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Grand Master

GRAND LODGE
A.F. & A.M. of CANADA
In The Province of Ontario

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An Open Letter to the Masons of Ontario from the Grand Master

14 May 2011

Does Masonry Matter?

My Brethren,

Once upon a time Masonry did matter. Once upon a time Masonry mattered enough that the earliest settlers took time and made the effort to establish lodges in the pioneering communities they were carving out in the wilderness of Upper Canada. Once upon a time Masonry mattered enough that working men saved the equivalent of a week's wages to join a lodge. Once upon a time Masonry mattered enough that the leaders in federal, provincial, and municipal government were proud and active members of the Craft. Once upon a time our Ancient and Honourable Society was invited to lay the corner stones for every important public building. Once upon a time ...!

What has changed? Does Masonry really matter the way it once did?

The first Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Canada, adopted in 1856 set the per capita fee payable to Grand Lodge at 'two shillings and sixpence.' What would the equivalent be in dollars today? Any mention of raising the per capita fee raises cries of alarm from the naysayers warning of the members we will lose. We cannot compare apples and oranges, but we must ask why there is such a vast difference in the membership fees members are willing to pay the golf club, the curling club, and other service clubs, and yet complain about the paltry fees payable to their lodge, which on average amount to \$15.00 a meeting.

During the most recent Conference of Grand Masters of the Grand Lodges of Canada, information was shared by the other Grand Lodges on the per capita fees levied: British Columbia - \$35; Saskatchewan - \$55; Alberta - \$43 + \$5 for publications; Manitoba - \$65 (with a proposal to move it to \$75); Quebec - \$30; New Brunswick - \$35; Nova Scotia - \$32; Prince Edward Island - \$24 and Newfoundland/Labrador - \$26. When one remembers that the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario serves more Masons than all the other Grand Lodges in Canada combined, we must realize and appreciate that the financial revenues of this Grand Lodge have been very carefully managed and services necessarily limited.

At a recent meeting of the Masonic Leaders of Ontario, (May 9) it was generally agreed that we have lowered the standards for admission, that we have sold Freemasonry cheap with ridiculously low initiation fees and annual dues, and so forth, in an attempt to increase membership quantity at the expense of membership quality. Once upon a time Masonry mattered to our predecessors enough that they contributed generously to building projects that provided the meeting places we enjoy today. Many of our Masonic meeting places have been allowed to fall into disrepair, almost to the point of being a disgrace to the fraternity, all because we have been afraid to raise funds for maintenance expenses by increasing membership dues.

At each Annual Communication, held on the third Wednesday in July, the registered delegates elect the principal Officers and Members of the Board of General Purposes. The Secretary of every Lodge in the Grand Jurisdiction has received by post the Agenda for the 156th Annual Communication, the nominations for elective offices, and the proposed amendments to the Constitution. There are matters of real import – both administrative and financial – to be decided this year. You will make those decisions.

My Brethren, Masonry matters to me, and matters most, not because it has been my humble privilege to serve as Grand Master, but because of what Masonry means to me as an individual. Masonry matters to the elected and appointed officers of this Grand Lodge who give freely of their time, energy and expertise as Members of the Board of General Purposes, Committee Chairmen, and hard-working Committee Members, travelling at their own expense, to serve the Brethren in the Lodges.

Does Masonry matter to you?

Sincerely and fraternally,

Raymond S. J. Daniels
Grand Master