

**GRAND LODGE A.F. & A.M. OF CANADA  
IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO**

**Fraternal Correspondence Committee**

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**Fraternal Review**

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**GRAND LODGE of RHODE ISLAND & PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS**

220<sup>th</sup> Annual Communication, Freemasons' Hall, Providence, Rhode Island, May 2011.

**25 Lodges**

**4,162 Members**

The newly Installed Most Worshipful Grand Master, Leon C. Knudsen, closed his Address with the quote **"I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.** I don't plan on being a failure nor do I intend to intentionally offend anyone. All Grand Lodges have but one Grand Master at a time and for the current term that responsibility rests with me. That may result in my having to make a difficult decision contrary to some members position, but I will make it based on what I believe will be the best for the future of the Craft and this Grand Lodge. I will not fail because I tried to please everyone."

The Grand Master considered this quote to be appropriate for one serving in his capacity at this time in his Grand Lodge's history. **Success** in so many other areas **should not overshadow a major challenge** ahead, the responsibility for initiating change to **halt the decline** in the number of **Masons** in Rhode Island. **Membership decreased** by approximately **5% last year**. The Grand Master and the Board of Governance focused efforts on specific programs to slow or halt this decline.

They include:

1. **PUBLIC RELATIONS.** The very active PR Committee has embraced, along with the Education Department, a **new program** aimed at reaching a **TV audience** by producing a series of **twenty-four half-hour programs**, two per month, on Public Educational and Government Television. Titled "Spotlight on Masonry", each segment will air four times during the month, beginning in February. The image of the Craft presented to the general public is of vital importance in attracting new candidates and controlling the decline in membership. These shows will also be available for viewing on the Internet. The Grand Lodge Website is operational and the information therein current, with regular and current updates. Guidelines

for electronic communications at both Lodge and Grand Lodge levels are being finalized for distribution.

2. **EDUCATION.** A Committee **Round Table discussion** was held, populated by a number of the newest members. The purpose was to **gain a better understanding** of what will best **attract new candidates**, what they expect to get out of Freemasonry, and what might entice lost members back to being active members. The intent is to reinvigorate and inspire faithful Brothers and new members, re-acquaint old friends, cultivate our membership, and create positive activity within the walls of our Lodges.
3. **FINANCE.** Between 2008 and 2009 Grand Lodge, at the height of the financial crisis, offered a decline in value of funds at its disposal of 28%. The updating of accounting systems over the last three years, strict budgeting, control of expenses and savings has returned this figure to a number within 5% of its original 2008 value. The **Per-Capita of \$33**, which is assigned to the operating fund, is based on the current membership of 4,212. Therefore, any decline in membership has a serious impact upon Finance and must be addressed.

The **importance of these issues** was summarized in the **Keynote Address** by Thomas K. Sturgeon, R.W. Grand Master of Pennsylvania.

“Friends who recently attended the World Conference of Grand Masters will verify that at that Conference, people stood up and said that they thought the next change for Freemasonry should be to allow the admission of women, and one Grand Master suggested that we should change the requisite that you must believe in God. Across my State in the last couple of years I have made many changes, some criticized, some applauded. But nothing I did was of that magnitude. I do believe that the way we live and practice our love of Freemasonry should be second to none. It is very important. ***So when we made changes to the Fraternity in Pennsylvania, people demanded to know why. It is a legitimate question.***”

Today, when I heard the statistics for the Grand Lodge of Rhode Island, they were kind of shocking. They are equally shocking in Pennsylvania. In our State we have lost 150,000 Masons in 50 years—a straight line of 3,000 for 50 consecutive years. Where does our Fraternity get to if we don’t change that trend? How do we change it? We need to be concerned about the future of our Fraternity and we need to care.

For the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century our Craft was on automatic pilot. It operated without leadership. It was on fire. The decline began and continued during the second half of the century. Little was done because it was still on automatic pilot. As we get into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need to concern ourselves with where our Fraternity is going and what it is going to take to change it.

**If we continue to decline, we will always have a Brotherhood**, whether it is 500 in Rhode Island and 20,000 in Pennsylvania. **The problem is** there will be **no building** to meet in and there will be **no money** to run a Grand Lodge. As the Masonic Fraternity shrinks, so does our financial stability. We need to be concerned about the financial side of this. In Pennsylvania, we now have Lodges meeting in buildings formerly owned by the Odd Fellows. We still have the Odd Fellows, but they don’t have buildings anymore. If we’re not careful, we will be in the same dilemma.

We need to change the Fraternity to reflect the time in which we live. **We must understand that the obligation to take care of Freemasonry is now in the hands of all of us.** Our forefathers did their job. Now, we must do ours. It is tougher today than at any time in our history. Be patient, tolerant and

understanding and be as willing as your Grand Lodge to find the necessity to change and be agreeable to it.

Don't worry about the past. Let's look to the future because that is where we are. **Let's preserve the Fraternity** for our children, grandchildren and those who will follow, so that 200 years from now there will be a meeting here, and maybe it will be in this building. If there is, it will be because of the changes and the way in which we restructure Freemasonry for future generations."