



## ENSURING THE VITALITY OF FREEMASONRY

Address to the Brethren and Visitors of Westmount Lodge No. 671 on April 23, 2019 by R.W. Bro. Robin J. Colville – DDGM Hamilton District “C” on his Official Visit.

Good Evening Brethren:

During my year the theme of my talks has been “Ensuring the Vitality of Freemasonry”, and tonight I am going to highlight the key message from each.

My talk at Ionic Lodge was based on ensuring Masonic vitality.

It is important for every member of the Fraternity to *live the Craft* each day through the application of the working tools in one's life and by embracing the message that Freemasonry conveys to each of us at the most personal of levels. The most effective and powerful promotion of Freemasonry occurs when our daily actions as men reflect the virtues communicated to us on the floor of the Lodge room.

A timeless proverb states: “It takes a whole village to raise a child”. In Freemasonry, it takes a whole Lodge to raise a single Master Mason.

When a man is admitted through the West Gate he is offering himself to be placed on a path of self-improvement and personal transformation. *Freemasonry exists primarily to transform men*. When we open the West Gate, we are welcoming these men to a new way of life.

We are building the future of Freemasonry in Ontario one man at a time. Quality over quantity should be our focus.

My talk at the Hugh Murray Lodge focused on the “Brother 2 Brother” program, which is built on 3 guiding principles - **RETAIN, REVITALIZE, RENEW**.

**RETAIN** – focuses on the retention of new members who are less than 1 year in the Craft. This is when we have planted the seed. Every Lodge needs to realize that

- The candidate is the most important person and lifeblood of our organization.
- The candidate is not an interruption in our work - he is the very purpose of it.
- The candidate is a person who needs something from Masonry - it is our job to fill those needs.

The object of **REVITALIZE** is to engage **ALL** members so that they feel they belong and are an integral part of the Lodge, with the goal that ALL members feel needed, wanted and welcomed.



**RENEW** – with a focus on the renewal of our inactive members! We have the opportunity to RENEW our relationship with our demitted and suspended brethren.

Today, Lodge members evaluate whether the value they get is worth the time and money invested. If not, those members will seek out other avenues for their satisfaction. Make it a point to talk to your newer members and greet your visitors. It is so important to ensure that everyone attending a Lodge meeting feels like they were a part of the night. When we make the evening memorable, pleasant and special, we will have taken that step that will make the Brethren want to come again.

My talk at Temple Lodge was about Mentoring. Masonry's purpose is "to make good men better", and the purpose of mentoring is "to assist and promote that goal"!

Brethren, we are in a phase of Renaissance in Masonry. Just because men are once again expressing an interest in the Craft, does not mean that we simply sit back and enjoy the glow of their membership. It is a two way street; our senior brethren owe them the courtesy of teaching and helping them to learn and, our newer brethren owe themselves and the Craft the duty to become good Masons.

My talk at the Electric Lodge was about the importance of our Blood Donor program. District "C" has always had a strong, energetic Blood Campaign with each Lodge appointing a Blood Donor Chairman. During the past 10 years, our District members have continued to support the Canadian Blood Services clinics and donating the gift of life.

As Masons, remember your initiation and the lecture you received at the northeast angle of the Lodge, and you were asked ... would you give it were within your power? Well brethren, please remember ... "it's in you to give!"

My talk at Buchanan Lodge was about have you considered what to say if someone asks you the question .."What is Masonry?" We know there are men in society who are interested in Masonry, but have not taken steps to submit an application, or just don't know where to start. What if tomorrow a man approaches you because he knows you are a Mason, and he asks you what Masonry is all about? You have 30-45 seconds to give him an initial answer that will either impress him, or leave him thinking that Masonry is not worth pursuing. So please understand that it is very important to **BE PREPARED** to address such a question should it be presented to you.



During my visit to Harodim Lodge, I spoke about Amalgamation. Lodges have to look at how they are going to continue to function at their current levels. A strong Lodge can plan and guide, a weak Lodge can only react to influences over which it has no control. Amalgamation may be a viable solution to consider

Therefore, when considering amalgamation as part of a long term plan, like a marriage .... make sure your partner lodge is very compatible and your members genuinely like each other, take time to discuss all aspects of the merger so all parties are satisfied, and be sure that there is an overall benefit to the health of the new Lodge and to Masonry in general.

At Valley Lodge I spoke about the Face of Masonry, and how in this fast-changing world, Freemasonry needs to attract and retain the best candidates, the future leaders who will assure the long-term success of the Craft. But the modernization of Freemasonry is not just about what happens at a lodge meeting .... It is also about the image we project. We need a visual identity that is recognizable, that represents our values and heritage, and also reflects our relevance to society.

Busy lifestyles complicate time commitments. Any organization wishing to attract members must offer something of great interest to even be considered worthwhile.

*Masons must first take ownership of an identity that distinguishes Masonry from other men's organizations.* Freemasonry is not an off-the-shelf product whose value can be assessed only in quantifiable terms. Masons are not marketing soap or ketchup. Masonry is a process of lifelong learning and discovery that delivers a way of living a principled life, observable in the simplest behaviors, whether at lodge, at home, or in the workplace.

At my visit to Ancient Landmarks / Doric Lodge I spoke about Masonic Charity. In Masonry, we are taught from the very beginning that the fundamental principles of our order are **Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth**. Relief in this sense also implies Charity.

The most common concept of charity is giving time, money, or property to those in need. However, a deeper and more significant meaning of charity is;

*To have a benevolent goodwill toward humanity, and to bear kindness and tolerance in the judgment of others.*



Thus, **CHARITY** doesn't only mean or focus on donating money or services, but having a **pure and charitable HEART**.

Sometimes all that is needed by someone who is sad, or lonely, or in distress is a kind word or gesture, a smile or handshake; a pat on the back or a hug. We know these little things can mean so much, so what stops us from sending that card, or making that call that we were thinking about? What stops us from making that visit or doing that favor that we could so easily do? We are human and none of us is perfect, but our Masonic philosophy, the teachings of our ritual, and our Masonic obligations are there to help us when we find ourselves being morally lazy or selfish.

At Seymour Lodge, I continued to talk about the profile of Masonry in Society.

We can raise the profile of Masonry through Volunteering and Community involvement, and not just as individuals but as an organization. We need to demonstrate to the public that we are a fraternity of good men who are all trying to become a better self, each of us setting the example of what a Mason is and stands for, by living a just and moral lifestyle, helping others and doing your part to enrich your community. These **actions** are what will draw new young men to see what we are about, and they will want to be part of such a noble fraternity!

At Meridian Lodge, I spoke about the Friend to Friend program! The Grand Lodge recognized that declining membership in Masonry is one of the key issues facing the success and longevity of the Craft, and one of the tools created to assist deal with this issue is the Friend to Friend programme.

Giving the applicant a chance to learn more about Masonry and what he is getting into **BEFORE** joining is a key step to ensuring his expectations are in line with what we as Craft Lodges can deliver, and help avoid the trend of new Masons dropping out before their Masonic careers even get started.

On pie night at Dufferin Lodge, I spoke about how visitation is one of the most important of all Masonic privileges, because it is based on the principle that the global Masonic Fraternity is one universal family.

At the simplest level, it is the opportunity to share comradeship & enjoy each other's company. But of course, visiting another Lodge provides opportunities to exchange ideas, to achieve a better understanding of the ceremony, and to make a fuller, more complete sense of



the ritual. Visiting helps serve as a guide, in our search for meaning and understanding within our own Masonic journey as we seek out a different perspective to our own Lodge practices.

When I was first elected as DDGM I was a member of Buchanan Lodge, but now I truly feel like a member of Hamilton District "C" .... no longer limiting myself to only 1 of 12 Lodges in our District .... and no reason to limit my Masonic circle to 1/12<sup>th</sup> of what it truly is. We are all members of our Hamilton Masonic Districts ... and need to pull together and think like members of a group that is bigger than just our own Lodge.

Tonight at Westmount Lodge, based on a summation of what I have learned this year I propose a simple 5 step recipe - Robin's recipe if you will - for Ensuring the Vitality of Masonry in Hamilton District "C".

- 1 Raise the profile of Masonry by doing things that matter in our community, like supporting important charities, Canadian Blood Services, our Masonic widows and families, and by each of us living our life with exemplary behaviour consistent with our Masonic principles and values.
- 2 Look after our new members .... make sure they are welcome and included, mentored and valued. They need to receive the experience they signed up for to insure their continued participation in the Craft. They are our future .... Treat them as such!
- 3 Less is more .... Quality vs Quantity ! In the past our organization focused on membership numbers .... But times change and we must realize our membership will never be as in the past. We must adapt and embrace the changes that challenge us .... and **we will** prosper and grow.
- 4 Is amalgamation the answer? 5 of the 12 Lodges in our District have membership between 40-60 ... and with elderly non-active members destined to pass to the GLA in the future, these membership numbers are likely to get lower posing a larger threat of sustainability for the Lodges in question. Amalgamation may indeed be a solution worth evaluating as part of a Long Range Plan.
- 5 And finally, do not consider yourself a member of your Lodge .... consider yourself a member of our great Masonic District. Make a point to visit the other Lodges in your District .... you have far more friends than you realize .... get out to meet them!



I realize this recipe may sound simple .... perhaps too simple to be a solution to such a big and complicated issue as ensuring the Vitality of the Craft ... but sometimes simple is the best approach. A warm smile is simple, a friendly hand shake is simple, welcoming hospitality is simple, and there is no substitute for genuine sincerity and humble leadership. Brethren, *each and every one of us must lead by example, and good men will follow!*

We have the power to make Masonry the fraternity we want it to be. Let's do something **as** a fraternity **for** our fraternity— lodge by lodge, brother by brother!

As my last official visit this term, I sincerely thank all of you for your support and hope to continue to serve our great District in the years ahead!

Thank you for your kind attention.