

## THE NEED FOR ESTABLISHING A CODE OF CONDUCT

*Presented by R. W Bro. William Unrau, Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, to the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research on February 17, 2004.*

We are indebted to the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research, B.C., Canada for the following paper.

Our organization has been around for a long long time. There are many things that we cherish about it, and there are things that we do not want to change. There are landmarks and tenets that form the core values of this order and there are many unwritten beliefs that we all should understand. However, there are also necessary actions required which keep this organization current with modern day issues. Sometimes some of these issues are not necessarily popular or easily understood.

It is the responsibility of individuals who assume management roles to provide leadership addressing issues, regardless of how controversial they might be.

Our present day society presents us with unique situations that must be seriously considered, one of which I believe is the best use of my time and yours on this occasion.

The structure of all Grand Jurisdictions whereby charters are granted permitting lodges to operate under specific guidelines places those in management roles accountable for conduct and property. Therefore, I believe it is paramount that we provide leadership that addresses issues and ensures that this jurisdiction takes reasonable action to live up to our stated belief that we are the most moral institution that has ever existed.

Obviously what I am about to surface is by no means a new issue. The author of our Master Mason's obligation saw the need some four hundred years ago to strongly re-enforce it by having every member of our order take an obligation that they will not only uphold a master mason's honour, but will strictly respect the chastity of those nearest and dearest to him in the persons of his wife, his mother, his sister and his child.

Circumstances now require somewhat more than just this obligation. We simply can not be naive and take the position that because we are all masons our membership is free of undesirable or immoral behaviour or that we are protected by this obligation.

Our organization must not only protect itself, we must ensure we have policies and procedures in place directed at protecting individuals that members of our organization come in contact with as a result of Masonic activities.

Everyday there are articles in the newspaper about adults brought before the court system for exploiting children. Programs throughout the world have been widely subjected to, riddled with, and exploited by individuals who abuse children.

There have also been numerous court rulings that have clearly held that adults who operate children's programs are both responsible and accountable for the safety of children involved in these programs.

This simply is no longer an area that can be avoided, overlooked or ignored.

Each organization is now responsible for and must have in place established policy outlining their position of protecting against any form of exploitation and of how to effectively and fairly process suspected breaches which surface within the entire membership of the organization. Previously held belief systems that are in conflict with this position cannot be allowed to deter its implementation. Every issue that can be surfaced as a reason not to have this in place is nothing more than a very uniformed belief about what is occurring in this field. That very position jeopardizes and places at risk everyone involved in this program, along with its young participants.

It is very well an issue that many wish to avoid. However, not only does common sense dictate implementation of a policy, the very continued existence of this organization requires it.

First, the responsible position when operating a program such as ours is to do everything reasonably possible to provide a safe place for children with whom we are in contact. The second responsibility is to ensure that our organization has made the necessary efforts to have in place policy, guide lines and procedures which protect the integrity of our organization and the volunteers who commit their time and efforts to it. This is by no means an easy task and by far the easiest course of action is to fabricate a reason why we do not need to deal with this issue. But we only need a quick look at the Supreme Courts of Canada's rulings relating to the various churches that have had civil actions launched against them to recognize the need to begin to address this issue. I pray that we will never be in that situation, but nevertheless our membership is deeply involved in youth activities and therefore we are exposed to risk.

I believe there are three components necessary to make efforts effective.

First, we as a Grand Jurisdiction require the adoption of a policy statement;

Second, we need to publish a behavioural statement or accepted code of conduct and provide it to all our members; and

Third, we must publish information designed to assist in the recognition of behaviour that centers on sexual victimization of children.

There have been endless examples of individuals who have concealed their behaviour over a long period of time, in the presence of many responsible people, successfully exploiting children simply because of a general lack of knowledge and understanding of this behaviour.

We accomplish or address two aspects in this endeavour; first and most important we make a reasonable and acceptable effort to ensure we reduce the opportunity for any member of our organization to breach this behavioural code, and second, we do not want to place our organization in the position that some churches have ended up in due to their choice of ignoring the problem and trying to deny that victimization of children occurred within their realms.

If we claim to be, and practise what our ritual outlines, then let's do so. And start from there. The rulings of our Courts place all our properties and assets at risk of civil actions.

I will leave with you well researched material, both as a policy statement/code of conduct along with a descriptive behaviour explanation. I seriously request that you consider this need, and assist our entire organization to address this issue

Hopefully a motion to adopt this material will be introduced at our next Grand Lodge.

Let's do what we can in this area to limit the possibility of incidents and then in addition if we are subject of a court action, to be in a position to demonstrate that we, as a highly moral organization, have acted as our ritual suggests that we do.

\*\*\*\*\*