

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

MOST EXCELLENT COMPANION

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GRAND FIRST PRINCIPAL - GRAND CHAPTER ROYAL ARCH MASONS OF ALBERTA

CONVOCATION - MAY 8, 2021

ME Companions, RE Companions, VE Companions, E Companions, Companions, distinguished members of sister jurisdictions, representatives from various masonic bodies, friends of Capitular Masonry, and a special welcome to our ladies and family members. To each and every one of you, you are very much a part of this historic day for the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Alberta with the holding of our Convocation virtually via Zoom, due to the ongoing world-wide COVID pandemic. A special note of appreciation to our Zoom Co-Hosts today: RE Companions Terry Gould, Jack Drebit and Kyle Burns; VE Companion Jaimie Wong, E Companion David Hochman, and Companion Jerry Waldern. Your services today have helped to make this an historic event. I want to express my personal thanks along with the thanks of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Alberta for your attendance with us today at this public Installation and Investiture

Before going any further in this Address, I need to express my appreciation to a number of individuals and I ask for your patience and indulgence. To our Installing Past Grand Z, ME Companion Jerry Kopp and his team of Past Grand Z's for their work in this Installation and Investiture. All of you have, and continue to serve our Grand jurisdiction with honour and dedication. I have no doubt you will always be ready to give assistance and advice when needed. It is of great comfort to the Grand Principals to know that you are there to be called upon when asked, for advice or support to our Grand jurisdiction.

To our newest PGZ, ME Companion Rod Ponech; you leave big shoes to fill. Rod you have contributed so much to masonic organizations in this province. You and I have served together for a number of years. I was privileged to serve as one of your District Deputy Grand Masters the year you served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alberta. A few years later when I served as Grand Master you were there for me in

a very supportive way. We have both experienced the highs and lows of that office. I count you not only as a brother, a companion but also as a good friend. Your friendship and the support of both you and Marilyn to Pam and I over the years will never be forgotten. You have now joined the small group of Past Grand Masters who have also served as Grand First Principals. Just as Royal Arch is the completion and copestone of the Craft Degrees, so too is our service as the presiding Grand Officer for both Craft and Capitulatory Masonry.

To Jerry Kopp, you have preceded both Rod and I as Grand First Principal but you have also supported both of us as Grand Secretary and now as Grand Scribe E. I too count you not only as a brother, a companion but also a good friend. As I look around today, I see so many friends that have been a part of my masonic advancement and who have supported me. There is a danger in naming each and every one of you. You know who you are and I will be speaking with you personally in the coming days to express my thanks. Thank you does not seem adequate to express my appreciation, but please know that I sincerely mean it and appreciate your support over the years.

To members of Shekinah Chapter, thank you for being here today and for your continued support. Your presence is really appreciated and valued. It was my honour to have a fellow member of Shekinah and Past Grand Z - ME Companion Eric Weigelt, perform a significant role in my installation. Another Shekinah member- Wayne King, has been a good confidant over the years. I know you are looking forward to travelling with me when we can once again travel to Chapters.

To my family, my love and appreciation for all your support. I appreciate the attendance of our daughter Bonnie, our daughter-in-law Pam, grandson Wesley, for being here today. Hopefully my father-in-law and brother-in-law who are both Royal Arch Masons were able to Zoom in as well. To my son Jerry, you have served with me in Grand Lodge as Grand Standard Bearer and now in Grand Chapter as Grand Tyler. I am proud to see your interest in Freemasonry and taking on officer positions in a number of bodies. Jerry, it was my privilege to invest you today.

Most importantly, I want to say thank you to my wife Pamela, for all your years of support and love. As Grand Master, I used to tell the story of how old my wife was when the investigating committee came around to interview me and to ensure that I had my wife's support. She correctly pointed out to me, that when I gave her age and how long I had been a Mason, that I was giving away her age. I will just say today, it happened in our first year of marriage and she was still a teenager. It's alright if you want to think that I robbed the cradle! Neither one of us could have imagined the ride that was to come. Throughout it all,

Pam has been my best friend, confidant and supportive of my endeavors. Pam, thank you for allowing me this opportunity. I love you very much.

Now to a few thoughts that I want to leave with you today and what lies before us. I am extremely humbled today, by the honour that has been bestowed upon me to be Grand First Principal. It is an undertaking that I accept with the full realization of the magnitude of my duties and responsibilities to our jurisdiction for the welfare of Capitular Masonry. The first and foremost duty of the Grand First Principal can be summed up in that well known phrase, "*to serve and protect*". Service and support to our members and the protection of our Constitution and Regulations, but more on service in a moment.

My remarks to you today are set with the backdrop of our current COVID 19 crises. Not since the Spanish Flu of 1918-20, have we seen such an unprecedented world-wide pandemic. Everyone here knows or should know that this virus has affected our lives with terrible sickness, loss of life, repeated lock-downs to try to curb the spread within our population, loss of employment, an economy that is severely damaged and challenges for our health care system. As well, the ability to see or be with family has been curtailed. It has challenged our whole Masonic family. We cannot presently meet in person however; I believe that our Royal Arch Chapters have adapted to this problem through the use of new technology and continue to provide masonic social intercourse. Many of our Chapters, have risen to the challenge through the use of Zoom. Chapters doing so are to be congratulated for not only keeping in touch with their membership and checking in on the well-being of their members, but also many Chapters are providing valuable and interesting education. Zoom has provided our membership within our jurisdiction the ability to attend Chapters they might not ordinarily have an opportunity to attend, to meet Companions from other jurisdictions, all within the comfort of our homes.

I know some believe that our inability to meet in person will somehow bring about our demise. I do not share this view, as I know Masonry has survived for centuries having faced far worse. We will have to adapt but I know we are very capable of doing that. What does bother me, is the attitude being displayed by many of our citizens and to one another. I want to take us back to the last century for lessons I learned from my grandmother's and mother's generations. My grandmother lived with us and over the years I learned what her generation and my mother's generation had experienced. It was common to have grandparents living in the home. This was due to a number of circumstances most notably the absence of today's social supports. The family was a strong cohesive unit that proved to be the bedrock of our society. The Masonic family was, and if we follow the lessons of our various rituals, remains an integral part of our Society.

There was an excellent article written a few months ago that I want to share with you to set the context of what previous generations have endured. It goes as follows. “It’s a mess out there now. Hard to discern between what’s a real threat and what is just simple panic and hysteria. For a small amount of perspective at this moment, imagine you were born in 1900. On your 14th birthday, World War I starts and ends on your 18th birthday. 22 million people perish in that war. Later in the year, a Spanish Flu epidemic hits the planet and runs until your 20th birthday. 50 million people die from it in those two years. Yes, 50 million. On your 29th birthday, the Great Depression begins. Unemployment hits 25%, the World GDP drops 27%. That runs until you are 33. The country nearly collapses along with the world economy. When you turn 39, World War II starts. You aren’t even over the hill yet. And don’t try to catch your breath. On your 41st birthday, the United States is fully pulled into WWII. Between your 39th and 45th birthday, 75 million people perish in the war. Smallpox was epidemic until you were in your 40’s, as it killed 300 million people during your lifetime. At 50, the Korean War starts. 5 million perish. From your birth, until you were 55, you dealt with the fear of polio epidemics each summer. You experience friends and family contracting polio and being paralyzed and/or dying. At 55 the Vietnam War begins and doesn’t end for 20 years. 4 million people perish in that conflict. During the Cold War, you lived each day with the fear of nuclear annihilation. On your 62nd birthday you have the Cuban Missile Crisis, a tipping point in the Cold War. Life on our planet, as we know it, almost ended. When you turn 75, the Vietnam War finally ends. Think of everyone on the planet born in 1900. How did they endure all of that? When you were a kid in 1985 and didn’t think your 85-year-old grandparent understood how hard school was. And how mean that kid in your class was. Yet they survived through everything listed above. Perspective is an amazing art. Refined and enlightening as time goes on. Let’s try and keep things in perspective. Your parents and/or grandparents were called to endure all of the above – you are called to stay home and sit on your couch.”

The valuable lessons I learned from my mother’s and grandmother’s generations was their sense of making sure future generations didn’t suffer the things they went through. Thus, we saw the development of pensions, unemployment insurance the old-style family allowance, health care etc. The last number of years has seen a promotion of individual rights at the expense of corresponding duties and responsibilities to all. My right to do something or that government or someone is harming my rights. Our society is tending toward a selfish me first rather than addressing the needs of community. John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address inspired the people of the United States and elsewhere with this his historic words “**Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country,**” it was a challenge for citizens to contribute in some way to the public good. From time to time, we like to name famous individuals in diverse fields such as politics, medicine, science, religion, military and entertainment etc.

that were Masons. I'm sure you know what I am speaking of. In the past, Masons made up a significant percentage of the leaders and in turn leadership in society. Their contribution to the well-being of our communities was done quietly and without fanfare or expectation of personal gain. Today, we need to ask ourselves why we are no longer producing the leaders we desperately need. We have done so in the past and we can do so once again.

A problem that I believe faces our society today, is a lack of good and caring leadership; whether in government, business or even our Masonic organizations. So many organizations and sectors are focused on a top-down approach. Visualize if you will, a triangle where the leader is at the top with everyone below serving and supporting them. As a consequence, the needs of the many are at risk of being replaced by the needs of a few. In order to produce good leaders, we must focus on how attributes of good leadership are produced. May I suggest a form of leadership that might accomplish this. Let's consider "Servant Leadership" where that same triangle is turned upside down with the peak at the bottom. The leader is at the bottom supporting the organization and its members by being a "servant". Simply put, servant leadership is a leadership philosophy in which the main goal of the leader is to serve. While some believe that the concept of servant leadership came about in the 1990's, I would suggest to you, that Servant Leadership can be found in several biblical passages. There are numerous references to servant leadership found in the Bible, our Volume of the Sacred Law. In Matthew we find "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant." Or, several references to ... "those who are last will be first, and the first last."

So, what do we find in our ritual that might suggest servant leadership and duty? Let me suggest that it begins the very first night when you were made a mason. We all have been told that the three great duties, which as a mason you are charged to inculcate are, to God, your neighbour (doing unto others as you would have them do unto you) and to yourself. We also teach that nothing in our obligations will conflict with our duty to God, our country, our neighbour, ourselves or our family. We are admonished that in the State we are to be a peaceable subject, true to your government and just to your country; you are not to countenance disloyalty to rebellion, but cheerfully submit to the laws that afford protection. Our ritual speaks a great deal about our duties and how we are to treat one another. Perhaps the best example of this can found in the closing charge of the ancient York Rite and again reiterated in the Royal Arch closing charge. As we leave our sacred retreat of friendship and virtue to mix again with the outer world, amid its concerns and employments, forget not the sacred duties and that every human being has an undoubted claim upon your kind offices. These closing charges best demonstrate the masonic philosophy that we are to do good to all and remember "others". We all know these complete charges

well and I would suggest they are in harmony with servant leadership. Perhaps, if we practiced servant leadership, we might be instrumental in making better leaders.

How might we apply servant leadership. If we are to practice servant leadership, it starts with me and our Grand Chapter Officers. Going forward at the present time, I believe things will be referred to as Pre-COVID and Post-COVID. I have hope that with vaccines we will once again be able to return to a time of Pre-COVID but we will be in a Post-COVID world for the present time. In terms of our Chapters, I recognize that as things go forward, we will need to offer a great deal of support to build our Chapters back up. One simple step was the action to waive grand chapter per capita for those members in a financial crisis due to COVID or having experienced loss of employment due to the economic downturn. This is a step towards retention of membership which in turn supports our Chapters. Along with Retention we will need to offer assistance for Chapters to Revitalize and some may even say Regeneration. Taken together, this will lead to Renewal of our Chapters. I am asking the Grand Superintendents along with the Grand Lecturers to develop programs of leadership and Education in each of our Districts. Much of this will need to be done by Zoom for the time being. By doing things in the District, those Chapters within a particular District will perhaps be able to support each other. If there are particular needs that Chapters need assistance with, you only need to ask. The Grand Chapter Officers whether elected or appointed are here to serve you.

We also need to recognize that when Alberta Health Regulations permit us to meet again that some of our members may not feel comfortable in attending Chapter Meetings. We must find ways to keep these members engaged and to have them feel as part of the Chapter. In the coming weeks, the Grand Council will need to address these issues and on behalf of the Grand Principals we would welcome your comments and thoughts as to how we can be supportive. At the present time Chapters may conduct business as previously set out by ME Companion Ponech. We are also going to develop a plan to offer assistance with changing officers such as a jurisdictional wide installation and investiture. This is still in the development stages. We understand the desire to get back to being able to meet, shake hands and share the word, but the duty of the Grand Council is to protect the well-being of our members at this time.

In closing, let me assure you that the Grand Principals and Grand Chapter Officers are here to serve you as your servants. I have great faith in our Grand Second and Third Principals as well as our Grand Scribe Ezra. And I know that our Past Grand First Principals will be happy to offer assistance wherever. Until it is safe to meet again in person, stay safe, protect your families and may the Great Jehovah be ever with us and bless us.