



Ensuring the Timeless Vitality of Freemasonry in Ontario

PROTOCOL & ETIQUETTE ESSENTIALS

Prepared by the Grand Lodge P. & E. Committee
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Greetings from Your P. & E. Committee

Welcome to the February issue of “*P&E Essentials*”. It is anticipated that these informative and easy-to-read newsletters will be published three or four times a year, normally between January and June.

“*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.

DOES HUMOUR HAVE A PLACE IN A LODGE ROOM?

When he was District Deputy Grand Master in 2012-2013, R.W. Bro. Douglas Fickling encouraged the brethren of Waterloo District to have fun; to enjoy all aspects of Freemasonry; and to remove or mitigate those negative thoughts and actions that get in the way of our having fun. At his Official Visit to Wilmot Lodge, on September 13, 2012, R.W. Bro. Fickling pointed out that “*if something isn’t fun, then I am much less likely to continue doing it*”.

My own mentor would agree, although he would also emphasize the importance of “satisfaction” and “inspiration” resulting from good ritual. “*I attend Lodge*”, he would tell me, “*because I feel so good when I leave!*”

I was reminded of both those wonderful points of

view recently when asked by a brother whether humour had any place in our lodge rooms. The answer, of course, is YES – but it should be tempered by common sense and also by those qualities and traditions which are so unique to Freemasonry.

Surely we can be inspired and guided by the principle expressed in Ecclesiastes 3 : 1, namely that ***there is a time and a place for everything***.

Lodge meetings should consist of two key components – carrying on with our time-honoured traditions and practices AND fellowship. Our meetings should provide ample opportunity for both.

There is no doubt in my mind that R.W. Bro. Fickling was not encouraging us to relax our standards. Instead, I am sure he was also urging us to find satisfaction in what we do and to take pleasure in delivering ritual that was “*learned by heart so it can be given from the heart*”. (As has been so eloquently stated by one of our former Grand Masters, M.W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels.)

“Fun” is not necessarily synonymous with “humour”. One definition of “fun” is “*that which results in enjoyment*”. “Humour” is but one component of “fun”.

As Masons, some exceptional protocols apply concerning the use of humour in the lodge room. Humour should be appropriate. It should be respectful and in good taste. It should only be done at the proper time. Do remember that our “ancient usages and established customs” fully embrace Masonic etiquette.

A lodge room is no place for practical jokes, pranks, horseplay, nor off-colour stories. Most importantly, a Worshipful Master must be particularly careful to

Please share this newsletter with other members of your Lodge – and your Masonic friends

see that nothing boisterous nor lax creeps into the ceremonial work of his Lodge.

Why? Because the great lessons of Masonry, which are taught by our ritual, should never be demeaned by levity or pranks. Masonic ritual is intended to be performed in a solemn manner. It should be inspiring to the candidate – and to all the brethren.

The etiquette governing the conferral of Degrees is very clear. There should be no talking, whispering, or laughing, nor any disturbances during the Degree work. It is not an occasion for mirth.

If you refer to **The Charges of a Free-Mason**, in *“Anderson’s Constitution”*, written by Dr. James Anderson in 1723, his number “VI” deals specifically with the behaviour expected of a Mason. That final charge, "Of Behavior", is most explicit. It states brethren are not to hold private conversations without leave of the Master nor interrupt anyone speaking to the Master. No jesting behavior or unbecoming language is to be tolerated when the Lodge is engaged upon solemn business.

Outside of those restrictions, and in addition to the ample opportunities for humour and fun which abound during a typical banquet hour, there are also times during an actual lodge meeting when humour may be appropriate. The welcoming comments by a Worshipful Master at the beginning of a meeting, or during an educational presentation – or perhaps even at some stage in those debates and discussions which can occur in the business portion of a meeting – come to mind.

With respect to the latter, we are reminded by a former Grand Master of Masons of Pennsylvania, M.W. Bro. Benjamin Franklin, that ***“wit and humour win more causes than arguments”***.

JOHN ATTENDS “THE PERFECT LODGE MEETING”

This appears to be an ideal opportunity to share with you one of my favourite descriptions of a lodge meeting which includes those key ingredients of fun and satisfaction, while at the same time incorporating all the basic precepts which make our fraternity so timeless and enduring.

It was posted on the web simply by “Mike” at:
(<http://www.masonicleader.com/author/mike/>)

John Grogan chuckled at the comments he received when he came to work wearing a suit and tie. The IT company where he worked had long ago adopted a casual dress code, so anyone wearing clothes that gave the appearance of “dressing up” brought good-natured kidding.

John didn’t care because tonight was his Masonic Lodge meeting and his dress was very appropriate for the affair. There wasn’t time to dress one way for work, get home, change and then make it to the restaurant in time for the beginning of the meeting. And besides, the suit made him feel special and he actually found that on lodge meeting days his attitude improved just because he looked, well . . . , gentlemanly.

John’s lodge began their meeting at a local restaurant. They had long ago decided that a well-planned “Festive Board” created the atmosphere of Brotherly Love that was so essential to a successful lodge. Besides the great food, it allowed planned time for the brethren to get to know each other, learn from each other and most importantly, laugh with each other.

It took several minutes for J.T., the Master of Ceremonies, to get the brethren calmed down so he could welcome everyone to the meeting. J.T., a relatively new Mason, was appointed the MC after it was discovered that he a great talent for entertaining. His winning smile and jokes that sometime made everyone groan, left everyone laughing and wondering what he would come up with at the next meeting.

Tonight was no exception as he opened with the question; “How many Masons does it take to screw in a light bulb?” He had perfect timing as a comedian and his answer came before anyone could open their mouth’ “Twenty five; twenty four to serve on the committee to decide whether it should be changed, and one to actually change it.” The groans were loud and long but the effect was achieved; this was an enjoyable place to be.

As everyone was finishing their dinner and drinks, J.T. rose, thanked everyone for coming and announced that lodge would open in approximately half an hour. The educational topic would be a paper presented by

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Brother Sanders entitled “Using Masonry for Personal Improvement”, followed by open dialogue.

“The Opening of Lodge was as elegant as it was simple. The officers assumed their stations with a solemn procession in a silent, candle-lit lodge room with soft, inspiring music playing. Once the officers reached their stations the period of reflection began. Each brother was left to his own thoughts as the music continued, ended and then a short period of complete silence was observed.

The Master then opened lodge with each officer responding in a clear and serious manner, loud enough for everyone to hear but in a tone that conveyed the meaning and importance of the Masonic experience to come. The brethren on the sidelines listened knowing silence and circumspection is an important part of Masonry.

The business matters necessary for the operation of lodge had been included in a “consent agenda” which was previously distributed to all members. This allowed the lodge to approve all items on this agenda with one motion unless a brother requests that a particular item be presented, discussed and voted on separately. All matters regarding petitions and reports on petitions were handled individually. This particular evening there were no petitions or separate items so the consent agenda was improved and the business of the lodge was handled in less than five minutes.

John and the brethren listened intently as Brother Sanders presented his paper on personal improvement. Brother Sanders had recently received his Entered Apprentice degree and his paper was a required topic for every EA. The open dialogue that followed produced several useful techniques for preparing, executing and continuing a plan of personal improvement. John made note of several things he needed to review or add to his own plan. Every member has a plan; it was a requirement of the lodge.

Each lodge member devised a plan for personal improvement, maintained it and periodically reported their progress. The lodge had written a template to use to devise the plan and had appointed several knowledgeable brethren whose responsibility

it was to assist each new EA.

Through the degrees these brethren would support, encourage and help after each degree to add items to your plan. After you were raised a Master Mason your plan would be finalized and you began full implementation by using the lessons of the degrees in support of your life goals, objectives and action plans.

Master Masons were then asked to become mentors for new EAs – which, as John knew, kept each brother accountable to his own plan as well as ensuring those men, who sought to improve their lives by Masonry, were given the proper tools.

Seeing the time for closing the lodge approaching, the Master concluded the paper presentation by congratulating Brother Sanders and thanking all brethren for their input.

As was tradition in John’s Lodge, the Master called on one brother at random, prior to closing, and asked him one question; “Brother, why are you a Mason?” In answering the question a brother was to stand and give his Masonic Purpose Statement which he had developed as part of his personal improvement program.

Brother Grogan,” said the Master, “Why are you a Mason?”

John rose, saluted the Master and the words he had written thirty years ago flowed easily.

“I am a Mason because I recognize that no man should live his life in a random manner. He should be guided by a plan that honors his God, supports his neighbour and provides improvement for him daily. Masonry has provided this plan for me and I will live in pursuit of knowledge and understanding for the purpose of providing for my family, supporting my Masonic brethren, and improving my community. My continued hope is that I live respected and die regretted.”

The lodge was closed with the same elegance and dignity with which it began.

As John drove home he was elated, inspired, refreshed and truly thankful he had become a Mason. He was so grateful he belonged to a lodge that truly practiced Masonry.