

Lodge Strategic and Improvement Planning

In 2002, a booklet containing the attached Vision Statement and supporting Masonic Principles was presented to each Lodge attending the Annual Communication. That statement has been restated for 2016 and beyond to guide the future of Maine Freemasonry. It is succinctly stated on the front of the new membership brochure:

Maine Freemasonry ... Enriching Lives through Education, Charity and Spiritual Growth

This positive “vision” is how we should want our Craft to be perceived by both our Brethren and our communities. It should be the focal point on which we set future goals and commit available resources. It is the foundation stone upon which every Grand Lodge committee and office holder, as well as every Lodge and individual Mason, should judge their performance and pursue their opportunities.

Each Mason or body of Masons must ask: What should I or we do over the next ten years to contribute to the realization of that vision within the parameter of the duties and responsibilities for which I am responsible?

Towards that end, it is essential that each Lodge consider its contributions to the fulfillment of the vision and to the benefit of the fraternity, Lodge members, their families and communities. By considering the following questions as they relate to your Lodge, Brethren can define the Lodge’s chosen vision and supporting principles, and then set in motion the development of a plan for improving the Lodge and for **adding Value** to being a member of the Lodge. Brethren are urged to answer the questions before developing a vision statement of what your Lodge wants to be – and be perceived as – in ten years, as well as establishing strategic and improvement plans and priorities to move the Lodge towards that vision.

Lodge Vision, Focus and Priorities Putting aside where the Lodge stands today, what do the Lodge and its members want the Lodge to stand for and be viewed as ten years from now by the Brethren, their families and the community – and within the Masonic District? What should be its image and its aspirations? Do you want to be known for: 1) the Lodge’s warmth – its welcoming, binding fraternal ties and support; 2) as a source of light – its strong presentation of ritual, and education on the meaning of the ritual and Masonic symbolism and on other topics; and / or 3) its community outreach, support and involvement? What do you want the overall impression of non-Masons to be on the stature and respect earned by the fraternity and the Lodge members? What can the Lodge do to make it “THE organization that people in town – men of good report and their families – really WANT to belong to and be associated with”? What are the Lodge’s values, and what value do you want members and others to realize from associating with the Lodge and from the Lodge’s presence in the community? After defining its vision, what are the Lodge’s current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that will influence the Lodge’s future and be the basis for setting priorities?

Leadership Identification and Training Has your Lodge defined what it expects from its leaders – by office and committee? Does the Lodge employ the District Lodge of Instruction as well as the Dirigo Leadership Seminars to educate officers? Officers move through the lines quickly these days. Does your Lodge have an Officers’ Manual specifically tailored to your local operation? Are there things your Lodge once did to prepare junior officers for the Oriental Chair that should be brought back? Again, do upcoming officers attend the Dirigo Leadership Seminar? Do you provide opportunities for junior officers and new members to address Lodge needs, such as by planning and holding a Fellowship Night?

Use of Time Do you try to minimize the number of nights your officers and members have to be out each month? Do you plan degree work by “classes” in advance? Do you name classes after distinguished and hard-working members? Can your meetings be shortened and more efficient? Do you avoid having strictly “business meetings” during monthly communications? Are interesting programs by the DER, Lodge or community members offered when there isn’t any degree work? If supper is at 6:30 and the meeting starts at 7:30, is there time for education program and Lodge assessments before the meeting starts and without lengthening meeting nights?

Membership Is your Lodge growing or shrinking, and is it welcoming only men of good report to the Lodge? Is the Committee of Inquiry an effective guard at the gate to membership? Has your Lodge recently conducted a Fellowship Night or some other well planned membership development program where officers and other members are asked to identify a number of good men, in their families, neighborhoods as well as professional and other circles, who might be interested in and a good match for Masonry? Will a successful membership development program require *convincing* Lodge Brethren to try the “fellowship night” or “open house” concepts as approaches to strengthen the Lodge? Does the Lodge need to implement programs that will make non-Masons aware of the Craft, *e.g.* Masonic Awareness programs, community service and awareness activities and public information activities? Do local collateral bodies contribute to the success of the Blue Lodge membership development programs? Can support be developed for a District membership development program including presentations at Schools of Instruction and meetings of the collateral bodies to solicit additional support?

Member Satisfaction Do your members feel they get value – their “money’s worth” – from their membership and by attending meetings? (Do you know their feelings; have you ever asked?) Is an evening spent at one of your meetings a satisfying experience? Are the meals and activities special? Do the ideals taught to your candidates square with the way the Lodge operates? In particular, is the practice of justice, equality and the other Masonic tenets evident in Lodge; does the Lodge practice “charity” through its checkbook, as well as through real work and the caring for others by members? Do members, and particularly the officers, try to get to know the other members? Is the only mail they receive from the Lodge a dues bill?

Ritualistic Work Ritual is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Lodges should not exist to deliver ritual but instead deliver ritual and related instruction to instill important life lessons. Does your Lodge’s ritual work create a positive impression on your candidates? Do you seek the assistance of the District Ritual Instructor / Assistant Grand Lecturer to learn the ritual correctly during rehearsals? Is ritual done well enough to encourage members to come back? Have you ever brought in someone with theatrical or public speaking training to coach your officers in delivering ritual? Do you ever use a Grand Lodge approved degree team or guest officers to offer something special to the candidate and the membership, and to set an example for new Lodge officers? Do you supplement the ritual with classes on what the degree ritual and its imbedded symbolism and allegory mean and why it’s important to our lives? Does witnessing the degrees in your Lodge – together with participating in programs of Masonic instruction – teach your new or old members what our Fraternity is all about – our principles and symbols, as they apply to today’s life experiences?

Masonic Education of the Membership Does your Lodge offer educational programs that create interest and engage the mind? Are there concepts in our 18th century ritual that need explanation to the average early-21st century person? Does your Lodge have at least one *qualified mentor to work with candidates*? Do you employ the Ritual Instructor’s Manual, the Pollard Plan and the degree videos, all of which have been provided to each Lodge? Has the Lodge hosted a Maine Masonic College course and do members attend classes and participate in certificate programs? Do members

and candidates employ the resources of the expanding Grand Lodge library to gain knowledge in Masonry?

Membership Involvement Are your officers and a few members overworked, over heavily engaged in other Masonic bodies? Are the Brethren of your Lodge provided opportunities to be active rather than passive members; how do you reach out to those usually not seen in Lodge? As people tend to live up to what is expected of them, are your members asked to do things for your Lodge? Do widows and shut-ins get regular visits? Remember, they have been a part of the life-blood of your Lodge and should expect our continued attention, and they may have sons and grandsons who are potential members. For those members who are so busy in their communities and houses of worship that they aren't able to significantly help in Lodge, does your Lodge recognize their practice of our Masonic ideals within their communities? Are you mentoring new members and employing the Rookie Program?

Membership Services Is your Lodge keeping track of the residence, contact information (including e-mail addresses), health and Masonic activity of its members? Does every member get contacted personally at least once a year? Are members aware of whom to contact if they need help from their Lodge (and the Charitable Foundation), and do they know what kind of help they could reasonably expect? Does your Lodge have a fund to remit the dues of those unable to pay, and are contributions to that fund encouraged? Do Brethren help other members and widows meet their personal goals and address their personal needs?

Family Involvement Two-income or single-parent families are now the norm. We cannot expect Dad to get his "nights out" unless Mom is supportive of Masonry or someone is available to take care of the kids. Does your Lodge hold events that involve families – events for kids and families? Are any of your older families willing to do baby-sitting – such as on Lodge meeting nights – to help the younger couples? What do you do as a Lodge of interest to younger members? Do you offer a scholarship program?

Communications How does your Lodge communicate with its members and other Masons in the District, as well as to the community in which it serves? Does the Lodge have a web or Facebook page; use the Grand Lodge calendar; send emails via MORI to Lodge members notifying them of upcoming events and Brethren in distress; use the local newspaper to announce meetings and community activities? Does the Lodge (or District) send out a monthly trestle board or newsletter, cards to Brethren on their birthdays or on other pleasurable or solemn occasions?

Masonic Education of the Public Do people in your community know anything about your Lodge and Freemasonry? Is the community better because the Lodge exists? Do you hold events that are advertised and open to the public, such as awareness nights or open houses? Do you take advantage of public relations opportunities with the local media? Do you try to establish media contacts in advance of really needing them? Do you employ social media such as Facebook (or the Internet) to let people know what is happening in your Lodge? Do you invite them to Lodge education opportunities?

Community Involvement Does your Lodge have a charitable program and is your community aware of your charitable work? Does your Lodge take advantage of the FOUR Grand Lodge – Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation matching grant programs (obtain \$2 in support for each \$1 raised)? – Community Betterment, Youth Programs, Bikes for Books, Project Graduation – or the Member / Widow Relief Program and the (Masonic / Military) Veterans "Per Capita Tax" Support Program? Does the Lodge participate in community-wide activities?

Masonic Facilities Does the condition of your Masonic Hall make a positive statement of the health of the Lodge that meets within? Can your Lodge / building committee afford to maintain your present quarters? Is the Lodge building financially and structurally strong for the future? Will a special fund raising effort be needed to finance building renovation and improvement projects, or even cover its regular operation and maintenance? Is the present Lodge location suited to its membership and is the building handicapped accessible and in conformance with building and safety codes? Is it adequately insured? Does the cost of maintaining the facility sap funds needed to offer interesting Lodge programs? Are there any alternative meeting locations? Does your Lodge give proper encouragement and support to the group that maintains your building? Have you pursued opportunities to have others use part of the building for Masonic or non-Masonic purposes?

Financial Capability Does your Lodge work from a budget? Is your invested money producing a good return on low- moderate-risk investments? Should a professional manager be handling your investments? Can special purpose funds set up through wills and bequests be pooled and used for purposes relevant to today's needs and activities? Do you hold fund raisers to benefit the Lodge, the building and the members? To what extent do Lodge dues and candidate fees cover Lodge / building / candidate costs?

These questions are by no means exhaustive and are only intended to fuel your thought process. Address these or your own questions when developing a vision, Lodge Improvement Plan and near-term priorities. Encourage the members of your Lodge to address one or more of these questions. The best proof of the success of a plan is seeing it work and having members volunteer to help on Lodge activities.

August 24, 2015

THE VISION OF FREEMASONRY IN MAINE

Freemasonry in Maine is the premier fraternal organization for men. It seeks to strengthen the individual man by providing opportunities for charity, fellowship, education, and leadership. It provides an environment that commits to the improvement of the individual man, his community and his world.

THE PRINCIPLES OF FREEMASONRY IN MAINE

Freemasonry is accessible to all men who believe in a Supreme Being and possess high moral standards and values regardless of race, creed or national origin.

Freemasonry provides educational programs and leadership training for the enrichment of its members and the betterment of their families and communities.

Freemasonry provides and maintains opportunities for its members to be involved in charitable activities and to serve from within.

Freemasonry provides opportunities for fellowship and the fraternal needs of a brother.

Freemasonry teaches the individual to practice the principles and tenets of the Fraternity in their daily lives.

Freemasonry encourages its members to be active participants in their respective places of worship.

As adopted in May 2002
MW Charles E. Ridlon
Grand Master