

THE COMMUNIQUE

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From the Grand Master:

In the Ottawa Valley today, I can tell you that finally, spring has arrived, the snow banks have gone from feet to inches of snow and the Mississippi River is in flood in my small home town of Carleton Place.

Recently, I had a discussion with an older Mason, who is very active in his Lodge and his District. We began to talk about some of the reasons that our Craft membership is in decline, when he suddenly declared he knew exactly the reason membership was dropping.

Well of course I immediately asked him to explain and he said it was simple. We have lost our direction by changing our mission. We are no longer a Fraternity as we move towards being a service club.

Well, my Brethren, is this true? Have we lost our way? Are we becoming a service club?

Webster's Dictionary describes a Fraternity as "a group of men joined together by a common interest for fellowship, working towards a common goal. A service club is defined as "provides acts of assistance, friendly help and are a benefit to their community".

My Brother, concluded by saying that as Craft Masons, we are more interested in helping others than assisting our Brothers. He continued, that we do all this good in the community while we have Brethren who are in financial trouble, have lost their jobs etc.

Upon reflection, I can't totally agree with the Brother's comments but perhaps I understand how he came to this conclusion.

He would have been a younger Mason in the forties or fifties, when Masonry was in its boom days and to him a very "powerful" Fraternity. Many of our members were on municipal councils as councillors, Mayors, others were members of the House of Commons, even Prime Ministers.

To work as a Police Officer, a Hydro worker and even a Fire Fighter, memberships meant advancement in the ranks. In my small town where I grew up, it meant immediate access to the local administration and if you were injured or needed a job your Lodge took care of you.

It was the right time to be a Mason, but was it right for the wrong reasons?

Even then, although society was changing with the advent of social assistance programs, to help all people,

the saying "Mason's only take care of themselves" went from being a positive statement to a negative statement.

Suddenly, outside the walls of our Lodges, we were becoming more accountable for our action and the publicity was not very complimentary.

In my opinion, the Masonic Foundation of Ontario rose out of the ashes of this publicity, starting with bursaries, grants and scholarships. We began provincial funding, specializing in research areas of baby deafness at birth, prostate cancer and this year Autism Spectrum Research.

So, this is all good, right? Yes, but what about our Lodges? What about our members and what about our Fraternity?

Lodges can continue good work only if they are healthy but unfortunately we are in some difficulty with our declining membership.

We need to start paying attention to our membership by showing our new members the rewards of fellowship and Brotherly love.

We need to make our Lodges, on any given meeting, a place of Masonic education to make members more knowledgeable and able to answer queries from our friends and neighbours about our Fraternity and to relate to them our pride in membership.

Our older members, may require frequent monitoring to make sure that never again will a Mason suffer from loneliness, a terminal disease or financial hardship, so that he never feels alone or forgotten by his Fraternity.

To answer my Brother's concern, we must establish a balance with our Charity, between taking care of ourselves and our responsibility to society. We must remember that the Mason who is in possession of this virtue (charity) in the most ample sense may just be deemed to have arrived at the summit of Freemasonry.

Then finally, maybe Webster will be able to describe our Fraternity "as a group of men, who have joined together with a common interest, for fellowship and a common goal AND who provide acts of assistance for themselves and others, and are a benefit to their community, all for the Cause of Good."

"Freemasonry is founded on the immutable laws of Truth and Justice and its grand object to promote the happiness of the human race."

~ George Washington, a man and a Mason

***Paul E. Todd
Grand Master***

From the Deputy:

A tree, as big as a man's embrace, springs from a tiny sprout.

A tower, nine stories high, begins with a heap of earth.

A journey, of a thousand leagues, starts from where your feet stand.

~ Lao Tzu, Tao Teh Ching, Ch. 64 (trans. John C. H. Wu, Shambhala Publications, Boston)

Grand Lodge has a strategic plan and we recommend that all Lodges have their own long-range plan. But 76% of Lodges don't have a written plan. That is the elephant in the room.

The process of creating a Lodge strategic plan often seems daunting. But Lao Tzu, known as the "Old Master", knew how to tackle daunting tasks. So does your Grand Lodge Strategic Planning Committee. They have broken down this process into easy bites.

First evaluation, then ACTION. They have developed a toolkit to guide you. Ask them for a half-day workshop with one of their facilitators. They will be happy to meet with you to work through this.

The first thing to do is evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your Lodge. The Condition of Masonry report card can help you with this, but there are likely other areas of strength and weakness that may not be captured. Only your members will know these. Put together a representative team to make a list.

Next, prioritize that list. Not everything can be done at once, nor should it be. Pick one, or at most, two items from that list and make a plan to improve them.

Don't forget that very important step of reporting back to the Lodge with your prioritized list. Keeping everyone informed is key to success.

Now you can form a strategic action team. It doesn't have to have the same members as your evaluation team, but it could. It could even have a different Chairman. Then make a plan for how you are going to affect your one priority item. Remember, a plan is not a plan until it is written down, someone is responsible, and measurable outcomes are set. Communicate this plan to the Lodge so everyone is on board. Review your progress regularly and make adjustments as needed. Communicate your progress to the Lodge and keep everyone involved.

When you feel you have completed the transformation, Communicate that great news to your Lodge. Then, and only then, do you start the circle again and tackle another issue.

Step by step, the longest march

Can be won, can be won

Many stones can form an arch

Singly none, singly none

And by union what we will

Can be accomplished still

Drops of water turn a mill

Singly none, singly none

~ Pete Seeger

***David C. Cameron
Deputy Grand Master***

From the Grand Secretary:

Brethren, please take note that included in the Lodge April mailing there is an announcement of two events to take place on Wednesday afternoon at the Annual Communication.

First, a presentation from 1:30 – 2:30 PM by Bro. Sam Friedman. Sam is a young energetic, enthusiastic Mason who has written a book titled "Millennial Apprentices: The Next Revolution In Freemasonry". This book is meant to inspire thought provoking discussion on what this new breed of Mason desires, and what it truly means to be a Mason in the twenty-first century.

Second, from 2:30 – 3:30 PM a Town Hall session with our Deputy Grand Master, R.W. Bro. David J. Cameron.

Last year many Brethren were disappointed that there were no activities on Wednesday Afternoon. Please take advantage of the above opportunities.

***D. Garry Dowling
Grand Secretary***