

M. Ex. Comp. Dean Elliott, Grand First Principal

May 25, 2024

Inaugural Address

Most Worshipful the Grand Master, distinguished East, honoured visitors and Companions all.

It is heartwarming to see such a good turnout of Royal Arch Masons for our 100th Convocation. I especially thank those Companions who came from other jurisdictions to participate in this Convocation with us. We have strong relationships in the Prairies and it adds to all that we do when we endeavour to strengthen them.

I appreciate the support of the members of Saskatoon Chapter No. 4 over the past 25 years, a challenge made more difficult given that I have not lived in Saskatoon since 2003. Special thanks to those who are serving as officers and extra special thanks to those members of No. 4 who will be part of the organizing committee for next year's Grand Convocation in Saskatoon, even if you are not yet aware of your impending role.

I thank those Grand Line officers with whom I have travelled over the past number of years, especially my immediate few predecessors, and the Grand Executive generally for their support and advice.

Of course one would be remiss to not thank Lorey for all of her support and to all of you for your kind words and prayers these past three months.

Before I share my theme for the year, let me for a moment discuss our current membership trends.

Membership

The topic of membership in our concordant bodies is always one of concern. Of course, our only path forward to increase our membership is to bring awareness of Royal Arch Masonry to the approximately 1,400 Master Masons in Saskatchewan who are not yet members.

Over the past 100 years, Royal Arch membership in Saskatchewan has generally been 15-20% of the Masonic membership. We are currently at 16%, with significant growth in Saskatoon and Regina but much less in most other Chapters the past few years.

Over the past five years, which of course includes the challenges related to COVID-19, we have averaged 1-2% admissions, 3-5% demits and 3-4% deaths. 2018 was an exception to those trends where there were 23 admissions, 70% of which were in Saskatoon and Regina. Those trends are unlikely to change without explicit intervention. Specifically, we need to average 6-7% membership growth (15-20 members) each year to keep membership numbers stable. If we do not, we need to accept that more of our smaller chapters are going to go into darkness soon.

What then can we do.

I was going to say “If you build it, he will come” but I think that’s been used before.

On a more serious note, I believe my theme of for the year, “**Educate, Illuminate and Celebrate,**” can provide some guidance.

Educate

We have two main roles with respect to Royal Arch education – to educate our current members and educate other Masons about Royal Arch Masonry. Educating our current members should lead to increased engagement, which might help reduce our suspensions and demits. Educating other Masons about Royal Arch Masonry should lead to increased prospects.

Illuminate

First of all, note that illuminate ends with the letter “e”, not the letter “i”. That being said, how can each of us help ourselves, our fellow companions, and our future companions in their search for further light in Masonry. We have a wonderful story to tell. Many believe that without Royal Arch the story presented in Craft Masonry is incomplete and leaves questions unanswered. How proud are you of our story and how well do you know the intricacies of the timelines and events on which it is based?

Celebrate

Companions, let us use the upcoming year to celebrate our achievements after 100 years of Royal Arch Masonry in Saskatchewan. Our membership, as already noted, has fluctuated over the years, but here we are 100 years later, still proud to be Royal Arch Masons. But we can not rest on our past laurels or spend our time talking about how it was done back in the day. Please think of what you might do in your Chapter to celebrate our past as we look forward to our future.

Steps Forward

Our work to **Educate, Illuminate and Celebrate** needs to take place at the Grand Chapter and individual Chapter levels. Our Grand Chapter, through the Education committee and the Grand Lecturer, can help prepare materials of interest to potential members and for current members and develop plans for sharing these materials.

We can tell more of our story, that in Royal Arch we watch as the workmen are taught the importance of labour, how to earn your wages, how to prove that work is your own, the penalty for fraudulently attempting to obtain wages for work that was not your own and that education is the reward for their labour. We see the completion of the Temple which signifies the transition from labour and finally we see the workmen discover that which was lost.

Let us find more Masons who are desirous of learning these lessons through the dramatic representations in Royal Arch Masonry.

Luckily, video conferencing technologies simplify the task of reaching out to our members and those Masons who are not yet our members. I challenge our education committee, the entire Grand Executive and the principal officers of our 10 Chapters to help us reach out to all 44 Lodges in Saskatchewan. To that end, I have put together a document that shows which Lodges fall within the geographic area of each Chapter.

Let's look at those numbers. Two of our Chapters (Moosomin and Wilkie) draw primarily from one Lodge each, three (Estevan, Unity and Eagle Lake) from two Lodges each, two (Battleford and King George) from three Lodges each and

one (Prince Albert) from four Lodges. Saskatoon potentially draws from 11 and Prince of Wales from 14 Lodges.

I am a strong believer that we provide a better Masonic journey for our members when the various components of the Masonic family work together. So let us also consider how to work with Cryptic Rite, Preceptory and Allied Masonic Degrees to plan education for non-York Rite Masons in Saskatchewan.

A common line in the business community is that it costs less to keep a customer than to find a new one. If that maxim is true in our fraternity, then we should ensure we are doing all that we can to meet the needs of our current members regarding their Royal Arch experience. Perhaps it is time for each Chapter to conduct a survey to determine what everyone is hoping to receive in exchange for staying a Royal Arch member.

- Do they want to see high-quality ritual done by memory to serve as a role-model?
- Do they want education and elucidation on the finer points of Royal Arch Masonry?
- Are they just happy to attend for the social and fraternal benefits?
- Why do they attend or not attend Chapter?

It is too easy to focus only on that regular group of members that attends each Chapter meeting. Have you asked why other Companions no longer attend? And, if so, have you done anything to improve the situation?

When we consider all of the influences on a member's life, we know deep down that if we collectively provide a worthwhile experience, those members will choose to come to meetings rather than not – save sickness or the pressing necessities of one's public or private avocations.

In closing, please think of what you can do in the next year to **Educate, Illuminate and Celebrate** and thank you for allowing me to serve as your Grand First Principal for the upcoming year.