

ADDRESS TO THE GRAND LODGE OFFICERS NIGHT AT NIAGARA
DISTRICT A
STONE MILL INN
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2018

R.W. BRO. T.W. HOGEBROOM, GRAND TREASURER
OF THE GRAND LODGE A.F & A.M. OF CANADA IN THE PROVINCE OF
ONTARIO

Mr. Chairman, Right Worshipful the District Deputy Grand Master, my Brethren.
Thank-you for that kind introduction.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to be standing before you this evening in Canada's vacation capital for the annual GLONDA presentation. I would like to thank R.W. Bro. Ted Dunsmore for inviting me to address you this evening. If you like what you hear, you can thank me. If you don't, you can blame Bro. Dunsmore.

The only problem I had with this request is that he didn't give me a topic on which to speak. Now you would think that after the many years of practice I have had with public speaking that I would be fine. But I have to tell you, I find it easier to write on an assigned subject and always have as far back as elementary school. So, we can't blame Ted for the topic which is a subject that is very near and dear to my heart – an explanation as to why I became a Mason and why Masonry has become such an important part of my life and that of so many men in this room over the years.

Now with a subject like this, you will no doubt find that almost every Mason would have a different story to tell. Personally, I joined the Fraternity out of love and respect for my Father, who was the Frontenac District Deputy Grand Master in 1980 – seventeen years before me. I still fondly remember the night of my Initiation when he showed up at my door in Kingston where I was doing my under graduate studies at Queen's University. Standing there in his number one dress, he told me to come along as I was being Initiated that night. Being kind of shocked at the news for the first time and having an exam the next morning, I kind of hesitated. At this point he reminded me of the many evenings where, as a young boy, I would be standing at the door with his regalia bag in my hand asking if I could go with him.

This feeling of wanting to be a part of my Father's life continued through my teenage years as I would volunteer to work along side my Dad in all the non-lodge functions held in our community. I remember with great pleasure the hours that he and I and several other members of the Lodge spent on the refurbishing of the Bath Masonic Hall in the summer of 1977. He was then retired and I was a high school kid without a summer job. We went down the road to Bath together everyday, except Sundays, that whole summer and worked side by side on another of his great prides and joy. These men that I worked with treated me as they would one of their own and my admiration and respect for them grew stronger everyday.

It really was a no-brainer that on my twenty-first birthday, I would sign an application for membership into Maple Leaf Lodge in Bath. However, I don't remember the visit from the Investigating Committee.

So, with this being such a personal topic, I have surveyed several of my Brothers and realized there are many reasons why they joined our fraternity. But a lot of them were out of respect or wanting to be like a family member, friend or community leader. We know that we enjoy being Masons but we need a little Psych 101 to answer why. First, we need to understand that the number one thing that people want to know about any organization is: "What's in it for me?" This is one of the things that is always the same in life. No one wants to become involved in something unless they benefit from it. If all the Masons in the room were to think back to when they petitioned their Lodge you would find that there are some striking similarities in the reasons that they did so. Some of these are that many of our male relatives were Masons and it was the family thing to do; or many of the men we worked with and associated with were Masons. We wanted to fit in with the crowd. People that we admired and respected were Masons. We wanted to emulate them and we wanted to belong to the most respected Fraternity in the world.

Freemasonry affords men the opportunity to be with others who have the same interests. These men support one another. This applies, not only to the activities of the Lodge, but also, to the activities of daily life. The first degree teaches us that we should "Promote each others welfare and rejoice in each others prosperity." When Brothers meet away from the Lodge at a social gathering we see much of this type of activity. The friendliness and genuine feeling we have for one another is evident at these affairs. Freemasonry is one of the few places that we can gather in confidence that we will leave with all that we arrived with. We do not take advantage of others. We are selective and do not, knowingly, accept any man who would take advantage of others.

The teachings of Freemasonry afford the member a better chance to live a happy life, with his chosen mate, without joining the ranks of the throw-away society. We learn how to work through our tough times and make our lives better and more productive.

If disaster should befall us we can turn to our Fraternity in confidence that help will be given. If financial aid is needed there are avenues open to the membership that are not available elsewhere. The Lodge will help to the best of its ability. If this is not enough, the Benevolence Committee of our Grand Lodge will do all that it can for the distressed Brother.

Occasionally, one of our widows will need assistance. All she needs to do is call the Secretary of the Lodge and the Brothers will do all that they are able to do for her. This affords security for the spouses of our departed Brothers.

These are some of the things about Masons that make them different from members of many other fraternal organizations. These things are good to know but most of these are peripheral to what and who we are.

Freemasonry is a way of life. It carries joy, heartache, failure and triumph. In books one can read its teachings, symbols and ambitions. We do not practice our craft in the dark, but rather in the full light of day. We are required to practice the teachings and love we are taught by the lights of our Fraternity. No greater thing can be said of the Fraternity than that it is an ideal way of life.

No other Fraternity offers the lessons contained within our ritual. Every word and act in our ceremonies carry a lesson to each of us if we will just open our eyes, hearts, and ears as we are taught to do by the second degree of Masonry.

We can study Freemasonry for years and each time we think about the things we see and hear we will find new meaning and inspiration. Each time this happens we see more of what Freemasonry is and for what it is intended. Great men have devoted many years to the cause of Freemasonry and when their work is finished they have realized that they have only begun to see the light and that they have only started to uncover the truths contained within our ritual. Thirty-eight years into this process for me now and I still do not believe that any Brother has fully understood all of the lessons that it teaches.

The meaning of being a Mason rests in education and character forming. While it may be accepted as an innermost desire, followed by obligations that make us members, yet in a larger sense, a man is never a Freemason until he truthfully and loyally lives up to his obligations. He cannot do this until he understands them and begins to learn their scope and meaning.

There is something inherently good about being a Mason. Freemasonry has stood through the years with the shining light of its membership as a beacon to the world. The greatness of the Fraternity is not due to secret teachings, mysteries, or deeds. It is due to the lessons taught to its members by its ritual and the comfort, inspiration, and enlightenment brought to all who will study it.

Through this study men learn more about how to live up to the obligations that they have taken when they became members of the Fraternity. They learn to better control their passions, prejudices, angers, and tongues. The Freemason is different than most of the people around him for he has the lessons of the Fraternity within him as he walks through life.

Freemasonry offers comfort to those who sorrow, hope for those who despair, counsel for those who error, and joy and contentment to all who genuinely practice it. The philosophies of the Fraternity provide a simple, but profound, solution to the problems of human relationships. It is accepted that it is a way of life to the Master Mason who is interested enough to appraise and value what is his, and his alone, simply because he is a Master Mason.

Freemasonry has a solid foundation in unchanging principles. It is an excellent training ground for ethical living and moral behaviour. The true Mason's word is his bond. What he says, he means. He practices fairness and honesty in all his dealings. He only knows one honesty. That is the lesson taught by all religions: "Do unto others as you would that they do unto you." This makes the Mason different from most people in this world. He is respected and revered by those around him. It matters not whether he is a maintenance worker or the president of the company. His actions are the same. This is important to the Mason as the world around him has no clear sense of purpose or firm spiritual foundation. To many people, the Mason's vision of life is ludicrous. These modern times seem to be seeking the lowest common denominator where the only question people want answered is: "What can I get away with?" Self-seeking is becoming increasingly prominent. Allegiance is becoming secondary to the selfish pursuits of the individual.

We see around us high unemployment, people who are worried about holding on to their jobs, shrinking buying power, continual warfare in the streets, commercialized sex, drugs being sold in every neighborhood, crimes of every kind are on the rise. Rampant consumerism that works on people to buy things they do not need that put them into

debt and homeless people are in every major downtown area. We are living in a throw away society where values count for less and less.

We see people more and more who do not think of the dignity and feelings of others. They have forgotten the virtues of temperance and prudence. These virtues can not be legislated but must be practiced for the good order of society. Good men practice them in Freemasonry.

Justice seems to take a back seat to rights in our society. Without justice our way of life is doomed also. We must get our society back to the basics. Freemasonry can help good men withstand the pressures of our run-away society. Freemasonry can help good men renew the values that are needed to rebuild our society. Freemasonry can help good men gain the knowledge to make our cities safe again. Freemasonry can help good men become better men.

Freemasonry teaches that the road to happiness is found in the journey towards perfection of spirit, intellect and soul. Freemasonry teaches men to reach their fullest potential. The Freemason works toward these goals each day of his life. To aid in his journey he studies the book of religion, the history of man, and the philosophy of life. He cares for his family and his house of worship. He puts forth his best efforts for the payment he receives in the workplace. He helps his neighbour and his community and he attends his Lodge so that he may join in the fellowship with others with the same aims and goals.

From the time the Entered Apprentice Mason stands in the Northeast corner of the Lodge and is told that he "Now stands as a just and upright Mason," he becomes a worker on the building of Freemasonry and a guardian of the foundation stones. As society digs the earth from under the stones of civilization he stands, ever watchful, guarding the foundation of Freemasonry so that the Fraternity will always stand tall for what is right and good in the world.

The Freemason is a builder. The building he works on is never finished. With every stone he lays, there is another to be shaped and set. We work together as a Fraternity to build a strong building in each member. The more men work and learn together, the better the building. We must impress upon the young men of today that this building is in danger of crumbling from age and may collapse without the labour of their hearts and hands.

We offer them brotherhood, understanding, help, encouragement and moral support. We must accommodate changing times but cling to unchanging principles. Unless men are properly influenced and guided by solid principles there is no hope for a brighter tomorrow. Not for society, not for freedom, not for democracy, and certainly not for Freemasonry.

Our Fraternity is a bastion of morality. Perhaps the last one outside of the secular churches. We have an advantage over churches because we cross all religious boundaries and bring together men of every country, sect and opinion in peace and harmony. We enjoy each other and the families of one another. We have family get-togethers to promote the togetherness of our Fraternity.

When we were young and going to school, most of us had a circle of friends with whom we did and shared everything. As we grew older and the concerns of the world began to hem us in, we became distant from this sharing. Freemasonry affords the opportunity to regain this important part of life. To have friends with whom we can share our innermost

secrets without fear of ridicule or reprisal is something that we can not get in most places. We can get it from our Brothers, for Freemasonry truly regards the whole human race as one family. As we progress through life with our Brothers we find that our lives are richer, better and more fulfilling.

When we put all of these things together we arrive at the bottom line. This is the simple explanation that a Mason is a good man who, by the teachings of the Fraternity, is working to become a better man and the Fraternity, is all the Masons working, one with the other, toward the same goal.

We must all realize that the Fraternity is made up of men who have all the frailties and prejudices of men. The difference between these men and others is that they work on themselves daily to make themselves better men.

Thankyou for this opportunity to explain to you why I became a Mason and continue to be so impassioned by Freemasonry!