

Masonic Education in Queensland - 2005 & Beyond

by R.W. Bro. Peter J. Hansen PJGW

Background:

The present state of organized Masonic education in Queensland is nothing to be proud of. Indeed, if you examine the rest of the Masonic world, you very quickly discover you would be hard pressed to find another jurisdiction which offers less educational support of its membership. While some may find this a fairly harsh assessment, it never the less appears to be the case. It is, however, difficult to engender a desire to engage in any form of Masonic learning when, for generations, successive administrators have determined that any form of structured Masonic education across the whole jurisdiction had no priority in their view of the future for Freemasonry.

An examination of Freemasonry in Queensland since the cessation of hostilities in 1945 reveals a pattern of inordinate growth mirrored in every jurisdiction in Australasia and the rest of the Anglo-Saxon world. Likewise, an equally predictable steady decline from the late 1950's which continues unabated to this very day. The heady days of the decade from 1945 were filled with a never ending supply of new members, multiple degree workings and no time for much else. What a former President of the Board of General Purposes referred to as "The Sausage Factory Era."

What our recent history tells us quite clearly is that, almost without exception, every Freemason in Queensland today has had no formal Masonic education and that the brethren who have pursued their interests in a search of the principles, philosophy and history of this wonderful fraternity have done so on their own volition.

On this assessment, and with an average age of 69, a large portion of the existing membership of freemasons within the jurisdiction will display complete disinterest towards any moves to now introduce Masonic education.

Structural Reform:

Looking at the provision of some form of education course in isolation, I believe has little chance of success without some fundamental structural reform of Grand Lodge.

The need for reform becomes more apparent if an examination of the present state of membership in all 150+ Grand Lodges throughout the world is made. The figures reveal some interesting statistical information.⁴

Freemasonry is in serious decline in Australia and to lesser extent in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America. In most of the rest of the Masonic world there is no decline, membership is growing. In many jurisdictions the growth is slow but nevertheless there is growth, not decay.

It is somewhat ironic that the jurisdictions suffering numerically are also the ones where membership of Freemasonry is most easily obtained. In most of the Masonic world, becoming a Master Mason takes from three to five years. The requirement to learn, and prove one's readiness is paramount and without adequate proof of proficiency there is no advancement. The concept of making a Master Mason in a few short months as is the case here, or in a USA based One Day Course, is practically unknown outside the AngloSaxon based jurisdictions.

When you seriously consider that in this jurisdiction three out of every four new members to Freemasonry do not extend their membership beyond five years there must be a realization that so very much of what Freemasonry is attempting to achieve goes directly to waste. Structural reform, I believe, is no longer optional, it's mandatory.

The structural reform necessary revolves basically around individual private lodges being given more latitude to chart their own course. I believe the days where everything is dictated down the organizational structure are over. If any other proof be necessary, the current attrition rate of 2 per day, with two-thirds of the loss resulting in resignation and strike-offs for non-payment of dues is unsustainable, even in the short

term. A study in 1995 within the Grand Lodge of South Australia examined the reasons men leave masonry.⁵ The largest area of dissatisfaction was with the actions of Grand Lodge. None of the areas of dissatisfaction in that study, in my mind, could not be resolved with some give and take and an understanding that the methods and procedures of fifty years ago which are still being applied are no longer appropriate. There is little doubt, in my mind, if a similar survey was conducted in Queensland, a similar finding would result.

What should the Education Committee do:

The Committee Chairman has supplied some topics for discussion and I will now comment on each item on the agenda.

Provision of education material for specific groups, such as Entered Apprentices, Fellow Crafts, Master Masons, Wardens (preparation for Lodge Master) etc.

Provision of educational material for each degree is mandatory. This should also include the provision to the prospective mason. The best program I have seen in recent times is the New Zealand Grand Lodge Mentoring Program.⁶ It is professionally produced and user friendly in its presentation.

Educational services must also be monitored and a system of performance indicators established. This should be done at Lodge level.

Collation and assessment of current UGLQ material.

All existing material should be assessed. Any material considered relevant to the needs of masons today should be converted to a .doc or .pdf file format and made available to all Freemasons through the UGLQ web-site.

Obtaining and assessing educational material in use in other jurisdictions, with a view to possible modification to suit Queensland requirements.

This is vital. It is totally unnecessary to re-invent the wheel. Converting material to suit local needs should also be permitted at lodge level. The 'one size fits all' approach to directing the use of educational material should no longer apply.

Investigation of different educational methods, such as lecture, self assessment material, computer-based material, travelling lecturers, etc.

1. The provision of educational services should have a multi-pronged approach.
2. A wide range of education material should be made available to lodges and to individual masons.
3. Lodges and individual masons should be able to choose themselves how their particular needs will be met from the material available.
4. Assessment should be done at individual and lodge level. 5. All educational material should be computer based. 6 Lecturers should firstly be computer based.
7. The highest level of structured educational services should be district level.
8. The office of AGSWks should disappear and be replaced by a District Manager.
9. The District Manager to assist (*not insist*) lodges with educational programs.

Consider running educational seminars at strategic locations from time to time.

Educational seminars will be a failure unless individual lodges and the brethren in them are prepared to acknowledge a collective need for educational services. Seminars would be better carried out at Lodge or District Manager level

Any form of educational seminar should be directed by an educator, not necessarily a grand lodge officer.

Consider to what extent, if any, education should be mandatory for new members.

If we are to learn anything from what is happening in non Anglo-Saxon portion of the Masonic world, it should be that education for new members at all stages of the initiation process is not negotiable. Personally, I find it ironic, that we all know and understand that to progress at any level of the society in which we all reside the pursuit of knowledge and training is mandatory. Yet, many men come to Freemasonry and in return for the honour of membership, contribute nothing in return.

There is a lodge operating in Queensland today working the principles of yearly spacing of degrees as a minimum. The completion of educational (both oral and written), ritual, attendance and visiting requirements before advancement between degrees. That Lodge is Millennium Masonic Lodge No.534.⁷

The Future:

1. The role of Grand Lodge in the provision of educational services should be solely one of facilitator, and nothing more.
2. Individual lodges will either take to, or ignore this educational initiative and there is a certain degree of inevitability it will not be universally accepted.
3. To provide for members in lodges (*showing no interest*) who wish to embrace educational advancement, some form of structure needs to be established at District Manager level.
4. Grand Lodge can establish a system of Lodge Accreditation and offer some inducement, such as reducing grand lodge dues by 50%, for lodge compliance.
5. Office in Grand Lodge should have as a prerequisite, the gaining of a degree of educational competency.
6. All Masons seeking higher office or any office of Grand Lodge should have and produce a comprehensive Masonic CV. The Masonic CV should detail their whole service of Freemasonry, not just within Craft lodge.

Conclusion:

1. This Education Committee must succeed. Firstly, as one very necessary step in stopping the bleeding of numbers in this jurisdiction. And secondly, to raise the level of awareness and meet the needs of younger members who will take the fraternity to the year 2050 and beyond.
2. I further believe the Committee should also include among its members — R.W. Bro. Richard King & W. Bro. Don Barry of Camp Hill Lodge and also V.W. Bro. Jonathon Ruddick of Gatton. These brethren have much to contribute in the field of educational services and are actively involved in the provision of educational material in their own way at the present time.
3. There also needs to be clear and unequivocal support from the President and members of the Board of General Purposes and also from the incoming Board President and his team.
4. There should be minutes kept of all meetings and those minutes should be published on the Grand Lodge web- site,
5. There should be regular updates made available to all lodges on the progress of the work of the Committee both through the magazine and on the Grand Lodge web-site.
6. The members of the Committee should be known to all Freemasons and be prepared to both speak to and answer questions regarding the work of the Education Meeting if called upon to do so in any Lodge meeting.
7. Any member of the Committee who is not prepared to pull his weight in the work of the committee should be prepared to take the appropriate action and retire.
