

THE COMMUNIQUE

Published by
Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario

Issue 9

May 2021

From the Grand Master ...

Brethren,

M.W. Bro. W.B. Simpson, Grand Master, wrote in the Proceedings of 1865:

“In November last, I received a letter from the Secretary of Beaver Lodge, No. 83, requesting to be informed whether it would be improper to initiate a person into our mysteries who was lame from an injury he had received in the hip, and in May last, I also received a communication from the Past Master of Trent Lodge, No. 38, desiring to know whether he would be justified in reporting favorably of a candidate who had lost his right arm.

In both cases I decided that the candidate could not be received, for, in my opinion, no person should be initiated into the mysteries of Free Masonry who is either maimed, halt, or blind, or who might not, in fact be termed a perfect stone for our Masonic edifice.”

Bro. Rudyard Kipling wrote a short story called *In the Interests of the Brethren* which describes a lodge meeting frequented by WWI soldiers on leave, many with quite debilitating war wounds:

“He used to talk to the men who dropped into his shop when the war began. He told us sleepy old chaps in Lodge that what men wanted more than anything else was Lodges where they could sit - just sit and be happy like we are now. He was right too. We're learning things in the war. A man's Lodge means more to him than people imagine.”

In 1918 the Grand Master ruled that a man who had been “physically perfect at initiation” but had subsequently developed stiffness which prevented him from assuming proper position in the ceremonies was allowed to be advanced, although he denied initiation to six others who had various disabilities.

By 1923 attitudes had changed such that M.W. Bro. Ponton gave dispensation to 16 men, most of whom were former servicemen, to be initiated despite their disabilities.

We now have no such restrictions, but surprisingly it was not until 2004 that a requirement for the DDGM to

seek special permission from the Grand Master was finally removed from the Constitution.

This past year the Management Committee approved a policy to implement the provisions of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. It reads:

“The Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario and its staff and volunteers throughout Ontario are committed to treating all individuals in a way that enables them to maintain their dignity and independence. Masonry stresses the principles of kindness, consideration, courtesy, dependability, and compassion. Our commitment to accessibility extends these principles to include those of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. We are committed to ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for everyone and to providing equal opportunity, access and integration for people with disabilities. We are committed to ensuring compliance with all applicable federal and provincial accessibility laws and to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility.” The full text is available through a link on the front page of our website.

We have commenced training for Grand Lodge officers and staff, but I would highly recommend all leaders in the Craft avail themselves of this. In fact all Freemasons should consider it.

Online “self-serve” training videos for general AODA content are available for all to access at <https://accessforward.ca> and training on the Ontario Human Rights Code content as it relates to AODA compliance and awareness about discrimination related to disability is available at <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/working-together-code-and-aoda>.

David J. Cameron
Grand Master

Brother Secretaries, please mail a copy of this to your brethren who do not have access to electronic communications.

From the Deputy ...

My Brethren:

After spending the last three months reviewing some of the proposed Constitutional amendments that have been submitted for us to vote on as part of the next Annual Communication and having spent several nights explaining some of the finer details of these proposals and with the able assistance of our Grand Treasurer, R.W. Bro. Ed Standish, answering questions that have arisen from Districts and Lodges throughout our Grand Jurisdiction, I would like to spend this month talking about the importance of keeping our Brethren engaged and informed.

It has been about a year now since your Grand Lodge created a GoToMeeting account for each District to assist the Lodges in keeping in contact with their membership. The access information was sent to each District Deputy Grand Master who was charged with providing this to each of the Lodges in their respective Districts. It was suggested that a District schedule be created such that every Lodge could host a monthly meeting on their regular meeting night to communicate with their membership, cover any business that is permissible, provide some Masonic Education and generally to take an account of the health of their membership and Lodge.

Another great advantage of this tool being used by several Lodges and Districts is to keep in touch with the many interested men who have inquired about Freemasonry either via our Grand Lodge web site, the BeAFreemason.org or the old-fashioned appeal to a current member. Many of our Masonic education videoconferences have been of such a nature that these interested men have been invited to get a feeling of the events and fellowship that is being shared during these events and get to know some of the Brethren they may potentially share membership with.

Some of those Lodges who have been making use of these monthly videoconferences on a regular basis have been reporting better attendance than when they were meeting in Lodge. Some members who may not be able to physically get to their Lodge building due to their health condition or where they are now living, have been once again enjoying the benefits of membership. And equally important, they have been

able to stay in touch with potential members by keeping their interest stoked until such time as they can be formally introduced to the Lodge room.

A few months ago, the Grand Master was checking in with some of the District Deputy Grand Masters and when the question of Lodges participating in monthly videoconference Masonic education/fellowship meetings was asked, there was a variety of answers ranging from 'none' to 'not much' to 'a few' to 'half' to 'nearly all Lodges on a regular basis.' I don't want to embarrass any District or Lodge with this but I will offer the generalization that those Districts that answered 'nearly all Lodges on a regular basis,' are the Districts that are flattening the curve over the last few years with respect to decreasing membership. A coincidence perhaps? Not likely. It stands to reason that those Lodges that keep their members (and prospective members) engaged in the process – whether that is to pre-Lodge banquets and socials, or currently to videoconference meetings – have a better chance of keeping these men as dues paying members, active Officers and future Grand Lodge leaders.

When this COVID-19 crisis forced the closing of all Masonic activity on Friday, March 13, 2020, we all thought it was a temporary thing and that we would all be back at Lodge within weeks. As I write this today, further restrictions are being added to our current stringent Provincial guidelines with no clear end in sight. To those Lodges that thought a year ago that it was just temporary and there was no need to change things, I would urge them to start now to change things – it is never too late to reach out to the members of your Lodges and interested men of your community and keep them engaged in Freemasonry. So many of the lessons we learn from the Ritual of our Craft are even more important in times of crisis. To those Lodges who are currently keeping their members and prospects engaged – your payoff will come when the restrictions are lifted and your Lodge is re-opened for business as it used to be!

Thomas W. Hogeboom
Deputy Grand Master

From the Grand Secretary ...

Brethren,

Several reminders related to upcoming elections and the Annual Meeting of Grand Lodge.

Elections for District Deputy Grand Masters:

See details of Feb 12 2021 letter sent to all DDGMs.

ALL Districts will elect their DDGM via an electronic election with voting on June 18 and June 19 2021.

Every current DDGM must submit ALL signed nominations to the Grand Lodge office by May 30 2021.

There will be NO acclamations. Even if only one candidate is running a signed nomination form and the DDGM Eligible Candidates form (fillable PDF) must be submitted.

Electronic Registration will be June 12-June 17; registration details will be distributed in early June 2021.

Voting details for brethren without computer access are detailed in the March 01 document.

Elections for Grand Lodge Officers:

See details of March 01 2021 letter sent to all lodges.

Electronic Registration will be July 12-July 18; registration details will be distributed in early July 2021.

Registrations from the DDGM election will be automatically carried over to the Grand Lodge elections.

If you did not register for the DDGM election you must register for the Grand Lodge election.

Voting will take place July 19 and July 20 2021.

Voting details for brethren without computer access are detailed in the March 01 document.

Voting on proposed 2021 Constitutional Amendments:

Voting for the proposed amendments will take place at the same time as voting for the Grand Lodge officers on July 19 – July 20 2021.

Proposed amendments have been distributed to every lodge (April 19 2021).

Amendments will be on the same ballot as the Grand Lodge officer elections.

Voting for members without Computer access:

The document emailed to all lodges on March 01, 2021 outlines the procedure for enabling an eligible member without computer access to vote.

Annual Meeting of Grand Lodge:

The Annual Meeting of Grand Lodge will be a virtual meeting held on Wednesday July 21, 2021 beginning at 9:00AM EDT. Registration information will follow closer to the date.

Installation of Grand Lodge Officers and District Deputy Grand Masters:

The Installation of Grand lodge Officers and District Deputy Grand Masters will NOT take place during the virtual Annual Meeting. Elected officers will be authorized to perform their duties effective July 21, 2021, but Installation details will be announced later.

Amending Lodge By-Laws for Dues ONLY changes:

There are number of factors pointing to the need for many lodges to amend their by-laws to increase the amount of lodge dues ONLY. This situation has been brought to a head by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent Masonic lockdown.

Therefore, Grand Lodge has adopted a temporary COVID-19 business policy and new procedure that will allow such amendments for dues only to be processed effectively and efficiently during the Masonic lockdown. That new policy will be distributed to all lodges as a COVID-19 update shortly.

Fraternally, Garry

D. Garry Dowling
Grand Secretary

From the Grand Treasurer ...

Brethren:

There have been a number of meetings with several Districts, Lodges and individuals related the proposed per capita increase. I will address the most frequently asked questions and concerns.

“Does such a large increase have to be approved in one amount now?”

Several options were requested.

“Delay the increase by one year to give the lodges an opportunity to meet after the pandemic shut down is over and we can meet again. This will allow them time to review their finances and adjust their dues to accommodate this increase is the basis for this request.” Some are saying the reason for the delay is they are not able to hold fund raisers during the lock down so their lodge is already having difficulty with paying its expenses. For a lodge to be financially sound our longstanding recommendation is that the dues should cover the operating expenses. We are using the same principle for Grand Lodge finances. If the lodge is using fund raisers to cover its operating expenses, it already has financial stability concerns. Thus, the question: “What will be the impact with further delay next year?” The delay results in a permanent loss of \$600,000 in revenue.

“Spread the increase over four years at a rate of \$5.00 per year for the next 4 years”. This option with several other levels of assessment was considered all resulting in accumulated losses of \$1.9 million to \$2.7 million.

“Reserve funds could be used to provide the cash to pay the capital improvements and to cover the losses.”

NOTE: ALL LOSSES HAVE TO BE REPAYED FOR THE LONGEVITY AND FINANCIAL STABILITY OF OUR GRAND LODGE.

Technology: “What is the upgrade and what is the benefit?”

There is a need to be able to communicate directly with all our brethren. Only some of our brethren are members of Grand Lodge but all our members including the newest Entered Apprenticed Mason will be supporting the per

capita through their lodge dues. Our present system for the distribution of information is the Resource Digest which has a mailing list of 682 made up of members of the Board and lodge secretaries. The lodge secretaries are then to forward the Digest to their members. We have not experienced a satisfactory success rate – about 14% from our analysis.

Establish a data base of all our members and have a single source for all membership data with different levels of access and security for the various levels i.e. by each member, lodge, District and Grand Lodge. There are 33,000 members, 500 lodges, 41 Districts and one Grand Lodge that will be sharing this single source membership data base with all the related access and security issues in place.

There are systems available off the shelf, or we have had offers to write programs by of our technical savvy members, but they do not easily, if at all, without major programming modifications meet our overall needs. A system written by an individual, leaves us exposed to being able to manage the technology going forward. We do not have an IT person on staff.

Workflow and Administration.

The administrative time involved with bylaw changes, dispensations, awards, and a number of regular office duties can be automated resulting with improved efficiency and savings for administration costs.

The upgrade to our technology will allow Grand Lodge, the District, and the Lodge to become more proactive compared to our present system supporting reactive activity.

Building: Our building is the head office for Masonry in Ontario.

“If the costs are so high, we should sell it.” This option was explored, and the decision is to continue to maintain and use our current building. There is no benefit from selling the property requiring us to find another home which does not seem to result in any savings.

Building continued on next page...

From the Grand Treasurer ... (continued)

There are two major issues with the building. The roof is estimated to reach the end of its useful life in three years. Waiting until it leaks with the associated increase in repair cost is not a good decision. The other building issue is accessibility under the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) which will require us to comply with the law when it comes into effect. The minimum will be a ramp to the first floor and an elevator to the second floor. This will also raise the issue of our washroom accessibility. Once you start modifications to this extent, you open the door to local building code requirements which may lead to even more than obvious modifications to meet the local code and AODA requirements.

Communication of financial information from Grand Lodge to our members.

“We are being asked to vote on a budget, having never seen any details of the budget or our present financial results.” “We receive this information annually buried in the proceedings when they are published long after these matters have been approved.”

The request is for more financial information to be available to the members that they may be better informed of before they vote. We plan to comply with your request by including the financial and budget information in the Preliminary Reports to be made available in early July.

I trust we have provided sufficient information to help you understand the reasons and the need for the increase in the per capita assessment for your approval in July.

H. Edward Standish

Grand Treasurer

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