

Moving Forward

There is no doubt Brethren that Freemasonry is at another crossroads. I'm sure that you've all heard time and again of declining role calls, of the amalgamation of lodges and even districts. Or of those lodges who have chosen to forever extinguish their lights. Is Freemasonry in decline or are we once again experiencing the patterns of ebb and flow. My sentiments lean towards the latter.

Throughout history, our Craft has journeyed through times of social and political unrest, growth and prosperity, as well as decline and regrouping. Each time, having to acknowledge, assess and navigate through the changing tides, and each time, adjusting to the prevailing social landscape. Let us bear in mind Brethren, that our organization is no stranger to change and shifting social standards. In fact, a great part of our success and perpetuity, has been our ability to foresee and adapt to change. And more so, within several key points in history, Freemasonry has been at the vanguard to affect the change. So I ask you Brethren, is our current situation any different from the variable movements that we've experienced in the past.

Our current social and political climates are tense at best, and, as it has in the past time and again, Freemasonry will regroup and face these shifting paradigms. By rising above the turmoil; by taking the high road if you will; where we can see and assess the moving parts which need to be studied and addressed. And, as in the past, we will prevail by not losing sight of the fundamental values and principles which we all know as the backbone of our existence as an organization.

Over the recent past generations, we have all been witness to changes in our cultural landscapes, and with it a rapid shift in our moral and value systems. This may appear to be alarming to our own generation affectionately known as 'the baby boomers'. But if you really think about it, it's no different to the cultural, moral, and value shifts that were orchestrated by the baby boomers when they came on the scene.

Author and presenter Samuel Friedman, a young Mason who spoke at our Grand Lodge Communication in July, notes that; 'millennials stand in stark contrast to their baby boomer parents who, confrontationally and boisterously protested against professor, universities, government, police, church, etc.' And perhaps, surprising to our general perception, he also notes that 'one of the most revolutionary characteristics of the millennial generation is that they generally tend to respect their parents, authority figures and many older adults.' He quotes that: 'they know that all is not well with the world. The boomer generation knew that and protested it. Generation X knew that and were depressed about it. The millennials know that but they believe they can have a roll in changing it.'

His further anecdotes illustrate time and again that education is a key reason why young men are joining the Craft. In one example, he cites that a young Brother had entered the Craft because he believed that it offered him a venue in which he could learn about himself. He believed that the rituals and teachings of Freemasonry would offer him a level of sacredness he had yet to experience outside of the Craft. He outlines in another example that perhaps what they really want is not necessarily the answers, but possibly, more of an environment where they can debate as to what the answer should be.

Interestingly enough, isn't that just the environment in which our speculative Masonry was founded. The Craft has always offered the same liberal environment and opportunity for man to explore and improve himself to be a better man. Our current generations are asking for just that. And we, are in a perfect position to provide exactly what they want. And as it was when we entered the Craft with a level of uncertainty and curiosity, so it's the same with our newer members.

Brethren, our newer members look for and expect mentorship within Freemasonry. But, as did we, they too experience trepidation as to how to approach us.

This is where we come in Brethren; The textbook definition tells us that 'mentoring' is a fundamental form of human development where one person invests time, energy and personal know-how in assisting the growth and ability of another person'. In Masonic terms, mentorship is, and always has been a basic and key fundamental upon which our fraternity is founded. Where; 'mentoring is a learning process, where a more experienced brother invests time, energy and Masonic experience in assisting, and caring for a new brother so that both may enjoy their Masonry to the full.'

The traditional method of teaching and learning in our Craft was that the work, the charges, the mechanics, the protocols and the etiquette were taught and passed to the newer member from mouth to ear. Imagine the inherent benefits of that 'person to person' mentorship. The relay of words, phrases, mechanics and ceremony passed down from mentor to student with incredible precision. Imagine the resolve and commitment required, and the lifelong relationships encouraged and developed, out of the necessity to ensure the passage of the Craft in its purest form, from one generation to the next. The implication of this built-in method of mentorship, is that Freemasonry has traditionally practiced mentorship in its purest form.

I'm sure Brethren that each one of us in this room can think of at least one brother who has left a lasting impression, and whom you fondly regard as a mentor. I often recall my regular visitations with a dear friend and mentor who now holds his rightful place in the Grand Lodge above, V.W. Bro. Wilf Goodman. My fond recollections are of many afternoons spent at his home near Shelburne. As we sat by his wood stove, deep in discussion and with a cold Creemore or a single malt in hand, he would stress the importance of the ritual on so many levels. How there is only one chance to leave an impression on a new candidate, not only at his initiation but also as he continues his journey. He stressed repeatedly during our deliberations, how the ritual is embedded with many lessons, it's up to us to explore their hidden meanings. On a more personal note, Wilf's driveway to his home is hidden, and it's marked by a lantern at the entrance off Highway 10. As I often travel through Shelburne, particularly after dusk, that lantern is always lit. As I pass it by, I'm left with a particular comfort knowing that his light continues to resonate with me.

In recent visitations to various lodges, I have been pleased to note; an increasing number of newer Masons, and to observe their attitudes and reactions to what is happening around them. An eagerness to further their knowledge of our Craft, as well as a willingness and desire to be mentored by those from whom they have come to expect direction and guidance. To learn from the more experienced and veteran members of the Craft. On one particular evening, a young Mason, recently raised, and being the third generation in the Craft, was proud to share of his history and association with the Craft, through his father and grandfather. He went on to express his eagerness in continuing his journey of learning through the lessons he anticipates from the experienced and elder members in his lodge. The enthusiasm with which this newer Brother expressed himself was a pleasure to watch as he captivated the Brethren in the room, to a standing applause.

So why do we seem to find ourselves at a loss for words when we are asked; what is Masonry, why are we Masons, why would someone want to be a member of our Craft. We strain and look to standardize responses and talking points to address those inquires. Easier said than done Brethren, because each answer is a very personal one.

I attended an Installation recently, where the newly installed Worshipful Master in his address to the Brethren, proceeded to thank the Brethren for their support and guidance through his journey in Masonry and his advancement to the East. He went on to share that this journey had changed and

impacted his life so much more, than anything else in his life. Before entering the Craft, he felt uncertain of his direction, focus and purpose. He explained how his journey has brought meaning and purpose to his endeavors. And how the growing confidence he felt in his abilities, was a direct result of the support and fellowship of his Brethren. He went on to express how pleased he was to belong to our Craft where we all share common values, and where honour and virtue are held with high regard. Where the gesture of a handshake truly means something, an unsolicited bond of honour, integrity and friendship.

This is what Freemasonry has meant to one Brother, his testament is what he has experienced personally and internally from the time he entered the Craft. I'm sure that each one of us knows a story of how the Craft has left a positive impact in either ourselves, or another Brother. That is why it is difficult for the answer to be a standard one, because Freemasonry has enriched each one of us in a different way. The most affective response is your own personal experience of what Masonry has done for you. Brethren, there is no better marketing than our own personal experiences and endorsements. We all have these testimonials resting within us, sharing these experiences when asked about our Craft is the best presentation of who we are and what we do. The story I've just shared with you is a great example of how it makes good men better.

In closing Brethren, we all have a responsibility to who and what we claim to be. Our newer members have entered the Craft no doubt having heard, and having been told that 'Masonry makes a good man better'. To that, we can easily say that one our primary goals in Freemasonry is to take a good man, and by moral instruction, give him the keys by which they can make themselves better and happier in the their lives. Our duty is to communicate to them what we have learned. Our newer members are here now within our Craft, eager to know how and why. It's up to us to show them by example how it has made us better men, and by sharing with them our own story.

R.W. Bro. Art Di Cecco
G.L. Management Committee
Community Outreach Pillar