

Where Are We Going



Submitted by Edgar Fentum -- 02/16/2003

Past Grand High Priest - Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of California

As the numbers of Royal Arch Masons decline, Chapters consolidate and more Chapters believe their survival depends upon fewer meetings we are beset with some important decisions. Fear drives us to retreat into a shell of 'hunker down', 'weather the storm', 'do nothing' 'things always get better' 'its cyclical' and hope that a magic wand will put it right. Yet what is needed is a positive and dynamic approach to meet the challenge.

Frequently I find myself at a Stated Meeting which was preceded by a soggy salad, the ubiquitous Spaghetti and Ice Cream. This is often followed by an equally unappetizing diet of poor ritual performed by hastily conscripted Officers, tedious minutes, business conducted in which the trivial is elevated to the sublime and where a few Companions feel that their justification for attending is to bore the hell out of the rest of us! If this is what we have to offer new Companions then we deserve what we have - loss of attendance and declining membership.

With fewer meetings some Chapters may be just four meeting away from oblivion unless they are prepared to infuse some life and vitality. In 1954 the Grand Chapter Centennial was celebrated with a dinner at the Fremont Hotel, San Francisco with the Lawrence Welk Band. You can imagine that ticket prices were rather high. But the Companions were willing to pay that price for such a gala event. There were about 600 Companions with their ladies in attendance. Can you see that happening next year at the Sesquicentennial? In 1854 some 750 Companions contributed over \$400 Per Capita to the Grand Chapter. In real money today that would be like \$50 per Companion. However, if we mention an increase in Per Capita from \$4 there are Companions predicting doom and gloom and the demise of Royal Arch Masonry in California.

Where during the so-called progress of Royal Arch Masonry in the last fifty years have we become an organization looking to provide ourselves with the cheap and tawdry. Do we not deserve better? Are we so inured to paying as little as possible for our Masonic pastime that we have denigrated it to a level of no significance and unimportance? Do we consider Royal Arch Masonry not worth as much as the cost of going to the Movies three times a year or even the cost of just one round of golf! Yet! I will pay a lot more for membership of the Allied Masonic Degrees with four meetings a year and Dinners at \$20 and a lot more to belong to the Red Cross of Constantine with two meetings a year and \$45 for Dinner.

We work on the assumption that one Companion in ten will participate in the Chapter the other nine pay dues to subsidize the one. Is this an equitable situation for a society that espouses morality? What if we double our dues lost three members out of ten we would be financially better off. We could then begin to run our Chapters with members who wanted to get their money's worth. This could make our Chapter become something meaningful and worthwhile. If we charged market value for quality meals and had fewer well-conducted meetings would we be more likely to have better attendance. Unfortunately, consolidations have made some Chapters not only large but also more affluent. With larger numbers their attendance may appear better but in fact still represents ten percent of their total membership. They subsidize their meals and have good entertainment so the answer does not seem to lie in affluence.

We need to look further and the answer may lie in the fact that many seek a deeper sense of purpose, identity and meaning to the august degrees of Royal Arch Masonry 'the root, heart and marrow of Masonry'. In which case I suggest we need to look upward to elevate our Chapters rather than to continue on the downward path of the cheap and tawdry. Maybe, with less meetings and higher dues, we take the opportunity to motivate

Companions to confer the degrees of Royal Arch Masonry in each Chapter, offer quality meals with worthwhile activities and well conducted Stated meetings containing a short educative content.

Whatever we do we need to bring back pride, quality and identity to our Chapters. We have to make the Chapter worthy of attendance by our Companions so that it competes with all the other attractions that abound in our lives.

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