

# **THE DEPUTY'S NEWSLETTER**

**November 2008**



**Sublime Princes of the Royal Secret:**

**In the November issue of the Northern Light considerable space is devoted to the "Re-pointing" of Scottish Rite Masonry. The illusion is of course to the renewal of the mortar between the stones of a building that weather has damaged over time. In the Master Mason degree we hear the Master say that the trowel is used to spread the cement of brotherly love and affection. Certainly it is this mortar that is corrupted first, allowing the stones in time to shift from place and fall. In pursuing the theme from Supreme Council to return our Rite to its roots as a Fraternal organization, remember that the weakest and most easily damaged part of our edifice is the cement that unites us into one society of friends and brothers.**

**Our Sovereign Grand Commander begins his remarks by saying "We need to change." Some of you may be wondering why this is true, so I thought I would give you a few facts about the Scottish Rite in Vermont. Our Rite reached its high point of development in 1982. At that time, there were seven Lodges of Perfection in the State. Haswell in Burlington lead the State with 1,254 members. Montpelier had 405; Delta in Rutland had 242; Webster Lodge in Brattleboro had 268 members. In 2007 Burlington had 415; Montpelier 335; Rutland 152; Brattleboro 189. The other Lodges of Perfection were extinct. Looked at another way, Burlington has lost 67% of her membership, Montpelier 17%, Rutland 41% and Brattleboro 30%.**

**We all know that Masonry in general has suffered a decline during this same time period. Yet Vermont is dead last in the Northern Jurisdiction in the percentage of Master Masons who have gone on to the Scottish Rite. And the most telling fact of all is that our losses are not primary from Death, nor even from Death and Demits, but from nonpayment of dues. A very large percentage of the Master Masons who join the Rite look at a few of our meetings and degrees, then go away, never to return. So those who say that the way we are doing things is the best way, that change cannot be considered, that change will damage us, well, I think they have some explaining of this history to do. You know what happens to a company whose customers have declined by 40%? They go out of business.**

**Our Supreme Council is working aggressively to change this situation and to help our Valleys. They have introduced what they call the "Hedgehog concept," pointing out that each of our decisions needs to be measured against the basic aims of "convenience, inspiration and enjoyment." This is not a suggestion, but a command from Headquarters. If Vermont was employing these ideas, I think most of our new initiates would not visit only long enough to take a look and then leave forever. We need to develop a new attitude about what we are doing. Hostility toward any suggestion of change must be replaced by a creative exploration of every option and idea. The brother who is suggesting a different approach or technique is not your enemy who is personally trying to destroy you, but the voice of the future trying to staunch the hemorrhaging of our Fraternity.**

How can the Valleys of Vermont utilize this directive in our work? I would suggest that we adapt a "Big Show" model. What are our strengths? Central of them all must be our degrees and their presentations. We are graced with the most wonderful degree system in all of Masonry, a system that explores and explains the meaning of Masonry as no other branch of Masonry does. But how are we using this great asset? Often by stressing the bare minimum of what is required, or even not meeting that standard. It is our meeting on degree day each month where we make or break our Valley. If a member takes the trouble to shower and shave, put on a shirt and tie, drive often very long distances to the meeting, only to be greeted by officers with an attitude of "let's get this over with as quickly as possible," a meeting shorn of every embellishment or consisting of only a poorly done degree, in itself reduced to its most minimum form, how can anyone blame them if they think as they are starting their car to drive home "not worth having come."

Under the Big Show model, each meeting is envisioned by its officers as the great test of the Valley, with the members the judges. Anything and everything that can be invented to increase the member's convenience, inspiration and enjoyment must be done. As officers of the Rite, your job is to make that meeting the most memorable the members have ever attended. When they start the car to drive home, they must be thinking "Wow, I'll have to bring Bob with me next time." As members, your job is to not quietly complain among yourselves, but realize you are customers and you deserve full service for your dues and your time. Let the officers know your ideas, complain to the administration councils, suggest how things can be done better, volunteer to do the things you know should be done.

The Big Show begins the moment the member enters the door. Who is there to greet them and make them feel welcome? Do the candidates wander around wondering if they are at the right place? Are visitors shunned and left to search for the restroom? Is there a meal?

When the meeting opens, is it little more than the Declaration and display of the Lights? Has the Valley nothing to communicate to its members? I know when I joined I was impressed by how poorly the Valley opening compared with my Blue Lodge. There was no welcoming of guests, no introductions. No flag ceremony. No tiling of the Lodge room. No officer duties- hey, in fact there were no officers, just a couple fellows in yellow hats standing anywhere. The officers should exercise their creativity and have something new and interesting for every meeting. We are in the business of show biz: pomp and visual effects have succeeded in creating enjoyment for spectators for thousands of years, and works just as well today.

One reason our membership knows nothing about the Rite is because they are taught nothing at our meetings. Even our officers feel there is nothing to know because most have never been taught much of anything. I've been told that everyone is too bored by knowledge about the Scottish Rite and would rather know nothing. I wonder if there is a relationship between this attitude and apathy. Under the Big Show model, education is a component of every meeting, so that Light we talk about gets displayed. Study after study shows that young men join the Rite truly searching for "more light." They have studied on the internet and usually are very knowledgeable about Masonry. The number one reason I have heard for men becoming disinterested in the Scottish Rite is the disappointment they felt when their expectations for knowledge were not met. Just as the Third degree is not all there is to being a Mason, so our Rite is not only composed of watching our degrees. What

**do they mean, what is their message? Men enjoy thinking of these things, and the message they contain is inspirational.**

**Following the degree work, what's the hurry? I have clocked five minutes between the dropping of the gavel and an empty parking lot. Why not invite the members to a social period following the formal work of the evening or morning? There is nothing wrong with some coffee or beers and friendly social exchanges, as these are every bit as much a part of Masonry as the meeting.**

**So to sum up, the members should demand a show, and the officers should give them one. Advertise there is something new, something different. Pack the sidelines and then deliver. The Scottish Rite became the largest Masonic organization in America because of its impressive shows. It pioneered the degree as a stage event, with a lavish display for ears, eyes, and mind. In short, men flocked to see the Big Show. We are still showmen, and our obligation to our members is still to make coming to the meetings as interesting as TV or bowling. Today's show must of course be different from yesterday's shows, but it still must be interesting. If all we can do is spend our time speaking ill of our Brothers and harboring hatreds in our heart, or complaining we have no time to deal with the Rite and can't be bothered, then we should not be officers. The Big Show is fun to put on and fun to watch, and fun is a fundamental part of Freemasonry.**

**The Supreme Council has pointed out the way. Let's all become hedgehogs.**

**Thanks:  
Eric Ginette**