

The Future of Freemasonry

Orono Lodge No. 325 – May 10, 2012

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

I believe in the future of Freemasonry. It is here to stay for the long haul. Its future activities, influence and size will depend on our dreams. You and me! No one else! Are you prepared to move ahead and meet the needs of today’s young men?

My comments this evening are meant to be controversial. I know that some of you will disagree with my thoughts but I hope that I can fire up your thought processes and get you thinking about what you and I can do to promote this wonderful fraternity.

I believe that our two greatest challenges for members and the future of Freemasonry will be –

- 1) – our Ancient Landmark that requires a belief in a Supreme Being and
- 2) – competition with the volunteer sector for members and for men’s time.

According to Stephen Covey, “There are three constants in life... change, choice and principles.” As to the first challenge, the belief in a Supreme Being, I agree with the Masonic position of holding sacred our Ancient Landmarks and traditions. However our current society appears to be looking more to Spirituality and this needs to be acknowledged and dealt with.

John Wooden once said that “Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be.” As to the second challenge we are a social brotherhood. Records back to the beginning of time indicate that many brotherhoods have appeared and disappeared. Why? Will Freemasonry do the same? I would suggest that there is a great future for the Brotherhood of the Masonic Order if we are prepared to adapt to the needs of the modern young man. I believe that change is inevitable for us to grow and flourish and change we can.

Why at this point in time are we concerned? Our Fraternity like so many volunteer organizations has shrunk in membership. In the first half of the century there was uncertainty in the British Empire and as a result our numbers expanded dramatically. It could be argued that men needed a faith and needed to cling to something. In round figures our jurisdiction grew to 150,000 brethren. In that unprecedented expansion period, did our fraternity have to focus on ritual alone due to the number of candidates and allow the fun and fellowship to slip?

Today membership numbers have shrunk to 50,000 and revenue continues to shrink. Consequently many lodges find that they are now saddled with the escalating expense of their Masonic real-estate. Even though we are a member oriented fraternity we are now spending more on real-estate than we do to support our members.

I believe that we must “think outside the box” and develop new and innovative ideas that will interest today’s young Canadians. As Masons we hold ritual as the most important part of our meeting. Many of us feel that without ritual it really wasn’t a lodge meeting but there is no

question in my mind that a lodge which holds 9 - 10 meetings a year that consists of ritual and afterwards a sandwich and coffee is a lodge that will be disappearing. A true social brotherhood must offer more!

Let's take a look at some of the Masonic studies that have been carried out.

The Conference of Grand Masters of North America Study of 1989 found similar information to the 1999 Study of the Valley of Chicago, Northern Jurisdiction of Scottish Rite Masonry.

The Northern Jurisdiction of Scottish Rite Masons Study questioned 1,000 men that did not belong to any organization. They were asked, "If you were joining an organization what would you expect from it?" They stated that their top five expectations were –

- 1) – Friendship,
- 2) – Fellowship,
- 3) – A role for the family,
- 4) – A role for the community and
- 5) – An opportunity to lead.

Taking part in or watching ritual didn't make it. They stated "I will put up with your ritual, as long as you're meeting my top five needs."

The Northern Jurisdiction of Scottish Rite Masons have prioritized their activities into three categories –

- 1) – Inspiration,
- 2) – Convenience and
- 3) – Enjoyment (I.C.E.).

As the Tercentenary approached for the United Grand Lodge of England they had the Social Research Center carry out a review on "The Future of Freemasonry" which reported in 2012. They created a broad statement, "The Common Factor should be about Fun and Enjoyment." We may argue that watching and doing good ritual is enjoyable. However I would suggest that ritual alone is not enough to keep our young men engaged.

R. W. Bro. Peter Tink in his sermon on April 29, 2012 at the Divine Service drew a comparison of Masonry and the Church with that of the Toronto Maple Leafs who last won the Stanley Cup in 1967. This hockey team has developed an effective defensive strategy which has worked well. However you cannot score goals when on the defensive. When asked what is Freemasonry? Pull out this little green card and give it to that person and tell them what Masonry is, not what it isn't. I would refer you to the speech, on the District website, that I gave at St. John's Lodge on March 13, 2012. Masonry is more than a religion; it is more than a service club; etc.

During my year I've had several Masons express to me their ideas of how Masonry needs to change. This would suggest to me that Masons are probably ready for some directional change. Let me share with you some of their thoughts.

- 1) – Should we be promoting Masonry as a place of solitude, sequestered away from today's hectic life? A place to rest, contemplate on who we are, what we are, the meaning of life, etc. Socrates said "The unexamined life is not worth living."
- 2) – M. W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels points out that we are a "Philosophical Men's Club." Should we be promoting our fraternity in this light?
- 3) – Should we be developing travelling warrants to move about rural Ontario? These travelling warrants could provide the opportunity for Masons in sparsely populated areas to periodically attend lodge without the excessive cost of Masonic real estate.
- 4) – Should we institute or require a debriefing for the candidates ASAP after their initiation? Our initiates are – required to pay a significant fee, are interrogated, then deprived of all metal and money, obligated with ancient penalties, asked for a donation when they have no money then given a book and told to memorize a large piece of material something that they have never done before. Did we tell them what's in it for me (the WIFM rule)? Then we wonder why didn't they come back?
- 5) – Service clubs require that sponsors take an obligation of support for the candidate that they have recommended. Should we require the sponsoring brethren and the brethren of the Investigating Committee to take a short obligation of support for their recommended candidate?
- 6) – Organized Religion as we know it is shrinking quickly. Spiritualism seems to be the thing of the future. Should we be promoting the spiritual aspect of Freemasonry?

Now let's talk about the good news in Masonry. And there is a lot of good news. The majority of candidates do obtain the level of a Master Mason and their work is exceptional. Many lodges are trying new innovative ideas. Let me share with you some of these ideas.

- 1) – Many lodges are having a banquet or a feast before their regular meetings,
- 2) – Durham lodge opens at 6:00 with dinner at 6:30 and returns to labour at 7:30 for the ritual or degree work,
- 3) – Some lodges are keeping their regular meetings for a banquet, Masonic education and business and doing the ritual at emergent meetings. Here all meetings are over at an earlier hour,
- 4) – Colborne lodge has for the last five years held a monthly breakfast at a local restaurant in the village and
- 5) – Many lodges have a regular "luncheon get together" while others have a regular "morning coffee club."

These are all great ideas to enhance fun and fellowship. However it comes back to – "Are you meeting the needs of your members and your potential members?"

Masonry has been around for a long time and will continue for some time into the future. Humans have the need to be together, to talk, to shake hands, to see body language and for a pat on the back. From my veterinarian's point of view, humans have a herding instinct so it's a perfect opportunity for Masons to take advantage of that trait provided we meet the needs and expectations of today's man.

The size and activity of Masonry in the future will depend on you and me. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

I believe that Masonry has a great future.

I believe in the Future of Freemasonry.

R. W. Bro. Douglas E. Galt
DDGM Ontario District

End of a Paradigm – Terry Spalding-Martin

The Future of Freemasonry – A Report by the Social Issues Research Center 2012