

THE ISSUE OF A LOCAL GRAND LODGE OF THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN

Much has recently been commented and written about this matter. In fact, our District is currently in the process of preparing a consolidation of various reports, mandated by our District Grand Master, to be presented at our upcoming Board meeting in March. Unfortunately, these reports simply reflect the rationale for the establishment of a local Grand Lodge, and, how it can work, based on our Constitution and the administration of our own District. It does not critically examine the pros and cons of the issue. Therefore, it is likely to present an incomplete and inadequate analysis for the consideration of Lodges and its members, who will eventually be asked to ballot for or against its establishment and withdrawal of our association with UGLE, the premier Grand Lodge in the world. This association, based on the formation of our District in 1740, is now in its 268th year and is one of the oldest in Masonry outside of the U.K.

The purpose of this paper then, is to present a more detailed perspective on the proposed formation of a local Grand Lodge for all of our members, but particularly our younger masons, who will likely make up the majority of those of us being called to vote on the future direction of Masonry in our area. It is a responsibility that those of us who are currently involved in its administration should not shirk, as it is the future of Masonry for our younger brethren which is at stake here.

Much of the research for this paper was presented at a panel discussion at Victoria Lodge's meeting in December last year and this updated and revised version covers the areas of **Autonomy, Costs, Comparative Organisations and Conclusions**. This exercise also assumes a merger with our brethren of the Scottish persuasion.

AUTONOMY

This is obviously the strongest motivating factor- to be totally in charge of own affairs. Unfortunately, it has been simplistically assumed that having prepared excellent reports on the how, why and wherefore and, having operated the District equally well, this translates into a similar level of performance in the establishment and management of a local Grand Lodge. This is far from the case, as a Grand Lodge will involve other areas of control and administration for which we have little or no expertise or experience such as the following, and this is not to be considered an exhaustive list:

- 1/ **Election/ Selection of a Grand Master and Management of the Grand Lodge.**
- 2/ **Constitution**
- 3/ **Coat of Arms, Banner and Regalia.**
- 4/ **Ritual**
- 5/ **Organisation of Degrees.**
- 6/ **Relationship and Coordination with Orders outside of the Craft.**
- 7/ **Relationship with Sponsoring Grand Lodges and their Districts in our region.**
- 8/ **Relationship with other Grand Lodges with which we need to be in amity.**

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I shall briefly run thru some of the difficulties which will be further magnified by the unfortunate reality of masonic and political insularity in our region. The Grand Master of a local Grand Lodge must be an individual of senior rank, well versed in all aspects of Masonry, but also one who has demonstrable experience in management, is reasonably well off to afford at least some Masonic travel costs and last ,but not least, commands the respect of a wide cross section of our masonic fraternity. These are not easy qualities to come by and, just to find much less to elect the right individual, will be no easy task in light of my above reservation.

We would have two Constitutions to work with but, having some experience in legal documentation, I am well aware that merging the two to our own requirements will require considerable legal and masonic skills and experience. There has been the suggestion of picking and working with a Constitution from another Grand Lodge, which would have been formed out of our two Constitutions and would have covered the basics of these Constitutions. If so, then this would ease the burden considerably, but comparison would still be necessary to ensure the quality of coverage we are accustomed to. Additively, there is the need to tailor the end product to the specific requirements of a very small Grand Lodge vis-à-vis the larger ones we would be emerging from.

Coat of Arms, Banner and Regalia will not be easy and we would require professional assistance in this regard, currently not available amongst our brethren to the best of my knowledge.

Ritual for the Craft degrees would likely be the easiest with the Emulation and Scottish Standard being the rituals of choice and older Lodges allowed to use their older, original ones where applicable. Rituals for most of the other Degrees outside of the Craft are substantially different between the two Constitutions. There are other, serious difficulties as well which are outlined below.

Organisation of Degrees can be considered with our relationship with other Orders outside the Craft and this will be a back-breaker. Our two Constitutions have different approaches to the Craft, Royal Arch and Mark Degrees, which are virtually irreconcilable in their present form. The other Orders would be a similar case in point, as their Grand Bodies operate independently of the two Craft Grand Lodges, with Districts in place in our region, and relinquishment by them is probably out of the question. This is a reflection of the fact that Masonry of almost every recognized Order in our two Constitutions has been with us for over at least 100 years and, in some cases, even longer than that. This is particularly true of Barbados with over 30 Lodges, Chapters, Conclaves, Councils etc. Additionally, Antigua and St. Thomas also have ancient and traditional masonic connections. Consequently, even though separation from the English and Scottish Craft Grand Lodges is at least feasible, there will be the almost insurmountable task of separation from the other Orders, to achieve complete separation and autonomy.

Our relationship with UGLE and the Grand Lodge of Scotland, the Sponsoring Grand Lodges of the local Grand Lodge, will likely be very amicable and reasonably easy to accomplish. This would hopefully carry thru to the other Districts in our regions, the largest of whom are unlikely to join with us in the foreseeable future, being firmly entrenched and much more in unity with their respective Grand Bodies than we appear to be. They do not share the lack of enthusiasm suggested by comments about being 'cast adrift and not getting value for our dues paid to them'. We could, however, find ourselves being slowly cut off from cohesive and fraternal contacts with them since, as members of a local, independent Grand Lodge, we no longer can truly share that original essence of belonging to the two Great Grand Lodges of the world from whence Masonry emerged.

We shall have to establish relationships with those other Grand Lodges with which we may wish to be in amity. This will not be as simple and straightforward as it may initially appear. There are presently over 170 Grand Lodges in the world and the communications involved will be time consuming, notwithstanding the fact that with the blessings of the UK Grand Lodges, they are unlikely to refuse us recognition. Nevertheless, we shall have to determine the extent to which we wish to pursue this and, hopefully, we may be able to solicit the assistance of our former Grand Lodges in this regard, but we cannot take this for granted.

COSTS

Costing exercises have been prepared by both the DGM and DG. Treas., EC. These have to be considered rudimentary at best, because it is difficult to even estimate if one looks at the variables outlined above. Many of these variables are not properly considered because, until the exercise is completed, whatever budget is prepared can only be looked on with askance in light of the uncertainty involved in the decision making process for the establishment of a new organization. For example, do we pay a Grand Secretary on a full time basis or should it be considered a half-day job? Should the fledgling Grand Lodge take over and assume management of the Salters Complex, the most likely headquarters of any local Grand Lodge? Or, should it just rent space and pay for that only and, if so, how much space? Will the Grand Secretary need an assistant on a part time or full time basis? Should we cover any or some of the travel expenses of the Grand Master or his Deputy officiating in his absence? And, this should not be regarded as a complete list. To illustrate the vagaries of costing further, let me just point to two recent costings of what it would take to run and maintain the Salters Complex. The disparity in costing between that of the DGM, EC., a prominent and successful, local businessman in his own right and Bro. Peter Ross, an experienced real estate property management accountant and consultant, was in excess of \$60,000. My own feeling is that the cost of running a small, local Grand Lodge will be at least double what it currently is for EC. members and more than that for our SC. brethren. The economies of scale, as we well know, do not favour small institutions.

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There is also the masonic cost in Grand Rank promotions which has gone completely unnoticed. Obviously, no mason can seriously consider a Grand Rank promotion from any small Grand Lodge to be comparable in prestige and importance to that from any of the two great Grand Lodges of the world to which we all currently belong. But there is a more insidious cost which can only be understood and realized by examining the statistics of the two kinds of promotion. Some elaboration and explanation is needed to exemplify this cost. Using statistics from the English Constitution which I have been able to obtain, UGLE awards about 250 Grand Rank appointments annually for its approximately 270,000 members or just slightly under 0.1%. A local Grand Lodge would have to do at least 20 in its first year or just over 1.5% of a projected total membership of 1500. But it gets much worse if we extrapolate further over a longer term like 10 years. Over that longer period, UGLE's percentage of appointments for its total membership would only rise to just under 1%, whereas those of the local Grand Lodge would increase to almost 14%! As well, these calculations only cover those appointments which are annual and not those of say the Grand Master, his Deputy and assistants, Grand Secretary, Registrar, Treasurer, Director of Ceremonies etc, which are usually of a longer term and would likely change every five or so years. Inclusion of such changes and new appointments to replace them would hardly affect the percentage situation in UGLE, but in a small Grand Lodge we are looking at 15% of our total membership in Grand Rank appointments over the longer term. This would represent a significant diminution in the importance of local Grand Rank appointments due to the vast, numerical increase in appointments additive to the obvious, unfavourable comparison in prestige already indicated. Brethren would have to seriously ask themselves if this is the kind of Grand Rank promotion they are looking for to sweeten their labour after working their way up thru the ranks. I doubt the statistics for the Scottish Constitution would be much different for comparative purposes, as the UK Grand Lodges tend to carefully follow similar trends.

Last but certainly not least, is the return of Warrants by Lodges whose members vote to become part of a local Grand Lodge. For very old Lodges, of which there are several in our Districts, this will be an irreplaceable loss. For an ancient Atholl Lodge like Albion 212 ER, which predates the Union in 1813 of UGLE, it is difficult to express the enormity of such a loss. Members of such Lodges will have an even more onerous burden to consider when they are required to vote on the formation of a local Grand Lodge. Return of Warrants, if applicable, will also apply to Centenary certificates and, in the case of Albion Lodge, its Bi-Centenary certificate as well

COMPARATIVE ORGANISATIONS

We need to ask ourselves, if this exercise we are about to consider embarking on, has been undertaken by other quasi fraternal/charitable organizations. In Barbados, we have the example of five such organisations with millions of members worldwide eg. Rotary, Lions, Jaycees, Kiwanis and Foresters. These bodies are divided into Districts to represent various geographical areas and, within these, branches, chapters, clubs etc. in the individual countries of such areas. Yet, they all retain that link with and remain part of their International Headquarters. They have not seen fit to relinquish that essential link which makes them recognized all over the world and of which they are justifiably proud. Brethren, these are large organizations, in some cases larger than our fraternity and, to ignore and dismiss this comparative exercise, would be both foolhardy and arrogant. After all, we are being asked to consider the severing of our relationship with our respective Grand Lodges, to be rid of what is being trotted out as a political and colonial connection to a fraternity that is nothing more than a relic of a past colonial empire spread across the world to assist the empire building process. The essence of true Masonry emanating out of the three great UK. Grand Lodges of which we are part, we are being told is reflective of nothing more than another extension of political and colonial indoctrination of our personas.

CONCLUSIONS

The obvious and the most perceived advantage of establishing a local Grand Lodge would be total control of our own affairs. This might be a worthwhile and useful objective if we were discussing establishing a local bank or other institution, where the only requirement would be to employ the right people and manage it properly and, if applicable, profitably. But Masonry is not just another organization: it is a fraternal brotherhood of men spread all over the world. There is a personal and spiritual essence to Masonry that is indefinable and incomparable. The brethren of our two Constitutions are part of that initial and formative essence as members of the two great Grand Lodges of the world. The Pro Grand Master of UGLE, the Marquis of Northampton, in a recent address acknowledged that UGLE, to which all the other Grand Lodges look for direction and advice, can only do that and will not assume the role of arbiter in reconciling Grand Lodge relationships. The recently appointed Grand Chancellor, Wor. Bro. Alan Englefield, in his first address as Chancellor last year, emphasized the importance of the overseas Districts and Lodges to UGLE. I mention these to remind the brethren of the reputation and importance of the great Grand Lodge of which we are members and, likewise, the respect and importance it attaches to our continuing membership.

We are not being cast adrift but we can cast ourselves adrift by forming a local Grand Lodge, which will completely sever us from that essence of Masonry to be found only in the great Grand Lodges of the UK, the spiritual home of Masonry.

Another aspect which brethren should not overlook and must consider, is that Grand Lodges, particularly the smaller ones, tend to isolate themselves because they are Grand Lodges in their own right when properly established. Their Districts and Lodges are their constituents and they develop into entities of their own, which eventually lose touch and cannot remain part of what they emerged from. It clearly needs to be understood therefore, that membership of a local Grand Lodge will ultimately separate us from that essence, which we presently enjoy and experience as members of the two great Grand Lodges to which we all currently belong. In other words, we shall have a masonic organization we can call our own, but it will be just that nothing more, nothing else. Any realistic comparison to what we had before will be purely a figment of our imagination.

Finally, brethren, the experience of Caribbean organizations to date has not been good and cannot be ignored. Appointments to executive positions are of times subject to political and other expedient qualifications, which do not transform into capable leadership. The end result is usually bad management and administration. The process of severing our current Masonic membership is well documented in our Constitutions, even though in the present instance, it has not been adhered to circumspectly. However, there is nothing in our Constitutions that I am aware of, which informs us of any procedures to be followed for returning to the fold, if we do not like what we create and have become part of. In other words, brethren, the decision to form a local Grand Lodge may well be irreversible, short of shutting it down; and, any of us who become disenchanted may find there is no recourse to what we once had and enjoyed.

A parting thought for further consideration. The two great Grand Lodges we belong to, although part and parcel of the same original essence, have developed and matured and have differences in Constitutions, Culture, Traditions and Protocol, which are not compatible. These would have to be replaced in the formation of a local Grand Lodge but with what? If we seriously think change is desirable, a very senior brother has suggested, tongue in cheek as he puts it, we join or merge with the Prince Hall Masons, who already have a Caribbean Grand Lodge in our region. However, this would mean adopting Masonry that is alien to us as those of us who have visited their Assemblies well know. Brethren, we were taught to be cautious very early in Masonry and we should be cautious about change just for the sake of change or for reasons not directly related to Masonry.

Brethren, this paper outlines other aspects of this issue, which I feel obligated as one of the senior masons in our District to explain to you. Hopefully, it will assist you to make a truly informed decision regarding the formation of a local Grand Lodge and the future of Masonry in our region.

PREPARED AND SUBMITTED BY

Original signed by

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March, 2008

ADDENDUM

A learned and senior brother in reviewing my paper posed a relevant query, which I feel obliged to respond and include as a consequence. His concern was the possibility of a divided ballot of confirmation as required under **Rule 187 (ii)**, with some of our Lodges deciding to form a local Grand Lodge and others to remain with UGLE. While the said Rule is very clear on the procedures for Lodges in favour, the Constitutions and Regulations are strangely silent on what those Lodges against should do. My take is that these Lodges would remain with UGLE as unattached Lodges or, if sufficient in numbers and desirous of so doing, merge and form a new Inspectorate or District after consultation and approval thereof by UGLE. There is already precedence for this in other areas of the world where UGLE operates, such as Africa and Asia and even Canada and Malta, where a local Grand Lodge was recently formed.