



Ensuring the Timeless Vitality of Freemasonry in Ontario

PROTOCOL & ETIQUETTE ESSENTIALS

Prepared by the Grand Lodge P. & E. Committee
Issue No. 37 – March 2016

Greetings from Your P. & E. Committee

Welcome to the March issue of *"P&E Essentials"*. These informative and easy-to-read educational newsletters are typically published three or four times a year, normally between January and late spring. Our thanks are extended to those brethren who have let us know they found past issues helpful and who have encouraged us to continue publishing them.

"P&E Essentials" is intended to be an interactive instrument, designed to help you make an advancement in Masonic knowledge. It will hopefully also assist you to achieve high quality in the delivery, comprehension and insight of the lessons communicated on the floor of the lodge. The Committee welcomes questions and/or suggestions for topics that could be addressed in future issues. Questions or suggestions not related to Protocol and Etiquette will be forwarded to the appropriate Grand Lodge Committee for response.

Committee Members

The current Protocol & Etiquette Committee members are:

Gordon Crutcher (*Chairman*); Howard Adams; Art DiCecco (*Team Leader*); Saliem Khoury; Michael Litvak; George McCowan; Bryan Middleton; James Pearson; George Pohle; Kennard Pratt; David Purvis (*Secretary*); and David Stevens.

With appropriate advance notice – and subject to travel constraints – any member of the Committee would be happy to make a presentation about P&E in your Lodge, or at a District Meeting.

IMPROPER SOLICITATION

The matter of asking others to join Freemasonry, which we term "solicitation", is a perplexing problem to many of our members and deserves clarification.

One of the most popular and widespread misconceptions held by Masons is that soliciting new members is forbidden. Our ritual is very clear that IMPROPER solicitation is to be avoided. Indeed, one of the first things that a new candidate must affirm on his initial entry into the lodge is that he has not been biased by such action.

BUT ONLY IMPROPER solicitation is mentioned. If ALL solicitation was banned then there would be no need to qualify the word. "Improper" solicitation does not mean "any" solicitation.

While there may be no written directive that prohibits solicitation, there is an established principle that discourages direct recruitment. Improper solicitation is specifically forbidden. This long-standing tradition, probably unique to our Order, has become an unwritten rule. Each applicant to Masonry **must** seek membership of his own free will and accord.

Clearly we must be careful not to FORCE anyone to join the Craft. We must not BRIBE, TRICK, PUSH, INTIMIDATE, COERCE, DRAG, BULLY, EXTORT, HARASS, HOUND, PESTER, PURSUE, or do anything else that would be IMPROPER.

However, there is nothing wrong with gently extolling the many virtues of the Craft. There is nothing wrong with telling someone that you believe they would enjoy the Craft. There is nothing wrong with telling someone that your personal experience has been a positive one. There is nothing wrong with asking them if they are interested in joining. There is nothing wrong with TALKING ABOUT MASONRY!

Many Masons developed a very unfortunate habit over the years of saying "it's a secret", when the truth was they didn't know the correct answer. This became a

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standard refrain among too many Masons, who were otherwise dedicated and sincere. It was easier to say this than to do a little research for the correct answer.

Society, at large, believes that you must be ASKED to become a Mason. Non-Masons don't really understand our hackneyed **2B1ASK1** phrase - and why would they? Many fine men wait their whole lives to be asked if they would be interested in becoming a Mason. Many become insulted at never being asked AND most would be complimented, excited and honoured to be gently, respectfully and PROPERLY asked.

There are several examples of how we currently solicit new members, (directly and indirectly), including:

- Posting a sign at our city or town limits proclaiming our existence.
- Adopting a section of a local road or highway, to enhance local litter collection activities.
- Erecting prominent signage on our Masonic Halls to alerts the community as to the purpose of the building.
- Holding a Friend to Friend Night for perspective members.
- Holding an Open House event and inviting the public to tour our building.
- By providing the following information on your **Lodge**, your **District**, and on our **Grand Lodge** web sites:
 - Who are Masons?
 - What do Masons do?
 - Why become a Mason?
 - How can I join?
- By giving a prospective member information about Freemasonry, (e.g. our Grand Lodge pamphlets: **"Have You Ever Considered Becoming A Mason?"**, or **"Freemasonry – Is It For Me?"**)
- By suggesting that a prospective member obtain a copy of a generic book such as **"Freemasons for Dummies"** by Christopher Hodapp.
- By participating in public Remembrance Day Ceremonies and wearing regalia. (See Section 143 of our Constitution.)
- By inviting friends and neighbours to attend our District Divine Services.
- By conducting Masonic Memorial Services impressively and with dignity.
- By direct participation in charitable activities that attract considerable public attention, (e.g. our

Grand Master's **Prostate Hope** project to help fund research into prostate cancer).

- By ourselves acting with such personal integrity and excellence of character as to inspire others with whom we come into contact in our community, our workplace, and our home.

Strict interpretation of "free will and accord" may have delayed admission of good men to our lodges. The craft may thereby have lost many years of productive output. As Past Grand Master Steeves of New Brunswick said at the Conference of Grand Masters a few years ago:

"It is not reasonable to assume that an ambitious young man would request membership in a fraternity about which he knows very little, that is not visible in the community, whose achievements and accomplishments are unknown, and which he has not been invited to participate in or join.

Nor is it reasonable or logical to assume that any man would, or even could, have a preconceived opinion of our order, favorable or otherwise. It is constantly hidden from his view."

We must learn from our experiences. Our membership numbers clearly show that what we have been doing isn't working very well. In Ontario, our membership numbers have been sinking quickly. Sadly, and logically, the more we wait for men to ask to join our fraternity, the less society will know that we exist. Eventually no one will know we exist and the question of solicitation will become moot.

There's an old saying to the effect: "If you want more of what you've got, keep on doing what you are doing".

We need to understand and appreciate that only IMPROPER SOLICITATION is forbidden.

WHO WOULD MAKE A GOOD CANDIDATE?

THE CONSTITUTION'S VIEW

When we are contemplating putting a man forward for application to Masonry we must be guided by Sections 307-315 of our Constitution.

Section 309 tells us that he must be at least 21 years old. Sections 312-315 help us understand that his

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residency is important. Sections 307 and 308 tell us which forms to use and how to use them.

But Section 310 is the only Section that attempts to “qualify” the person we are pondering. It says that our prospect must be able to “understand and appreciate” the “ceremonies prescribed by Grand Lodge” and that he must be “morally worthy”.

From this we are led to understand that a basic level of intelligence must be present and that ethics suitable to society will be required. There is no strict definition provided in the Constitution to cover “understand and appreciate” or “morally worthy”, so we must use common sense to judge the minimum standards that are acceptable. The Constitution is very general and is not restrictive in this area.

THE RITUAL’S VIEW

The ritual often speaks about the character traits of a good and experienced Mason. It challenges all Masons to improve and learn as they seek the light of truth. However, the ritual seldom counsels our **sponsors** on what to look for in candidates or how to judge a prospective Mason.

We know from the ritual that the candidate will be required to answer three questions. These questions are essentially necessary for any candidate to be accepted and the sponsor needs to be guided by them.

We also see clear direction in the “Charge to the Entered Apprentice”. It says we should refrain from recommending anyone to a participation in our secrets, unless we have strong grounds to believe that by similar fidelity, he will **ultimately** reflect honour on our choice.

OUR DEGREES AND LECTURES

No one would disagree that our degrees are filled with a wide variety of teachings designed to enrich the mind and soul of every new Mason. Each degree has a theme and each provides the candidate with information that will truly help him be a better person.

Every experienced Mason has his favorite example of specific lessons that have helped him lead his life. We could all think of examples from the lectures that make good men better. Together the three degrees provide

the framework and structure which helps us live on the level and act by the square.

We learn the basics of harmony, charity, trust, love, truth, morality and fidelity. We learn that we must keep ourselves open to further education. We are exposed to concepts and theories that are assumed to be either new to us, or which are worth reemphasizing again to us.

Freemasonry is a fraternity which is open to all moral men. It provides an experience which accentuates the highest levels of education in morality, charity, nature, science, and the liberal arts. It reminds us of the intricacies of life and death.

While our precepts and aspirations are admirable and benefit society as a whole, we must be careful not be overly aggressive in promoting them to potential members. Our approach with candidates must be a gentle, almost subliminal one. In our enthusiasm to extol the virtues of Freemasonry, do nothing that would impair the ability of a candidate to be able to accurately describe his decision to join our Order as being free and voluntary.

SUMMARY

Our ritual does not forbid proper solicitation, nor does our Constitution. We are not instructed by the Constitution, nor by the ritual, to only accept the highest and best men into the Craft. In fact we should expect that those we initiate will learn and benefit from our teachings, as did so many of us.

A sponsor’s highest expectation for a candidate is that individual should **ultimately** reflect honour on his choice! Look for that potential before you encourage him.

If we can help to enrich the Craft with worthy men, then we have played our part in securing the future of the great fraternal organization ever created.

Perhaps the next time you see a friend or colleague who you think would make a good Mason, you should tell him exactly that and see what happens.

The invaluable contribution of R.W. Bro. Johnstone Trotter, together with the inspiration provided by R.W. Bro. James Kirk-White, to the development of this educational newsletter is gratefully acknowledged.

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