

(The opinions expressed in the following paper are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research)

The Future of Freemasonry
(Preserving the Dignity)
by R. W. Bro. Gordon Phillips
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"What is this Masons' thing we are involved in?" My understanding of what constitutes Freemasonry, is that it is a Noble Order, a fraternity of men bound by a common rule of life, which has the result of creating integrated individuals, who, in their Lodges, homes and community, base all their decisions and activities on those great values of morality and virtue. We are reminded each year at our Installation of Officers, as we hear the "Ideals of a Freemason" in the Address to the Brethren, in what manner we are expected to behave. Supporting the life and work of the Order lies in its adherence to its great purpose ~ Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. It speaks to us of the Dignity of the Man and of his character; and outlines for us a truly noble brotherhood, where the welfare of the fraternity is far more important than any agenda of the individual.

As members of this Order we need to continuously labour to preserve Freemasonry's integrity and the integrity of its membership. I suspect that this night we speak to the choir, and that you already do those things regularly that distinguish us as the aristocracy of Society. Some of the finest Freemasons that I know, are here present in Victoria. It is you who are ever ready to support your Lodge by serving in whatever way is required, who walk your talk in your everyday vocation, even though your situation may have you retired into the multitude. You are the ambassadors that will ensure the survival of our Gentle Craft. As Grand Lodge Officers we need to be there to facilitate the environment that is conducive to the practice of Freemasonry by all our constituent members. We need to exist for you, not you for us. That is what has enabled Freemasonry to survive since the building of King Solomon's Temple, and we are sure will serve us well into the fourth Millennium.

At this point of time in our Masonic history, it appears to me as if many of our members are disorientated. Much like "The Fiddler On The Roof, they stand with one foot in the past while the other is placed in the future. We are not permitted to dance from one foot to the other as we may please for the moment, we need our feet firmly planted in both.

We should be justifiably proud of our heritage, that has withstood the lapse of time and the dismemberment of nations. If we stay locked in the past, this may prevent us from seeing what needs to be done in the present; and, while being proud of our past, we should have dreams about the future. As well, we need to be able to take decisive steps to deal with the difficulties and dangers which daily confront us. Too many of our newer Freemasons have reached the conclusion that this Order, which was once great and carried much influence in society, is now a burned out force and has little future. They hold that opinion primarily because they have not yet been taught to realize the importance of strict adherence to our fundamental and time honoured value system. Their perceived lack of action in us working on our problems, or more appropriately, the "building of our fraternity", leaves us with two major consequences:

The first is an obvious lack of vitality in many of our Lodges. We members of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon need to ensure that worthy candidates for Initiation are knocking on our door and our newer members understand they are requesting memberships to conform with our principles, with us, for the rest of their lives. Newly made master masons, upon receiving their Grand Lodge Certificate, need to be persistently attentive to the working of their Lodge. We are confident all must agree that apathy in our organization renders it relatively unable to function effectively. The problem here is not with Freemasonry, but rather with the perception of those who would hold memberships, but do not necessarily belong.

The second consequence is a general lack of vision within our Gentle Craft. We desperately require Leaders at all levels who will articulate the vision in understandable terms for the Brethren to follow. We need relevant strategies today to implement the programs that will move us ever forward towards the objective. We need to always deal with one another as partners in the common goal. And we must never give up on our dreams for the future of the Order and its influence upon the lives of those men who, putting their trust in the G.A.O.T.U., are willing to undertake the work required, and to be worthy of hearing the welcome words "Well done, good and faithful servant."

It is one thing to have a vision, but where are we to find the working plans to guide our labours. Our forefathers in the Order rightly placed the Volume of the Sacred Law at the centre of its workings. And to this day it provides the primary orientation of Freemasonry. Freemasonry and the V.O.S.L. tend to be somewhat synonymous in their teachings, No true Freemason escapes being confronted by the V.O.S.L. as the rule and guide to his faith. In short it commands that we are our brother's keeper and on it we have obligated ourselves to help, aid and assist one another. This promise is not just for use in dire circumstances, it is our way of life. When the need is perceived, we generously answer to it. Might I suggest that the need is ever present as we individually build ourselves to become what we are capable of, with the help of the G.A.O.T.U. That need is present in each and every member regardless of age, if they truly wish to be active Freemasons , and not just to hold membership.

There are no magic beads nor exists a secret formulae. It is hard work to walk the talk so that all who meet us, know that we are Freemasons. There is no way of living a life of innocence, morality and virtue save that of doing. Our primary right as Freemasons is to do our duty. We do not get there by dreaming of a righteous life nor having visions regarding the building of a temple worthy of the dwelling presence of God, but by a constant labour in the daily walk of life in the here and now. We best acknowledge the honour that is ours in being Master Masons, by taking personal responsibility for the continuing work and new tasks the Order may undertake in the present, and in response to the contemporary situation at hand. Absent Freemasons suffer from the delusion that Masonic life may be lived in some freelance fashion; when they are unconnected with its underlying principles of morality, virtue and innocence on a regular basis, how can they labour with us?

Truth exists no matter how unpopular it may be and whether or not anyone believes it. One truth is that nothing of consequence is accomplished without organization and discipline. No human can successfully live outside society, and every society entails a system of authority. Another truth is that each of us is inferior in some ways, but happily, superior in others.

Our unique pursuit of Freemasonry was never intended for the "average man", it absolutely is meant for those who would be superior. It was not supposed to be easy nor "palatable", nor was it ever supposed to require nothing of its participants. It is difficult, and should be; it is meant for the strong, the venturesome, the workers and the doers. We can promise them no magic formulae, no instant success! We offer not a stroll upon a garden path, but on the contrary, a grueling journey up a rough road strewn with obstacles, many frustrations, danger and privation. There is beauty, peace and harmony, and deep personal satisfaction, that awaits us as we travel down that road, and it is there for those who willingly will join with us in the pursuit of the very nature and purpose of our Ancient Free & Accepted Freemasonry here in British Columbia and Yukon.

It must be obvious to all involved in Freemasonry that the influence of its membership to attract new initiates has waned, perhaps by our own fault. It is not sufficient to simply wear our Masonic regalia; we should wear more openly the uniform, which would clearly distinguish us, our uniform of brotherly love, relief and truth. To do so would clearly establish to everyone that Freemasonry, and its work, is a worthwhile cause, deserving of support and well-worth belonging to. The fact is clear, we shall start to attract a growing and active membership when we offer the individual man the chance of making a marked contribution to a valuable cause. To be worthy of emulation we must ourselves choose, choose to belong, for it is in making this choice we shall best fulfill our commitments and keep our solemn obligations. Visualize the transformation of the life in our Lodges, where instead of having some idea that the Order belongs to us, we become those who belong to it, to do its work.

That kind of Freemasonry teaches us how to take our life experience to a new level of

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The Future of Freemasonry (Ideals
and Goals for Freemasonry)
by R. W. Bro. Robert McSween
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Let me start off by giving you some facts and figures:

- a. In 1962 our membership in Grand Lodge was 26,700 members;
- b. Today our membership is at 13,800 members;
- c. Two-thirds of the worlds' Masonic Brethren live in North America;

- d. Since 1962 our population increase for those eligible to join the Craft has increased 88 %;
- e. Since 1962 our membership has decreased 44 %;
- f. Our projected loss of members this year is expected to be between 500 and 800 members.

There are many things that we as Members are doing right but there are also some things that we can improve upon. Here are some of the following things I feel we can improve on!

1. To participate in the fellowship of sharing ideas and support the Masonic goals of living up to our ideals;

Many of our Brethren talk of living up to our goals and ideals, but, unfortunately that is as far as it goes with some. This cynicism must not be allowed to thrive in our Lodges. It only breeds contempt and disharmony in our Lodges. If however, we can be positive in our attitudes and actions both within and without our Lodges, we can live up to our Ideals. When this happens it is only natural that we begin to share in the ideas of making our Lodges and our Craft not only stronger but much more vibrant. We begin to live to the goals of Freemonry. Therein lies the spirit of Freemasonry. The things which it conjures up in our minds are pleasant things, human things, irreplaceable memories of the past, understandings of the present, and hopes for the future.

2. Share information on Masonic Retention and successful methods of attracting more members to attend Lodge from successful Lodges;

There are Lodges that are thriving and doing very well and there are those who are barely getting by with Lodge membership. We must learn from those who are doing well as to what it is that they are doing, so that others may share their ideas and perhaps become successful as well. One way of doing this is by using the Mentorship Program which so far has proven to be very successful. Something else we should remember is that, "the new members should be kept as active as possible until they get the Masonic feeling. Once a member feels that his is an integral part of his Lodge, he will become a more active member". This is easy in small Lodges where every members can quickly get to know every other member, but in larger Lodges he might go home feeling that his Brethren couldn't have cared less whether he was present or not.

3. Develop strong leadership qualities amongst our members;

When we went through the several degrees of Masonry, we were given the Working Tools of the different degrees that we might labour in those degrees. We must give the members the Working Tools of a Leader. One way to do this is through the Leadership Workshop. However, these are only conducted twice a year and sometimes in regions not accessible to us. We must

have Leadership Workshop Committees in every region of our Jurisdiction to conduct Workshops on a need as required basis. By doing so we can cover a much larger number of Brethren. For instance the last one conducted was in Vancouver. It was the first one conducted in seven years. How many more years must they now wait before there is another Workshop there? We look to the Worshipful Master and his Officers for Leadership, but, when they do not have these qualifications, our Lodges often flounder and some take many years to recover.

4. Provide a platform for information dissemination through posting Trestle Board articles, notices, and general Masonic information;

We already have the Grand Lodge Electronic Trestle Board which is available to Lodge Secretaries, but, how many of us are aware of this? How many Secretaries use this? If you are travelling to another region of our Jurisdiction, wouldn't it be nice to visit this web - site to see what is happening in that region so that we can visit a Lodge in that area! We can also post events that are happening other than just meetings! Electronic mail allows people to read, send, and share messages locally and across the world. As an example, you could use the the Inter - Net to share mail between yourself and other executive members of your Lodge — or if Grand Lodge was accessing the Board, they and Lodge Secretaries could transfer mail between each other. These are just a few of the dozens of uses for the electronic mail and the dissemination of information.

5. Develop friendships and increase Masonic fellowship through e-mail communications throughout our Jurisdiction;

We could easily have a web page where Masons in this Jurisdiction could sign on to and share information with their Brethren. By doing this, we would develop friendships with those who we have not yet met. What a wonderful way of getting to know each other!

6. Designate acceptable web-sites for review and study;

As I have already said there is a Web - Page for Grand Lodge which serves this purpose but again I ask you how many have used it or even know that it exists? If we all knew of it we could have even more information on this web - site for review and study. We could even have a review and study on the resolutions that are to come before Grand Lodge so that when we go there, we are better informed. Also, by having these web - sites the Brethren pick up more Masonic information and education. We must have the Brethren better informed on our Craft. Younger members thrive on knowledge and younger members are all on the inter - net. This is the best and easiest way to get this information out to them.

7. Have better guidelines for investigative committees and find out why so many members demit in order to stop this decline;

When an Investigative Committee goes to a prospective candidate, are they in possession of the proper questions that they should be asking and do they inform the prospective candidate of all the information he requires prior to becoming a member? Most of the times they do not because they are simply not in possession of these questions themselves. If all Lodges received a list of questions which are suitable plus information that is suitable, we might be more successful in having a new member who completely understands what exactly it is that he is joining!

Also our decline of members is far too rapid! If Grand Lodge were to strike a committee for just one year and were instructed to find out why so many members were demitting we might be surprised. They could instruct all Lodges to answer the following questions such as:

- Was the member an active member with the Lodge?
- Is the member's health the reason his is demitting?
- Is the member's financial status the reason he is demitting?
- Did the member have feelings of animosity with another member?
- Did you talk to the member to find out his reasons for demitting?

These questions could go on! This committee could then give their findings at our Grand Lodge Communication!

8. Improve public awareness and our public image;

Some of our Lodges are involved with the community by participating in parades, church services, and community events. Others are involved in the Cancer Car Project. We can all be involved in the community in some small way to improve our image. We can also do this by looking after a particular park area, by assisting in the organizing of community events or simply by participating in any of these functions. By doing so we become involved with our community and also become a part of our community.

9. Establish electronic means to improve communications between the Grand Lodge Office and the Lodges (i.e. computerize Grand Lodge forms);

The days of filling out Grand Lodge forms by hand went out with the typewriter and gestetner. We have many Brethren who are more than capable of producing programs for us that all Lodges can use to improve their communication with Grand Lodge, and, they will do this because they enjoy doing so. We are in a new century and we must join this new century now!

10. Implement the Mentorship program by providing appropriate documents to all Master Masons upon "raising;"

Some Lodges are using the Mentorship Program and have found it to be very successful. All Lodges must be encouraged to use this program as well. If we can have all Lodges participate in some type of Mentorship perhaps, we can slow down or stop our decline of members.

11. Have more fun at our meetings and inject more humour;

If we can have more fun at our meetings and inject a bit of humour, the members will go home with a much better feeling about being there. They will want to come back again, simply because they had a good time. Boring meetings do absolutely nothing in attracting members back or encouraging them to become active in our meetings.

As I said at the start, there are things that we are doing right and things that still must be improved upon. If we can improve on some of the items mentioned, we can make a positive change in our Craft Lodges and make our chances of success even better!

In summary the goals which I spoke of were:

- Participate in the fellowship of sharing ideas and support the Masonic goals of living up to our ideals.
- Share information on Masonic Retention, and successful methods of attracting more members to attend Lodge from successful Lodges;
- To participate in the fellowship of sharing ideas and support the Masonic goals of living up to our ideals;
- Develop strong leadership qualities amongst our members;
- Develop friendship and increase Masonic fellowship through e-mail communications throughout our jurisdiction;
- Designate acceptable web-sites for review and study;
- Have better guidelines for investigative committees, find out why so many members demit and stop this decline.
- Improve public awareness and our public image.
- Establish electronic means to improve communication between the Grand Lodge and our Lodges;
- Implement the Mentorship Program by providing appropriate documents to all Master Masons upon raising;
- Have more fun at our meetings and inject more humour,

Thank you, for your attention but most importantly for your friendly hospitality.