

Grand Master's Message
Installation Ceremony
September 28, 2008

Most Worshipful Sirs, my fellow Grand Lodge Officers, Brethren, Ladies and Friends.....

Seven years ago I was afforded the honor and privilege to stand at this very lectern and address the brethren of this jurisdiction as it's then Grand Orator. It was a difficult time for me that day, not because I was unaccustomed to addressing large groups, but instead, it was just 28 days after the tragic and evil attacks of September 11th, 2001. That had a profound impact on what I had planned to say! And, in that address, I told the brethren assembled that this event would change the world forever. I told them that I believed it should place a renewed importance on all Masons, whither so ever dispersed around the globe to the relevance of the virtues and teachings of our Craft. I told them that each of us must stand in direct and absolute defiance of the cowardly and despicable acts of those who live by terror and hate. And that evil, no matter how man attempts to disguise it, was still evil. Just seven years ago, I asked our Lodge leaders and all California Masons to re-commit themselves to building a stronger Craft in California so as to carry forward our teachings and principles into our communities and to the world.

Today, seven years later, I stand before you as your 144th Grand Master and profess to you that it is a "great time to be a Mason in California" and the world! Whether inspired by my charge then, or their own sense of responsibility, California Freemasonry has been and is building for a better and stronger tomorrow.

So what is it that leads me to believe that our outlook is so very optimistic? Let me share with you some information about the "State of the Craft in California."

After some five decades of member apathy, decline in membership, and a general attitude of complacency, Freemasonry in California is changing.

For the last seven years, almost the entire decade of this century, we have seen a substantial increase in the number of men seeking the light of Freemasonry. In the past two years alone, from 2006 to 2008, our Lodges have conferred in excess of 8500 Degrees. During this same period, we have seen over 3000 men petition for membership in our constituent Lodges. In 2007 alone, our California Lodges made more Entered Apprentice Masons than in any other year since 1988 and conferred more total degrees than any year since the beginning of the 1990s. These trends clearly highlight a new attitude among our members and our lodge leaders, and confirm what I believe and have professed... that we are embarking upon a new era of exciting progress and unparalleled opportunities here in California.

Seven years ago, the average age of our membership was just about 70 years. Today, the average has dropped to 64 years old. And the average age of a new Master Mason is only 37 years old. The fastest growing segment of our membership is 18 to 30 year old men. Our membership gains show that men, young men, are being drawn to the principles and values of Freemasonry. So it is time, right here and right now, today, to stop debating whether Freemasonry is relevant in our society. You see, if we haven't figured it out, society has. Instead, I believe it's time for us to ensure that we are prepared for the emergence on our scene of this new generation and realize that our legacy will be defined by whether we can stand up and deliver on our promise to provide lessons, experiences, and mentoring, and apply the principles that show them the path to becoming better men.

Meeting the expectations of our new members will be the true test of our generation of Masons. So, I would ask each of you to stop for a moment and challenge yourself as to:

-What distinguishes you as a Mason?

- How have you embraced the virtues and lessons of our craft?
- How does your behavior and your daily actions set you apart?
- Are you guided by brotherly love, relief and truth in your every thought, act and deed?

You see, wearing a ring on one's finger or a pin on one's lapel, or even wearing an apron, is not the true test of a Freemason. Instead, practicing out of our lodges those duties which we have been taught in it, is the essence of society's interest in us and what I believe defines Applied Freemasonry.

Are we the ones to whom the burdened heart may pour out its sorrows? The ones to whom the distressed may prefer its suit? And the ones whose hands are guided by justice and whose hearts are expanded by benevolence? Even more simply put, are we the ones who open the doors for others and aren't afraid to say hello to a stranger? The ones who will reach down and pick up something dropped and in need of return to those who lost it? Are we the ones who willingly give up our seats for someone who may need it more? And the ones who, without prompting, call or visit the infirmed? Are we the ones who will reach deep into our pockets to assist those less fortunate and in need?

Our newly received brethren are watching carefully and looking at us to be examples of how we should live. "Applied Freemasonry" is the theme and message I am bringing to you. This year, it emblematically is represented by the rough ashler, or stone, denoting the imperfect state of human conscience. Yet, from it, the smooth, or finished state, is evolving, which reminds us as Masons that it is our obligation to labor zealously toward making ourselves better, and to strive for the more perfect side of man. Added to this truly Masonic symbolism is the phrase, "living the virtues today, building for a better tomorrow." For I believe that Freemasonry's future will depend in large part on our commitment to living every moment guided by virtue, and if we, by example, cause others to simply "take note", then Freemasonry will continue to be of interest to good men all around the state.

The progress we have made in this decade has been a true partnership of committed leadership, both from our Lodges and your Grand Lodge. And I'm committed to seeing that this partnership of cooperation and strategic thinking continues to be fostered and grown.

Five years ago, we adopted a philosophy aimed at institutionalizing "strategic thinkers" throughout our Jurisdiction, based on a belief that merely managing our institution, simply put, "wasn't cutting it." Our Grand Lodge committed itself to a new "strategic thinking" model, and that model has been and continues to be an essential part of the success that we are experiencing today.

Two years ago, we undertook an effort to better align our Committees to meet today's emerging challenges. Our Lodge Support Committee was re-chartered and now provides essential "Lodge Consulting Services" for those Lodges that are facing challenges of leadership, membership and financial difficulties. Manned by dedicated and professionally skilled members, this committee has been an integral part in saving several Lodges from sure consolidation and surrender. To its Chairman, Worshipful Miklos and Vice Chair O'Brien, our craft in general, and those lodges in particular, are truly indebted to your committee's unselfish and tireless efforts to preserve Freemasonry in these Lodges and most importantly in the communities they serve.

We also re-chartered our Membership Committee and told its leadership to take on a more broadly-defined membership process. One that includes not only those who may have an interest in joining with us, but to develop program support for the entire process of moving men from interest through and including the successful ascension to the sublime degree of Master Mason. Pass-it-on and On-the-level are but two of the soon to be "Three Programs" aimed directly at this strategic challenge.

Strengthening Lodges must always be the single most important focus of this Grand Lodge. Four months ago, with the support of Grand Master Hopper and the Executive Committee, I asked

the Grand Lecturer to join with me in addressing what I characterized as a “system in need of change.” Over the past several years of serving in a progressive leadership role, I observed a vital support system that I believe was stretched beyond its ability to be effective. Our five-division structure left our Assistant Grand Lecturers spread unrealistically thin and spans of control were beyond any model used by successful organizations. If we were going to be of aid and support to our Lodges in their times of need, then this systemic problem had to be addressed. We could not allow Lodges to suffer because our structure was inadequate to provide them needed support. Effective today, we now have a nine-division structure, and with it, a more realistic and manageable system of control. My Brothers, our Lodges deserve no less of a commitment and I’m convinced that our new team of Assistant Grand Lecturers will be our Grand Lodge’s “Dream Team” and I thank each of them for their commitment to our future prosperity.

Much has been started in reshaping our direction for leadership training. Two of our Membership Development Certification courses are now high-tech and online, thereby broadening their availability to all lodges, and in the next month the third module, Lodge Administration, will be available. Three more modules are planned in 2009, bringing all of our training expertise to you in the convenience of your home, on your time, and at your pace. I would like to acknowledge the Chairman of Leadership Development, Worshipful John Lowe, for his vision and support of this new and creative thinking, and his committee’s commitment to being relevant to today’s needs. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge our partner organization, American Research Institution, for their expertise and commitment to create state-of-the-art technology. Their Managing Partner is in our audience today, and I ask him to please carry back to his staff our deepest appreciation for their support.

But that’s what has been accomplished. I would like to talk about what is on the horizon. Those of you who attended our Annual Communication last September heard me speak to the leaders of our Lodges about several priorities that I feel are critical to our future. I asked for, and received, their support to set forth a plan to rebuild our youth orders. My brothers, members of the Family of Freemasonry in the most populated state in the country, we now have less than 5,000 members of our combined youth orders. These orders lack a Masonic involvement. DeMolay chapters, Job’s Daughter’s Bethels and Rainbow Assemblies continue to face closure due to a lack of adult leadership, and that is criminal and unacceptable to this Grand Master, and I plan to change this. Beginning today, I have restructured our Youth Orders Committee and given them my own positive injunction. We will rebuild our orders and Masons will lead that effort. We will begin by rebuilding our infrastructure of adult support with a massive infusion of Masons available to participate in and lead advisory councils, guardian councils and advisory boards. We will aid in seeing a doubling of your participation in the next five years and at least a 25% increase in Chapters, Bethels and Assemblies. For any young person who has a desire to be affiliated, we will be available to answer that call. I’m serious about this challenge and to prove it, I’ve asked two Past Grand Masters of this Jurisdiction to help see that this is accomplished. Most Worshipful Sorsabal and Most Worshipful Decker, thank you for stepping up as the new co-chairmen of these efforts and for helping me to answer this essential call. But more importantly, I challenge each of you to become involved and be a part of this vital effort.

Additionally, we will provide our Lodges with more sophisticated tools to track and locate members and widows in our jurisdiction. Too many of our members are being suspended simply because we loss track of their whereabouts. Suspending members who have had a thirty plus year membership affiliation is **not** right, and this effort will help to eliminate these losses. If we could eliminate these losses in our membership and continue our new applicant growth, we would completely neutralize our losses due to deaths and see a positive growth in California for the first time in decades.

The ownership and management of our Hall properties is a source of much confusion and discord among our membership. Starting in October, a full-time resource in the Grand Lodge office will be on staff and available to assist our Masonic Properties Committee and, more importantly, our Hall Associations in understanding proper administration and compliance associated with the ownership of our precious Lodge properties.

Preparing for our future must be a continuing focus of this Grand Lodge's future. In order to better prepare the leadership of our Inspectorial Corp, I am pleased to announce that the new and exciting Inspectors Development Academy (the IDA) is nearing completion, and in February we will begin our inaugural class. Under the leadership of Worshipful Vernon Dandridge, this new academy will help us to attract the best and brightest in our mid-management ranks and prepare them for success.

Each year, we in California are asked to support an effort sponsored by the Grand Master, which is aimed at a charitable or community activity, known as the "Grand Master's Project." This year is a little different; no, a lot different than a Grand Master's project. It is a California Freemasonry project. I am going to ask California Freemasonry to support me in a new, bold, and what I believe is a grand concept and exciting venture for our Grand Jurisdiction. This project, "A Partnership to Advance the Study and Understanding of Freemasonry" places us at the forefront of Masonic research and education in the realm of higher education.

You know, throughout our history, the Grand Lodge of California has distinguished itself as a leader in the study of Freemasonry. Numerous Masonic scholars have their roots here in California, and I have long felt that as leaders in our fraternity we should be taking a much more expanded role in defining Freemasonry to the world, rather than having the world define us.

Two weeks ago, your Grand Secretary and Director of Philanthropy and I met with key officials at the University of California at Los Angeles and reached a final agreement to form such a partnership. Capitalizing on our relationship with the renowned academic scholar and foremost expert on Masonic studies, and a member of the faculty at UCLA, this partnership will be directed by Dr. Margaret C. Jacobs, a distinguished professor of history, along with our Institute for Masonic Studies here at the Grand Lodge. Let me tell you a little bit about Dr. Jacobs and what this partnership could mean to all of Freemasonry.

She is, as I have stated, among the world's foremost Masonic scholars. Her work represents some of the most informative and comprehensive studies on Freemasonry today. She has studied our historic role, particularly in areas such as the rise of constitutionalism and civil societies. Her work has already demonstrated how our Masonic values and tenets have influenced and guided the development of constitutional democracies world wide.

Our partnership proposes to raise funds to establish and ultimately endow a program titled "Faculty Research and Graduate Student Support at UCLA." This program will include:

1. Faculty research in the area of Freemasonry and civil societies.
2. Curriculum development for undergraduate courses on "Freemasonry and its impact in America and other civil societies" like that at the University of Oregon.
3. Graduate student support for graduate scholars who are working in, or have an interest in the history of Freemasonry.
4. Support of an ongoing Masonic lecture series including worldwide scholars in the research of our craft.

My brothers, let me be very clear. I don't see this as a "Grand Master's Project." I see this as an historic and bold venture on behalf of Freemasonry. I believe that this partnership program will have far-reaching and very positive benefits for all of us associated with the family of Freemasonry.

My vision is to see this become the model for the establishment of centers and facilities for Masonic studies on additional university campuses both here in California and throughout our country.

On Friday, Most Worshipful Onkst shared a very telling observation with us here in this auditorium when he said that we no longer can be represented by the Masonic phrase “To be one, ask one.” But today, instead, it is to be one, you have to find one. Regaining a legitimate foothold with the institutions of higher education will substantially expand society’s understanding of our craft and our contributions to the advancement of civil societies. I believe that it is this understanding that will help to bring men in our doors. Working together with our Office of Philanthropy, I believe we can raise the funding necessary to move this program towards becoming a true reality. I look forward to working with our new Chairman of our Masonic Institute, Worshipful Glen McBride, and his board as we come together to complete this important work.

As optimistic as I am about our future and the interest of the younger generation in our craft, I am also concerned about the behavior of some who currently share the title of “Mason.” Too much time is being spent by your Grand Lodge leadership in addressing issues of conduct and behavior, and that must change. Men, and even organizations, within our fraternity that bring discredit to our venerable institution have no place in California Freemasonry, and this Grand Master is giving notice today that it is your time to either reinvent yourselves or remove yourselves. There is no other option available to you.

I would be terribly remiss if I didn’t take a moment to thank God for the great blessings that he has brought to my life, that of my family. Many of you know that I am a fifth generation Mason. It has always been my father’s belief that Masonry would help him to become a better man. He has been and continues to be a guiding light and I am truly blessed by his presence in my life. Nine weeks from yesterday, I will be part of a first in California Freemasonry, when I, as Grand Master, will have the honor and privilege to install my father as the Master of Siminoff Daylight Lodge #850 in Union City. I think that is going to be an emotional day! Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in acknowledging my father, the Worshipful R. L. Doc Adamson.

I have also been equally blessed to have a partner in my life who has never failed to support me in every venture I’ve chosen to pursue. She has and displays the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, and a herculean strength of character. Lynn, I love you and I am so very excited that you will be with me on this journey as California Freemasonry’s First Lady.

Brethren, ladies and friends, this is a great time to be a Mason in California. I believe that our future has never been brighter, but I also believe that we must move quickly to define our future. I hope that all of you, my brethren, will answer this challenge and commit to applying our principles in your every thought, act and deed. Applied Freemasonry means living our virtues today and building for a better tomorrow. Together, let’s make it happen!