
Lodge consolidation

Introduction

Is consolidation a dirty word? I was asked by RW Bro. Don Stutt to participate in this discussion after having been involved in the consolidation of Maple Leaf Park No. 74 and Park Lodge No. 63, resulting in MLP No. 63. This idea was proposed a few years before being implemented, but initially was opposed by some of the old guard of both lodges.

Eventually Park Lodge initiated the process by writing Maple Leaf to consider consolidation with them.

Why Consolidate?

MW Bro. R. Glen Allen told me that usually putting two weak lodges together results in one large weak lodge, that eventually turns in its warrant anyways. I wholeheartedly agree with him.

I believe the ideal time to consider consolidation is when both or all lodges have something of value to offer the other(s). MLP had a full suite of officers and good 'bench', providing years of officers for the lodge. Park had many experienced Past Masters, lots of attending brethren who didn't want to assume office and, of great importance, it's own lodge building, in good financial health. I look at lodge consolidations like a corporate mergers. They work best when both lodges have significant 'assets' to offer the other. This is a key point. If lodges wait until they are near bankruptcy, either financially or in terms of having very few active brethren, it's a serious mistake.

At that time I believe they probably should just turn in their warrant, as they have very little to offer a potential 'partner' going forward. Unfortunately in all too many cases, the same lack of lodge planning, egos, stubbornness and a lack of foresight that got the lodge to the point of collapse can cause the demise of what otherwise could have been a successful consolidation of one or more lodges if planned earlier.

So Brethren, once again, lodge planning is key.

What steps need to be taken?

If it appears that consolidation is a consideration, than the worshipful Master, with guidance from experienced Past Masters and perhaps your DDGM and Grand Lodge Committee on Warranted Lodges should:

1. Form a committee. Your committee needs to consider what lodge(s) would be suitable 'targets' to consider approaching for consolidation. Some of the areas to consider might be:

- A. What is the culture and feeling of the lodge? How closely does their culture mesh with your own?
- B. What are their goals and objectives? Are they a 'social' lodge or one that focuses on education? Again, a good fit?
- C. What type of work do they do? How close is their ritual to your own? How flexible is your lodge on changing *your* ritual?
- D. Where would you meet and when? As hard as it might be to believe, some lodges are very inflexible regarding meeting dates and times.
- E. Be realistic. What strengths do you have to offer? What weaknesses do you need to improve on?
- F. Be committed to compromise and sharing. Like in a marriage, two good 'givers' is essential.

2. Visit the other lodge regularly. We normally date before we marry, and so we should do likewise with a potential consolidation. Perhaps doing a joint degree or other joint activities may give you some further idea of how that lodge functions, and what you might expect if you merge together.

3. Contact the other lodge, preferably in writing. You would want to explain in your letter that you are seeking a possible consolidation, and would they be interested in forming a committee to explore the possibly with your lodge? While you may have already had some informal discussions on the matter it's best to properly document the process so it can be properly presented to your lodge for a vote, if it proceeds to that stage.

4. If the other lodge is open to the idea some of the key factors to discuss with their committee may include:

- A. Finances. (Just like a marriage)
- B. Meeting location and times.
- C. Ritual. In our lodges, our ritual was very close but had some minor differences. We resolved it by letting brethren give lectures in the ritual they knew, but all new officers would learn it from the book. (A little challenging for the Director of Ceremonies) Eventually all of the ritual performed will be from the Grand Lodge book.
- D. Lodge name and number. Usually the lowest number is chosen. (The easy part). The name can be a contentious issue. Remember the marriage analogy with giving and compromise.
- E. Officers who will be Worshipful Master and filling the other offices? Ideally a mixture of brethren from both lodges.
- F. What needs to be done to keep the newly formed lodge healthy going forward? Otherwise whatever caused the lodge to need to consolidate will happen again in the not too distant future if steps are not taken to plan and prepare for the future.

5. Provided the two committees are agreed to recommend consolidation to their brethren, organize an informal meeting together with both lodges. I believe this is a key step that should not be ignored. In our case W Bro. Lloyd Linn chaired this meeting and made sure that *every* brother in attendance had the opportunity to ask questions, express his concerns and be heard. This will help allay the concerns of some who may only attend lodge infrequently and are worried that the nature of their lodge is being changed and may otherwise just show up to vote against the consolidation. The result of taking this step with our lodges was that when an official vote was taken in both lodges the result was unanimous in favor of consolidation.

6. Provided that the informal discussion was positive, prepare a proper notice of motion, give due and timely notice, and conduct a vote in open lodge. Generally this is a vote and not a secret ballot unless dictated otherwise by your by-laws.

7. If approved in both lodges, a new set of by-laws will need to be written and submitted to Grand Lodge for approval, along with a request to consolidate. Having done this process twice, I would highly recommend getting some assistance and direction from Grand Lodge and experienced brethren. There are a number of ways to simplify the process, and avoid contentious complications during the writing of your by-laws.

I wouldn't rely on your existing by-laws since they may be very old and Grand Lodge has different requirements today than at the time your by-laws may have been written.

8. Once approved, Grand Lodge and our Grand Master will arrange for the constitution of the new lodge.

So is 'consolidation' a dirty word? Some think of it as a failure, and the end of their lodge. I believe it may be a chance however for a new beginning, one that will have a future with growth, prosperity and strength for many years to come.

Thank you for your time and attention. I welcome any questions or comments.

RW Bro. Dan Mosher

Maple Leaf Park Lodge No. 63

Excelsior Lodge No. 194

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