Greetings Brethren,

Tonight marks my final official visit and it provides a time to reflect, consider the lessons learned and give thanks.

Even with three years of preparation, I started this journey as D.D.G.M. feeling slightly insufficient. I was following in the footsteps of 39 previous leaders; a company of men who have served with unselfish and constructive devotion, making Hamilton District ‘C” a strong and vibrant example of Masonry in Ontario. Men I looked to as leaders and mentors suddenly talked to me as a peer.

My goals have been to encourage involvement from all the Brethren, emphasize the value of our privileges, make execution of the Work a priority, and maintain the tradition of excellence which allows us to act towards each other as gentlemen and brothers. It seems to have worked, this year I have seen the new members getting engaged in degree work. Visitation is up, we had fellow crafts and entered apprentices using the district webpage to look up degrees and pop in on lodges to see the work. We had good attendance at the Lodge of Instruction and there has been a real focus at the lodge level on practice and making the Work meaningful.

One overarching lesson learned this year is contemplation on our purpose and what a privilege it is to belong to the fraternity. While a business functions to make money; a Lodge exists for a fundamentally different purpose. We exist as a mechanism to make good men better. A refuge where like-minded men can come together and share ideals related to the important matters of truth, honour and virtue. Knowing that a body full of men who prize integrity exists...men who hold themselves accountable to a high standard of conduct and dealings; is refreshing for those of us who can get weighed down and caught up in the ongoing grind of our lives.

Three became a theme for me in 2015, and I want to share three important lessons. My first lesson came before my term began. R.W. Bro. Bill MacPherson said. “You don’t just belong to Temple Lodge anymore, you belong to the District. I didn’t believe him at the time, but I have learned that he is correct. My masonic home and heart is here in Craft Lodge. Home is where the heart grows fondest, where things are best known and emotions heartfelt. Home is where you can be your true self, where you are supported for all that you are, both good and bad. Home is where you know you are home and most at ease. While I will always thank Temple Lodge for the support, guidance and love they have provided me over the years; I learned that Home now includes all the Brethren of the 13 Lodges throughout the District. I have been overwhelmed with the support and encouragement received from the members and you should know that this is an honour that is not taken lightly. One which makes me work to be a worthy representative of you all. I strive to live up to the faith you all place in me to represent you and our District.

A second lesson came at the conclusion of our winter District meeting. A remark was made to me that resonated deeply and triggered a new paradigm of thinking. Simply put I was pulled aside and told: “Don’t forget that Masonry primarily exists as benevolent fraternity, not as a mechanism for community service.” It made me consider that while opportunities are there to get involved and help out, within Masonry charity is done quietly…When we see a need… we fill it.

Application of the lesson means that each of us, as individuals, has to weigh the reasons where and how to get involved, and decide how we can add value.

My biggest lesson to share is that Masonry is a continual journey of self-enlightenment. Consider the value of the Ritual and the Work. Those words are so well crafted, so meaningful. I implore each of you to look beyond the words on the page and consider their meaning. Consider the significance of each degree, think and feel the words which are important to you. Learn a part, or a passage “Today we may tread in the flowery meads of prosperity; tomorrow we may totter on the uneven paths of weakness, temptation and adversity” the words of the Work have meaning, they are a life lesson. In each degree we are given opportunities to consider a broader perspective. But the Ritual is just the tip of the iceberg. When the Work is done well it sparks a curiosity and feeds a desire to know more, to become self-aware. To live up to the promise the Supreme Being inculcates and expects from all of us. And ultimately to reflect on the most important of all studies; to know yourself.

Our time here on earth is finite. The 24 inch Gauge enables us to compute the time and effort for all of our activities. I cannot express how deeply I appreciate my District Advisors who took the time to help me grow. Keeping me on a true path of improvement. The District Chairmen, who looked after things quietly behind the scenes and to the brethren of the District who showed their support by coming out, expressing a quiet word or their thanks. But especially I want to thank my right hand. Someone who put aside personal tragedy to be present and help me on this adventure. There is no one whose respect I desire more than my Brother Michael Samolia. He has been at my side, providing heartfelt advice, just counsel and a true perspective on my journey. I cannot imagine doing this without him.

To all of you I thank you for spending some precious and irreplaceable time away from family and other commitments to be here with me. Thank you to all the brethren who have taken the time to support me on this journey. Time is a non-renewable resource and I appreciate the effort and sacrifices people make to keep the Masonic heart burning strong in District ‘C’.

As Brothers we need to show up and be present in our Lodges. To greet each other, especially the newer brethren. To take a part, maintain our ethics and integrity, volunteer for a committee, and make the personal commitment to raise the torch high; and help light the way for current and future generations. We learn and grow as Brothers, and there are times a simple word or gesture can help more than you know. To paraphrase Albert Schweitzer, “At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have relit the flame within us.” Reflect on the times where a kind word, a phone call or some acknowledgement has made a difference. My thanks to each of you for being there when called upon to give a lift, or provide a spark. I have one request as DDGM, and that is that everyone here take the time to call a fellow absent mason, share some warmth, tell them they are missed, and help rekindle their desire for Light.

Know that your presence, your time, your attention, and your commitment is greatly appreciated; and your support through the year has made me feel worthy of the role that has been entrusted to me.

Good evening.