

Victoria Lodge of Education and Research

650 Fisgard St, Victoria, B.C. Canada

Some Thoughts and Views for Leadership of our Craft

By Rt. W. Bro. Stephen Godfrey
Junior Grand Warden

Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon

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This paper is serving two purposes. The first is to give a response to those in the craft who may often ask the question, “Why do we have a Grand Lodge and what is its function?” The second purpose is to explore eight areas that are felt by the writer to be addressed for the continued enjoyment of the craft as well as an exploration of new avenues that could enhance our image.

The purpose of Grand Lodge is to see that everything we do masonically is regular. Regular means that we are consistent with the rule and regulations of the constitution, and that we recognize the essential guidelines which allow us to be accepted by other Grand Lodges in the world. The accepted relationship between Grand Lodges is defined as 'mutual recognition' and should include the exchange of Grand Representatives. We accept the Standards of Recognition as established or accepted by the Conference of Grand Masters of North America. The standards are:

- ❖ Legitimacy of origin.
- ❖ Exclusive territorial jurisdiction, except by mutual consent and/or treaty.
- ❖ Adherence to the Ancient Landmarks (specifically a belief in a Supreme Being, the Volume of the Sacred Law being an indispensable part of the Furniture of the Lodge and the prohibition of the discussion of politics and religion).

By adhering to these expectations, our Grand Lodge is accepted the world over; the obverse is also true that not abiding by these simple expectations could harm us and Grand Lodge and our international reputation would lose recognition. Regularity, therefore of our lodges allows us to be accepted by other Grand Lodges throughout the world. And more importantly we can visit with our brethren in lands across the world, and they can visit with us.

Grand Lodge establishes a set of rules (Constitution and Regulations) the purpose of which are to give us guidelines on how to work, to deal with uncertainties, keep us performing our work and conducting our business correctly enough to be allowed to continue to hold onto our warrants.

Grand Lodge therefore meets regularly in order to check that we, the Grand Lodge members, are satisfied with the regularity. If we are not satisfied with our standards, then members of Grand Lodge offer proposed changes to our rules.

Because Grand Lodge meets as a Lodge meeting, so then it creates a set of its own officers similar to those we find in a craft lodge. There are some extensions: 12 Stewards, Grand Sword Bearer, Standard Bearer, Superintendent of Works, Marshall, Deputy Grand Master, etc. The majority of officers are appointed for one year and it is usually the prerogative of the Deputy Grand Master to select the next year set of officers. Recently an attempt was made to add the office of Grand Piper. Sufficient opposition quashed the idea. The Chairman of Constitution Committee, when handling the debate of this topic, almost fell off the stage with laughter at even the suggestion of the new office.

In order to check on our regularity in lodge, an inspector is appointed each year (District Deputy), whose job it is to report to the Grand Master first and then to Grand Lodge. He also assists lodges in translating the rules of Grand Lodge if confusion arises. He reports to Grand Lodge yearly. The role of a DDGM has to be taken seriously by the brother who receives the appointment as well as by all brethren in the district to

which he is appointed. The position is the Deputy to the Grand Master, the highest office in the District. We afford a brother with this rank, as if he is our Grand Master in the lodge.

Grand Lodge is responsible for benevolence and charity within the craft, agreed upon by the members of Grand Lodge many years ago. The Benevolent Fund and the Bursary Fund reaches out to support respectively our members and children (and those children do not necessarily have connection with a Mason to apply for consideration of a grant). More recently we agreed that Grand Lodge should support a local and national charity – the Communities Charity Fund, more commonly called the Cancer Car Project.

Grand Masters are in a precarious position when in office. They are seen as guardians of the right and proper running of the jurisdiction under our rules. They are also expected to motivate brethren to continue to further in their personal development. Grand Masters will appoint committees to assist with special programs he initiates. He calls upon experts from the craft to assist in the work of Grand Lodge to promote and extend his work.

Grand Masters strive for something better for us all in our Masonic lives. They hope for improvements in lodges. They desire that lodges are robust and thriving.

Of all the programs which a Grand Master has proposed in the past, you will note that many are created for the betterment of a lodge specifically. Often those programs promoted by a Grand Master originated in lodges and were seen fit to promote provincially. Grand Lodge promotes best practices. I would stress that not all programs proposed by a Grand Master leave a legacy for the jurisdiction, but most do continue. For example Grand Lodge has accepted an early education and instruction program for new masons, which was established formally by a craft lodge, encouraging its use, not dictating its use. On the other hand one Grand Master strongly recommended several years ago that all lodges should publish their own newsletter. Some lodges have, some have not. We have two programs promoted by Past Grand Masters. One is now firmly accepted by Grand Lodge, while the other not having been given recent promotion, is only seen in occasional lodges as a means of internal promotion and interest. But in the end the lodge makes the decision on its involvement on both issues.

As another example, Grand Master George Baldwin (1985-86) wished that three minutes of education were offered in every meeting. Some lodges took on the challenge, others did not. What was established from this small recommendation, however, was the concept of the District Education Officer as an officer of the DDGM. Today we find few lodges taking the time to offer substantial time and topics for education.

So the question is, “What visions do I see for the future of this Grand Lodge?” “What kinds of advancements and projects can a Grand Master suggest which can be accepted by the membership generally, which will show growth in our brotherhood in the province and territory, and will be taken on with enthusiasm and with commitment?” This is a tall order, and let me remind you again that a lodge need not accept any plan of a Grand Master.

1. Quality of Lodges

Accept that the lodge is the first tangible connection that all men meet when entering our fraternity. Our lodge gives the first impression to a new Mason – *our lodge*. If he sees any sense of disharmony within its ranks, chances are he will not stay. He learns through ritual that we are a fraternity which supports and helps each other, not for monetary gains but support and help on strong and firm friendship basis. Thus we have to work harder in showing our lodges in the best of lights.

We have to bring our brethren into the culture of our lodges quickly and reveal that we are indeed an extension of a family at home. The new brother is just as cared for here in lodge as he is in his home with his family about him. We nurture him we help him grow. Mentoring is our first response to this expectation, but it has to go beyond that. We want him to build to his potential; know his strengths and find the best plan for him to help the lodge continue to flourish. What is the greatest height to which he can strive in his life? Can masonry be seen to give him that pathway? Much of a candidate finding his potential is more about the members showing him what potentials they have and the success they have found as a member of the lodge. The lodge demonstrates to the new brother that he can risk without being offended, that he can make mistakes without chastisement.

My first area of work would be to see that all lodges have a clearly stated plan of welcoming a brother into a lodge. A response of “We use the mentorship Program” would be a start but would need to be expanded: -

- books to read,
- articles to read,
- magazines to read,
- discussion groups to explore ideas, theories, and uncertainties,
- meeting other Masons who are show Masonic skills worthy of imitation,
- meeting Masons of sound Masonic knowledge
- observing different lodge cultures and programs
- papers to present to the lodge.

2. Known in our backyards

We need to open ourselves more to our local community. Let me qualify this immediately. Already some communities know of the work of a local lodge. In some cases the Community has been invited to view a lodge hall, to join members in social events and to meet the brethren, wives and children of members in a relaxed environment. Opening to the community is not just supporting a local charity. It is about knowing our neighbours. It is about being seen in the community working where need is in supporting, in volunteering, and in being just good folks.

Local newspapers, with small circulations, tend to be more willing to tell of Masonic events in stories and pictures. In all attempts to encourage reporters to be present at presentations, most major papers find such news not interesting enough for them to cover.

The United Grand Lodge of England declared a week two years ago as a time for local lodges to come up with something of interest to show the communities who they were. The magazine *Freemasonry Today*, an independent Masonic magazine was used for photos of Masonic and social events. A lodge in Bristol in England decided for their stint, to pull a lodge commercial aircraft along a runway.

Most of all, we need to be seen as regular community men who have received lessons that teach us to work more for the betterment of society. We are the first to respond to tragedy in our community, to offer a helping hand, open our doors to those in need. We learn the extent to which Charity can be used to help our fellow human.

In recent District meetings, I have observed that lodges about BC are already well connected with their local communities. Some have offered financial support for well-needed equipment to the hospital. Others have raised money for a local charity. Some have been prominent at annual community events. It is the lodge members who have decided on the depth of their connectedness.

Community involvement can be from none to full participation. It is in the hands of the lodge. It is imperative that each year there is time taken to review past work, past practices. Ask members again, especially new members, “Is our lodge meeting your needs?” Or “what do we want from our Masonic Lodge?” Responses will help develop a lodge in keeping in touch with its membership.

3. Learning is a lifetime of work

Generally we are still very poor in our collective general knowledge of Freemasonry, its history, its symbolism, even the basics. I say that because I still hear so many Masons inquire of others what can and cannot be said about freemasonry to non-masons. We find it hard to speak to non-masons and tell them what we are all about, what we do, what we try to achieve. And we do not place in the hands of brethren materials to help with that education. A mentorship program or the Manual of Instruction and Improvement at the moment are two support packages which begin to help brethren in gaining confidence. And following that, then what? Maybe we as a Grand Lodge should be working on further publications of short Masonic papers, from past Masonic Bulletins, from newsletters of other jurisdictions, from magazines, and all of which to be built into a small personal library of general knowledge which could assist us in our learning. It might even be a worthy venture to plan an educational evening for your lodge to review material already printed and learn how to speak with non-masons.

Knowledge comes from reading. We have volumes of well written works that can guide us to understand our craft. We also have the same number of volumes explaining other mason's perceptions of symbols and their explanation. We have many books from anti-Masonic writers. We need to read them all. Most especially our reading should be of discussions of social trends, where Society mores are moving then ask ourselves if we fit with what we have and does it still reflect in our philosophy?

We should be encouraging new brethren if they have not already started reading, reading, and reading some more.

4. Ritual importance

Our Grand Lodge is not in favour of mass initiations, of annual classes of men being made Masons. Our Constitution allows for us to work to a maximum of five brethren for one degree. Thanks to a recent paper I have read by W. Bro. M. Yule of Vancouver, I have come to the reality that our ritual and its understanding can only be truly understood when one or at the most two Masons receive the degrees at one time. The ritual is the basis of our mystery – through its careful preparation of the players and the careful preparation of the candidate can he truly appreciate the work and power of the words of each degree. I would much rather see a lodge with a long waiting list of applications who desire to be made a Mason than see a lodge running ragged trying to initiate candidates as fast as they are received. Our ritual, the essence of our Freemasonry, is too precious to present with no feeling, no sensitivity, no heart.

5. Long Term Plans

A higher expectation from our Grand Lodge Officers for inspired leadership is needed. Grand Master Unrau said that in his travels through several jurisdictions, many have already set in motion long term plans for their future. I am please to inform you that our Board of General Purposes is meeting for a day workshop retreat this month to begin to discuss visions for our Grand Jurisdiction. We will be discussing areas:

- Membership Retention
- Leadership and Education
- Relevancy of Masonry in the Community
- Developing Communication Systems
- Developing Effective Management Plans.

We need clear plans in all these areas for our future, and our leaders need to work towards their achievement.

In terms of membership consider the following:

Our membership in BC and Yukon is now at 10,713, as of Wednesday February 16th, 2005.

The approximate population of BC in 1961 was 1.63 million. The population of BC in 2004 was 2.80 million (Stats. Can.) In 1962 there were approximately 29,000 Masons [1.7% of the population of BC, or 17 out of every 1000 residents were Masons]. In 2005 our membership has declined to 10,713 Masons [0.38% of the population of BC, or 4 of every 1000 residents are Masons].

In 1962, this jurisdiction had 166 lodges on its roster, with an average of 175 members per lodge. In 2005 we now have 149 lodges, with an average of 71 members per lodge.

We want a plan for retention and growth.

The Board is also discussing the distribution of lodges in districts and the possibility of reorganizing some districts as lodges amalgamate or simply close. I believe that lodges should at all times make decisions in their future, but I see in the future that sometimes Grand Lodge will be required to assist in the decision to be made.

6. Re-committing

We should again revisit and examine the words of our ritual. The messages for good living are there. Often our initial involvement in Freemasonry tends to become lethargic later on. We know today that a Mason on

average will remain so for four years, compared to remaining a member for over 30 years about 40 years ago.

Sometimes an early exit from our fraternity is accompanied by criticism: we are not relevant for today's society; we are not a fraternity which seems to fit into today's world; lodge meetings accomplish nothing.

We are in desperate need of brethren who are committed and stay committed to the fraternity. I have often heard that a master having completed his year expresses his delight that his year has ended. How sad that is. Some Past Masters are not continuing to be supporters of the lodge. In every ten new Masons received into membership two will remain as active in the craft for a long time, and four of ten Past Masters remain active in their lodge. This is my perception, brethren. I have no statistics to prove this. However there have been several studies which have shown that only 18 % of a membership attend lodge regularly.

Some investigators of potential candidates are asking if the applicants are willing to attend the lodge regularly. Men are being encouraged to seek other organizations if they cannot offer that level of commitment. We have to do more of this.

Those who were at Grand Lodge in Salmon Arm you will recall the report of the Chairman of the Grand Lodge Committee on Research. His statistical data collected from past Annual Communication Reports was interesting to say the least. To quote from R. W. Bro. Keith Godfrey: "When the number of initiates is high, the Craft prospers...." "When rejections are compared to the number of initiates it is evident that for the first 35 years of the last century about 1 in 3 of those who applied for membership was rejected. From 1935 to 1970 this number dropped to 1 in 10. In the last 12 years not a single applicant has been rejected. If we compare the first twelve years of the 20th century with the twelve years before 2003 we find that about the same number were initiated (3687 vs. 4002). From 1901 to 1912, 1489 were rejected. From 1992 to 2003 none were rejected. Does this mean that our applicants have improved so dramatically in their quality? Are our committees of Investigation more thorough? It is likely that we are not applying the same standards [today] as yesterday."

Even here in the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research, it is noted that each year the officers have a difficult time finding brethren willing to write and present a Masonic paper on any topic. Are we really offering the opportunity for the new Masons to get their hands on Masonic books, journals, to research topics? Our Grand jurisdiction should offer a list of recommended reading as well as offer freer access to libraries for new brethren to browse, and read. As much as we are witnessing new masons finding their initial interest from web sites of lodges, and our Grand Lodge, quality reading comes from the various Masonic journals, not always available on the internet.

7. Chair of Research

Professor Andrew Prescott is a professor of History in Sheffield University. Under financial sponsorship from the United Grand Lodge of England, the York West Riding Province Grand Lodge, Lord Nottingham the Pro Grand Master, and Supreme Grand Chapter, these four groups offered three years of financial help to Professor Prescott in establishing the first chair of research of Freemasonry in the world. He is not a Mason, but has worked closely with many Grand Lodges.

The aim of the Centre is to put Masonic study squarely into the academic community of historical research in Britain. *The centre is offering public seminars in Sheffield by scholars from a variety of disciplines working on subjects related to freemasonry.*

Further, the Centre has organized bi-annual conferences. It has now held two. These are drawing eminent social historians to attend thereby building legitimacy for the work of the centre. Teaching is becoming another focus of the centre, although at the centre there are no undergraduate courses which focus on Freemasonry, post graduates are studying areas of freemasonry. Prof. Prescott has been invited to lodges to give papers. His work is opening Masonic libraries to the academic world. For the first time historians have found a new source of information in a variety of topics from the papers and books of these Masonic libraries. Prescott has been impressed with the 'enthusiasm' that he has seen in scholars in the various '*aspects which the subject of freemasonry represents*'.

Brethren, here for the first time is an opportunity for students to study freemasonry at university. Consider the ramifications of this advancement. For the first time there is authenticity for Freemasonry. When students take courses which refer to Freemasonry then we have students who will become familiar with our philosophy. And not just in the Faculty of History, but in social development, architecture, and certainly in beliefs and values.

My desire is to see if we can establish the world's second centre for Research into Freemasonry in the Northwest. I will be presenting in October a paper on this topic at the 2005 Inter-provincial Conference of the Officers of the Four western Masonic Jurisdictions. I will be suggesting that this geographical area would be ideal for another centre, and that with four Canadian Grand Lodges and some six local State Grand Lodges, that perhaps we could finance the venture. I have my work cut out to really get a fuller understanding of this work.

8. Leaving a Legacy

Ms Elizabeth G. White, professor of English and director of University of Victoria's Co-operative Education Program said that she has a strong conviction, that "...*meaningful work can be one of life's most trans-formative experiences.*" (*Victoria Times-Colonist*, 13th March, 2005. Sec. D. p. 11)

Stephen Covey mentioned that in his work in developing business practices and encouraging team work in big corporations, delegation is the highest leverage activity there is. It empowers people.

Freemasonry does that too. We are in the 'business' of empowering men to see what potential they have in their lives. Our philosophy is based upon many cultures of the past which have expressed their values on solid social behaviours to build a strong society. Empowering men does not mean we are empowering all Masons to be leaders for Freemasonry. Some will, indeed become our leaders. But many will see the potential to become leaders in their work, their recreation ties, or in their volunteering endeavours. I see, then that our Provincial Leadership Workshops which have been presented since 1994, should be an annual occurrence in various locations in our province. There is more for the Master to turn up at his lodge meeting to run the business. If he has done his work well, a Master will create impressive meetings of quality, with education, and study, even with humour. The planning will give him unbounded skills to build success in his life. Indeed, surely that is the desire of all members, to build success in their lives and become solid citizens in their community.

In his latest book, *The Eighth Habit*, Stephen Covey shows to his readers to "... [find] one's voice and inspire others to find theirs." He believes that the whole person is made up of Mind, Body, Heart, which all make for the Spirit of the person.

Body – to Live, Mind – to Learn, Heart – to Love, and Spirit – to Leave a Legacy.

To live, to learn, to love, to leave a legacy. Exactly what Freemasonry is to do. We teach our candidates to live anew, next to learn, to love our fellow humans and to show society that we are here to make a difference, to leave the legacy. My goal is to work to make this real and reachable to all lodges, to all Masons.



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