



Greetings Brothers:

I want to take this opportunity to share with all of you my philosophy and direction for the 2007 – 2008 Masonic year. I am presenting my philosophy and analysis on Montana Masonry and the respective role of the constituent lodges, Grand Lodge and the appendant Masonic bodies. Using this philosophy as assumed goals, I proposed a plan toward achieving these goals, which after consultation with the other Grand Lodge Officers, is hereby adopted.

Philosophy - The main mission and function of Masonic lodges is to make Masons. Though lodges are encouraged to do charitable works and perform civic services, their primary function, which is the moral basis for their good works, is to make Masons.

Making Masons has two components: 1) initiating men into the fraternity; and 2) constantly educating members in the moral teachings and lessons of Masonry. In other words, making Masons means attracting new men to petition for membership and tending to the needs of our existing members. Making a man a Mason is not accomplished only through the conferral of degrees on a candidate but is a life-long endeavor of the lodge. Most of us are still making ourselves Masons.

To make Masons means the lodge must approve candidates worthy of the fraternity, confer meaningful degrees that inspire the new Mason to be a better man and continue Masonic education. The man we seek must be of exemplary character and moral qualifications. We are not seeking into membership a man whose moral character is marginal at best. We want the best because it attracts the best.

Until 1996, the individual lodges were responsible for the making of Masons—from petition through education. Since that time Grand Lodge sponsored group-initiation classes whereby a candidate could receive all three degrees in one day. Though this approach produced instant large numbers of members, some lodges to their long term detriment relied exclusively on these Grand Lodge-sponsored classes for all their degree work. As a result of over-reliance on the one-day classes, too many lodges lost their ability to confer degrees and make Masons. When a lodge can no longer perform its primary mission of making Masons through initiation, it loses its fundamental purpose for existence and is predictably destined for extinction.

There is a Chinese proverb that if you give a man a fish you feed him for a day; if you teach him how to fish you feed him for a lifetime. The mission of Grand Lodge is to help lodges perform their mission of making Masons. If Grand Lodge does all the work for the lodges, it makes Masons for a day; but if it teaches and empowers lodges to make Masons, Masons are made for a lifetime. The function of Grand Lodge therefore is to support, encourage, teach and excite lodges to make Masons. That is the key to the fraternity's long term survival.

However, the one-day classes had two positive features: setting a deadline for lodges to process petitions for new candidates; and providing fine exemplification of the degree work. As noted, the downside of one-day classes is that although it made members, it failed to always make Masons—men dedicated to and students of the lessons of Masonry. The one-day class candidates did not in many instances become enrolled spiritually and emotional with the lodge that processed their petition. They were Masons in the generic sense but did not share in the esprit de corps of a lodge.

The appendant bodies, particularly the Shrine, want potential candidates for their organization through an expeditious process. Quality Masons are the optimum type of candidate for both Masonry and the Shrine. The better the man is a Mason, the better he will be a Shriner. If the membership process is so expedient as to not make the member a good and loyal Mason, both organizations suffer. The immediately achieved gain in membership through an expedited process is offset by the noticeably high dropout rate of member of one-day classes.

The goals, therefore, are to:

- 1) Teach and instruct lodges and their officers and instructors in ritual proficiency and excellence, especially in conferral of degrees.
- 2) Provide education resources to lodges to continuing making Masons, both newly initiated and the established.
- 3) Provide opportunities for conferral of degrees for lodges that need assistance.

Blue Print - The plan to accomplish the three goals set forth above emphasizes proficiency in ritual and education in the lodge. The following elements of the blue print are as follows:

1. Use of district meetings: The district meetings will be district-sponsored lodges of instruction and are scheduled throughout the year rather in just the fall. Each district meeting as a lodge of instruction will instruct lodge officers and members in the ritual for opening and closing and conferral of a degree. If any lodge has a candidate in need of degree work, the degree can be conferred at the district lodge of instruction. At the conclusion of the degree conferral the new brother with his mentor will go to a separate room and start learning his proficiency. While proficiency instruction is ongoing, the other brothers would attend a lodge of instruction on other aspects of the ritual. If time permits the district officer may also present other matters to the brethren of the district. The district meetings must be prepared for the complete conferral of one of the three degrees.

The Committee on Work is responsible for developing a lesson plan with the content and presentation agenda for lodge of instruction. District officers in conjunction with qualified brothers whom they have selected are responsible for the conduct of the lodges of instruction. The district officer has the discretion in selecting the brethren who will participate in the presentation of the ritual. The district lodges of instruction are available for attendance by brothers from any Montana lodge.

The district lodge of instruction will be conducted under the charter of a lodge selected by the district officer. If the chosen lodge does not have its stated meetings at the site of the district meeting, that lodge must apply for dispensation to move its charter to that site for the district meeting. Except for the lodge with charter authority to meet at that site, other lodges desiring to bring candidates to the district meeting for degree conferred must request courtesy work from the lodge with charter authority in accordance with the Code requirements.

2. Instructors: Each lodge will have an instructor appointed. However, there will be a higher recognition of instructor—the “certified instructor.” For a lodge instructor to be certified, the instructor must meet the following criteria:

- a. Attend a lodge of instruction at one of the district meetings during 2007-2008;
- b. Complete and pass the Grand Lodge’s open book test on the Constitution and Code within the previous five (5) years; and
- c. Conduct a lodge of instruction.

Instructors must be Masons who exemplify the virtues of Masonry and are knowledgeable in the ritual and our Constitution and Code. During their appointment instructors must ensure their lodges do proper degree work. Instructors of course may not bring discredit on themselves, their lodges, the Grand Lodge or Masonry in general.

3. Unauthorized Copies of the Work: District officers and instructors must ensure that lodges do not use unauthorized rituals or materials in the lodges. The only materials that lodge officers may use in delivering ritual are the Mnemonics and Monitor. The instructor and district officer may have his copy of the written Secret Work in the Big Book. It is illegal to copy pages from the Big Book and thus machine or handwritten copies of the Big Book Secret Work may not be used by any person in lodge. Other written-out versions of the Secret Work regardless of the form are not allowed in lodge for use. When such materials are discovered the district officer or instructor after notification to the Master of the lodge shall request that the unauthorized materials be surrendered to that officer or instructor. Lodges failing to voluntarily turn over such materials must be reported to Grand Master for possible disciplinary action against the lodge, including suspension of charter. For explanatory lectures, extraneous written materials and copies are allowed for use by the lecturer or for prompting. The Montana ritual is the work that is to be used. Though not encouraged, explanatory lectures from other recognized jurisdictions are permitted if consistent with the Montana lectures. Unauthorized copies or materials are to be destroyed after confiscation.

4. Education: Each lodge is encouraged to either do conferral of degrees or presentation of Masonic education at every meeting. The Committee on Masonic Education and Research will produce at least 18 educational lessons for use by the lodges during the year. The lessons should be short (less than a page, double spaced) and include questions that presenter could ask to start a discussion. The Committee is encouraged to use existing materials and may adapt these materials for discussion purposes. The lessons are not intended to be just read as a lecture but to stimulate thought and discussion. So the lesson should utilize questions as catalyst to encourage group participation and discussion. The former alternative proficiency is an example of a fine source for lessons. Preferably the lodge should have a qualified brother other than the Master present the lesson and discussion. Since the lodge secretary is usually heavily involved in presenting administrative matters to the lodge, lodge secretaries should not be expected to present the lesson.

5. Specific Job Description for Committees:

- a. Committee on Work will prepare content and presentation of lodges of instructions. The district officer will coordinate with Committee on finding qualified brothers to do the instruction.
- b. Research and Education Committee will prepare at least 18 short educational lessons for lodge use. At least six (6) must be prepared and completed and distributed to lodges by July, 2007. The remaining twelve (12) must be completed by September 1, 2007.

6. Master Builder: To qualify for the Builder or Master Builder, the following requirements must be met:

- a. The lodge instructor must be certified.
- b. The lodge must conduct either conferral of degree or Masonic education at every meeting, including and especially the Feast of Sts. John.
- c. At least three of the top five officers must attend a lodge of instruction.

7. Supplemental District Degrees: A district officer may conduct more degrees on a district level than just the district lodge of instruction. The scheduling of supplemental district degree functions must be coordinated with the other district meetings. The Grand Master will be consulted prior to scheduling these degrees. The district degree may only confer one degree followed with proficiency instruction similar to the format at district lodge of instructions.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David L. Nielsen".

David L. Nielsen
Grand Master