

# **Report on the Conference of Grand Masters of North America: Feb 16-20 2012 – Kansas City, Missouri**

The Grand Master and the Deputy Grand Master were privileged to represent the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario at the Conference of Grand Masters of North America. The conference was held at the Sheraton Downtown Atlanta Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri. Following is a short report on the Conference activities and some comments on general items of discussion among the participants.

This Conference is the premiere event for Grand Masters of the United States, Canada and Mexico. Many visiting delegations from other parts of the World are also in attendance.

The Conference is an incorporated body and there are 64 Grand Jurisdictions in the USA, Canada and Mexico, whose Grand Masters preside as Directors of the corporation.

This year, 59 of the 64 member jurisdictions were represented at the Conference. Over 800 delegates attended to represent these jurisdictions and other guest jurisdictions. The Conference theme in 2013 was **“Restore, Retain, Renew”**.

I was privileged to represent our Grand Lodge on the Time and Place Committee, which selected Omaha, Nebraska as the site for the Conference in 2017.

## **1 Conference of Grand Masters: Cultivating the Masonic Experience**

The primary activities include reports from Committees of the Conference and other bodies as well as a series of breakout sessions based on the Conference theme.

The following Committees or bodies made reports:

- National Masonic Foundation for Children
- Masonic Renewal Committee
- Masonic Service Association Report
- Committee on Information and Recognition
- George Washington Memorial Association
- MasoniChip International

These are primarily summary reports of activities of these Committees and bodies and more information can be found on either the associated website or from the Association’s Annual Report.

Concurrently with the Grand Masters Conference, the Grand Secretaries Conference of North America is held at the same location. M.W. Bro. Terry Shand represented our

Grand Lodge and the Scottish Rite of Canada was represented by the Grand Secretary General of Canada, Ill. Bro. Brian Gilkinson.

We were also privileged to attend the Demolay Breakfast sponsored by the Imperial Shrine.

## **2 Breakout Sessions:**

The 2013 sessions included the following:

### **Mentoring and Membership Retention:**

Robert Conley, PGM, MI

### **Grand and Local Lodge Business and Finance:**

Nick Cichielo, Grand Treasurer, Mo.

### **Technology in Today's Masonry:**

Mark Menard, Enable Companies

**Note: This topic dealt with the MORI Membership database system sold by the Enable Companies and already reviewed by our Grand Lodge several years ago.**

### **Changes in Family Structures & Impact on Masonry:**

Randy Rogers, PGM, OK

### **Youth Groups:**

Demolay, Job's Daughters, Rainbow

### **Lodge Officer Training Programs:**

Howard Dumhart & George Heflich, NJ

### **Local and Grand Lodge Relationships:**

Randy Rogers, PGM, OK

### **The IRS, Grand Lodge, Local Lodges and You:**

James Cole, Virginia

### **Masonic Restoration Foundation:**

Tom Jackson, PGS, PA

## **2.1 Individual Breakout Session Comments:**

### **2.1.1 Mentoring and Membership Retention:**

Robert D. Conley, PGM, MI

#### **M.W. Bro. Conley is an excellent presenter and spearheads the Grand Lodge of Michigan's Mentor Programmes**

Michigan is presently attracting approximately 2000 new members each year

In 2012, they dropped the suspension rate by a whopping 30%

The WW2 block of Masons is almost gone now

Mentors are hard to find today

New men today don't have mentors (role models, friends, coaches, etc.)

In Michigan, a member must apply to Grand Lodge to be a Lodge mentor. M.W. Bro.

Conley interviews each applicant before he can become a mentor

Michigan borrowed and adapted the Six Steps to Initiation program from the Grand Lodge of BC and the Yukon

#### **Awareness; Acquaintance; Acceptance**

A poll of their initiates revealed that in the top 10 reasons for joining:

- Fellowship and friendship (85%)
- A role for the family
- A role in the community

A poll of those who left revealed the top reason was that they were ignored (85%)

Of those who stayed – reason for staying – my Friends are here

What is the 'Brand' that you see in Masonry?(What picture do you see in the frame?)

What is the Brand that a non Mason sees?

Need to light the fire in new Masons – because of the friendship and fellowship that you find there

The 'brand' of Masonry is the view in my frame – is it smiling and happy? Does it represent fellowship?

This feeling doesn't come from the business meeting

The process of filling out the application and talking to the applicant is the beginning of fellowship; now is the time to give him a mentor

The Lodge circle of Friendship must be extended to include him

The Lodge needs to give the new man something tangible when he joins: a trinket, something motivational, a letter from the WM/DDGM/GM

We must establish effective, efficient and concise communication – especially to new members

Michigan has built a software application to track mentoring across the jurisdiction. It is available on their website Member portal

- Email is directed to members from inside the system not from an external mail server
- Every change in a candidates status sends an email to the Lodge Mentor and the Grand Lodge Chairman
- Only the mentors have access to the tracking stats – The Grand Lodge mentor oversees all Lodge mentors and gets a regular summary report on progress

The Grand Lodge of Michigan website has a list of programs to use to keep Brethren active – e.g. hobby night; who am I? (presenter gets to pick the presenter for next month, etc.)

Everything they do must be consistent with their ‘Brand’

### **2.1.2 Typical Masonic Issues in Tax and Finance:**

Jim Cole, PGM, Virginia

**NOTE: While this presentation is geared to American Grand Lodges and Lodges, it does have some key best practices listed that apply in our jurisdiction. Specifically – refer to Key Issues and Temple Corporations topics below.**

Topics to discuss (agenda):

- Importance of good controls
- Avoiding IRS problems
- Typical issues
- Issues from the audience
- Best practice

Communicate to the Brethren about Money:

- Budget
- Financial reports

Good Practices:

- Audits (external vs. internal)
- Segregate duties
- Dual cheque signing, plus 1-2 extra signers
- Reconcile bank/investment statements
- NO cheques signed by payee
- Receipts/supporting documents for all cheques
- Secondary (+) access to Investments

The IRS Story:

Every person and every entity OWES TAXES UNLESS – granted an exemption by the IRS

IRS Exemption:

- Brings special rules
- Reporting
- NO private benefit
- MAY owe taxes
- NO Lobbying
- Other special rules
- 501 (c ) expenditures

Lodge Federal Tax Exemption:

- Blanket exemption under Grand Lodge
- Required reporting
- Fiduciary report
- Each tax ID will have to report (990) separately if not on a group return

Avoiding IRS Problems:

- Payroll taxes
- If paid less than \$100 per year - no FICA/Medicare
- If less than \$50 per quarter – no FUTA tax

Typical Issue – UBIT

- Use of proceed (raised) does not matter
- Rent of debt encumbered property
- Rent of non-real property
- Advertising
- Catering business
- Sale of membership lists

What is Not Taxed – Exemptions:

- Interest
- Dividends
- Rents from real property (with no debt)
- Royalty income
- Gains or losses on sale of property

What is Not Taxed – Exemptions:

- Not “regularly carried on”
- Volunteer workforce
- Sale of donated merchandise
- Convenience of members
- Distribution of low cost (<\$9.70) items
- Conventions (registration fees, etc.)
- Sponsorship Income

Problems to/from a C-3:

- Payments/services to/from a 501 (c ) 3 to Lodge
- Payments/services to/from a Lodge to 501 (c ) 3
- Must be arm's length
- Must have a reasonable business purpose
- No rent free use of space/equipment
- Very little scrutiny – charitable donations

Typical Issues:

- Not filing form 990 or wrong form
- Wrong type of corporation setup
- Transfer of charitable funds to a 501 (c ) 10
- Paying taxes when not necessary
- No budget
- No audit
- Sloppy records

Temple Corporations:

- Often set up wrong
- May not have tax exemption
- Have no liquidation/withdrawal strategy
- Voting issues
- Funding issues

## **2.2 Items of note:**

### **2.2.1 Commission on Recognition**

The following notes were provided by R.W. Bro. Brian Gilkinson

Recognition is usually assessed using three criteria: legitimacy of origin, exclusivity of jurisdiction and adherence to the ancient landmarks, including a belief in God, an expression of His will in the V of the SL and refraining from any discussions on politics or religion.

The Commission reported on the following:

#### **Baja, California**

**The GL in Baja, California** under Jose Guzman currently meets standards of recognition.

#### **Bolivia:**

In Bolivia two states have declared GLs, however, the GL of Bolivia is a national GL with jurisdiction over the entire country and, therefore, the only GL in Bolivia meeting the requirements for recognition.

**Bulgaria:**

The commission recommends the suspension of relations with both competing GLs in Bulgaria until a resolution between them can be achieved.

**France:**

France is the scene of some progress regarding the GL National of France. New elections occurred last fall. However, the U.S. takes the position that no recognition should be extended for at least one more year while the UGL of E may wait two years to see how things develop.

**Mexico:**

Mexico had a split in the early 1990s, with the result that there are now two GLs in Cokoweila(?). The commission continues to monitor the situation but at present there is insufficient information to determine the issue of recognition.

**Paraguay:**

The same situation prevails in Paraguay where two competing GLs exist and reports are so conflicting that legitimacy of neither can be determined. It is thought that one of these GLs could be in a position subservient to the Supreme Council.

**Detroit:**

The International Free and Accepted Masons Incorporated of Detroit is reputed to be self-chartered in 1950. It purports to include craft, SR, Shrine members and men and women. It meets no standard of recognition.

**Tahiti:**

The GL of Tahiti meets standards of recognition.

**Prince Hall:**

Prince Hall – this issue of recognition will be addressed by the commission but the problem appears to be the exclusivity of jurisdiction standard of legitimacy. The commission requires evidence of agreement or treaty between GLs and their Prince Hall counterparts before extending recognition.

### **2.2.2 District Deputy Grand Masters:**

North American Jurisdictions have many ways of selecting District Deputy Grand Masters and Board Members (if they utilize Boards). Most jurisdictions appear to appoint their District Deputy Grand Masters – some by the Grand Master alone, others by means of recommendations from the Districts.

In many jurisdictions, the term of the District Deputy Grand Masters is longer than one year. Also, the duties and responsibilities of the District Deputy Grand Master are far more extensive than in our jurisdiction.

### **2.2.3 Social Networking;**

Seems that everyone is doing it. You are almost outdated if you don't participate in social networking in some fashion.

See notes below from R.W. Bro. Brian Gilkinson, on the presentation made at the Conference of Grand Secretaries on social networking.

### **2.2.4 Town Hall Forums:**

As I mentioned in my notes from 2012, a number of Grand jurisdictions are turning to Town hall forums to communicate with the grass roots of their jurisdictions. The primary reasons driving this style of communication remain as:

- A belief in getting back to face to face communication as the only real effective way to get a message across
- A realization that if you want to know what the brethren are thinking, we need to ask them and listen to them

Based on feedback from the Town Hall sessions held in Ontario during the last two years, the Brethren of this jurisdiction have enjoyed the sessions, the opportunity to ask questions of the Grand Master, and the frank and open discussion that followed.

### **2.2.5 Other tidbits and comments heard out and about:**

- Due to increasing costs, a number of Grand Lodges are doing extensive reviews of their administrative operations with the intention of increasing efficiency and becoming more cost conscious
- The GLBCY Six Step Program for initiates is getting widespread attention

### **2.2.6 Canada Lodge UD:**

Once again I had the privilege of discussing Canada Lodge UD with the Grand Master of the American-Canadian Grand Lodge of Germany (M.W. Bro. Paul Litteral Jr.).

Last year I mentioned that our Grand Lodge granted dispensation for one of his members to sit in the East in Canada Lodge UD, when our own V.W. Bro. Rick Fulford was unable to be present. M.W. Bro. Litteral granted similar dispensation at his end and so it was that a member of the American-Canadian Grand Lodge conducted a degree using our Constitution in Canada Lodge UD.

That Bro., W. Bro. Bill Hobbs, was not an attendee at the Conference but had travelled several hundred miles just to meet with M.W. Bro. Litteral. I had the distinct pleasure of meeting W. Bro., Hobbs for a very brief time. He was close to being overcome with emotion as he recounted how much his time in Kandahar at Canada Lodge U.D. had meant to him and the other Brethren on duty there.

Respectfully submitted,  
D. Garry Dowling  
Grand Master,  
Grand Lodge of Canada  
In the Province of Ontario

### **3 Conference of Grand Secretaries:**

Concurrently with the Grand Masters Conference, the Conference of Grand Secretaries was held.

The following notes on the presentation on Social Media were provided by R.W. Bro. Brian Gilkinson, who attended the Conference in his role as Grand Secretary General for the Scottish Rite. My thanks to R.W. Bro. Gilkinson for sharing his comments.

#### **3.1.1 Social Media Presentation:**

An interesting presentation on social media was given by Eric Smith, a young Mason and Worshipful Master from Indiana. He has a background in education and owns a company known as Black Star Consultants. He can be located at [eric@bscevv.com](mailto:eric@bscevv.com)

He believes that communication is the biggest issue facing Masonic bodies today. We have great ideas and timeless principles to convey but need new tools to communicate them to young people in modern society.

Tools of communication were reviewed. Standard mail service is too slow for a society that, good or bad, wants instant gratification. Telephones are not a suitable communication tools for large groups. Much of society has become de-sensitized to email, deleting much of what they receive after, at best, a quick scan of what is received daily. Much gets ignored, scanned, deleted and forgotten. The goal of good communication is to stimulate interaction.

What is social media? In short, it is all forms of electronic communication where users create online communities. It is a way to bring connection among many people, with three primary goals:

1. Communication – of an event or description
2. Interaction – by creating a dialogue and forums where people can respond
3. Community – the creation of which sets social media apart from other forms of communication. The dialogue between people is greatly enlarged by the use of social media.

There is a caveat. Social media is not a panacea that will solve all problems but it is a useful and increasingly important communication tool for those who wish to remain relevant in today's society. Ignore it at your peril.

Types of social media mentioned and briefly discussed were:

Facebook – 1 in 8 people have a Facebook account. This equates to roughly one billion people in the world. 50% of those people log onto Facebook daily. 350,000 of those access Facebook by a mobile device. 30% are between the ages of 25-34, however, the fastest growing demographic in Facebook use is those 50 years or older. The advantage Facebook offers is the ability to connect with family, share pictures and other information no matter the distance apart those communicating may be from each other.

Twitter – it is the quickest growing form of social media, experiencing a growth of 714% since 2009. Again, the fastest growing demographic using Twitter is the group over 50. It is a quick way to get news but there is a limitation of 140 characters per message. This can challenge the ability to communicate effectively the intention and meaning of a message along with the message itself.

You Tube – the ability to share videos

Pinterest – is a site primarily for girls that deals with interests such as crafting.

Google+ - is a Facebook like site

Foursquare – a geographic locator site

Linked in – an information sharing site for business professionals

Tumble, Instagram are others.

Eric's advice is not to attempt to use all of these but to concentrate on the larger sites and those that give the most advantage for your activities.

Application to Masonry

Facebook has three levels of use: GL level, local lodges, and private Masonic groups.

The use of Facebook by GL provides information on Freemasonry for young and old members and prospective members, it can deal with administration concerns for its members and is an opportunity to put a human face of the GL by engaging in a dialogue with people.

Local lodges should have a Facebook page to publicize local lodge events to a local Masonic community or district.

Private groups of Masons generally could be of diverse interests but with a common requirement that you must be a Mason to join the group. In his experience, the GL checks prospective members against its data base to approve an individual for entry into a group.

Setting up a Facebook account

Correct and detailed information is critical to the impression the organization will make.

It is also critical that the page be updated regularly.

Content types

Status updates to track progress within Freemasonry, sharing of pictures of events or individuals represent one of the most interactive aspects of facebook use and the provision of links to websites where much more information is available to those interested are several uses that can be made of social media.

Examples of content material

GL level – GM itinerary, special events, calendar, concordant body events, history, biographies, How to Join information – essentially any GL activity can be communicated to a wide audience.

Lodge level – ladies' nights, open houses, installation notices, memorial services, public service events (e.g. CHIP)

Masonic Group page – It is important to stress that nothing that occurs within the tyled recesses of the lodge should be posted on Facebook for once it is, it is there forever. This is the danger of using social media unwisely and carelessly.

Twitter is a similar media to Facebook, however, each communication is limited to 140 characters. Mr. Smith likened Facebook to a slow moving creek and Twitter to a fast moving river.

Best practices in the use of social media

Use “we” and “our” not “I” or “my” – remember you are part of a community. Don’t appear ignorant and try not to look like an idiot. Check spelling and grammar as all impressions on social media are lasting ones. Include all relevant information in your posts if you want people to rely on them for sound information and assistance. Likewise, be consistent. If you commence to post on social media you should post at regular intervals to appear active and relevant.

If leaders in an organization use social media the practice will trickle down. Again, do not post or discuss confidential matters on social media sites. Never argue on social media. All is kept and retained and harsh words or controversy cannot be controlled once posted. Be civil, be polite and never appear condescending. A good impression is often the biggest asset of an organization and it should be protected. Delete and block all who communicate with you using profanity. If someone has a grievance, address it politely and move on. Harry Truman once said, “Free speech is not an excuse for careless talk.” Brothers in their communications should uphold and reflect the principles and values of the fraternity. There are nasty consequences for doing otherwise both for the individual and the fraternity.

Teach people how to use social media appropriately and these issues can be avoided.

Without education, inappropriate communication should attract suspension only as a last resort. Eric recommends reference to the GL of Mass. It has a Code of Conduct regarding the use of social media. The Gr. Sec. is Arthur Johnson.

It is important, notwithstanding the potential dangers, to create a Facebook page before someone does it for you. Always use a trusted administrator and a trusted language list. Social media is where to meet and make contact with the younger generation, many of whom are seeking an opportunity to be part of a community, give back to society and be part of something bigger than ourselves. It is a great opportunity for Freemasonry to introduce the general public to the mysteries of the order and whet appetites for more knowledge and a greater experience. However, many of the younger generation use neither telephones nor email. Failing to embrace social media and use it effectively means losing communication with our target audience.

Hootsuite is a social media application for smartphones and allows one to manage and schedule the posts they make to maximum advantage. It integrates with Facebook and other media. Facebook Pages Manager performs a similar function but only for Facebook. Twitter also has post management and scheduling programs.

Eric’s contact information

Website [www.bscevv.com](http://www.bscevv.com)

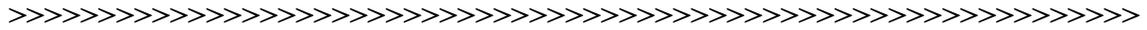
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End of Notes on Conference of Grand Secretaries:



My thanks to Ill. Bro. Gilkinson for his contributions to this report.

All the above is respectfully and fraternally submitted:

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