



Officers for 2019-2021 [Photo at Edmonton session]

Most Venerable Brother R. John Hayes

Sovereign Grand Master 2019-2021

Sovereign Grand Master's Address

August 24, 2019 – Edmonton, Alberta

Good afternoon, My Companions, My Brethren, My Friends.

I want to begin by thanking many people –

- My family, Linda and Kaitlyn, who support me and of whom I am very proud. I know they wonder why one would spend time on Freemasonry, and some money, and it puzzles them, but I do appreciate their puzzled support. The home that we have built continues to be my refuge and our place, no matter what goes on out in the world. Thank you. I love you both.

- My Allied Masonic Degrees brethren, who are self- and other-selected as among the best of the Freemasons. I was struck some years ago when the past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alberta, when he became First Principal of North Star Chapter in Edmonton, said in his remarks that the companions in the chapter are the brethren he can trust, rely on and most enjoys spending time with. I feel the same way about the brethren of St. Lawrence. Thank you for your ongoing support of the AMD, and thank you very much for the confidence that you have shown in me. I look forward to working with you over the next two years.

- My brethren and companions in lodge and chapter, who are the foundation stone of this organization. I am fortunate in belonging (having joined blind, as we all do) to a pretty good lodge and a pretty good chapter (or two). You have been supportive of me in all my endeavours, corrected me when I needed it, laughed with me on many occasions, and we have seen a lot. Your support has and continues to mean a great deal to me. I wouldn't trade our Masonic relationship for a great deal.

- Finally, my friends and co-workers from outside the Craft, with whom I share many enthusiasms. I have great friends who are not Freemasons, and they are of value to me as a balance, as a place to go when I don't want to whine about dues or Grand Lodge, when I want to talk hockey or soccer, politics or travel, railways or food, literature or movies.

- And finally, to those who have gone before me in this office, for your support over the last few years, and your promises of support going forward. I appreciate you greatly.

It would not be too much to dilate on the excellencies of the people, past and future, who make up the Allied Masonic Degrees. For it is they who make this organization. A lodge is not a building, or a place, or a number, or a charter, it is the men and women who make up the lodge, the men and women who join together of their own volition and "free will" to become a cohesive group. In my view, as I have said already, the best of Masons gravitate to the AMD.

The core of our order as you know is research and education. We share a vision of education, primarily to educate ourselves but to then share our discoveries with others, that is unique within the Craft. It gives our councils a focus and purpose; it gives our meetings a kind of content that is valued by our membership.

The good news, from the point of view of this organization, is that we have grown and continue to grow. I find that we have one new council that will be consecrated within the next twelve months, and potential new councils in three or four more locations across the country. This is an issue that other Masonic bodies would give their eye teeth, if they had eye teeth, to be facing. Indeed, over the last ten years, we have seen growth of our organization despite the decline in other Masonic groups, despite AMD being utterly reliant on those groups for members.

I spoke a couple of years ago at a chapter event, and mentioned the ongoing growth of the AMD, and a past Grand Master took offence and tried to do what he could to damage the AMD in Alberta. Because the way to deal with a growing organization is to pull it down, rather than to look at it and see why it is bucking the trend. I still shake my head.

The numbers in the Craft are unfailingly bleak. They have been catalogued by others, so I won't spend a lot of time on them here. Suffice to say that it's enough to know that the Craft, since 1959 when some say it peaked, has declined by a little more than 94%. Sixty years, and the loss of just about 19 out of every 20 members who were in the Craft at that time. Projections are equally bleak: 2043 is the year that there will be zero Masons in North America (which point we will never reach, obviously, but that's where the vector runs into the bottom line). Well before then, the structure of Grand Lodges and Chapters will no longer be able to support itself. We have seen the decline in rural lodges, the closure and merger of many city lodges, and the size of the membership lists continue to dwindle. In all that time, the initiatives taken by various bodies have simply not worked. Calling for education in lodges has been a failure; shortening the time or the requirements for membership has been a failure; lowering the price of membership has been a double failure – no new members and we've starved the organization; lengthening the time or increasing the requirements for membership has been a numerical failure at least

– what do we, in the AMD do?

We rely on the lodges and chapters for our members. We are “downstream” from this disaster. What should we do.

I do have a suggestion, or several.

1. Let’s support individual lodge and chapter initiatives. One of the strengths of this organization is that we in AMD are not constitutionally strictured to the point of killing our lodges or councils. The sameness of a Masonic lodge is celebrated by some. You see the same ritual in each and every lodge under a jurisdiction – many jurisdictions even have “inspectors” who check out whether the lodges are doing it exactly the same, and some award and deduct points for sameness, purity of purpose. In AMD, I am proud to see that a council in one part of the country will have a distinctively different flavour to the others. Raymond C. Purslow Council’s meetings are not the same as those in Peace Council, Borealis Council is not the same as Wakamow Council, Mozart Council is not the same as, well, anyone else, and the new council, Northern Equinox, will again be very different.

As Sovereign Grand Master, I urge each council to review their operations – all aspects of their councils – and make any changes that the members of that particular council desire. Rest assured, within very wide parameters, the Grand Council will support and encourage initiative and change within our constituent councils. When it works, we will celebrate the innovations and join with you in your explorations.

2. Each lodge, and in this context I mean all lodges, chapters, councils throughout the Craft, need to meet the needs of the next generation, not the last. We are an inherently conservative organization in many ways, our landmarks are “unchanging,” even though they have all been changed, and even the one that demands that they never be changed has been changed at least twice. But the next generation always sees things differently, and our organizations are in general governed by men and women three generations removed from those entering the lodges in their early 20s. Talk about cell phones in lodge and there will be someone who rails on about how they are destroying the fabric of society. Just as ten years ago the same man would rail about how emailing a lodge notice would cut the heart blood out of the Craft. Don’t dare mention social media! And so we as leaders beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

But that won’t appeal to the newer Masons, and if we want to drive them away even faster, let’s insist that they adhere to technological standards of the 1990s, entertainment standards of the 1980s, moral standards of the 1970s, dress standards of the 1960s, etc.

3. Freemasons regularly celebrate the time we spent leading society. George Washington, Ben Franklin, John A. MacDonald, how many times O Lord, how many times? I recently saw yet another paeon to past glories online – they come up every few weeks – where a man with no hint of irony listed leaders from more than 200 years ago in the United States to show that Freemasonry is on the cutting edge. He even nodded to a non-American source, which is rare enough, and mentioned the Royal Society. Cutting edge. I kid you not.

The thing is, if we want to lead society, we can do it. We can take the initiative in many aspects of the world, but we can’t do it while we are longing for the meetings of the past. The past is a source of great knowledge and some wisdom, but it is not the source of innovation or leadership today. We can choose, but if we do, we will have to be willing to embrace change.

4. The key we all speak of is that we want to grow as human beings. See the world as a better place for us and our children. Discuss how we want to be restored to a position of comfort in a safe society, and we can do it from a place of safety and shelter, a place of calm introspection and peaceful intercourse. A lodge. A chapter. A council.

This is the role of a lodge. We speak of this in many of our openings, several of our charges. Is it really there? Calm introspection. Discussion. In lodges?

5. Finally, there is the issue of structural deficiencies within our organizations. This is a core point to be addressed. We have done a lot to address some of the regulations that would deny men and women access to the benefits of Freemasonry, but have not even dared to speak the name of some others. We no longer bar amputees from joining a lodge, although I have heard that some fundamentalist Masons continue to do so. We still talk about the need to be “free born” or “free by birth,” but I daresay we’d not have an issue initiating a 40-year-old man who was born into indentured servitude as some millions are every year. We have removed the racial barriers, to some extent, in most of our lodges. We have started to address issues of LGBTQ members, if only notionally, and I expect that it wouldn’t come up as an issue in most cases. But in coming to terms with the 21st century, we have not come to terms with the equality of women. And we have not come to terms with the essentially Christian nature of the Craft. There’s that awkward moment when we look at a non-Christian, and ask him to make a promise or a vow that is so coloured with the water and air of Christianity that calling it non-denominational is intentionally misleading to ourselves. There is that awkward moment when we speak to a potential Mason and he asks with incredulity whether we continue to consider women as second class citizens. We need to address these things, and we need to do so from the point of view of where we want to end up, not using the vision of where we are.

And I haven’t even talked about our bureaucracy.

But why, my brethren, am I tasking you with this list?

Because there are no better men to speak to about this than you. I am addressing a group with membership overlap into a dozen Craft jurisdictions, into a similar number of Royal Arch jurisdictions, and I am speaking to leaders in those places. Your strength is in your membership; our need is in our membership requirements. I’ve already spoken about how I feel about the members of the AMD. You truly can take on leadership roles throughout the Craft.

How are we to take this on?

The key function of the AMD is research and education. Let’s change minds and hearts – minds through education and hearts through the warmth of our friendship and passion for our brethren. For that’s what it will take. We are not stuck in an endless loop of decline. AMD has proven that over the last dozen years, in both the US and Canada. We are, dare I claim it, still at least near the cutting edge. It is the rest of the Craft that is not there any more.

Take your R&E back into your lodges. Share the papers that you write for AMD, share the papers that you see in AMD, share the papers that are published in the Architect, with your lodges and chapters.

Advocate for change, as I am today to you, to the Grand First Principal of the Royal Arch in Alberta and to the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alberta. Find ways to keep the conservatives happy in your

lodges while shifting this organization of ours into the 21st century. Look today at 2029, not at 1959, in each of the considerations we make. And that includes our councils.

Grand Council officers will be there for you and with you, to assist you in your researches (seriously, we hear that line one hundred times for each one time anyone actually does it), to assist you in your education and presentations, to assist you in your leadership endeavours. Each of us will give a paper when we visit your councils, please expect one – it will not necessarily be long, a few words even, but it will be expected from each of them.

We spoke yesterday about Mentorship in Research and Education, and today we appointed R V Bro Adam Thompson, and I can't think of a better person, to lead the activation of that initiative, working alongside the Editor of the Architect and the DDGMs across the country.

Personally, I have huge shoes to fill. I look back at Bil Segui, Bob Turner, Prince Selvarage, Larry Halliday (who we miss here today), and am amazed that I am wearing this collar and apron. I will do my best to contribute what I can.

Let us all, as members of the Allied Masonic Degrees, continue to grow our organization. Let us be happy ourselves and let us extend that growth and happiness to others.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve you all. Again, I am proud and humbled to be in this position, a position in which I feel no little amount of imposter syndrome as I stand before you. I look forward to visiting widely over the coming two years, to getting to know each of you a little bit better than we know each other today, to assisting you (seriously) in your researches, to joining with you in celebrating your successes. It is on substance not insubstantial words that the bonds of fraternal love, relief and truth are based – I believe that we in the Allied Masonic Degrees are best positioned to extend them.

Thank you.

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BIOGRAPHY -- M. Ven. Bro. R John Hayes, Sovereign Grand Master

John was born in Edmonton, and attended school there, graduating from Bonnie Doon Composite High School and the University of Alberta with degrees in English, Psychology and Classics. After graduating, he worked as a writer and sports administrator, during and after playing and refereeing soccer, hockey and ball hockey – playing at a high enough level to be a good (if not quite good enough) multi-sport athlete and refereeing at a national or international level in all three sports. He continues to contribute to the soccer and hockey communities today. He is a lifelong supporter of Millwall Football Club in London and the Edmonton Oilers in the NHL. As a writer, he has written more than 3,000 separate articles on a variety of topics, and worked as an editor at Alberta Report newsmagazine, Windspeaker and Alberta Sweetgrass. He has owned a publishing company since 1997, and has taught

writing, editing and communication through Edmonton Continuing Education and in the U of A School of Business. After years with Alberta Soccer, he took a job with The Press Gallery, Edmonton's premier dry cleaner, and continues there in a managerial position.

He is married to Linda and has one daughter, Kaitlyn, who is also a grad from the U of A. As a family, they enjoy travel, canoeing and the outdoors. John reads widely and enjoys food, beer and wine, and he and Linda have a wide circle of friends. He is recognized as an expert in political and physical geography, and has been a featured speaker on speculative fiction, golden age mysteries and organizational theory, as well as a Masonic speaker on a variety of topics.

Masonically, his journey began in 2002 when he was initiated, passed and raised in Highlands-Unity Lodge #168 in Edmonton. John's father was an active Mason, a member of Canada Lodge #165 and Eastgate Lodge #192, but he had passed away prior to John joining the Craft.

John joined several concordant and appendant bodies within a few years, and served as Master of his Lodge in 2007, Master of Fiat Lux Lodge of Research #1980 from 2013-15, First Principal of Capital City Chapter #13 RAM in 2010 and 2019, High Priest of Northern Lights Tabernacle #130 HRAKTP in 2016, Sovereign Master of Yellowhead Council #220 AMD from 2006-8 and was the first Sovereign Master of Borealis Council #223 from 2014-16. He is also a member of Norwood Chapter #18 RAM, Zohar Council #4 Cryptic Rite Masons, Lumen Terrestris College #69 of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia and Arcturus Chapter of the Chapter of the Spiritual Knight. And a member of the Martinist Order of the Golden + Rosy Cross as well as several other esoteric organizations. He was elected Grand Scribe Nehemiah for Alberta from 2012-13 and Grand District Superintendent for Alberta District #1 in 2015-16. In the Allied Masonic Degrees of Canada, he served as District Deputy Grand Master for District #4 from 2013-14, was appointed Grand Lecturer from 2015-17, elected Deputy Grand Master from 2017-19 and Sovereign Grand Master for the term 2019-2021.

With wide online connections as well as in-person friendships, John has embraced the challenge of returning the Craft (or his portion of it) to a position of leadership within society, and of updating the Craft to match the avowed tenets of the organization and the accepted standards of the 21st century, while maintaining the ethos of the organization as best it can be maintained. He believes that this is a challenge which must be met by any facet of the Masonic structure that hopes to thrive, and it will take servant-leaders who are willing to address the issues facing the organizations to deal with this challenge.

Most Venerable Brother R. John Hayes

Sovereign Grand Master 2019-2021

Allied Masonic Degrees of Canada

- Past Master, Highlands-Unity Lodge No. 168, AF&AM
- Past First Principal, Capital City Chapter No. 18, Royal Arch Masons
- Past Sovereign Master, Yellowhead Council No. 220, AMD Canada
- Past Sovereign Master, Borealis Council No. 223, AMD Canada
- Past District Deputy Grand Master, District #4, AMD Canada
- Zohar Council, Cryptic Rite Masons
- Edmonton Preceptory, Knights Templar of Canada
- Holy Royal Arch Knights Templar Priests

