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HOW DO WE AS MASONS MANAGE CHANGE?

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We as Masons are a link between the past and the future. The past has gone and cannot be altered, even by those who would rewrite history. The future lies ahead and will come whether we as Masons are part of it or not. Let us remember Freemasonry does not belong to us — w^e only have it on loan and are the custodians only in our lifetime. Eventually it will be handed to those who follow, who, like us, will consider it their sole property. So as the present custodians, we should have some idea what is expected of us and I think the wisdom of Freemasonry tells us this in the final paragraph of that incredible Address to the Brethren — *"May the genuine tenets of our time-honoured Institution be transmitted through your Lodges pure and unimpaired from generation to generation."*

To me, Brethren, three things come to mind:

1. Society's image of Freemasonry
2. The quality of our attitude towards one another
3. Our knowledge and understanding of Masonry

1. IMAGE Over the years Grand Lodges have advised that a courteous refusal to enter into any form of discussion was the best response to our critics. Well maybe in the eyes of those Grand Lodges, it preserved the dignity of Masonry but at the same time *it allowed our critics to form the public's opinion of Freemasonry*. In fact by today's politically correct standards if this muck raking is not challenged, we are considered to be endorsing it by our silence. Brethren, the first recorded attack on Freemasonry was in 1745 (255 years ago) — *'Masonry Dissected'* by Samuel Pritchard. This book in its effort to discredit Masonry gave a full record of ritual complete with the solemn obligations. Presumably in an attempt to prove to the public the authenticity of his work, Bro. Pritchard swore before a magistrate that all he had written was a true and perfect record of Masonic workings. Now in this exposure was the Solemn Oath he had taken not to reveal the secrets entrusted to him as a Mason. Think about it — this guy was a perjurer big time! If the contents of the book were true, he had perjured himself as a Mason by revealing them. If the contents were not true then he had perjured himself before the magistrate. So how could the magistrate allow his name to support the writings of an obvious perjurer? Why did Bro. Pritchard write this? The truth lies in the final paragraph of the book's preface where he wrote, *"I was advised by some friends who were not Masons to publish this account in return for a small stipend for my necessitous circumstance,"* Yes Brethren, just like all those who followed, he did it for money. Believe me my Brothers, if we are to preserve Masonry for the future, we must repel these unwarranted attacks. If any one asks, what do Freemasons do? Don't use the 'Cop Out' that Masons have been propagating to hide their lack of Masonic understanding; IT'S A SECRET; I CAN'T TELL YOU! No Brethren, we have to know what we are talking about and to develop communication skills that will enable us to inform others. Strangely enough, there is a thread from these exposures and attacks to our second concern.

2. OUR ATTITUDE AS MASONS TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER Could it be that Bro. Pritchard realised that the penalties referred to in his obligation were unlikely to be inflicted. So there were no real penalties, it wasn't a real obligation and there wasn't any harm in violating it. Especially if you were paid to do so. Just as we today, when we are reading through our ritual, do not get terribly troubled when reading that part of the obligation where we have sworn not to write, carve, mark, or engrave any of our ritual I think that we may have been desensitized to the seriousness of our obligations as Masons.

Take the fifth of the five points of fellowship in the Master Mason Degree. *"I will uphold a Master Mason's honour and carefully preserve it as my own. I will not revile him myself nor will I knowingly suffer him to be reviled by others if within my power to prevent it."* Every Mason has repeated this many, many times. Yet, almost every day I hear of some Brother, wanting to bring Masonic charges against another Mason or wanting to take him to court Or, for example, when a Brother goes borne and says, "Do you know who that idiot of a Grand Master has appointed as District Deputy? - his half-witted son-in-law from COSMOPOLITAN LODGE " - a double whammy! Number one—the Grand Master can never be an idiot Joe Blow who is wearing the apron this year may be but the Grand Master is the Grand Master *and you* put him there. Now, what does the wife think? These Masons are just the same as everyone else; jealous and always at each others throats. No Brethren, we are different, very different and we have to keep working at it to keep ourselves so. Just think when you are driving down the highway and the car in the other carriage-way flashes its lights. You look down and see that you are doing 110 km. in a 100 km. zone. You touch the brake and drive through the speed trap at 91 km. *"Thankyou, Brother."* When you get home at night and think about the poor cop who never wrote a ticket all day saying to his wife, "What a day! Nothing but Masons driving in both directions!"

My Brothers, don't listen to our political critics in England who claim Masons are only looking after Masons. It is refreshing for a Mason to know that Masons are looking out for each other especially in a world where it's even' man for himself. Brethren, if Masons only looked out for each other, everyone would be lining up to get a piece of the best *"insurance"* in the world.

When I was fairly new in Canadian Masonry, I attended a meeting where RW.Bro. H.A.D. Oliver (now Mr. Justice Oliver and Conflict of Interest Commissioner) conducted a mock Masonic Trial complete with lawyers for the Prosecution and the Defence and, of course, H.A.D. as the judge. The circumstances leading to the trial were that a Brother was seen sitting at a table in a crowded restaurant when a person, not in attendance, became the subject of some considerable verbal abuse whereupon the Brother got up, excused himself and left the table. Seemingly the person being abused was known to the Brother and the witness as a fellow Mason. The charge was that the Brother who left the table had violated his obligation to defend the honour of a fellow Mason in his absence as he would in his presence. I was astounded — I thought that this Brother did probably just what I would have done — and here was H.A.D. breathing fire and brimstone, about to send this guy to the Electric Chair! What a wake-up call! Brethren, our ritual has been desensitized to appease our critics. Maybe we need additional measures like this up-to-date drama to get the message across. Or to emphasise the penalty that surely can be inflicted; *"To be branded a willfully perjured individual void of all moral worth etc "* This gives us a thread to our third and final point

3 KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING If we are the finest organization in the world, we have to ensure we are the smartest. If we are to take that last paragraph in the Address to the Brethren seriously, we do not want to leave to our successors an assembly of run-down buildings owned by an organization whose leaders are there because it's their turn. My Brothers, we have to pick leaders who will ensure we package Freemasonry for its journey into the future in the best possible way. *Symbolically* with its fundamentals pure and unimpaired and packaged in a container strong enough to withstand the attacks of its enemies yet wrapped in a high quality finish to convey

to all the premium value of its contents. Brethren, our Grand Master, M. W. Bro. Jack Harper, often quotes an oriental proverb which claims a fish rots from the head. I wish he wouldn't look at his deputy for confirmation when he says that But my Brothers, we must ensure that Masonry has the best in leadership all the way from our Lodge Wardens up to the Grand Master. There is indeed an important place for *every* Brother in Freemasonry. When you are choosing your leaders, make sure you are using a Brother's talents to his and our best advantage; avoid losing a good craftsman and getting a poor foreman. Let me assure you, Brethren, we are working on ways to ensure that the good craftsman is recognized and rewarded in other equally fulfilling ways rather than rewarding him with a leadership role that he often doesn't want or hasn't time for. Let us have pride in our Masonry. My Brothers, if you want to know how to deal with our critics just look at how the special interest groups circle the wagon when under attack, even though many of them are self-serving and without the '*common good*' goal of Freemasonry. Yes, we have a lot to learn for sure. So next year, Brethren, I will ask of you three things:

1. Stand up to our critics.
2. Improve the quality of our attitude toward one another.
3. Encourage a leadership based on *Knowledge and Skill*

The losses are also compounded by the exclusions made by Lodges — figures extrapolated from a small number of known Lodges writing off members. On the other hand, there is a plus side, with new Freemasons, and some affiliates from other jurisdictions.

These were *not* predicated to increase, the figure used was a steady number of eight hundred thirty initiation per year, it being thought wiser to be conservative until new strategies for Craft revival took hold. To achieve this rate in Carpentaria district would mean sixty-two initiates, more than twice the best year in the last ten.

One wonders how accurate the individual estimates were but in total, the net balance must have been about right. The loss to the end of 2000 is numerically seven thousand three hundred with half the period envisaged now elapsed.

In hindsight, the loss of seven thousand three hundred from 1993 to 2001 increases Grand Lodge dues by only fifty per cent or one and a half times over seven to eight years plus inflation of about twenty per cent. This is a tolerable figure.

Unfortunately, the losses due to ageing of the 1992 membership will start to 'bite deep' over the balance of the fifteen year period. For the reasons given in the report, this will cause the other loss categories in Lodges to accelerate and a total membership of only four thousand five hundred fifty was foreshadowed in 2007. This means Grand Lodge dues could rise by at least a factor of three (3) to \$200 (A) or \$250 (A) with inflation. Such a figure could be well-nigh intolerable .

We must surely therefore expect Grand Lodge to make every effort to fight for its very existence and come forward with a number of strategies to get new initiates and to keep them. Remember the words of the 1993 UGLQ Committee that, "The under forty-five years age group is not appropriate for membership recruitment without significant product changes." We have not yet seen any significant changes approved or recommended by Grand Lodge to our ritual but time is now running short and we need a lead to be given in the not too distant future so that fall-off in subscribing membership can be arrested.