Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Alberta

Membership & Long Range Planning Committee

Report to the Executive Committee

Saturday, February 9, 2008

Companions all,

During the fall of 2007, I was invited by our Grand First Principal to assume the Chair of this Committee, comprising the following members,

M. Ex. Comp Jesse Carr

R. Ex. Comp Gerry Hawley

V. Ex. Comp David Roth

R. Ex. Comp Marvyn Rogers

In general, terms, the Committee is charged initially with the following:

1. To develop innovative and practical programs to:
    - Increase membership.
    - Increase membership turnout.
2. Increase public awareness of Royal Arch Masonry.
3. Develop long range planning systems for the guidance of Grand Chapter Officers.
4. Develop a handbook for each of the Chapter Offices of Z, H, J, Scribe Ezra and Principal Sojourner.
5. Develop guidelines for examining Z, H & J prior to installation.

Certain responsibilities, which I considered to be of high priority pertaining to the foregoing were delegated to each member of the Committee, each member will in turn, following the presentation of this my own report, present an independent report on progress pertaining to his own area of responsibility.

As a committee, we have communicated with each other through the media of e-mail and held one extremely successful meeting in Edmonton on January 16th. At which we were able to review progress made to date on areas of responsibility and carried out an overall assessment of our Terms of Reference with the view of setting future priorities.

Unfortunately R.Ex.Comp Gerry Hawley, due to health considerations, recently submitted his resignation from the Committee, thank you Gerry for your endeavors, we wish you well.

We welcome as his replacement V.Ex.Comp Peter Johansen and shall look forward to his companionship and contributions to our work.

Companions, I myself am deeply challenged by the task that I have shouldered, I have deep concerns as to problems facing present day Royal Arch Masonry, as do the members of my Committee and without doubt many throughout the jurisdiction,

My aim today, is hopefully to provide each Companion present with some food for thought, to see each one of you depart this place with a new found desire to play your part in strengthening and where necessary revitalizing your own Chapter and Royal Arch Masonry in general.

Members of this Committee will as time unfolds make their presence felt throughout the jurisdiction by visiting every Chapter, with the object being to assist in putting into action the ideas and suggestions, which we shall over time place before you.

Companions our problems have not materialized in the short term, the roots go back many years, have dug themselves in and fostered a ***"status quo".***

Much has been said and written by many learned Companions over those years as to causes, effects, solutions and leadership deficiencies, but by and large little has been done to take heed and take positive actions.

My Companions I do not point the finger, there are always exceptions and I can only suggest that where necessary Chapters should if the cap fits, wear it!

If vigorous actions had been undertaken over recent years, we would not be facing today's problems, it would be presumptuous for me to suggest that I have any magic formulae, progress will take time.

I suggest however, as the first step we must all accept the fact that we do have membership problems, without such acceptance, **then** I believe that our order will simply continue to deteriorate.

In order to highlight some of our problems, I will now present to you some quite startling ***statistics*** pertaining to ***membership.***

The timeframe, used to compile these statistics, was used simply because I used data, which I had immediately at hand and for no other reason.

At December 31st 1993, our membership stood at 2,205 Companions.

Following an elapsed period of 14 years to December 31st 2006, our membership stood at 1,365 Companions, a decline of 840 or 38.1%.

This amounts to an average annual loss of 60 Companions over that 14-year period.

The statistical paper, which, will be made available to you at the conclusion of my report breaks down our losses by individual Chapters from a 57.9% high to a 3.8% low of losses over the 14 yr period mentioned.

It would seem obvious Companions those losses cannot be sustained indefinitely, the very survival of our order could be the result, and we are on a slippery slope.

The first rule of being in a hole is the simplest, "stop digging". Yet it is the toughest rule to follow.

Each one of us must be humble enough to accept and take responsibility for the present difficult circumstance's which our beloved Royal Craft faces but at the same time, be courageous enough to take whatever initiative is necessary to creatively work our way through or around the challenges which face us.

We must not succumb to cynicism and hopelessness, by believing that we are the victims of circumstance, by doing so we lose hope, we lose drive, and we settle into resignation and stagnation.

Many of us perhaps feel that "I am just a pawn, a puppet, a cog in the wheel and can do nothing or little about circumstance".

Many I am convinced feel this way and suffer the broad range of discouragement and depression attached, we just lower our expectations to the point that we are no longer disappointed by anyone or anything and accept the ***"status quo".***

We must re discover and accept the fact that "***we***, ourselves, each and every one of us are the creative forces of **Royal Arch Masonry**",

I quote to you, words spoken by Albert Pike, taken from the publication ***Morals and Dogma.***

Quote, " ***He who endeavors to serve, to benefit, and improve the world, is like a swimmer, who struggles against a rapid current, in a river lashed into angry waves by the winds.***

Often they roar over his head, often they beat him back and baffle him.

Most men yield to the stress of the current, and float with it to the shore, or are swept over the rapids; and only here and there the stout, strong of heart and vigorous struggle on towards ultimate success." *Unquote.*

Companions, let us all be stout and strong of heart

We must each re-examine the symbolic significances of our three craft degrees and our three Royal Arch degrees and apply them to the strengthening of our foundations and the rebuilding where necessary if you will of our symbolic Temples.

We must set goals by priorities.

During the 5 yr period 2002 through 2006, we lost 587 Companions, 205 through ***Death,*** over which we have no control, 257 by demit and 125 from SPNPDues.

Companions demit and suspensions, totaled 462 and I strongly suggest to you that we do have or can apply control over those two category's, during that same period admissions were 238.

The figures tell their own story's do they not?

I ask you, why are we loosing so many of our membership by demit and suspensions.

Therein must be our immediate and primary goal for action to stem the tide of such losses.

The reasons will be many and varied by Chapter.

However, I am convinced that ***attendance or lack of it***, those ***empty seats*** in our Chapter Rooms is the major contributing factor to our losses by demits and suspension.

The immediate first and critical priority of every Chapter within our jurisdiction, must be to increase attendance, this must be the first "rung in the ladder" leading on to other priorities such as "increasing membership".

Strong vibrant thriving Chapters will without question attract new membership; existing members will become proud ones again and thus eager to invite Masonic brothers to enter into Capitular Masonry.

How do we increase attendance? Companions we are facing a simple "cause and effect" scenario.

The "effect" being low attendance, the "causes" being many.

Each Chapter must examine what it considers its own individual "causes"; no doubt, they will differ by Chapter.

I shall not here today attempt to provide you with a list of such causes, that is your job, compile them through open discussion in your Chapters, they are many and we have all heard many of them over the years.

Prioritize the causes then actions planned to counter such causes must be swift, aggressive and prompt, make contact with every individual member of the Chapter especially those who no longer attend, talk to them face to face where possible, they will provide a "gold mine" of information for your future action.

Use your "signing in register" to chart past and recent attendance, it in itself will provide a wealth of information as to attendance, sporadic and otherwise.

On a final note, just the other day I came into possession of the "Survey Material" conducted some 10 years ago by M.Ex.Comp David Bruce, it seems that this material was never compiled and therefore never acted upon, no doubt predominantly due to the unfortunate and untimely death of David.

My examination of the survey indicates that much of the material is now outdated to say the least, although some ideas will still be relevant and I shall most certainly continue to go through its content and make use of anything considered to be still of value.

Companions I myself and I am sure my Committee members also, are always available by e-mail or whatever means that you wish to use, to receive your thoughts and ideas

Companions, I close with these words; ***"whatsoever we sow, that and only that, shall we reap. Let us take care therefore that we sow".***

Respectfully submitted

Peter Fairbridge