

PROGRAM FOR PROGRESS  
GRAND CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA

BY: WILLIAM E. NORMAN  
PRESENTED: JULY 13, 1985

At the 1964-1965 Annual Convocation of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in Virginia, there was appointed unanimously, "A PROGRAM FOR PROGRESS" to be followed and continued at three levels of Grand Chapter organization, VIZ:-Grand Line Officers (including the Grand High Priest), District Deputy Grand High Priests and all member Chapters in Virginia. In this great commonwealth, where leadership, initiative and originality have long been an outstanding characteristic of our order, Capitular Masonry has been the peculiar position and almost exclusive distinction of being sovereign unto itself, and solidly grounded upon the basic fundamentals of Ancient Craft Masonry of the purest kind. At one time Virginia Masonry extended over West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio, - hence it has had lasting influence on Masonry of these fine States and in turn, on Masonry of all of our United States. Because we are sovereign, we can look primarily, only to ourselves for initiative and leadership in our affairs. We must do our own thinking; plan our own administration and depend mainly upon ourselves to carry out our plans and shaping of our destiny. Because of this position of prominence which we occupy in the eyes of sister Grand Jurisdictions, and in which we have been placed by virtue of our sovereign and independent originality, those eyes are constantly upon us to see what image we will continue to present. It is therefore of utmost importance that our conduct be exemplary, - that our judgements be wise and that our actions produce results, - not only for our own vigor and well being, but also because the course we adopt, so often, may be the path in which others may follow. We are expected to be exemplary and vigorous and progressive. Let us then rise to the challenge and be so.

The "Program for Progress" was put into effect in 1965-1966, a seemingly short year. Introductory details and first implementation had to be worked out before the inoculation began to take effect. True was the reluctance to change or procrastination of some of the Chapters to spend the effort to help themselves. True also was the difficulty of becoming fully co-ordinated between all levels, - Grand Chapter, Districts and subordinate Chapters. But nevertheless, with all this, those chapters which did get on the band wagon and co-operated, even partially, showed great results and have turned a serious net loss trend into a promising net gain curve for Grand Chapter. Reports by District Deputies were most revealing of deficiencies as well as of proficiencies at all levels of our organization, and provide some sound bases for correction as we continue along.

Grand Chapter accepted the challenge and pledged itself to follow

the "Program for Progress" as laid out for all Grand Chapter Officers to follow, - including the Grand High Priest. How can Grand Chapter help? It would for this year, stress two areas of the program:

1. An organized, all out effort to give every symbolic lodge master mason an opportunity to petition some Royal Arch Chapter.
2. A concerned effort to show tangible interest in our youth organizations. Many ideas for these are presented in the new High Priest's help manual which outlines a program balanced between present growth and long range planning. Taking first the item membership growth, it is fully believed this one area alone would answer many of the problems of the three phases of the "Program for Progress", e.g. RITUAL, ATTENDANCE, MEMBERSHIP AND INTEREST. A real honest effort along this line, these three phases reacting cumulatively to each other, would have surprisingly catalytic effect. So the important thing is to get in the petitions and the other phases automatically take care of themselves. Petitions mean friendly contacts to obtain them, - vouchers to speak for them, - mentors to guide them through. Petitions require activity in the ritual, hence practice and proficiency, which in turn attracts more petitions. So 'round and 'round we go. With all this comes zeal and interest and attendance, not only on the part of the officers, vouchers and friends, but as well by the general membership. Soon, the side-lines begin to fill up and that wonderful fellowship takes over.

Speaking of ritual, - we spend many man-hours studying, learning and perfecting it. We spend much of our personal money, and the chapter's money and Grand Chapter's money, time and travel, year in and year out, learning ritual. So what use is all this if we do not have candidates on whom to use it? We must have petitions - lots of them - to make this time, effort and expense expended really worth our while. With petitions rolling in, suddenly things do not seem futile. Apathy is overcome and we are back in business in a really big way. Try it!

In Virginia there are 81 Royal Arch Chapters, each with at least 9 Line Officers and 4 others taking active parts for a total of 1,053. In 1969, some 600 new companions were exalted, - less than an average of two thirds per officer. Surely that could be greatly improved upon. Let each officer select 5 companions, - each with 5 names of prospective master masons, to go out and bring in an average of one petition apiece. This would produce some 4,000 new members. Our best prospects are the newly raised members of which Grand Lodge reports some 2,150 per year. Here is where your leadership capabilities come into play with a bit of planning, work and personal follow through, and success is bound to follow.

It is our duty, as Most Excellent Masters, to ASK our blue lodge brethren to petition the Royal Arch Chapter. It is felt that they should be given the opportunity to petition early, after being raised, for several reasons, - first, his zeal and warmth for masonry is at it's highest peak at this point. After he has stood his master's catechism examination, he wants to know more and more in order to fill in that incomplete picture, - find the true word, - know more about King Solomon's Temple. At the best he is confused by the incomplete story of what he has just been through. Where can he obtain the answers he seeks better than in the Royal Arch Chapter? The Royal Arch was once an integral part of the symbolic lodge and then completed the true story and long-sought Grand Omnific word of Ancient Craft Masonry. For this reason our newly raised master mason should be LED into continuing further light in masonry, early. The incidence of demits and suspensions NPD of symbolic lodge members at this stage is seriously greater (40 to 1) than among those who have gone on to complete their Ancient Craft Masonry in the Royal Arch Chapter, -- Why? -- they must have become disappointed somehow, somewhere, the confused incomplete story, they had never heard of the chapter or of Ancient Craft Masonry and its relation to a master mason. The ease of demitting from one body is greater than from two or more bodies, when one must think twice before demitting once.

Secondly, - in our present day, with Inimical idealogies and isms, competition for the mind of man, or even just his attention, is extremely keen. We need every recruit we can get to think along our lines together with us, if we believe we are on God's side. Whether a companion continues to attend chapter or not, he has at least been exposed to our teachings which are bound to have made some impression, even if so slightly on his mind. If not, why, we ask, do not more of our now-attending members demit? Could it probably be that they do not care to disassociate themselves from an organization which they know in their hearts stands for the right things as does the Royal Arch Chapters? So they continue to pay their dues in support of these ideals, even though they take no active part.

Thus we must make sure every master mason, - especially the newly raised, - has been apprised of what lies ahead in masonry and the advantages of continuing his quest. Give him a definite opportunity to petition for the Royal Arch of Ancient Craft Masonry.

Now taking the second item, - youth organizations; we cannot say too much on the importance of presenting a good image of masonry to the young impressionable minds of those who are soon to take our places in the destinies of the world. This must be done while they are young, or their influences will be found elsewhere than in our masonic fraternity. Masonry is their proud heritage, - of Demolay, of Job's Daughters and others. Now how in the world can we expect these young people to develop good impressions or receive steadying influences from us masons, if we never evidence interest in them or in what they are doing? - Never attend their meetings or functions -

never show appreciation for the great work of character building. How can we expect them to have good opinions of us or masonry - much less pass it on to their friends, children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, when they never even see us? Here is the real bread, which if leavened, even a little bit, will grow to great proportions. Here is our own future wherein should lie our long range planning.

Oh, yes! you say, we have them display their work in our lodge occasionally. We endorse them - let them use our temple. But we do nothing else and thus miss the point and purpose entirely. We are selfish in asking them to sacrifice their valuable school study time to come to pamper us, and sometimes there are more of them than of us, let us instead, go to them on THEIR regular nights, on THEIR own ground (usually Saturdays or Sundays, our off days, when there is no sacrifice of our time or theirs). Just our presence will indicate our interest. They are proud of their work and anxious to display it to grown-ups for approbation. You have no idea how much our presence means to them until you go and see. This can help us in other ways. Many of our inactive members become weary of seeing and hearing in lodge and chapter, over and over again, the work, ritual, business, endless introductions and speeches, hence they never attend. In youth organizations is something new and different, vigorous and refreshing for them to enjoy, while really taking part in chapter affairs. A new lease on life - new interest in their own chapter. In our inactive membership is tremendous latent power just waiting to be tapped and led. Here is 95% of our strength. Put it to use effectively. Let each chapter organize a goodly group of these companions - say 25 to 50, to make at least one visit per year to each of the youth organizations in the immediate area and be known in advance as a Royal Arch Chapter group so that they may be recognized as such - a good image of capitular masonry and good advertizing. If there is no youth organization in the area, there probably should be. Organize one. Your money is not asked for since most youth organizations are trained to be self sustaining. But your sponsorship, approval and leadership is needed and looked up to. Your accomplishment is two-fold. You have awakened interest in dormant members and created respect and appreciation of our youth. You have effectively displayed your wares to a most susceptible potential for new and future members. Here is your long range planning at work.

These two areas of endeavor - AN ORGANIZED NEW MEMBERSHIP DRIVE AND INTEREST IN YOUTH are in accord with Grand Chapter's "Program for Progress". Grand Chapter's Line Officers wholeheartedly back the program and will be working with you. Make this an "ALL OUT" year. We want to give it all we have at least this once, to show and prove there is nothing wrong with Royal Arch Masonry that a little zeal cannot overcome, through leadership, planning and a little honest effort. Your own banner year is up to you and your team work. Seventy one is a lucky number. Play it! The stakes are high. If you are on God's side, you cannot fail.