Ensuring the Timeless Vitality of Freemasonry in Ontario

PROTOCOL & ETIQUETTE ESSENTIALS

Prepared by the Grand Lodge P. & E. Committee Issue No. 36 – February 2016

Greetings from Your P. & E. Committee

Welcome to the February issue of "P&E Essentials". With this issue, we are resuming the publishing of these informative and easy-to-read newsletters. Our thanks are extended to those brethren who found past issues helpful and encouraged us to continue.

"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.

"FREEDOM OF THE LODGE"

There is a wide-spread innovation by lodges in our Jurisdiction which has never been defined, nor sanctioned, nor encouraged by our Grand Lodge. Indeed, no mention is made to this practice in any of our reference material. This innovation is known as "freedom of the lodge".

There are differences in interpretation by our lodges as to what is intended when a WM grants "freedom of the lodge", with perhaps the most common being that:

- (1) It is typically an unscheduled, informal break in lodge proceedings;
- (2) The lodge remains open but not at work;
- (3) The VOSL remains open;
- (4) The outer door remains closed and tyled;
- (5) Brethren are free to walk about the lodge and converse with each other;
- (6) Brethren are NOT at liberty to leave and re-enter the lodge room at their discretion (although some do).

Is there anything amiss with this practise? Well, please consider our approved ritual. Our ritual provides for the opening and closing of a lodge in each degree, plus a specific ritual for calling from L. to R. and from R. to L.

Nowhere is there any ritual pertaining to "freedom of the lodge".

Our research also indicates that no other Grand Lodge makes any formal provision for "freedom of the lodge". In fact, at least one Jurisdiction, (the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon), formally condemned the practise at its Annual Communication in 2010.

(See: http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/masonic_bulletin/74/lxxiv04.pdf)

So a lodge is either open or closed; either at L. or at R. These are the only options. These two options were established a couple of centuries ago and are uniformly practised throughout the Masonic world. There is no provision for temporary cessation or suspension of activities which may detract from and disrupt the meeting.

Granting "freedom of the lodge" takes away from the solemnity of our proceedings and detracts from what would otherwise be a serious and meaningful meeting.

There may well be circumstances when a break in the proceedings is essentially necessary, (such as when several of the older brethren need to use the washroom facilities). In such cases, the lodge must be called from L. to R. in the proper manner.

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

ORIGIN OF THE PRACTISE CALLED "FREEDOM OF THE LODGE"

In case you may wonder where the expression "freedom of the lodge" originated, the answer may surprise you. It actually arose with our ancient brethren, those operative Masons in medieval time. However, "freedom of the lodge" had an entirely different meaning and purpose to these Masons than it does to us.

It was a privilege accorded to select non-Masons to ENTER and access a construction site, in order to observe progress and to converse with the operative Masons while they were at labour in their lodges/workshops.

As described by that prolific Masonic author, H. L. Haywood, in his book, a *History of Freemasonry*, when their lodges were engaged in construction activities, operative Masons in medieval times kept themselves strictly apart from unskilled workers, i.e. those workers who were known as rough setters, wallers, plasterers, layers, cowans and masons who were "without the word".

Apparently there was free intercourse among members of the cathedral builders' lodges and those of the local mason guilds, but no master might lay out plans or display trade sets in the presence of workers of the cowan class. As a certain amount of intercourse between the craftsmen and the directors of the work was essential, it was a custom to give the "freedom of the lodge" to the more notable of these, such as a bishop, an architect, or a man skilled in the mechanical sciences.

What is important to note here is that THE WORK CONTINUED during the time that the select visitors had access to the construction site.

SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVE TO "FREEDOM OF THE LODGE"

When a candidate is resuming his personal comforts, what a wonderful opportunity this presents for you to provide about five minutes of Masonic education to the brethren. This would be much more productive, significant and appealing to the brethren than having an aimless break — and would eliminate any need to call off and call back on.

OPEN RITUAL BOOKS IN LODGE

One question which often arises is whether it is acceptable to have your copy of the *Book of the Work* (and/or the *Ceremony of Installation & Investiture of Officers of a Lodge*) open while sitting in lodge.

The answer can be summed up in seven words:

NO! NO! NO! NO! Absolutely not! Definitely not!

There are supposed to be only two books open when a lodge is at work. The first is the VOTSL. The other is the prompter's copy of the *Book of the Work* (and/or the *Ceremony of Installation.*)

It is a mandate from the Custodian, the Grand Master, and the Ritual Committee that you are not to have a ritual book open in lodge.

Extenuating Circumstances: - are there any?

Let's suppose you are going to be participating in the work that evening and you have momentarily forgotten a word in your assigned lecture. This has happened to all of us.

In such circumstances, you may <u>discretely</u> open your *Book of* the Work (and/or Ceremony of Installation), refresh your memory just as quickly as you can, and then CLOSE YOUR BOOK.

Here's a bigger question for you to think about. Take the situation when a brother doesn't know his work. He just isn't prepared.

Since our goal is to make each degree as memorable and as impressive as we can for the candidate, is it permissible for that brother to read his part – rather than the candidate hear the work done twice – once by the prompter and then for a second time by the brother who doesn't know his work?

The answer is, of course, still the same. **NO!**

Why? Well, such an approach would solve the problem at tonight's meeting. But what about next month, should that brother still not know his work? Shall he read his part again, for the second time? What about the third time?

You know the old maxim. After something has been done wrong twice in a lodge, it then becomes a "lodge tradition".

It is your responsibility to learn your work and to become proficient in any work you have been assigned or volunteered to perform.