

THE COMMUNIQUE

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From the Grand Master ...

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both*

...

*I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

- Robert Frost

Brethren,

As lodges are planning for the rest of this year and for next year, there still are brothers who are not ready to gather in person yet. Turn-out to meetings has been low and that is to be expected. That, and the fact that we are all rusty, limits what we can do. But before the pandemic our lodges were following too many roads anyway - too many for us to do justice to. We were trying to be all things to all people.

By now you have all heard my focus on Ritual, Education and Mentoring, but let me re-iterate. They are the quintessence of Freemasonry. The other things are nice and, if we concentrate on R.E.M., will fall out naturally, but we must lay the groundwork again to recover. As we gradually return to meeting in person let us not restart every event just because "we have always done it". Let us rationally think about what value it adds to our existence. And whether we have the manpower and energy to do it right now. And to do it well.

Your lodge may have something for which you are known - a Burns dinner, assisting at your local fall fair, educational lectures. By all means, restart that, but be wary of restarting too many things at once.

And make sure your primary work is Ritual, Education and Mentoring.

It is our Ritual that separates us from all the Service Clubs and other community organizations out there. It is what makes us different. What makes us, us. It is what has been passed down from generation to

generation. It is what our ancient brethren guarded steadfastly.

The Ritual teaches everything we need to know to be a Mason. But it does need some explanation, and that is where education comes in. Reading, lectures, contemplation, and discussion are all routes to understanding.

Back in the day, the proficiencies that a candidate had to learn were not written down. They had to be learned mouth-to-ear from their mentor. Doubtless during all those hours spent learning the ritual one-on-one, there was time for questions on our philosophy, our practice, our charities, our way in the world. Time to get to know the man, and his family, his hopes, his ambitions. Time to build a lasting relationship.

And the candidates could not be rushed through their degrees. They needed the time to learn the work. And there is time. Becoming a Master Mason is not a race.

With a tradition in place of giving true mentorship to new members, and giving them time, a lodge may ensure that they develop fully as Masons, learn our precepts and philosophies, and go out into the world to provide leadership in their communities and in their lodge. They will be seen to be good men, contribute to society and be someone others will want to emulate. They will be Freemasons.

Ritual, Education and Mentoring.

These are the essence of Freemasonry. They are our work. Let us concentrate our efforts on them plus maybe one additional road to travel down right now, and do them well. It will make all the difference.

*David J. Cameron
Grand Master*

From the Deputy ...

My Brethren:

Historically, when a man enquired about Freemasonry, he did so via the traditional path of knowing a Mason – family member, friend or colleague, etc. Today however, the most predominate path has been by electronic means – Grand Lodge, District and Lodge web sites, social media and electronic campaigns such as Not Just a Man – A Mason initiative. It is estimated that 75% of the men seeking to join Freemasonry, come via this electronic path and of those men, 85% do not know a Mason. This makes the proactive engagement of these men exceedingly important.

Historically, the referral process for prospective members was a short one. Typically, once the contact information was sent to the District Deputy Grand Masters to handle, that was pretty much the end of the referral process for our Grand Lodge. As the pandemic arrived and started to take hold, concern was being expressed about how the men enquiring about Freemasonry were going to be processed as Lodges were not meeting. The reality is that the flow of enquiries did not slow just because we were not meeting.

Following some discussions, it was felt it would be beneficial if our Grand Lodge were to take a more active role and begin to track the progress of men from the initial enquiry, through to the possible submission of an application. It was at this point, that two new initiatives were created: the tracking of prospective members by District and Lodge, and the Freemasonry in Ontario Information Session.

The tracking initiative commenced more than a year ago, and with it came an added benefit; that of introducing a great level of accountability for both the DDGM and the Lodge, when dealing with men referred to them. Once the DDGM received the man's contact information, it is his role to assist the man in finding a suitable Lodge. Following that, the DDGM is to ensure that the Lodge is actively engaging the man.

To date, we are tracking just over **1,000** men and this number continues to grow each day. The next step in this initiative, is tracking how many of these men apply to a Lodge. This is beginning to gain traction as Lodges begin to re-open. Presently, we are close to 20% having submitted applications, this too continues to grow each day as well. Tracking applications is an important final step, because we are hopeful that this will allow us to gauge how successful engagement by the Lodges, Districts and our Grand Lodge has been over the past twenty-four months and on into our future. Having this information provides us an opportunity to analyze the application activities in each District, and then each Lodge, thereby providing us with some insight as to where future assistance may be required regarding prospective member engagement activities. The Mentoring Committee receives a monthly update of this information and have been charged with using this opportunity to focus their Mentoring efforts on specific Lodges.

As an example of what this analysis can provide is; if a Lodge was successful in converting many of the prospective members into an application, it might suggest that their early engagement process was the reason for this success. We say this, recognizing that, sadly, there are far too many Lodges that hand out applications much too quickly. However, we believe that by using the L1 submission data, collected by the Condition of Masonry Committee, we should be able to develop a list of Lodges that have membership retention issues and use that list as a means of cross-checking the data from the tracking analysis.

All enquiries are followed up in five days and then fifteen days later to ensure the Lodge has made appropriate contact with the objective of greatly reducing the number of prospective members that have seemingly slipped between the cracks previously.

What cannot be forgotten, as Lodges move forward with applications, is that as each month ticks away, the flow of prospective members will continue as the Lodges work through this backlog. Please don't take this comment in any way as to speed up the process. Each Degree must still be given the solemnity and importance which it deserves, and we must continue to guard the West Gate.

So, it is incumbent on each Lodge to be prepared to handle these prospective members. What plans does your Lodge have in place, to manage these potential applications and the degree journey that follows? How is your Lodge going to keep the waiting men engaged as you work through this backlog? How is your Lodge going to keep your newly Initiated members engaged, while they wait to be Passed or Raised?

Remember, Masonry historically has never had an applicant shortage but have always had a retention problem. This tracking initiative and the subsequent questions that are being asked, is all about membership retention. Membership retention begins with the initial enquiry and the first impression that each man gets about our organization. With this initiative, we are establishing accountabilities that will serve us well into the future.

A sincere thank you to all our Brethren for their support and assistance in ensuring the success of this initiative but especially to R.W. Bro. Iain Wates, Michael Locke and Edward Denbeigh for the continual attention they have shown in leading this initiative on behalf of your Grand Lodge and to each of the participating DDGMs for their efforts in directing these interested men to the right Lodge and following up to assure they are being treated as we would all expect!

Enjoy the light of Freemasonry and hopefully we will greet each other soon!

Thomas W. Hogeboom
Deputy Grand Master

From the Custodian of the Work ...

Success isn't something that just happens – success is learned, success is practiced and then it is shared. (Sparky Andersen).

We have lived for 2 years with COVID-19, and it has not been easy for Masons in Ontario. We have been through a lot and unfortunately it is not officially over. But I am optimistic we can beat this once and for all, if we follow what works. Continue to keep our hands sanitized, wear a mask if you choose to do so and get vaccinated, and follow all local, provincial, and Federal health regulations. It is all about health and safety. If you don't want to be inoculated, fine it is your choice, and we will respect that, however, please respect our position, and wear a mask.

Brethren, we have been waiting for this date for two years. Now Lodges are permitted to initiate, pass, raise and install Lodge officers. My question to you, are you prepared? Have you held a practice session? Have you reviewed your Work? Are you comfortable performing a degree knowing there will be close contact? More importantly, have you ASKED the candidate is he comfortable with close contact? You must ask the candidate if he is comfortable with close contact before the night of the degree and respect his decision.

It sounds simple, but it is more than that. I highly recommend you review your Work and I ask you to review following booklets before the night of the degree.

Guidelines for Lodge Officers in the Mechanics of the Work (2018). These guidelines and reminders are intended as ready references and aide-memories for lodge officers in the performance of the opening and closings of the lodge and in the conferring of degrees.

Grand Lodge of Instruction – Questions and Answers (2013). This book contains many questions on the Entered Apprentice Degree, Fellowcraft Degree and the Master Mason Degree (Pages 33 to 43). Take the time and review these questions and answers before you perform a degree.

Book of the Work (2020). Now is the time to open to the first page. If it does not say, “The Work – 2020”, then yours is outdated. And you need the latest issue. As an example The Work has the removal of all wording with “F.B.”, the raising of the hand to expose the fingers, and the removal of the word “only” on page 92. Also, check out the questions asked to the candidate before his initiation, especially question 2.

The Masonic Memorial Services (2019). A memorial Service should be an inspiration, not something to be avoided. Conducted properly, it can be the most meaningful indication the grieving family has ever had of our Order's caring purpose. The impact of the Service on the family, friends, and other Brethren, will be directly proportional to the effort you expend on practicing and preparing for it.

***Donald A. Campbell
Past Grand Master
Custodian of the Work***