

Official Visit to Dufferin Lodge No. 291

April 19, 2007

Lecture

How to Guard the West Gate

Good evening W.M., R.W.M.'s, V.W.M.'s and Brethren. This evening I would like to dedicate this talk to the much talked about topic of the West Gate; the gate through which a new candidate comes in when he first joins the Craft, but unfortunate, also the gate through which, in too many cases, we see him leave the Craft a short time later. Why are so many new young Masons changing their minds about our beloved Craft a short time after they have been initiated? - Unfortunately, our Grand Lodge has recently reported that the drop-out rate after the first degree is steadily increasing. In 2005 it reached a shocking 27 %. That is at least one out of every four new E.A's. who join the Lodge will leave the Fraternity before he even becomes a Fellowcraft. Can Lodges in Hamilton District "C" afford these numbers? Most certainly not.

Grand Lodge continues to report an increase in the number of initiations performed this year in our province. Hamilton is no exception. Although, it is not across the table, many lodges have seen a very significant increase in the number of new candidates in the last couple of years. If records are correct, it is safe for us to assume that we have lost some of this year's new candidates already, and the year is not even over yet.

As our Grand Lodge suggests, we need to ask ourselves some very important questions: 1. Why are young men joining

Masonry in increasing numbers today? 2. What are these men hoping to find in Freemasonry? 3. What are these men seeking in life that Freemasonry may be able to provide? 4. How can the expectations of each new member be fulfilled? 5. After the Degree, What is there?

First, why are young men joining Masonry in such increasing numbers today? This is a very important question we need to ask ourselves. Or perhaps more importantly, we need to ask the candidate himself, why he is joining Freemasonry. Do we know? We are happy to see them coming through the West Gate, but do we wonder why is he joining? Or is it our business to know the reason? I say yes. If our intention is to make a better man out of that E.A., it is imperative for us to know who he is and what he is mad out of. It is only through the clear understanding of the shape and the symmetry of a rough ashler that we get to finish with a perfect ashler. We need to know the type of stone that ashler is made out of, we need to know the size and dimensions it consists of, in order for us to be able to calculate the final form of the perfect ashler. Brethren, we need to pay attention to our E.A. We need to make him feel at home every time he comes to Lodge. We need to make him feel he is important to us. After all, the future of our Craft depends on him. We say the candidate is the most important person in the room; well let us show him that we mean it. Not just during the initiation, or the passing, or even the raising to the S.D. of a M.M., but as long as it takes until he is ready to take a leadership role within our ranks and become a leader in the Craft.

Second, what are these men hoping to find in Freemasonry? In today's society, spirituality and morality are taking a second row to the busy styles and disruptions of life which are readily available to young people. Other institutions such as churches and clubs are also feeling the crunch. Today we live our lives in a hurry. We do not have much time. Technology keeps us busy and for many of us, all we can do is keep up with change. All of this has a price though. We can loose contact with ourselves and with others. We can become isolated and distant from one another. Today's technology and our way of life may have the tendency to separate us from one another. We travel further distances and our immediate world is a bigger place. We may loose touch with our grass roots. We may even loose track of who we are. A new candidate may have learned that Freemasonry is an ancient Fraternity where members live by an oath of secrecy. Easily available information on the principles and tenets of the Order shows that it is a Fraternity where morals and virtue are taught by allegories and symbolisms. It is a fraternity where "good men are made into better men". That sounds like pretty a good deal for anyone in search of truth. Anyone in search of light is going to find out more about this mysterious Fraternity and perhaps even join it to be able to be part of it and learn from it. So direct education of the E.A. and of the F.C. and even the M.M. ought to be a common part of what goes on in a Lodge.

Third, how can we assist these new members in their research? Well, we have the tools. We have the vehicle, but do we have the heart. The truth is, do we know ourselves why we belong to this Fraternity? Our Craft has an abundance of

principles, tenets and lessons from which all Masons can learn. But they need to be learnt. They need to be discussed; they need to be assimilated into our daily lives. Let's take the time to learn and those who are higher in Jacob's ladder need to take the time to teach the ones who are coming below. We all know that the best way to teach someone is by example. We, the Master Masons of every Lodge, have heard all the lectures, have been there for all the explanations and are quite acquainted with the symbolism. We all know that if we are to become better men, we need to live our lives by the square. A big part of that square is about how we treat, help and feel responsible to the betterment of our fellow Brethren in the Lodge. We need to make a new E.A. feel welcome in the Lodge. We need to make the Lodge a place where a new Brother may come for assistance and support, but also a place for daily opportunity and growth. We need to talk to our new members. We need to find out what their expectations of the Fraternity are. We need to guide these new candidates through the path of virtue and science. Again, the question is, are we willing to take the time? Because if we are not ready to do this, then our fraternity will continue to loose over a quarter of those who join. We need to slow down and meet the new candidate. Not just congratulate him after he has completed yet another degree, but get to know the man. Who he is. What he is looking for. How can we help him become a better man? After all, he is our Brother and what are Brothers for?

Written by:

R.W. Bro. Eduardo J. Cordero - April, 2007