.

Preparing for an independent audit meant looking closely at processes that could otherwise be taken for granted. A certificate had value because of the disciplined work behind it. That experience still shapes the way I think about the Cornerstone Program.

In that sense, Cornerstone is the ISO 9001 of Freemasonry. The comparison is an analogy: Cornerstone is a Masonic development program with its own standards and review process. What the two approaches share is an insistence that good intentions should be supported by consistent practice.

For a lodge, that means looking beyond the successful conduct of a meeting.

Administration, officer preparation, ritual, education, member retention and community involvement all contribute to the experience we offer our brethren. Each deserves attention, and each can be improved.

Earning a Cornerstone designation shows that a lodge has completed and documented a balanced program of work. Maintaining it asks the lodge to keep examining what it does, to learn from experience and to prepare for the next cycle with purpose.

The most useful question is therefore a practical one: can the good work of this year be understood and carried forward by the officers and brethren who follow us? Clear records, shared responsibilities and regular review help make that possible.

A lasting structure needs inspection and maintenance. Used in that spirit, Cornerstone helps us give every Mason a more thoughtful, better-supported journey through lodge life.



Illustration: a working record gives good intentions a practical form.

“A lasting structure needs inspection and maintenance.”

W. Bro. Vinesh Lala

02 / CONTINUITY

Beyond the two-year certificate

Why Cornerstone excellence must be continuous

By W. Bro. Vinesh Lala | District Cornerstone Chairman

A lodge’s first pursuit of Cornerstone can bring remarkable energy. For two years, brethren record their work, visit other lodges, strengthen community ties and pay closer attention to the experience of their members. The presentation of the certificate is a moment worth celebrating.

The harder test often comes afterwards. When an award feels like a finish line, the habits that made it possible can begin to weaken. Records become less regular, projects lose their momentum and the next qualification cycle arrives sooner than expected.

A designation lasts for two years. The benefits of the work can last much longer, provided the lodge continues to practise what it has learned. Cornerstone is voluntary, but I believe its spirit of regular self-examination belongs in the everyday life of every healthy lodge.

Visits, education, careful administration and attention to members are the substance of that life. When they become established habits, officers inherit a clearer path, new members receive more consistent support and the lodge is better placed to respond when circumstances change.

Continuity also requires a deliberate handover. An incoming officer should be able to see what has been completed, what remains in progress and which brethren are carrying each responsibility. A workbook is most valuable when it remains a working record.

Celebrate the certificate, then use the achievement to begin the next conversation. What has become stronger? Where are members still being missed? Which practice is worth keeping, and which needs more care? The answers will give the next cycle its purpose.



Illustration: education and participation sustain the life of a lodge.

“Like the perfect ashlar, true excellence is only maintained through constant effort.”

W. Bro. Vinesh Lala

03 / UNDERSTANDING THE PROGRAM

Decoding the Cornerstone blueprint

How the program turns good intentions into organised work

By W. Bro. Vinesh Lala | District Cornerstone Chairman

What does it take to earn a Cornerstone designation? The answer begins with a structured, voluntary program of work across a fixed two-year qualification period. A lodge selects twelve elements from three groups of standards, then completes and documents each one.

The balance is deliberate. One mandatory selection establishes a sustained framework, such as member mentorship, officer mentorship, Friend to Friend or Strategic Planning and Action. Five major selections address the depth and health of lodge life. Six basic selections strengthen fellowship, community involvement and the culture of the lodge.

Major options include an annual operating budget, Masonic education, degree work and retention measures. Basic options range from supporting shut-ins and widows to holding an open house or maintaining a lodge website. The full selection list appears on page 6.

Qualification runs from June 1 to May 31 over two years. Some elements require activity in both years, so the committee should read the detailed criteria before making its selections. The selected mandatory element must extend across the whole cycle.

As work is completed, the lodge sends its workbook and supporting evidence to the District Cornerstone Representative for review. Approved elements are signed off, and the updated workbook becomes the continuing record of progress.

Once all twelve selected elements have been completed and approved, designation follows for the next two years. The certificate is prepared for presentation at Grand Lodge in July to the newly elected District Deputy Grand Master, who then presents it to the lodge.



Illustration: the certificate and working tools represent achievement and continued effort.

- 1 MANDATORY**
Choose from 4 options
- 5 MAJOR**
Choose from 15 options
- 6 BASIC**
Choose from 16 options

04 / WORKING TOGETHER

Cornerstone is a team sport

Why it takes a whole lodge to succeed

By W. Bro. Vinesh Lala | District Cornerstone Chairman



Illustration: a committee shares responsibilities and reviews progress together.

“There is room in this process for a new Master Mason as well as an experienced Past Master.”

W. Bro. Vinesh Lala

One of the most persistent misunderstandings about Cornerstone is that the Worshipful Master, or one especially willing Brother, should carry the entire program. That approach puts too much pressure on a few people and leaves much of the program’s value unrealised.

The work begins with a lodge Cornerstone Committee. Together, its members review the standards on Grand View, agree on the elements the lodge will pursue and invite brethren to lead particular activities. Clear responsibilities make it easier for people to contribute with confidence.

A Brother might coordinate support for shut-ins and widows. The Education Officer can arrange the Masonic education presentations. A mentorship team can support candidates through their degrees, while the Secretary and Treasurer help organise the budget and written communications.

The official fillable workbook gives that shared work a common home. It records who is responsible, what has happened and what evidence is ready for the District Cornerstone Representative. Regular, manageable updates help the committee see where support is needed.

There is room in this process for a new Master Mason as well as an experienced Past Master. A small, well-defined responsibility can be the beginning of deeper involvement in lodge life.

Cornerstone strengthens a lodge through the relationships formed while its members work together. The certificate records an achievement; the confidence to plan, contribute and follow through together is something the lodge carries into its future.

05 / THE NEXT QUALIFICATION CYCLE

Raising the bar

The next step after earning your designation

By W. Bro. Vinesh Lala | District Cornerstone Chairman

The certificate has arrived. Your lodge has completed its twelve selected elements, and the brethren have good reason to feel proud. Before the next cycle becomes routine, take time to decide what this achievement now makes possible.

A successful cycle gives a lodge experience it can build on. The committee knows more about its strengths, the work has drawn brethren into new responsibilities and there is a clearer record of what the lodge can accomplish together.

I encourage every Cornerstone lodge to consider elements it did not attempt in the previous qualification period. Familiar choices can remain an alternate plan, but a new selection can bring a neglected part of lodge life into focus.

A lodge that concentrated on social events and open houses might next support three members in completing a College of Freemasonry module. It could consider a Masonic C.H.I.P.

event, participation in at least three blood donor clinics or a formal Officer Mentorship program.

A Strategic Planning and Action process may help turn longer-term ambitions into a practical schedule. The retention option—70 per cent of initiates retaining membership for at least five years—invites a different, equally valuable discussion about the experience members have after their degrees.

Choose with care. Read the current criteria, consider the people and time available, and agree on responsibilities before the work begins. A meaningful challenge should stretch a lodge while giving it a realistic path to completion.

Cornerstone provides a reason to keep asking what a stronger lodge could look like. Carry forward the habits that have served you well, then make room for the next improvement.

“Carry forward the habits that have served you well, then make room for the next improvement.”

W. Bro. Vinesh Lala

A CONVERSATION FOR YOUR NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING

01 Look back

Which activity made the clearest difference to members? Keep the evidence and carry its useful habits forward.

02 Choose deliberately

Which part of lodge life needs more attention? Select a new element with a clear purpose and a realistic schedule.

03 Share the responsibility

Who will lead, who will help, and when will the committee review progress? Agree on these details together.



FROM THE EDITOR

A newspaper for the work we share

This first issue begins with a lodge’s achievement and follows the work that gives such recognition meaning. The pages ahead bring the Cornerstone guidance together in a form that can return to the committee table throughout the year. Lodge reports, photographs and practical lessons from your own experience are welcome.

Vinesh Lala · Editor · Cornerstone2026.27@gmail.com

THE CORNERSTONE PROGRAM / PURPOSE & PARTICIPATION

A working tool for a stronger lodge

Purpose, qualification and a clear process from intention to approval

THE PURPOSE

Cornerstone enables lodges to evaluate their proficiency in lodge activities and business. It combines self-evaluation, discovery and accomplishment with an effective process for building a team.

It can help a lodge strengthen its viability, involve more members and become better known and valued in its community. Its aim is a happy, healthy environment for the brethren, supported by purposeful activity.

WHY PARTICIPATE?

“We do all this anyway” is a useful place to begin a discussion. Do we do these things consistently? How well do we do them? What does the experience look like to a new member, an officer or a Brother who has been absent?

Reflection often reveals something that can be done better. Cornerstone offers tools for that review and a practical way to act on it. Participation is voluntary; the program invites a lodge to examine its own condition and improve its operations.

WORKING TOOL & DESIGNATION

The program’s first purpose is to engage the lodge and its brethren in meaningful activities. The designation recognises full completion of every selected element across all three groups of standards.

A lodge can benefit throughout the journey: more brethren participate, activities gain a clearer purpose and the community has more opportunities to know and value the lodge. The work also shifts attention towards the future and the people who will help shape it.

TWELVE ELEMENTS

A balanced program of shared work

1

MANDATORY

from 4 options

5

MAJOR

from 15 options

6

BASIC

from 16 options

THE TWO-YEAR RHYTHM

Qualification dates are fixed: June 1 to May 31 over a two-year period. The chosen mandatory element must run throughout that period; other elements may require completion in both years. Read each criterion carefully before scheduling the work.

For example, work completed from June 1, 2026, to May 31, 2028, leads, after approval, to designation from June 1, 2028, to May 31, 2030. That next two-year period also provides the opportunity to qualify again and maintain the designation.

THE PROCESS / FROM INTENTION TO APPROVAL

01 Convene the committee

Bring together a lodge Cornerstone Committee. Review the standards available on Grand View and select the elements the lodge intends to complete. Assign brethren to help with each element and agree on a schedule. This is a team undertaking; participation should extend beyond a single officer.

02 Enrol with the District Representative

The lodge Cornerstone Chairman contacts the District Cornerstone Representative (DCR), confirms the lodge’s intention to participate and supplies the applicable start and end dates. The DCR records this information and informs the Grand Lodge Cornerstone Committee that the lodge is enrolled.

03 Use the official workbook

Use the fillable Cornerstone PDF Workbook from Grand View to record the selected elements, the individuals responsible and progress to date. Check which elements require activity during both years and make those commitments visible in the schedule.

04 Submit each completed element

As an element is achieved, email the workbook and the required supporting proof to the DCR. Submit work as it is completed so that questions can be resolved while the details are still readily available.

05 Review and retain the signed record

The DCR reviews the submission against the stated criteria and may approve it, request more information or reject it. When approved, the workbook is signed off and returned with the approval date in its filename. Continue recording subsequent work in that returned version.

06 Complete, celebrate and renew

Repeat the process until all selected elements have been achieved and approved. The Grand Lodge Cornerstone Committee prepares the certificate for presentation at Grand Lodge in July to the newly elected DDGM, who presents it to the lodge at the first convenient opportunity. Then begin the next qualification cycle.

THE CORNERSTONE PROGRAM / SELECTION LIST

Choose the work your lodge will do

One mandatory, five major and six basic selections form the qualification program.

1 MANDATORY
Choose 1 of 4

- 01 Friend to Friend Program
- 02 Mentor Program
- 03 Officer Mentorship
- 04 Strategic Planning & Action

READ BEFORE CHOOSING

The selected mandatory element must extend throughout the entire two-year cycle. The detailed standards explain what counts as completion and what evidence is required.

Some elements require work in both years. Select the elements as a committee, assign responsibility and record the schedule in the official workbook.

MAKE THE WORKBOOK
A LIVING RECORD

**Record / Submit
Review / Continue**

Each returned, approved workbook becomes the lodge’s current record. Keep the supporting evidence with it, and make sure the next officer or committee can understand what has been completed and what remains to be done.

“The purpose is to engage the lodge and its brethren through meaningful activities.”

From the Cornerstone presentation

5 MAJOR
Choose 5 of 15

- 01 Attend a Grand Lodge Annual Communication
- 02 Establish an annual lodge operating budget
- 03 Conduct four Masonic education presentations
- 04 Confer all three degrees and prove the Master Mason degree
- 05 Distribute three written communications
- 06 Participate in a Masonic workshop
- 07 Visit a tyled regular meeting of another lodge
- 08 Conduct a lodge survey
- 09 Participate in a District-initiated visitation program
- 10 Participate in a Masonic C.H.I.P. event
- 11 Participate in at least three blood donor clinics
- 12 Increase lodge attendance
- 13 80% of Entered Apprentices become Master Masons within two years
- 14 70% of initiates retain membership for a minimum of five years
- 15 Three members each complete a College of Freemasonry module within the two-year cycle

6 BASIC
Choose 6 of 16

- 01 Invite or host another lodge as a lodge initiative
- 02 Host a social event for ladies and widows
- 03 Recognise Masons
- 04 Support local youth groups
- 05 Assist shut-ins and widows
- 06 Conduct a Rusty Mason event
- 07 Honour new lodge members or new Master Masons
- 08 Attend a religious service
- 09 Hold a program with proper protocol and etiquette, including toasts or tributes
- 10 Hold a lodge of discussion
- 11 Participate in a community event
- 12 Hold an open house
- 13 Attend a District Past Masters and Wardens meeting or equivalent
- 14 Attend the Sankey Lecture
- 15 Create and maintain a lodge website
- 16 Create and maintain a lodge social media group



Illustration: planning and a clear record of progress support the program.

DOCUMENTS & PROGRAM ENQUIRIES

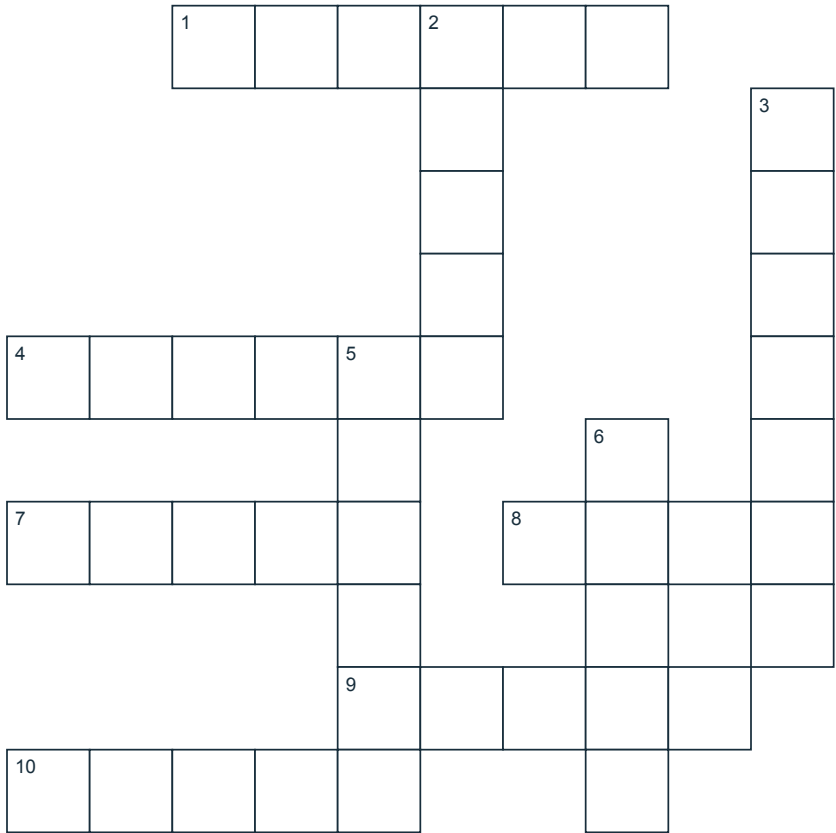
Current documents: ontariomasons.ca / Member Portal. Download the current detailed standards and fillable workbook before beginning. For help locating them, contact the Grand Lodge Cornerstone Committee at glcornerstoneinfo@gmail.com.

Primary Contact
W. Bro. Vinesh Lala
District Cornerstone Chairman, 2026-27
Toronto West District
Cornerstone2026.27@gmail.com

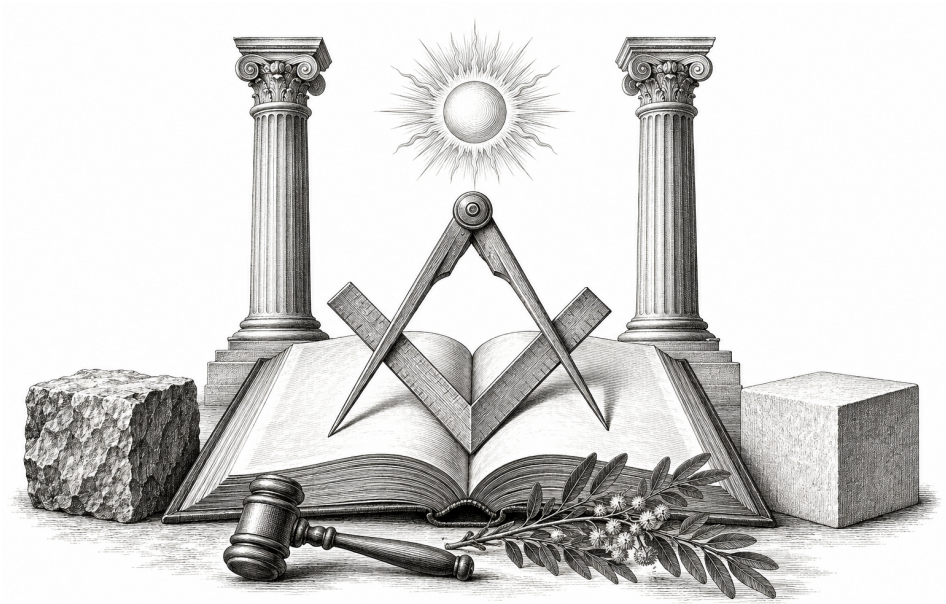
Additional Contact • Grand Lodge
R.W. Bro. Graham Tait
glcornerstoneinfo@gmail.com

Words of the Craft

A small puzzle about the tools, people and ideas of Masonic life.



10 answers · 10 × 10 grid · Write one letter in each outlined square



THE WORKING TOOLS

Knowledge takes shape through practice. The tools remind us to bring care and attention to the work before us.

Original engraving-style illustration created for this issue.

ACROSS

- 1 A stone, rough or perfect, used as an emblem in the Craft. (6)
- 4 Working tool paired with the compasses. (6)
- 7 Masonic image for knowledge and understanding. (5)
- 8 The direction associated with the Master’s chair. (4)
- 9 The distinctive garment worn by a Mason. (5)
- 10 Small mallet associated with the Master’s authority. (5)

DOWN

- 2 The Masonic body at the heart of this newspaper. (5)
- 3 Care and practical help offered to those in need. (7)
- 5 The formal words and actions of Masonic ceremonies. (6)
- 6 A member of the Craft. (5)

SOLUTION A1 ASHLAR • A4 SQUARE • A7 LIGHT • A8 EAST • A9 APRON • A10 GAVEL • D2 LODGE • D3 CHARITY • D5 RITUAL • D6 MASON

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Editor & District Cornerstone Chairman
W. Bro. Vinesh Lala · Cornerstone2026.27@gmail.com

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