

REVIEWING THE LODGE/CHAPTER FUTURE

Background

The Provincial Grand Lodge of East Lancashire has continued to stress that East Lancashire, whilst having a comparable number of individual Masons to several other Provinces, has a vastly greater number of Lodges; many of which are experiencing difficulties due to declining membership.

A measure of re-organisation has over the last number of years become necessary.

This leads to a knock-on effect with Chapters who are also experiencing similar difficulties with recruitment and retention.

In 2000 there were some 406 Lodges and 140 Chapters in East Lancashire, when the first of the struggling Lodges decided to close their doors; the Province having already tried, with little success to implant 'survival strategies'.

Since then over 170 Lodges and 30 Chapters have returned their Warrants/Charters to UGLE/SGC, either through closing completely or amalgamating with another Lodge/Chapter.

The RW Provincial Grand Master/ME Grand Superintendent has confirmed that he is prepared to accept the return of a Lodge Warrant/Chapter Charter to UGLE/SGC or the amalgamation of Lodges or Chapters if the members see this as the only way forward. The RW Provincial Grand Master/ME Grand Superintendent has said that at all times if a Lodge/Chapter is contemplating such action the Lodge Secretary/Chapter Scribe E must contact the Area Assistant Provincial Grand Master/Assistant to the Provincial Grand Principals before any action is taken. He will then arrange either to visit the Lodge/Chapter himself or organise an appointed Co-ordinator to visit.

General

So that the above situation does not arrive suddenly or unexpected it is recommended that every Lodge/Chapter should, on a regular basis, (say every three years or at the very most every five years) meet to consider its current position and future.

This should be an item for discussion, in the first place, at a Lodge/Chapter Committee meeting.

The outcome of this discussion should be one of the following options:-

- Option 1. The Lodge/Chapter is healthy and has a bright future.
- Option 2. To agree that a revival plan is required.
- Option 3. To seek an amalgamation with another Lodge(s)/Chapter(s) in the Province.
- Option 4. To soldier on regardless.
- Option 5. To close the Lodge/Chapter

SUMMARY OF THE OPTIONS

Option 1. The Lodge/Chapter is healthy and has a bright future.

- No further action is required, apart from ensuring that the Lodge/Chapter has a regular flow of Initiates/Exaltees and Joining Members.

Option 2. To agree that a revival plan is required

- A small sub-committee (preferably an equal mixture of those with long and short membership, and a suggested maximum of 5/6) should be formed to review the possibilities and report back to the Lodge/Chapter in general.

Option 3. To seek an amalgamation with another Lodge(s)/Chapter(s) in the Province.

- Following a decision taken at a Lodge/Chapter Committee meeting a meeting of the Lodge/Chapter membership, at which as many members as possible should attend, should be called. The APGM/APGP (or his representative), the District Chairman/DORA and the appointed Co-ordinator should be invited.
- At the above meeting a small sub-committee (preferably an equal mixture of those with long and short membership and a suggested maximum of 5/6), and including the Co-ordinator, should be formed to review the possibilities and report back to the Lodge/Chapter in general.

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Option 4. To soldier on regardless

- Although small in numbers the members do not wish to consider Options 3, or 5
- Members quite happy to be in a small Lodge/Chapter but hope that new members will be forthcoming.

Option 5. To close the Lodge/Chapter

- Following a decision taken at a Lodge/Chapter Committee meeting a meeting of the Lodge/Chapter membership, at which as many members as possible should attend, should be called. The APGM/APGP (or his representative), the District Chairman/DORA and the appointed Co-ordinator should be invited.
- At the above meeting a small sub-committee (suggest a maximum of 5/6), plus the Co-ordinator, should be formed to review the procedures and report back to the Lodge/Chapter in general.

Procedures

Following a meeting of the PM's/PZ's, particularly if Options 2, 3, or 5 are to be considered then, it is expected that in all cases a meeting to which all Lodge/Chapter members must be invited to attend should be held as soon as is possible. At this meeting;

- All the options listed above will be outlined, together with a clear idea of the work and possible timescale involved in each of them.
- Notes should be made of these discussions and circulated to all members, so that members unable to attend are kept informed and given the opportunity to comment.

The Lodge/Chapter members should then be given a period of time for reflection and discussion amongst themselves before a second, more formal, meeting is called at which the members will make known their decision.

- Minutes of this meeting must be taken and circulated to all members of the Lodge/Chapter,
- Such Minutes should embody clearly all resolutions taken and be approved and signed by the WM/Z.

EXPLANATION OF THE OPTIONS

Option 1. The Lodge/Chapter is healthy and has a bright future.

- No further action is required, apart from ensuring that the Lodge/Chapter has a regular flow of Initiates/Exaltees and Joining members.
- This should be an action item for ALL members of the Lodge/Chapter.

Option 2. To agree that a revival plan is required.

- A sub-committee (preferably an equal mixture of those with long and short membership an age) should be formed to review the possibilities and report back to the Lodge/Chapter.
- To discuss at some length, a revival plan (The 'Changing Times' document is recommended as a template, as it contains a number of recommendations which could help to strengthen the Lodge/Chapter..
- Discuss the revival plan and assess its feasibility.
- Discuss whether the Lodge/Chapter changes its character [i.e. become a specialist Lodge/ Chapter].
- Discuss whether the proposals would be:-
 - Attractive.
 - To whom would they be acceptable?
 - Whether they would constitute a conflict of interest or the overlap of a function with another body that might cause problems or failure.

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Option 2. To agree that a revival plan is required. (Cont.)

- Whether they would involve the inclusion of a change of venue or timing.
- To change the time and/or place of meetings. If this option is to be pursued then:
 - No change of venue or timing should be contemplated without the considered agreement of the APGMs/APGPs concerned and the Hall Company/Management Boards involved.
 - The By-Laws of the Lodge/Chapter must be amended (the latest procedure for doing this can be obtained from the Secretariat website).
- To amalgamate with another Lodge/Chapter within the Province. (See Option 3 below)

Note: No change of venue or timing should be contemplated without the considered agreement of the APGMs/APGPs concerned and of the Hall Company/Management Boards involved. These avenues must, therefore, be explored carefully before any decision is taken. Also, care must be taken to amend the By-Laws of the Lodge/Chapter (the latest procedure for doing this can be obtained from the Provincial Office). The relevant Hall Manager must be kept fully informed. Any amendments to By-Laws MUST be approved by the RWPGM/MEGSupt.

Option 3. To seek an amalgamation with another Lodge(s)/Chapter(s) in the Province.

- A sub-committee (preferably an equal mixture of those with long and short membership and age), and including the Co-ordinator, should be formed to review the possibilities and report back to the Lodge/Chapter.
- Endeavours should be made to find a suitable “twin” Lodge(s)/Chapter(s), preferably within the same District or Area. The APGM/APGP and his District Chairman/DORA should take a guiding role in this process. “Twinning” is very useful for sharing work and giving mutual support. In addition, this can be used as a means of finding a compatible new “home” for the Brethren/Companions in case of amalgamation, or in the event of closure, for those who wish to keep together and who do not already have a local or alternative Lodge/Chapter in mind. Thus a period of several meetings may be needed.
- The following should be considered.
 - A Receiving Lodge/Chapter, which a majority of the members of the Lodge/Chapter to be closed agree is compatible, must be found and a period of “courtship” begun. Ideally, this should last several meetings and involve as much cross visiting (both in Lodge/Chapter and socially) as possible. All members the Lodges/Chapters concerned should participate as much as they can and share the work; especially ceremonies. This process is usually facilitated when it is a Daughter Lodge/Chapter falling back into a Mother Lodge/Chapter.
 - Agreement for an amalgamation must then be reached and a timetable devised. Several important decisions must be jointly taken, (hence the importance of carefully building an amicable relationship) not the least being which Lodge/Chapter is to be preserved. Others include:
 - whether a change of name is involved in order to reflect the amalgamation,
 - possible adjustment of meetings, dates and times
 - the ritual to be used and
 - future disposition of monies, artefacts etc.
- If the decision to amalgamate is agreed, then an Amalgamation Committee, of the Lodges/Chapters involved, should be formed. This would usually consist of the Worshipful Master/First Principal, Secretary/Scribe E, Treasurer, Almoner and a Senior Member of all the Lodges/Chapters involved, together with the Co-ordinator who will act as Chairman.
- Once general agreement is reached, specific notices of motion must be given in both Lodges/Chapters and hardened into formal resolutions at the subsequent meetings.

Via the APGM/APGP, the Province is then notified and approval sought from the UGLE/SGC for an amalgamation to take place. At an appropriate point the Warrants/Charters of all Lodges/Chapters involved are sent to London. That of the Continuing Lodge/Chapter will be enfacéd to show the new Lodge/Chapter name (if such decision has been agreed), its

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Option 3. To seek an amalgamation with another Lodge(s)/Chapter(s) in the Province. (Cont.)

- number remaining unaffected. The surrendered Warrant/Charter, after erasure, is enfac'd accordingly and returned along with the continuing Warrant/Charter together with a Certificate of Amalgamation from United Grand Lodge/Supreme Grand Chapter. All Warrants/Charters and the Certificate of Amalgamation **MUST** henceforth be displayed at every meeting and handed over to each newly Installed Master/First Principal.
- A ceremony of Amalgamation (unification) can be held but is NOT mandatory, as the Amalgamation is ACTUALLY formalised by the approval of UGLE/SGC. Should an Amalgamation ceremony be required by the Lodge's/Chapter's this will be conducted by the PGM/MEGS or his Deputy.
 - At all stages, advice and guidance should be sought from the Province through the Co-ordinator, so as to avoid as much stress as possible. The Co-ordinator will keep the District Chairman/DORA; APGM/APGM and Province informed of the progress made.

The current cost for enfac'ing a Warrant/Charter of the continuing Lodge/Chapter can be found on the Provincial Website; as can the cost of a Certificate of Amalgamation. At this moment in time UGLE/SGC only charge one enfacement fee per amalgamation.

The above is, of course, only a summary of the main stages, but it gives some idea of the timespan and work involved. Help and advice should be sought at an early stage via the District Chairman/DORA and APGM/APGP, who will appoint a Co-ordinator to ensure a close liaison with the Province.

PLEASE NOTE:- That there is no "short cut" in the system which over-rides the procedure. The speed of the progression of the request to amalgamate is entirely dependent upon the speed and accuracy of the written information supplied by all the Lodges/Chapters concerned.

In the event of your Lodge/Chapter contemplating an amalgamation, you should ensure that your Lodge/Chapter follows these requirements.

IMPORTANT !

When a Lodge, to which a Chapter is attached, decides to close, or amalgamate with another Lodge(s), its Secretary must inform the Chapter accordingly. Thereafter the Chapter should, after discussing its own future, maintain careful liaison with both its former and prospective Lodges, with advice being sought from the APGP at all stages.

Please Note that it is now possible for a Chapter to 'Stand Alone' without attachment to a Craft Lodge after that Lodge has closed.

NOTE. It is hoped that no member, of a Lodge/Chapter that surrenders its Warrant/Charter, is lost to Craft or Royal Arch. It is hoped that he will join the Amalgamated Lodge/Chapter or another Lodge/Chapter, either individually, or as a group to retain friendships previously forged.

Option 4. To soldier on regardless.

- Although small in numbers the members do not wish to consider Options 3, or 5
- Members quite happy to be in a small Lodge/Chapter but hope that new members will be forthcoming.

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Option 5. To close the Lodge/Chapter.

- A sub-committee (preferably an equal mixture of those with long and short membership, and a suggested maximum of 5/6), and including the Co-ordinator, should be formed to review the possibilities and report back to the Lodge/Chapter.
- Handing in a Lodge/Chapter Warrant/Charter is an emotive process and it is recommended that this option should only be chosen after extensive consideration.
- If the decision is to close and return the Lodge/Chapter Warrant/Charter to UGLE/SGC then a Closure Committee, of the Lodge/Chapter, and the Co-ordinator, should be formed.
- The Closure Committee would usually consist of the Worshipful Master/First Principal, Secretary/Scribe E, Treasurer, Almoner and a Senior Member of the Lodge/Chapter, and the Co-ordinator who will chair the meetings.

The above is, of course, only a summary of the main stages, but it gives some idea of the timespan and work involved. Help and advice should be sought at an early stage via the District Chairman/DORA and APGM/APGP, who will appoint a Co-ordinator to ensure a close liaison with the Province.

PLEASE NOTE:- That there is no “short cut” in the system which over-rides the procedure. The speed of the progression of the request to close is entirely dependent upon the speed and accuracy of the written information supplied by the Lodge/Chapter concerned.

In the event of your Lodge/Chapter contemplating closure, you should ensure that your Lodge/Chapter follows these requirements.

IMPORTANT !

When a Lodge, to which a Chapter is attached, decides to amalgamate with another Lodge(s), its Secretary must inform the Chapter accordingly. Thereafter the Chapter, should after discussing its own future, maintain careful liaison with both its former and prospective Lodges, with advice must be sought from the APGP at all stages.

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