

Whither are you Directing your Course?

For more than fifty years I have pondered about the future of our organisation whilst reading the edicts and opinions of our senior members when discussing matters that make us who we are. It is so easy to continue on enjoying what we have become used to so many years ago. However, it surely is apparent that we, as an organisation, have failed to address short comings that have, and are, steadily steering us on a course that is not conducive with growth.

How often I have read in articles published in our magazine that Freemasonry is in "good heart". This is the quote used by our leaders after having visited outside Wellington and having been well received and entertained by heartland Lodges. Perhaps many take heart from these supportive assessments but I, for one, am of the opposite opinion. Question, "Whither are you directing your course?" Answer. Along a dead end path to oblivion, unless we face up to vital issues that are bringing the organisation to its knees !!

So, what is the criticism? Too long we have held on to the hope that the Freemasonry that existed in the '60s is as relevant today as it was then. (I am referring not to the lessons of our teachings but rather to the means we use to convey them). I identify the following areas that need serious attention if we are to survive: 1. Grand Lodge 2. The Ritual 3. Dress code 4. The reluctance to change.

So how do these stifle growth in a modern world?.

The perception of Grand Lodge in far away Wellington is not all that praiseworthy if you listen to informal chatter. (I do not refer to office holders of District Grand Lodges here) but rather to the pivotal small group of people operating out of the Capital who have the power to use funds, seemingly at their own behest, without thought to the general membership e. g. Scholarships to students, donations to particular causes unknown to Heartland membership. Some Lodges have the financial ability to support wonderful charities but others do not, and I am not talking about some of the wonderful work being done by some individual Lodges who can afford it

Members out there often mention the \$30 million held by Grand Lodge and the Freemasons' Charity, and wonder just who decides on its use. Could not some of this money be used more effectively to enable Freemasonry to grow throughout the Nation? Is the system such that it is too difficult to enforce change and, as a result, cause many to become apathetic? How many Lodges lament the fact that their Lodge one day will close and the assets they have accumulated from within their community

will be added to the \$30 million pool for others not of their district to control?

How does the Ritual affect the work of the Lodge? Is it still appropriate in today's high tech world to continue to repeat the language style of a bygone era? To spend so much time working a degree using language that modern man cannot possibly identify with (unless he maybe studied English Literature or semantics at University) is a questionable task and, quite frankly, a turn off. Should a new member be charged with having to learn such a strange means of oral communication just to understand the lessons that could be conveyed in a familiar form? How come Grand Lodge publishes the introductory booklet in "Plain English" then proceeds to use the established ritual book?

Are we addressing the dress code to fit into today's world? Is there a need to ask that members wear the formal attire that found its way from Mother England? How do the public displays of members in tails and dinner suits sit with prospective members?

Are we resisting change in that we are influenced by older members without a will to change and a new membership not wanting to upset the established leadership?

So what practical changes can we make to ensure our future?

Let's consider a Lodge that struggles to pay its way as well as having falling membership. They are out there. If every Lodge was charged with the task of producing a growth plan that outlines just how they will operate a system in their community that gets the name of Freemasonry out there showing it to be a modern exciting Lodge to belong to, then Grand Lodge should be in a position to grant that Lodge a year's holiday from Capitation fees. It is simple business practice to invest in the future by getting the company's name out there. Maybe that money could enable a lodge to trumpet scholarships in their own community....why not?

Is it true that Grand Lodge is happy to see country Lodges close, and centralize Freemasonry in the larger towns and cities.

How many people in your town know who received grants in the University scholarships in Wellington. It's no good in our magazine. It's best in the local paper. Give that money to the individual Lodges to work with. Whose money is it? Check out how all local projects by the Lions Club get into the paper (and it's the community's money). We can do that! We do the Charity bit, but surely we need mileage out of it to progress. An initial investment from Wellington should mean more publicity bringing more members more funds and lower lodge fees.

Our new Grand Master wants us to talk more to others . Great idea but are we going far enough?

Projects in the media get to the whole town faster than word of mouth. The ritual should follow the path of "Plain English". Churches have modernised their books, the Bible is now published in "modern speak", Insurance Companies have policies in "Plain English" legal documents reflect the modern era. Why do we dwell in the past still? A new candidate would have the privilege of understanding the degree from the outset and find it easier to learn.

The dress code does not have to change its standards to jeans and jandals, but what is really wrong with lounge suit or jacket? I recently visited a Lodge overseas whose dress code stated "collared shirt". Their ritual had for the most part been changed to modern English. All the teachings were there, their ritual had dispensed with much of the repetition and the Brotherly love shone through. (Their membership rate is booming)

Try mentioning some of these proposals at a district meeting and see how long it takes for the response, ("I like it the way it is"). Maybe it's time to announce that it is not about us but what is best for the future.

Can we change? Of course, as we have done so before. Who changed the ritual from its older form? Our wording is not those of the Ancient Catachisms. Has not the dress code changed? Did not Grand Lodge change the ancient penalties in the ritual to the version we have today?

Look at the approach we now can make when talking to a prospective member. How long before we will be able to openly ask a good man to join. We changed originally in NZ when we set up our own Grand Lodge instead of staying with the English, Irish and Scottish. We changed from Provincial Grand Lodges to today's system....does that work for your Lodge?

We cannot continue with small piecemeal alterations. A proactive approach will give Lodges the ability to modernize and appeal to the modern man.

Wither are you directing your course?.....orWhere are you heading? What do you think? I can hear the rumblings already.

This is not an official statement from my Lodge, but if you have similar thoughts in your Lodge, our Secretary would love to hear from you. Maybe it is time for the mouse to roar.

Fraternally
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