

THE COMMUNIQUE

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From the Grand Master ...

The Masons of Ontario await the month of contrasts, March which often produces weather which one moment it is spring like and then suddenly the weather returns to winter and here in Eastern Ontario we have a saying "if the March weather comes in like a lion it will go out as a lamb". If only it was true!!

As Masons we should continue our efforts to try and establish the reason or reasons for the decline in membership of this great fraternity we call Masonry.

A component of membership which we as Masons often forget is the need to retain members, perhaps it is how we treat Brethren in Lodge, whether a new Mason or a stranger that adds to our decline in membership.

We have all experienced being a stranger in a Lodge room for several different reasons.

The obvious one is that you are travelling through the area and want to visit a Lodge, there are of course other ways you can be a stranger.

How about the member who has decided to return to lodge after several years of absence. He likely will feel like a stranger, or the new member who comes out to Lodge and is ignored. He feels like a stranger in his own Lodge.

We must always remember that a Mason in good standing in his own Lodge should be welcome wherever he goes and not only in his hour of distress but also in his hour of pleasure.

He should always know that the language of Masonry is the same the world over, it is the language of the heart centered on the divine principals.

It speaks in the eye that beholds the sign, in the tongue that speaks the Word, and the hand that feels the grip. In other words there should be no strangers in a Lodge room.

Who among us has not entered a Lodge for the first time and noticed that Brethren walk by without speaking to you, so you then slowly and awkwardly find a place to sit but no one makes an effort welcome you. Perhaps the Lodge is cold not only in temperature but also in the feelings because we feel no grip of a Masons hand, we hear no words of friendship and we see no signs of a Fraternity.

Whose fault is it? The Master, the Officers perhaps, however I believe it is every Mason's fault when we would allow a new Mason, a returning Mason or a visitor to feel like a stranger in Lodge. In Lodge we should never let a new Member, a Visitor or in fact any Mason sit alone, it is after all a Brotherhood.

The Grand Master, Grand Secretary and the Deputy Grand Master and our Ladies have just returned from the

Conference of Grand Masters of Masons of North America which was held in the Black Hills of South Dakota and which for several of us created unique travel experiences.

The highest number of registrations in many years attended this Conference. It was suggested that this was created by the revamping of the Conference from comments taken from a survey after last year's Conference. The membership of this gathering came from a vast majority of American Grand Lodges, seven Canadian Grand Lodges, and Lodges from Mexico. Several European Grand Lodges sent representatives as observers.

The agenda of the Conference included several presentations along with several speakers mixed with breakout groups designed to support Grand Lodge officers in the roles and responsibilities of their offices.

A "closed" session of only Grand Masters, Deputy Grand Masters and Grand Wardens provided much discussion on key issues facing our Fraternity. This event was intended to review, reflect and discuss such issues as: moving our Fraternity forward by improving communication with all members, raising the bar on Masonic Education and improving the stability of our Lodges and this was accomplished by Brethren standing up and speaking up.

We came with a desire and expectation of Fellowship and came away with shared time, and great discussion which may improve ourselves and our Craft in Freemasonry.

This month's third step in my Blue Print for our Grand Lodge is the regionalization of our Grand Lodge for the purpose of electing members to the Board of General Purposes. This proposal has been discussed for several years however with quality Brethren not running because of long travel commitments it is time to incorporate this into our Board elections.

Each region would be developed taking into consideration geographical area and membership. In each region there would be two members of the Board of General Purposes, one elected in the region by that region's membership and the other member appointed by the Grand Master and these two members would have a two year mandate however they would be elected/appointed in opposite years thereby ensuring there was always an experienced member in the region. The benefit is that the elected member would only run in his region and it would not be necessary to travel all over the Grand Jurisdiction for election and the Grand Master of the day would appoint a Brother from the Region, thereby ensuring 2 "local" Board Members for each region.

***Paul E. Todd
Grand Master***

From the Deputy ...

Why go to Masonic Events? Can't you learn the core lessons of Freemasonry from just attending your own lodge? Well, of course you can, but visiting and special events provide an opportunity to expand your horizons – meet new people, look at things from a different perspective.

The first major special event, in Masonic history, was a meeting at the Goose and Gridiron Alehouse, located in a section of London known as St. Paul's Churchyard, on June 24, 1717. It was not a Lodge meeting. It was a revival of the quarterly meetings, which the Masons apparently used to have. It seems they had an election and a banquet. I'm sure there was also much time for the Brethren to chat and get to know one another.

The Grand Master and I recently had the opportunity to attend the Conference of Grand Masters of North America, and the Grand Secretary went to the Conference of Grand Secretaries, which was conveniently held at the same time and in the same place. It took place in South Dakota in February, but the warmth of the fellowship made up for the cold weather. There were speakers who inspired us and seminars where we could share our challenges and successes. And, of course, a banquet.

You, too, have several opportunities coming up to participate in a special event.

On March 24, Brock University, in partnership with our Grand Lodge, will be putting on the tenth Annual Sankey Lecture. Dr. Chernoh Sesay, Jr., Associate Professor of Religious Studies at DePaul University, Chicago, will present a talk on the origins of Prince Hall Freemasonry in the early American Republic, together with some reflections on the problems and possibilities of democracy in America. The Sankey Lectures are actually put on for the students, but the public is invited to attend, and our enthusiastic support has meant that the Sankey Lectures are the best attended lectures on the Brock campus. This year, we hope our numbers will be bolstered by a number of our Prince Hall Brethren. Admission is free but

tickets are required and can be obtained at: <http://sankeylectures.ca/tickets>.

On April 6, we will be holding an Especial Communication of Grand Lodge in North Bay. In a hearkening back to the days of the quarterly communications revived in 1717, we occasionally call a meeting of Grand Lodge in addition to our Annual Communication. These have been in different locations around the province. In recent years, we have held them in Ottawa, Sudbury and Thunder Bay. A great chance for Brethren from around the province to get a glimpse of what goes on at the Fairmont Royal York. We will have seminars and reports from a few Committees and special talks by the Grand Archivist and the Grand Historian. Much pomp and circumstance will be taking place in North Bay! True to form, we'll also have a banquet and opportunities for the Brethren and their partners to socialize.

And lastly, of course, the big festival, the Annual Communication is coming up soon. This is such an event, that most of us call it "Grand Lodge" even if that is a misnomer. Preceded by the annual meetings of the Board of General Purposes, the Masonic Foundation and the MASONICH.I.P. Foundation, all of which are open to all Masons by the way. The Annual Communication is several days of meeting and working with our Brethren. Committees report on their activities, educational seminars are held, elections take place, and the new officers are installed. Oh, and did I say there is a banquet? R.W. Bro. Allan Casalou, the Grand Secretary of California and a great speaker, whom I have often quoted, will be giving a talk at the banquet. And Bro. Sam Friedman, author of *Millennial Apprentices: The Next Revolution In Freemasonry*, whom I also often quote, will be holding a seminar. The booking information will be coming out soon, so make sure to watch for it.

***David J. Cameron
Deputy Grand Master***