

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
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THE USES OF COMMITTEES IN A MASONIC LODGE.

by

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Recently, at the official visit of the Grand Master to District No.21, the Most Worshipful Grand Master, M. Wor. Bro. R.A. Kitchen, commented on a topic which has been a concern for many in Freemasonry for years... that of reduced membership in our Grand Jurisdiction, subsequent reduced attendance of members at lodge meetings, and the number of members demitting from the craft. He quoted our Past Grand Secretary Rt. Wor. Brother Lorimer, as saying that these visible signs of declining enrollment and loss of membership was not a problem but rather the result of a problem.

For me, then, it is a question of searching for the problem and then thinking about solutions. One obvious statement of the problem is that we, and here I mean many of us, . we are not giving the membership enough opportunity to get them very much involved with what is happening in the lodges. My statement comes from observations, a lot of listening to members about the way their particular lodge is working, and my own feelings.

I believe our Past Grand Secretary when he said that the reduced membership was a result of a problem. The Problem is lack of involvement. From observations of other organizations the key element for success in retaining membership is involvement With this being one possible problem as I see it, I would like to suggest at least one possibility.

Let us look at the use of Committees.

In our masonic history we know that originally operative masons were simply bound to their master to learn the trade and in time become masters in their own right At this time possibly no committees were necessary. When speculative masonry began, lodges were small and there was probably little need to use committees to assist in the running of the lodge. As the constitution and workings became larger, and probably as Grand Lodge of England became larger, the need to delegate work to a few and have a committee report back to the Grand Lodge with recommendations, helped ease the work of the Grand Lodge. Subsequently, small lodges began to find a need to use committees on special occasions, maybe to help the lodge make a decision on certain matters without long debates on the subject. or to enlighten the brethren further on a topic Whatever the case may have been then, the fact today, every lodge I know has committees doing various jobs to help in the smooth running of the lodge. Some lodges may have as few as two or three committees, others may have ten or more. The point is that committees are a very integral part of any lodge today and I feel they could be put to some better uses, in particular that of solving the declining enrollment by getting members involved.

To assist you in visualizing the idea I have for committee use, let us first look at the total population of masons in our Grand Jurisdiction; 22,192, (from the Grand Lodge Report for 1983). At that time there were 172 lodges working in the jurisdiction. Dividing lodges into membership we arrive at a total of 128 members in each lodge

Brethren I would now like to introduce to you AVERAGE LODGE #X on our Grand Register. Average Lodge has a full slate of officers installed, fifteen in all. (I will include the I.P.M. too). Now each of these members is involved since every meeting they will be seated in a lodge chair and through the year probably will participate in ceremonies. Let us also assume that there are at least fifteen Past Masters who are attending on a fairly regular basis and who on occasion will be called upon to do some work. I am assuming that they are involved... at least they were when they went through the chairs. Some may now wish simply to sit and enjoy lodge. They worked hard in their years and want to leave it to "younger blood".

So far, then, we have used about 30 of the 128 membership. Let us now take about another 10 who may be called upon, during the year to participate in ritual work. Some of these 10 may come from the 30 we have already assigned as involved". This lodge may also have a few standing committees established for the year. I think AVERAGE LODGE may have 5 such committees consisting of 4 members each, that is 20 members. Some are officers and some are Past Masters. As I see it then AVERAGE LODGE, at this stage in the scenario already shows signs of duplication of involved members.

So we have a grand total of 40 members doing something specific during the year.. Brethren these members are involved. The other 88 are not. That is a large percentage of the membership not being as much involved as they could be. This is a generalization but there we have it, a typical lodge where more than half of the members will not be specifically active in any way during a typical year of lodge activities.

When we joined Freemasonry, we were carefully instructed in the tenets of our profession. One in particular I want to draw to your attention ... Brotherly Love.. Fellowship.. that one perfectly delightful part of Masonry. It makes us feel an important segment of a brotherly chain that binds us closer together. It is the part that cares for, that finds the needy, that listens to, that supports, that involves. Fellowship is all of these but if one is not being satisfied it could affect the others. if we are not seen to be involved or if we feel that no one wants us to be involved, our Fellowship is not whole. This may eat away the other parts of our Fellowship In the end we may quit simply because one need is not being met.

Back to Average Lodge then, 88 members not involved. Let us just change a few of the way the committees are formed. Rather than having standing committees let us make some Ad Hoc or Special Committees To help you understand the differences here I will define a Standing committee and an Ad Hoc Committee:

A STANDING COMMITTEE: committee established for a set period of time as a year or session,

An AD HOC or SPECIAL COMMITTEE : a committee specially appointed for a specific job.

Now, the Worshipful Master is the key to their success. It is he who forms the committees before his installation. To use Ad Hoc committees well then, he needs to do three things. Firstly, he has to be prepared to find small jobs that are necessary for the committees to do. This requires him to have an overall plan. Secondly, during the year he has to be alert to find ways of establishing further Ad Hoc Committees to aid in solving problems arising from monthly meetings. Thirdly, he must continually encourage the meeting of small groups of

his members informally outside the lodge meeting talking MASONRY and things related to MASONRY. (it is easier to talk Masonry if you have some specific topic to discuss).

It is therefore in the establishment of these special commullees that I see the greatest opportuni~ for members to be involved, Instead of a Sick and Visiting Committee consisting of three members for the year (a standing committee) why not have a Chairman and then each month have appointed two brethren to assist the Chairman, just for that month to do some particular visiting necessary. In 10 month 21 members would have served on that committee.

We might consider a General Purposes Committee comprising of three senior officers plus two others making a standing committee of 5 for the year. Then when the committee has to meet, of appointing a further 3 others to serve just for that month on the committee, By the year's end, 30 members could have been involved.

Consider the Education Committee, rather than having 3 members for a full year, the Worshipful Master might plan X number of education lectures during his year with a permanent chairman with pairs of members to assist the chairman in planning topics We all have strengths in our knowledge of Masonry. Let each pair select a topic, or have the Worshipful Master select the topics for his year and the members he would like to make the presentation.

Understand Brethren, I am not advocating the exclusion of standing committees in our lodges. They are a most essential part of the running of the lodge. You could probably imagine what a lodge would be like if the Finance Committee changed each meeting!

Many ideas have been bandied about that are useful to encourage involvement; social events, 5 minute lectures, masonic education through medias other than a talk, (slides, film, plays, poetry reading).

But none I feel, are comparable to the small tête-à -tête that will take place when two or three brethren have to discuss something Masonic. It has all of the segments of the big chain encircling fellowship and brotherly love:

CARING---LISTENING---SUPPORTING---ENCOURAGING---SHARING---LEARNING--INVOLVING.