

COMMANDER'S ADDRESS FOR 2010 ANNUAL SESSION:

Brother, I, too own a television set, but that does not keep me home on Lodge night. I have never yet had one of the characters on television come off the screen and shake my hand. They have never offered me the warm friendship that my Lodge Brothers do.

These words, from the recent trestleboard of Washington Lodge #3, describe well the importance of Freemasonry and its unique position in our lives. To step from the small group of brothers in our Symbolic lodges up to the Scottish Rite is to truly progress to the "University of Freemasonry." The work the officers of our Rite carry on is therefore of the utmost importance in furthering the meaning of Masonry to our members and those who will become our members.

Although our progress is not always steady, I believe that all sections of our Rite here in Vermont have advanced in this past year. Our overall numbers of members have continued to decline, but our Rite itself is not declining so much as entered into a period of change- the change from the generations that joined before the Masonic collapse of the 1990's, to those who never knew those days of fuller lodge rooms and overflowing dining halls. Here are some of the changes that have occurred in the year just past.

In August Don Duquette became an Active member of the Supreme Council and my partner here in Vermont. He has been of the greatest assistance to me, and I know that in the year to come his influence will continue to expand. In particular, Don has worked closely with the Valley of Burlington and with its Learning Center, and has also become the Valley Advisor for Montpelier. He has earned his hat with hard work.

Also of significance this year has been the completion of our State web site, which is owned and operated by this Council. We are now in the process of changing web masters from Mason Pratt to Richard Boise, the secretary of the Valley of Rutland. I cannot thank these brothers enough for their contribution to our Rite. The calendar alone has been invaluable in quelling the confusion about our Valley schedules. On our site, vtscottishrite.com, there is a wealth of material that should be used more in our publications. Please take the time to look at it.

Another important change this year has been the State wide adoption of the "21st Century Officers Model." One immediate result I have noticed is that almost every officer in every Valley was present for installation this May, rather than the handful which showed up to be installed in the past. This shows that the positions are important to these men- a key move away from the apathy that has plagued us in the past. I have asked the main office to change both their certification forms and MDS to allow our secretaries to properly record their officers under the new designations.

I have created an Administrative Board for this Council to carry on the day by day State wide work of our Rite. In the past this was done solely by the Deputy, but just as I am trying to reshape our Valley officers into management teams, so I am striving to create a management team for our State wide work. Currently, this group is composed of the Active members and our secretary and treasurer. If the Valleys would like to have someone designated to sit on this board that may not be a bad idea at all. Such a brother might become the Valley advisor. At this time only Montpelier has a Valley advisor. This position is not meant to counsel the Valley, but to inform the Deputy of what the Valley is doing.

Burlington has done very excellent degree work this year. The Consistory held two reunions, in November and April, and did a good job with both. We will not have a "Scottish Rite Day" this autumn, but perhaps we can return to an October reunion of Consistory work somewhere in the State- I would suggest in Rutland to better

involve our more southern brothers; and not for candidates but for our general membership- that is, not the top two degrees, but one of the others.

Montpelier has continued excellent degree presentations, but the management of the Valley has declined. Two of their top officers have moved into Active positions, and they are still seeking to regain their footing. Almost completely lacking in older and more experienced members, they have had to invent the Valley afresh, which is not inherently a bad process, but it can be a difficult one.

Rutland has in my judgment made the largest strides forward this year. Degree work continues to improve and expand. Officer changes have seen promising leaders take control of key aspects of the Valley's affairs- they have excellent men in leadership positions. There has been a complete reorganization of the Valley, with new by-laws, the adaption of the new officer's model, and the creation of a more organized and active Administrative Council. Although they are the Valley with the smallest number of members, they continue to hold better and better meetings.

Brattleboro's core of leaders is determined to press forward through any obstacles. They have learned much in the hard knocks of Scottish Rite in our southern tier. They have been unable to expand their degree work, but they are focused on improving it. Also adapting the new Officers model, they have excellent and experienced leaders in key positions. I think it would be fair to say that they have progressed from talk to doing, and it is in doing, of course, that success can be found. And they continue to attract candidates, so there remains hope that their small core will grow. They have begun publishing a newsletter, have been regularly sending postcard notices of their meetings out to their membership and the lodges, and have family life events planned for the future. You know brothers, it is easy to go forward when there are no obstacles in the way; but real leadership goes forward even when the odds seem slim and the way steep. I have great respect for such brothers.

For this coming year, I have several initiatives in mind. The first, a return to an autumn Consistory reunion, I have already mentioned. Another is the rebuilding of this Council's investments, with an eye towards using the growth, however modest, to defray the amount of assessment on our membership. I also want to announce at this time the creation of a "Futures Committee" and to invite interested members to participate in it. We know roughly what our Rite will look like in three, five or ten years. It seems to me irresponsible for leadership not to have some agreed upon plan in place to deal with the future. Vague aphorisms like "we need to do more" must be replaced with decisions based upon real analysis.

I think we also need to revisit this Council's bylaws, which I feel are too complex and detailed to be useful for any but a short amount of time. I would like to see them simplified and shortened, to create the flexibility our future will demand. Laws cannot force success, but often stifle growth. Elaborate bylaws enshrine how we used to do it, rather than how we will meet the demands of the future.

Thank you:

Eric Ginette

Commander in Chief VT COD