

Speech to Guildhall Lodge, Oklahoma

By Thomas C. Jackson, PGM, Minnesota

At the Petroleum Club, September 7, 2011

Guildhall Lodge brothers, and guests.

I am very pleased to join you on this beautiful evening, to share with you this wonderful festive board. My compliments go to the planners, and to Worshipful Master Dunaway for an excellent venue and meal, and to Robert Davis who invited me to speak.

I will do my best to provide you a topic of interest.

Before THAT, I'm going to tell you about myself, because it will help you understand how I came to the perspective I will outline today.

As mentioned in the introduction, I am a PGM of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, having served in 2008-09, and am an honorary PGM of the GL of Cyprus, on whose behalf I have played the thrilling game of jurisdictional politics and helped them win recognition, in spite of England's reluctance, as one of the newest grand lodges in the international family of recognized groups.

My interests as a grand lodge officer, and in the years since, have been largely focused on the area of revitalization, along with my foreign entanglements.

I obviously didn't listen to Washington when he warned about those.

Besides Freemasonry, I also have a deep affinity and prior history of volunteerism with my college fraternity, and am waist deep in a project to finally deliver on the promise of connecting this fraternity-friendly collegiate pool of fellows to Masonic lodges which can often provide a healthy post-college step for these young men and a massive boost to our numbers.

Are there any college fraternity men in the audience?

It's a topic for another day, but I want you to know that, I believe, jurisdictions that attempt to start a "university lodge" are almost certainly doing it wrong.

But like I said, that's a topic for another day. Or maybe for the pub this evening.

Tonight I would like to address the topic of, "The Forgotten Freemason." This is a fellow who MIGHT become a Freemason if we were to catch him at the right stages of his development. Or he might be too old for us to reach in time. As a group, I fear though, men like him represent a LOST GENERATION. I've brought a clip with me, a movie preview that will give you a visual...

[Show YouTube clip <http://www.youtube.com/v/5y28R-ZWP9A>]

Not to pick on Matthew McConaghy, but his example is legion. Did you catch his age? 35, and living with his parents. We see 'men' like his character in films such as the Dumb and Dumber movies. Anything with Chris Farley. Our Idiot Brother – not my actual brother, but the current movie of that title.... These movies reflect the cultural reality.

Here's another:

[Show You Tube clip <http://www.youtube.com/v/Yxk6wS8SYIs>]

How old were those fellows sitting around the living room in the afternoon? 30? And another:

[Show You Tube clip <http://www.youtube.com/v/XrBJ0G1ZOJ4>]

I cringe any time this commercial comes on. These 20-somethings are actual customers, extolling praise for a company called Game Fly, which is like Net Flix for video gamers. These are probably not recruitment prospects. What they are, are casualties of war. A cultural war.

Seriously -- Let me ask a question of those of you who are, oh, 40 or older. When is the last time that you said you were going over to some other fellow's home to... PLAY!?! --In a non-sports related context. Sure, we play football. But I remember as I got older, IN JUNIOR HIGH, when I consciously lowered my voice and said I was going to go "play a game of hoops, Mom." By 11 or 12 there was no talk of "playing" even though back in those days we had video games. Pong. Mario Brothers.

Today, our culture tells these fellows that, well, *playing* is what boys or even men in their 20s and 30s do. These are the men, the boys I want Freemasonry to rescue.

With this context in mind of what the average boy or man does on a Wednesday evening in September, instead of joining us at the Petroleum Club, I thought I would explain some of the projects we've taken on and how we are addressing this *freakin' cultural wasteland*.

We'll get back to the Lost Generation.

Each of our revitalization projects aims to increase a man's involvement in the lodge from a lower level to a higher one. I view lodge participation on a spectrum, when it comes to revitalization, with the goal being to increase participation and involvement wherever the man starts. Experience shows that having more, even if smaller lodges promote a higher level of average involvement per man.

One of the high-points of my year as grand master was to have signed the charter petitions of two new lodges that we started; these represent the first new, startup, evening lodges formed

in Minnesota in 25 years. Before signing these new charters, I told the assembled masters and wardens from my seat in the Grand East that we are simply out of the habit of starting new lodges, and far too practiced at closing or merging those we have.

Nationally, there are anywhere from zero to perhaps six lodges formed each year. HALF of these in the past decade have been Traditional Observance lodges. You can give yourselves a round of applause as one of the icons of this movement.

I assume most of you are founders of this lodge or of the Tulsa Traditional Observance lodge, true? As you well know, starting a lodge is harder than it may seem from the outside. I commend you for this work.

Half of the other half of new lodges formed in the US during the past decade, that is, about 25% of all lodges formed in the US going back even 20 years, have come from the GL of DC. I will explain shortly their approach to this successful effort.

So it was a rather big deal to start up two new lodges back home.

In this effort, I worked with a group of dedicated young leaders from around my state, who've done the heavy lifting. We've done it – not me. Nothing would have happened without them. I was the one pushing from the back, encouraging and rallying during all those late night “what if” discussions we had.

I tell you all this so you understand I want to help others find their entry into Freemasonry. I want to find a way to deliver Freemasonry's gifts to society as a whole, and then to ensure we have vibrant lodges when they arrive. Our tactics have been to encourage involvement, lodge formation, solvency and membership stability, and a few other items I will describe later in this talk.

OK. That's the introduction. There will be a middle section, and then we can all hope, a extraordinary conclusion. If I fail you in any way and you begin to get bored, please, do EVERYONE a favor, and ask me a question...

Ah, any questions?

I want to discuss the impact of new lodges as a revitalization technique, but first would like to survey the field from a bit higher altitude. Help me list the innovations that have taken place in Masonry recently, will you? Say over the past forty years?

Traditional Observance – or Traditional Practice

Use of ciphers in most jurisdictions

One Day Classes – love ‘em or hate ‘em

Lodge Education Programs and LEOs

Repair of most Prince Hall relationships

Relaxation of some language on Masonic Solicitation.

The mind reels from the pace of such rapid change. Doesn't it?

Another key innovation is the rediscovery of Affinity Lodges. I say rediscovery, because I am convinced that in the golden era, pre WWI, much of new lodge formation centered around a specific affinity, whether the members named it that or not. New lodges may have been job related, employer or union related, shift related, town or neighborhood related, or perhaps were connected to a Shrine unit or another interest group. To this way of thinking, a traditional practices lodge can be one form of an affinity group. Affinity is simply an additional point of connection that helps bond a group of brothers together. I don't believe a single lodge can be all things to all brothers. Instead, an affinity strategy helps brothers (or prospects) of similar interests gravitate toward specific lodges.

The Grand Lodge of DC has formed a new lodge every 18 months for the past twenty years. They've doubled their membership in that time, and their count of lodges. These are small lodges, and for my part I am convinced that these are a bigger success story than any big, ponderous lodge such as my home lodge. Because with small lodges, every man has a job to do. Their affinity ranges from specific languages, to ritual variations, to professions, historical interests, and lodges to support universities. All are small-to mid-sized, but thriving. To compare and contrast, my home lodge has 650 brothers, 200 of whom we see at least once per year. The rest are in other states, or they no longer drive, or [air quotes] "life is busy". You know the type of lodge. My new lodge, [Sir Winston Churchill](#), has 45 men now, of whom we see 42 on a regular basis. Three are working out of state and visit when they can. A Traditional Observance lodge would feel more comfortable with our arrangement: required RSVPs, higher fees, festive boards, and certainly, vibrant presentations and expectations of every member.

Long ago, had my home lodge split into four or six smaller lodges over time, because of a Code requirement or ceiling, with all the groups meeting at different times at the same building, and with the resulting involvement of four or six full sets of officers instead of a single set, our brethren would be substantially more involved *on average*, leading to a healthier outcome for Masonry. Peripheral brothers would step up to take on roles that were not filled. I no longer believe big lodges are a healthy evolution. Of course, being dragged into this change wouldn't work. Members would have to choose this course themselves, and have the positive attitude essential to any such culture change.

As a new lodge, the choice was before us at the beginning. Was our BEST PURPOSE to study Churchill, the roots of our ritual and other aspects of our English nature? So much of our past had been lost to the rise and precipitous fall of big lodge, social club Masonry. Just like Traditional Observance lodges, we could explore what our forebears did so well.

Or, was our best purpose to take an opportunity where so much scrutiny was on us as a new lodge, and create a teaching lodge, a model lodge? Contemplating this, we had the idea of turning the word “Emulation” on its head, to not just practice Emulation Work, the predominant British ritual, but to be an EMULATABLE lodge. Without knowing it, our visitors would study US, to their benefit, if we were good enough.

A third path was suggested, because with four, and now five men who had been, are, or who will be grand master, we may have easily slipped into a role of serving as the lodge that would get things done for the grand master – a project lodge – to serve any grand officer who asked. Pragmatic, I suppose, if not inspiring.

Historical lodge... Model Lodge... Service lodge...

Which of these, do you think is closest to the Traditional Practices model?

[DISCUSSION]

The question remains, now three years later. In a sense, we are doing all three. This gives us a dynamic unrest, and it's in the ongoing conversation that we continue to derive benefit. We are inward focused, with a vibrant educational mission and core, strongly supported by the brethren. And we are outwardly focused, generating four festive boards a year and several big events, our recent Atlantic Brotherhood Summit and Masons in Motion are examples. The ABS brought in a dozen or more Masons from the UK's Internet Lodge for a series of events, including a riverboat cruise, festive board and a British Third Degree exemplification that was witnessed by several hundred Masons. Our Masons in Motion event is a group of Masons running the Twin Cities Marathon this coming October 2nd, which was designed to raise charitable donations from all Minnesota lodges. We embarked on these events in spite of our being the youngest lodge in our state, with no building, no real money, and 'only' 45 men. Finally, our grand lodge-centric view keeps us keenly aware of our job as role models, and where we can, we assist grand lodge officers who ask.

I'll tell you this much: We prefer to call ourselves an Affinity lodge, versus a Traditional Observance lodge, though we have many, if not all the trappings. Informal polling suggested that, statewide, our brethren prefer the Affinity label to Traditional Observance. This may cut to the core of a problem with TO lodges: how one defines them.

“Problem” may be too strong a word. How about “Barrier to wider acceptance.”

You know more about Traditional Observance or Traditional Practice lodges than I do. So, please accept my notions as an example of the perceptions that are out there.

Any questions? Heh.

So we were aware of some ‘baggage’ with this ‘movement’ of returning to our roots. But we wanted some of the good things that we’d learned from leaders in the Masonic Restoration movement. Some of these leaders are here today.

During our formation, when we sniffed around, we found that traditional lodges – well, let me re-phrase that. MAINSTREAM lodges, are a bit scared of you, of all Traditional Practices lodges. They don’t know if they can do what you do. They feel somewhat insulted actually, as if your mere presence says they are doing it wrong. They don’t know if they can keep it up if they tried to DO WHAT YOU DO. And because the definition is still slippery, they have a hard time pinning down whether they are doing it right IF THEY TRY. So they duck and cover when the subject comes up.

We had all this in mind when creating Churchill and MacArthur lodges. The question on our minds was, is our best purpose to be inward focused Masons and an inward focused lodge? Or are we outward focused? Can we be both?

I know what is easier. I know what is safer.

Heck, I know what is probably better for myself strictly as an individual Mason and seeker.

But that isn’t the road we’ve taken, in developing the culture of Churchill Lodge. In this age of cocooning it is less risky and very comfortable to hunker down, individually, or with our families or small groups, and avoid the agora. --The marketplace. But which of these philosophies would usher in the best future for our friends, our community, our state and our grand lodge?

Not to mention, the kids of this lost generation.

That is the pivot point that I came to, which frustrates me about modern lodges, ALL lodges. The frustration is the same, whether they be mainstream lodges or traditional observance lodges.

We Masons lack deep engagement in our world today. We have the inheritance, the responsibility even, for ALL THIS GREAT STUFF! Yet we hide it under a bushel. Our focus is maddeningly - selfishly - inwardly focused. We’re monkish in our reserve, yet in the middle ages only a very few monks were able to hide themselves away in solitude and study. Most of them engaged with the world as a face of Godly service to humanity, in contrast to the more

imperious priests. For a moment, picture Friar Tuck, just one of the fellows, or the Christian Brothers, happily making their brandy and wine for the townfolk, compared to the image of the priest presiding over high church before he retreats to his cloister? Today, what should be our best lodges, have a tendency to carry on like a group of modern St. Jeromes or those other cave-dwelling, aesthetic monks, and worship at the flame of knowledge but with NO CALLING TO USE IT TO SPARK INSIGHT AND DEEPENING WITHIN OTHERS. At risk of being a tiresome nag, in many speeches I therefore have challenged my generation of Masons, my lodges, to impact society in a visible, authentic and fearless way. What good is it, I ask, to know the nuanced differences between Anderson's first and second constitutions, but without an ability to proclaim Masonic Values – interchangeable with the highest aspirations of Western Civilization – to young men in the lodge, to prospectives, to our families and neighbors, and our fellow workers?

How long can the Craft last without an ability to readily proclaim our alternative course to a society that has fallen so far from its prime?

To engage in this fight, we've adopted a Culture of the Lodge document, discussed with each petitioner, and signed by all of us, along with our bylaws.

Key points of the Culture of Churchill Lodge:

1. Members must, must, must remain active in their home lodge. Our intent is to spread ideas around.
2. We discuss a pragmatic philosophical issue at each meeting. Examples include the nature of lodge charitable donations, raising self-sufficient children, how 'tough love' works, and a roundtable about the most impactful mentors in each of our lives.
3. We discuss a lodge management problem at most meetings. Examples include NPD management, encouragement of volunteers, and lodge promotion. These discussions often occur after the formal close, when we are enjoying a meal together or gathering around the firepit.
4. We have a limit of 60 men, and some members are challenging us to limit the lodge to 40. Perhaps triggering formation of a new lodge when we hit the hard ceiling of 60.
5. We've agreed to a surprising level of transparency. Our discussions and many of our "sensitive issues" are reviewed on our website, and with our home lodges. The intent is to bring simmering issues to the surface. We realize we face many of the same problems other lodges face. Prospective members that shy away because we are dealing with real-world issues are pretty much like fair weather friends, eh?

6. Members are encouraged to engage as leaders in their home lodges, but also in politics, church, etc. We have two brothers stepping up to run for local school board and city council seats.

7. Visitation is encouraged and visitors are 'rushed' in the sense that we make every effort to engage visitors in our conversations, to discuss problems and solutions that will help them, and NOT for the purpose of recruitment.

8. Collaboration with other lodges is highly sought after. Our big event in June, bringing those British Masons to the US for the Atlantic Brotherhood Summit meant we asked several neighboring lodges to assist with greeting, and to participate in our festive board.

All of these are steps that take positive action, going beyond study, and self improvement. The aim of the Craft must be to result in Action if we are to survive. Study and purity of form are not enough. We have been given a great gift, and I would that we were all to act as mirrors, reflecting our light outward, professing our values.

I imagine building a network of lodges that train engagement in professing our values.

In contemplating this, I am indebted to the great state of Oklahoma, and one of your own. He's a friend I haven't met face-to-face yet, but *I know him*. Brett McKay of the Art of Manliness website has tapped into something that I use every week in my fraternal work. Do some of you from Veritas Lodge know Brett? Please pass along my greetings. I use AOM topics to derive discussion items at my lodges and with my collegiate fraternity chapters. A dozen of our brothers at Churchill Lodge have similar engagement points where they seek to make a substantial difference in the lives of young men at crucial points: With high school students, or young adulthood, in fraternal connections, at their first job. We engage in church, as professors, as scouting leaders or coaches. If we do this, new members will come. I've found that do-ers attract other do-ers to step up.

Our affinity then, is an external focus, but to do this we need a strong internal lodestar, a program where we challenge each other and teach each other to engage as best we can.

I know from speaking with you tonight that my perception of Traditional Observance is colored by my experiences back home with our local group. In fact, I wish I had a group like yours in Minnesota to point to as an example when the subject came up. Warm. Tightly connected to the jurisdiction. We could easily support similar lodges in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, and Rochester. Maybe a couple more. I find that our local lodge of the Traditional Observance movement still lacks 'warmth' and engagement with the broader jurisdiction and community.

Lodges can and should “feed us.” The pastor I had growing up told us how he would get so caught up in church politics and the day to day of giving his sermons, and in service, that he sometimes got dried up in a way. He had to break off and go somewhere so he, in turn, could recharge his spirit, and in his terminology, GET FED. Get fed. I always liked that metaphor. He would insist on his annual spiritual retreat. He would attend other churches and sit in the congregation.

I think that his example points the way for us in Minnesota, and may hold a clue for the role of a good lodge elsewhere. It recharges us, so we can get back to the front lines in the culture wars. Because we are, whether we know it or not, cultural warriors. We are called to fight for our values in a world that needs us so desperately.

The videos I showed you are snapshots of a terrible waste. These boys haven’t been challenged, haven’t had the right discipline, and they are left woefully unprepared for life in the real world. Commercials generally make me ill – it seems every adult male is portrayed as a dunderhead or child, compared to the wisdom of his wife. The “Peter Pan” games-playing commercials are even worse. How can these young men waste their passion on things with so little meaning?

I call on you, the best and brightest of Masons, to use what you’ve learned from the Craft to engage outsiders even when it is scary and when the room isn’t sympathetic. Get yourself outside of the lodge, and lead, work, profess your values, teach, inspire.

Call video games and reality TV what it is: A waste of time.

Pull those whom you can influence into opportunities for volunteerism, charity and lessons of manliness. Be that interesting old man in your neighborhood who knows how to fix things, or who recognizes someone having a sorrowful day, and knows how to give good advice.

Run for office, teach a community class, start these conversations at your home lodges.

So many kids come from broken homes. Give them a role model. Talk with them.

Individually, we can only reach out to a relative few. But, like in the film, *Pay It Forward*, if we reach a few, they, in turn may reach others, and so on, and so on...

Wherever you can engage, get out there and make something good happen. Be more than just a knowledge collector, a title collector, or a pin collector.

Thank you for your time this evening.

[On screen references were made to www.ChurchillLodge.org and to www.TheChairmen.org. You are free to review and take content from our websites, designed for this purpose.]