

# **“DISTRICT MASONRY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM”**

## **A Brief Presentation**

**By**

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### **Introduction**

I really don't think that any of us needs to articulate the obvious major underlying assumption in this brief Presentation that Masonry is, to say the least, very beneficial and that we are all very much the better for it. Be that as it may, it does need to be said, first of all, that the subject of this Presentation – which, given the occasion, is one in an essentially Guyana context – can probably nevertheless be regarded as having at least four dimensions. Also, that basically the issue will probably boil down to one fundamental concern. And that concern, I suggest, is the following. What sort of District Masonry – subject, of course to our adherence to our fundamental principles, tenets, landmarks, etc. and subject also to our basic organizational structures – do we as Guyana Masons really want in the new millennium and to what extent are we really focused, organized and enthused to go for what we want.

### **Some Relevant Dimensions Of Masonic Activity/Capability**

Of these four dimensions, then, there is, first of all, the reality, known to us all, that District Masonry is, of course, an integral part of Masonry worldwide and must therefore, of course, be firmly anchored, so to speak, in Masonry Universal. As laid down and practiced by the Craft in general and formulated through and by the United Grand Lodge of England.

Secondly, and following from this reality, that anchoring has, more especially, to do with the fundamental beliefs, tenets, principles and landmarks, etc. which, as we well know, have subsisted “from time immemorial”, which are universal and which, whether in the District or worldwide, are adhered to by us all. We can't, for example, do or say anything of fundamental import in Masonry in our Guyana District which is inconsistent with the general fundamental principles, procedures, etc. of Masonry worldwide. In this sense, one can perhaps do little better than assert, without more, that District Masonry is now, and will be in the new millennium, no more and certainly no less, than whatever Masonry Universal is or will be at that time.

It is sometimes said that Masonry is “a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols”. Thirdly, then, there are the occasional portrayals of our fundamental principles, etc. – as we sometimes say, “somewhat in a dramatic form”. And in that regard, any Brother who has experienced a Mt. Olive 1<sup>o</sup> Ceremony cannot, I believe, but be impressed with the very effective, incisive and poignant dramatization of one particular truth there represented and advocated.

And fourthly, there is the question of organization and administration which, in most cases of human affairs of any magnitude, complexity and import, is absolutely essential for the realization and the effectiveness of the other three dimensions mentioned above.

This Presentation will therefore concentrate on this “Fourth Dimension” while in no way losing sight of the others, including the reality that whatever is proposed must be in conformity with the principles, etc. of Masonry Universal.

### **Societal Change**

If, as I consider both possible and desirable, we should continue to strengthen District Masonry and make it even more effective as well as efficient, in the new millennium, we should probably reflect on the following two aspects, namely:

- Current membership in the various Lodges which comprise the District of Guyana.
- Potential additional membership, whether in the various existing Lodges or in new ones to be formed in the District.

Bearing in mind that both the avoidance of unnecessary defections or serious “backsliding” on the one hand, and the fostering of new entrants of appropriate caliber on the other hand, would, at least to some extent, be influenced by the perceived state – certainly qualitatively and perhaps quantitatively also – of the current membership of the Lodges which comprise the District of Guyana. (We do, of course, recognize that there may be special cases of commendable motivation to join the Lodge, or to be steadfast in the Lodge, as the case may be, whatever happens. For example “Lewises”).

There is no question that our society here in Guyana – including, of course, both current and potential Masons – has, in a relatively short time, been undergoing fundamental societal changes of almost every sort. And some of the changes, which can often have serious adverse effects are, of course, economic. Although it has to be said that, whereas the general level of economic well-being in this country has undoubtedly decreased, there are some of us that have been doing very much better, and in such circumstances while we, as Masons, may feel unmoved in relation to our principles, etc. the fact regrettably is that adversity on the one hand, and affluence on the other hand, can and do sometimes, equally, deflect us from our true course. And even if we say that our principles themselves remain intact, practical issues such as attendance at Lodges in general or even at our own Lodge, may be a problem – albeit in different ways for Brethren in different circumstances.

### **Strengthening Capability And Gearing For More Effective Action In The New Millennium**

To the extent that the difficulties associated with these societal changes loom large, what is to be done? I would suggest that one thing that certainly needs to be done in the new millennium, and expeditiously, would be to strengthen the Lodge organization and/or that of the District itself and/or have recourse to any appropriate capability in any other Lodge or group of Lodges – at least for the time being. Officers of the Lodge in the new millennium, including the Almoner, if they have not yet done so, need to be aware of any of these difficulties and to focus and organize to overcome them if at all possible, beginning with the short term.

As far as the possible entry of potential Masons into Masonry is concerned, most of the above realities also, it would seem,

apply. We know very well “who are fit and proper persons to be made Masons”. But of course that is in the sense of “what kinds of persons” rather than “how can we actually get hold of such persons to the greatest extent possible”, both for their good and for ours as Masons.

Nevertheless, armed, in a manner of speaking, with a renewed and crystal clear appreciation of what we seek in potential members of the Craft – including, of course, and most importantly, a true and sincere belief in a Supreme Being – we can surely, by appropriate means including personal contact and observation, strengthen our capability and our resolve in identifying, in the new millennium, community groupings, as broad-based and as like-minded, of potential Masons. For example, service organizations/clubs, religious groups, etc. Perhaps there could be established in tandem, in a re-invigorated new millennium Guyana Lodge structure, the capability to ensure both that current Lodge membership is “on track” and that potential members are identified and encouraged to become Masons.

Moreover, we should not discount or write off the many other joys and satisfactions which are often typically experienced among members of our Fraternity and which can be a source of great encouragement, as well as comfort, particularly in difficult times. Most of these are of relatively inexpensive in money terms so that per se, they may be enjoyed by all Brethren. Some of them are:

- The satisfaction of a “working” well performed and well appreciated
- The philosophical and soul-enriching (including charitable) benefits of Masonry
- The fellowship, discipline and appraisal involved in well-attended, well-organised, and fully participative rehearsals
- The approbation of one's Brethren – for example, in the case of truly well-deserved Masonic “Honours”
- Visiting/socialization (including “After Proceedings”)

The District organization stands, of course, organizationally speaking, between the Lodges and the United Grand Lodge – the District incorporating the individual Lodges of Guyana and the Grand Lodge encompassing them both. And in the new millennium, the District organization will, no doubt, need to re-dedicate itself to supporting, guiding and encouraging the efforts of the individual Lodges, quite apart from “ceremonials”, routine “statutory” meetings, etc., and including perhaps a more structured inter-Lodge cooperation and rationalization which is not quite the same thing as “Visiting” – important as that undoubtedly is.

Incidentally, the District organization does have at least one potent means of encouraging individual Masons, namely the awarding of Masonic “Honours” both at the District level and through the level of the Grand Lodge. I seem to recollect that Grand Lodge has urged that the award of these “Honours” should include not only commendation for service long, well and faithfully performed, essential as that no doubt is, but also the expectation of (further) meritorious service confidently anticipated to be performed for a reasonably long time to come.

### The Need To Plan

And as in the case of any other similar organization, efficient and effective Planning is absolutely essential. Such Planning in the Masonic District of Guyana in the new millennium should be focused as well as “professional” in nature and objective and should seek to place individual, as well as collective, responsibility and accountability for the various aspects of the re-invigoration of Guyana District Masonry in the new millennium on Brethren, in the first instance, who truly have the time, the knowledge, the aptitude, the dedication, the Mission to seriously carry out that responsibility efficiently and effectively. As Masons we do not believe that, has sometimes been said, “the really marvelous thing about NOT Planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise and is not preceded by long periods of worry and depression”.

### The Vision For 2000 and Beyond

Having regard to the foregoing, therefore, an appropriate vision for the new Millennium should probably be characterized by the following:

- Increased and more attractive Masonic activities – both in and out of the Lodge
- Something akin to a certain capability elsewhere in Masonry whereby each of certain members of the Lodge, Chapter, etc. “takes responsibility” for a group of other members
- Structured, and truly participative, occasions for appropriate Masonic lectures as well as other instruction
- Structured occasions, at appropriate level, for ensuring that Masonry is appropriately understood by members of the general community in Guyana, as well as by the appropriate particular Guyana “constituencies”.
- New, appropriate and meaningful outreach charitable opportunities.
- Structured “fellowship” opportunities among Masons as well as, on occasion, together with wives,, children and other friends.

“What is doing well”? someone once asked. Masonry is, or should be exciting as well as philosophical. It should, of course, also be seen to be a good, efficacious and beneficent thing not only for Masons by for the society in which they live and have their being. And in that context, one of the most moving admonitions in a certain passage of our ritual urges – in ageless and timeless terms, including those of the new millennium – in part, as follows: “.... So that when anyone is said to be a Mason, the world may know that he is one .....” It may be well in relation to the new millennium, for us, as Masons, to be particularly concerned about that admonition, given some of the very complex forces, ideas, etc. which are certain to be vying for center stage, or perhaps on

occasion more subtly, with potentially disastrous effects for us all. We may, perhaps, take heart in the story of someone who irritably raved to a certain principal functionary of a certain religion: "Don't you talk to me about (the particular religion). Look how long it has been in the World, and just look at the state of the world"!! To which the functionary calmly replied: "Look how long water has been in the world and just look at the state of your dirty face"!!

In the final analysis, Brethren, we as Masons in Guyana in the new millennium would be well advised to re-affirm that Masonry, in all its appropriate aspects, is good and worthwhile in ways which we, at least, clearly understand, feel and appreciate. And on that basis, Masons, often as active members of other organizations, know how (and have what it takes) to sustain a successful organization, community, etc. As far as Masonry in Guyana in the new millennium is concerned, and as the wise old man said to the lad who, with bird cupped in his hand, asked him whether the bird was alive or dead: ***"it is or can be anything that you would like it be"***.