

Discussion paper: "Templum Fidelis, Five Years Later" (written & presented in Lodge by R.W. Bro. Cliff Farber)

As most of you are aware, on the 6th day of this month we marked the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Consecration of Templum Fidelis Lodge. Over the past 6 or 7 years what had originally been a spark in the minds of a few Brethren has been defined and refined and we have seen it evolve into a Masonic experience which is truly like no other in our Grand Jurisdiction. Of that we can all be proud.

When you reach a milestone such as this 5th anniversary, it is never a bad thing to do a little self-analysis, a review if you will, of where we came from, where we are, and wonder if we've made all of the right choices. Since the formation of Templum Fidelis, we have been very fortunate to have men join the ranks of the Masonic Fraternity through our Lodge and each one of them has given or will give their perspective on how joining Templum Fidelis has changed them and their lives. Each one of these perspectives has been very interesting to listen to because, while each presentation has some common points, each experience has been different, and they were each very personal. The rest of us can only envy these men for that experience and wonder whether our Masonic journeys would have been different if we had shared a similar experience. Since I cannot tell you what it was like to be initiated into Templum Fidelis I will tell you what it was like for me to come in fairly close to the beginning and discuss some of the issues that arose and some issues that we are still facing.

First of all, I should point out that I was not part of that small group involved in the early discussions which lead to the possibility of creating a Traditional Observance Lodge. That vision, indeed, came from the minds of others. At that point in time when my first discussion took place with Bro. McDonald, I had been a member of the Fraternity for about 15 years and for the most part I was content to be a member of a regular craft lodge and take part in their activities and in those of the District. I had been fairly active in the District but I had never asked for or looked for anything beyond that. I did not have the time or the inclination to join any of the concordant bodies. Like many Masons, I supported my Lodge and the District; I learned to accept the good and ignore the bad; and overall I enjoyed myself and I enjoyed being part of the Masonic Fraternity, as I then knew it.

However, with the advent of Templum Fidelis, or I should say, with the proposed advent of Templum Fidelis, things changed dramatically. That one unexpected Saturday afternoon phone call from Bro. McDonald changed everything. That initial discussion with Graeme, where he laid out in general terms what a Traditional Observance Lodge was, and what a small Band of Brothers were attempting to accomplish, was a real eye opener. Being asked to be part of this group and possibly assist in the development and implementation of a Lodge based on the Traditional Observance model was indeed unexpected and exciting, and one that I knew would be a definite learning experience. I say this because, and I'm sure others in this room felt the same way, I had never looked beyond what was already there, and despite the considerable amount of reading I had done on Freemasonry, I had not heard of or come across anything even remotely related to the Traditional Observance proposal. I had read only Masonic Material of the usual kind, that which was related to Masonic ideals, its history, its symbolism and the mechanics of being a good, craft lodge Mason.

I must admit that I did find the possibilities of a Traditional Observance Lodge intriguing and it didn't take much consideration on my part for me to come on side. Honestly, I was fascinated. Was there really a more fulfilling Masonic experience out there? Could there be a Masonic experience where respect for Protocol, Etiquette, Ritual and each other, actually mattered? Yes, apparently there was, and I did not want to pass up the opportunity to be involved in it. When I was given the names of potential members, I was indeed impressed. Each of these men had served the Fraternity with distinction and each was highly respected for their dedication. When I attended my first organizational meeting, you could instantly feel a common bond and a mutual respect for what was trying to be accomplished. These organizational meetings were probably the most interesting and most unusual Masonic meetings that I ever have attended or ever will attend.

As I recall, contact had already been made with the Masonic Restoration Foundation and we had available to us an outline of how existing Traditional Observance Lodges were formed and what the key elements of what such a Lodge should consist of. If you look at some of those key elements: the Dress Code, The Agape, the Music, the darkened

room, the lighting by candles only, the Chamber of Reflection and the Chain of Union, they all point in the same direction: a dignified, contemplative Masonic experience and above all else, a truly unique way of preparing and assisting new members of the Fraternity. It would provide a truly distinctive initiatic experience.

Obviously, one of the first requirements was to establish the Charter membership and as I think back, that task must have been a very difficult one. Templum Fidelis Lodge was to be based within Frontenac District, but it was not going to limit its membership to that geographical area, which allowed it to encompass some extremely experienced individuals. In the early process, I understood that a limited membership was a necessity and that it would have to remain limited until all of the ground work had been completed and the Consecration had taken place. But I have to think that when the charter membership list became widely known, it ruffled more than a few feathers. Because of ruffled feathers or not I am not sure, but on more than one occasion I have had the term "elitist" brought up in relation to Templum Fidelis Lodge. Elitist, by definition, implies a feeling of superiority. I for one did not understand that tag being applied to this process. Selective? Definitely. But elitist? Never. If the charter membership had not been so selective, then that implies that the membership would have been thrown open to the entire Masonic Fraternity. That being the case, it not only would have been unworkable, but I firmly believe that Templum Fidelis would not look much different than most other craft Lodges, with the possible exception of a higher quality banquet and a few members wearing tuxedos. In this situation there was only the one choice; there had to be a base of experienced members dedicated to the creation of a Traditional Observance lodge, and the proposed Charter membership would have to be prepared and capable of handling the compromises and negotiations that would likely be required.

Charter Membership aside, I have sometimes wondered if the formal dress code also swayed some people towards the "elitist" title. Possibly. But Templum Fidelis certainly was not the first Lodge in our Grand Jurisdiction to implement a dress code. In fact, if memory serves me correctly, 10 or 15 years ago, another Lodge in Frontenac District tried to change their by-laws to impose a Tuxedo Dress Code. But the peasants revolted so to speak, and it didn't happen. The dress code at Templum Fidelis was never open for discussion, it was just accepted as a necessity. If we wanted to enjoy a more dignified Masonic experience, then dressing for the occasion was to be part of it. There was never any negotiation or compromise needed here.

Another fundamental element agreed to as part of the establishment of Templum Fidelis was the expectation and insistence on well-delivered ritual. In theory, the delivery of the ritual in a professional manner should happen in all craft Lodges. It is a simple fact that that is not the case. The quality of ritual is one of the factors that determines the development and participation of new members, as you cannot encourage new members to be the best that they can be, when the Lodge itself does not meet that high standard. It goes without saying that not all Masons will excel at the ritual but the perception of effort has to be there. If you enjoy and respect the ritual, as I assume all of us do at Templum Fidelis, sitting in a Lodge room listening to someone stumble through a piece is not a pleasant experience. I have had that experience far too many times and far too many times I have left other Lodges shaking my head as to what I just sat through. Should Templum Fidelis have relaxed it a bit and set the bar a little lower? In my opinion, absolutely not! It sets us apart. The quality of work here is extremely high and I've been told that it is appreciated by both members and visitors. As an aside I must add that I have never witnessed the quality of ritual work conducted by newer Masons handled any better than that of our new members here at Templum Fidelis. It has been nothing short of outstanding.

Regarding new members at Templum Fidelis, unlike other Lodges, the candidate would likely wait about one year between degrees. This was by design and was a significant departure from the tendency to push candidates through for fear of them losing interest or in an eagerness to get them into Officer positions. But here at Templum Fidelis the slower pace of advancement has obviously worked. There is no doubt that our new members are extremely well prepared and have been able to use the time between degrees to understand the degree itself and be able to present a paper on their experience. To my knowledge none of our initiates have ever had a problem with the time separation between degrees. Score another one for the Traditional Observance model.

From the beginning it was determined, that in order to make Templum Fidelis work and in order to provide for consistency, there would have to be an insistence on compulsory attendance. And, with few exceptions, our members have been in attendance unless they had personal situations that have dictated otherwise. What has surprised me

though, is that the compulsory attendance has never carried over to the practices. I have been to very few practices when all of the necessary Officers have been in attendance. I could be wrong, but I have the feeling that, as a group, we just don't have the commitment to the practices that we have to the Lodge meetings themselves. Why that is, I'm not sure.

One of the original concerns expressed by the District membership was the fear that Templum Fidelis would steal members from other Lodges and thereby reduce their membership. From day one we have always encouraged the charter members as well as our affiliating members to maintain their membership in their Mother Lodge. And for the most part that has been the case. Personally, there have been a few instances where I felt like walking away from my Mother Lodge and maintaining membership at Templum Fidelis only, so I would hardly be surprised if others sometimes felt the same way. I am currently aware of three of our members that have left their Mother Lodge over the past five years, but I'm fairly sure that there was more justification than having membership in Templum Fidelis.

Another area of contention is that we at Templum Fidelis have always maintained that anyone attending a meeting should stay for the Agape, as they would be missing out on a large part of the Traditional Observance experience. Some Brethren in the District feel that they, as Masons, should be able to attend our meetings without having to pre-book, just like at any other Lodge. I don't recall if we have ever discussed the possibility of allowing visitors to the meeting only? Is this something that we should consider? It sounds simple enough, and we have had a member or two that has had to skip out before the Agape, albeit with extenuating circumstances. Do we really want to deal with the separation of Agape attendees and non-attendees? It could become problematic, not knowing who is dining and who is just lingering after the meeting. Depending upon the number of "meeting only" attendees, it could become chaotic. And we all know that Templum Fidelis is definitely not about chaos. The entire Templum Fidelis experience above all else, is organized, serene and respectful.

In that same vein, as a personal observation, one thing that jumps out at me at every meeting is the dignified way that the meetings & Agape are conducted and the overall sense of order, respect and dignity. This comes from the silence in Lodge, the procession, the periods of reflection, the music and the professional way in which both the meeting and the Agape are conducted. Without question the Agape and the incredible catered meals create an atmosphere unlike any other Masonic Banquet. And that atmosphere of course, is the fit and proper setting for the many excellent papers that we have been privileged to have had delivered here at Templum Fidelis.

As I have alluded to, initially there was definitely some negativity in the District towards the establishment of a Traditional Observance Lodge. I understand that some people oppose anything new just because they don't understand it, without any real justification. That aside, I was still very surprised at how fast misinformation spread throughout the District and to this day I cannot comprehend why the negative factor arose at all. One piece of misinformation that made the rounds was that we were permitted to modify the ritual in some way to serve our lofty purposes and of course that was never the case. This myth upset quite a few Masons unnecessarily. As everyone should know, our Grand Lodge has one ritual and that ritual is imposed on all new Lodges, as it must be. Templum Fidelis would never have been consecrated if we had varied at all from the established ritual of our Grand Lodge.

Still others could not understand or accept the need for a new and different Lodge. If we had struggling Lodges in the District, why add another? Weren't we just compounding the problem? It was difficult to make it understood that Templum Fidelis was going to be a unique Masonic experience. Yes it would be different, but certainly not in a negative way. Early in the process, I was discussing the proposed new lodge in one of the smaller rural lodges in the District which, by no stretch, would I have considered it a bastion of free-thinkers. As expected, most of the members were wary of anything this new but to my complete surprise, an elderly PGLO of this Lodge stood up and said something to the effect that even though he would not aspire to join such a lodge, every successful organization should have an outlet for those that do aspire to learn more. He also said that, after looking over the proposed charter membership, he thought that this new Lodge would be an asset to any District. End of discussion.

So here we are, five years later, and I am surprised to learn that there are still negative feelings out there. Why would that be? We have proven to be successful. We have not destroyed the membership of other Lodges. We have consistently shown a high regard for Protocol, Etiquette and the Ritual, and deliver it as well or better than most

lodges in this District. We are all Masons after all and what is to be gained by still attacking something that you do not understand?

As I bring this to a close, I would like state that I believe in Freemasonry, and the ideals that it represents. I believe that Templum Fidelis Lodge fully exemplifies those ideals and does nothing to detract from them. Don't misunderstand me, I certainly do not want to come across as being special because I belong to Templum Fidelis; there are a lot of knowledgeable Masons in our District that are not members of this Lodge. Frontenac District survived just fine before Templum Fidelis and would likely have survived just as well without it. The fact of the matter is though, Templum Fidelis does exist and it is different, and I feel that it is something that the entire jurisdiction should be proud of. I have always been very proud to be a member of Templum Fidelis and I have always been grateful that I was given the opportunity to be part of the experience.