

Grand Master's Address at Grand Communication held Wednesday 21 April 2010

Good evening brethren all. Tonight I wish to talk about the following topics:

Membership
Lodges
Grand Masters Challenge
Charity
The Holding Lodge
This Building
Acknowledgements and Thanks

MEMBERSHIP

It is pleasing to report that the slide in our membership numbers has ceased and for the last couple of months our new and joining member numbers exceed the level of deaths and resignations, be it that the difference is small, we are on the right side and it has been many many years since this has been the case. It is quite common now to attend Lodge meetings and see several entered apprentices and fellow crafts attending and see most of the office positions in Lodges held by master masons. At one recent Lodge meeting I am told there were 7 entered apprentices present and in addition some fellow crafts. Our focus now is to keep all of these new Freemasons as members and I want to here publicly recognize the wonderful support and initiative in this area given by Pieter Haverhoek and the Young Freemasons Network. Not only are they providing the link between the younger members and Lodges they have actually introduced some new members to our craft and continually develop new ideas about socializing with each other and attracting new members. Pieter Haverhoek has just been to the Northern Territory this week to launch the Young Freemasons Network in those Districts and I am told that there is a similar positive attitude developing there. I would like to draw your attention to the latest initiative of this group in their wine sales promotion which will provide some opportunities for all Lodges to participate and benefit and raise some revenue for the Young Freemasons Network which can enhance their already impressive charitable spirit. If you want to know more, contact Pieter Haverhoek or make contact through their own website. Details are in the journal or can be obtained from the Grand Lodge office.

This change in membership statistics is very encouraging and there is a very positive attitude being developed. I hope you can feel this change and see the reinvigoration occurring. If I can now talk about Lodges.

LODGES

We notice that as the momentum starts, Lodges that were previously graded as being just ok are now becoming vibrant and re-energized. When I analyze the Lodges in our jurisdiction, I see that, out of our 109 Lodges, about 85 are doing ok, well or very well. About another 15 are just holding their own, but sadly about 9 or 10 are still shrinking and are at risk of closing. From Grand Lodge's point we are totally committed to supporting these weaker Lodges as much as we can and we will allocate manpower to assist these few Lodges to turn around.

Sadly some Lodges have not recognized the need to change and want to keep operating the same way that they have been doing things for the last century. Can you imagine how vibrant our Australian Rules Football entertainment or our National and State Cricket would be if these sports had not changed to meet current needs of spectators. Now night time under lights play in both football and cricket is everyday practice. Football games are played any time from Thursday night to Sunday night and cricket is played any time and in a variety of types of matches. I can well remember my father and Grand father who were avid purists of these sports saying that it would be the end of those sports now that the changes have occurred. Ask yourself what would have happened if the changes to these sports had not occurred. Yet some want to operate their Lodges the same way that it has been operated for the last 100 years. As in the examples of cricket and football we need to keep our principles, rules and benefits the same but we do need to change the way we deliver our Freemasonry to our existing and to our new and perspective members. If you think your Lodge is in need of some help please ask - make it happen - don't wait and say what happened?

On a good note I am expecting two new Lodges to be formed in the next 12 months. One Lodge who shall remain nameless has had such success that their numbers now demand that a second Lodge be started so as to avoid lack of opportunity for members to advance through office. There is also a group of active Freemasons wanting to start a new Lodge and adopt new and innovative ideas in operating a warrant. Although nothing has been approved as yet we will watch developments with keen interest, and I personally support this push.

The latest newflash in this area came to me today - I have been informed that a new Lodge in a country location will be petitioned for very soon.

THE GRAND MASTER'S CHALLENGE

Thank you to all the Lodges and brethren who have engaged and embraced this concept. There are numerous good news stories that I could convey to you about the success of this initiative and the benefits obtained by Lodges and our Freemasons Foundation are substantial. Tonight we are going to reward some more Lodges who have achieved progress in obtaining higher levels of success.

Our Grand Secretary is currently collecting data and communicating with Lodges about their progress and this Grand Master's Challenge will continue to evolve.

Later this year I will be launching a high profile campaign which will attract lots of public interest and media support and will involve Freemasonry working in partnership with another Institution. I am unable to give you any more details at this point other than say that I am hoping this will be launched at our October Conference and I will be asking and challenging Lodges and individuals to also engage and embrace this campaign and then we can truly hold our hand on our heart and profess that we practice one of our core values, and I mean Charity. Please do not think that this means you have to contribute funds or donations; it does not; we only want support. More about that later.

I have just spoken about Charity and I now want to briefly talk about Love as Freemasons to one and other; another of our core values. Brethren, the Administrator of the Holding Lodge and The Grand Chairman of Care have been working at providing and delivering care aspects to all those brethren who are members of the Holding Lodge and negotiations are taking place with Lodges to provide this support and care which was missing in lots of cases. To all those who are involved in this process and who have been working on this change - well done!

THIS BUILDING

Brethren will recall that quite a few years ago, due to our financial viability, the Board of Management decided to sell this building and consequently the property was sold with a lease back to Freemasonry for 99 years. It was the intention of the developer to demolish the Great Hall and erect a multi story building at the rear of the site with some compensation to Freemasonry and some renovations to the Lodge building. As many of you know the developer was put into receivership last year and the mortgagee through a manager took control of the building. With no liquid assets of the developer we have had a huge struggle getting payment for ongoing maintenance and even payment for day to day services for which the owner is responsible. The Grand Secretary and the Grand Registrar and the Board of Management have been working hard behind the scenes to protect our interests and our credibility which was being damaged through non payment of accounts which was the responsibility of the owner.

Over the last year we have leased more space on the first and second floors to the University and as of February this year the Great Hall and Chandelier rooms have been leased also to the University on very satisfactory terms. Together with our Investment Income from the Building sale proceeds and this secure Rental income we are now in a much better financial position than we were several years ago. As such, when the Receiver appointed to the developer put the building up for sale a few weeks ago we were able to negotiate an exclusive contract to repurchase back our home for a price much less than what we were paid for it some years ago and settlement is due to take place in a few weeks time. I hope you agree with me that this is a fantastic outcome for Freemasonry and the job is now ahead of the Board of Management to diligently manage this building and plan the ongoing renovation and opportunities that lie ahead.

Brethren this has been a huge task and my thanks must go to the Board of Management, the 254 committee and especially to our Grand Registrar, Grand Treasurer and Bro Victor Daminato from Lodge St Alban who have each put in numerous unpaid hours of time for the good of our institution, and I wish to pay tribute to the courteous, honest and fair manner which they displayed in all our dealings and thus displaying the high moral standards which we expect.

I am happy to speak with any of you about this topic, and feel free to contact me through the Grand Secretary - my style is to be open and transparent.

Another benefit that you all would have been advised of is that we have also negotiated for the full night time use of Wilsons car park next door for very minimal cost and this we see will also enhance the opportunity to visit Lodges who meet in this complex and for brethren to attend large functions such as tonight without the hassle or large cost of finding alternative car parking. For the record I wish to advise that contrary to the Masonic rumour mill and contrary to the Grand Treasurer's feelings, Grand Lodge will not be receiving any of the revenue raised through these minimal parking fees.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS and THANKS

Finally, my thanks to each of you for attending this April 2010 Communication of the Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of SA & NT Inc. I also wish to thank all the Worshipful Masters and Lodges who have received the DGM, the AGM and me during our official visits. We have been warmly received and have had excellent communication occur. On that note thank you to the Deputy Grand Master and the Assistant Grand Master for their unquestioned support and, for the record, there has been well over 100 Official Visits done during the last 12 months between the DGM, AGM and me.

Thank you to the retiring Wardens. My heartfelt thanks for representing me at nearly all the Lodge Installations. You have been wonderful ambassadors, also to Colin Ey, retiring Grand Director and your team of Assistant Directors and all of the working Grand Lodge and Past Grand Lodge officers who have worked hard and helped throughout this year. Thank you all.

One could not let this moment pass without giving gratitude to the President of the Board, the Board of Management, the Grand Secretary and his office staff for the untiring efforts as well, and last but not least to MW Bro. Alan Pearson, Grand Master of Mark Master Masons, and Most Excellent First Grand Principal of Royal Arch Masons, John Carter for your support and wise counsel.

Thank you brethren .

R.A. Clark

Grand Master of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory