

## **What is a Grand Lodge? Or what is the Grand Lodge of Minnesota?**

By Ed Halpaus,  
Grand Lodge Education Officer

There is a word I like called “Mumpsimus.” It is a real word, and it comes from an old story of an illiterate priest who, on being told of an error of his reading of the [Latin] Mass, replied, “I will not change my old mumpsimus for your new sumpsimus.” So the word mumpsimus has a meaning of one who clings obstinately to old errors or disproved ideas,<sup>i</sup> or as it was first explained to me, mumpsimus means a persistent belief in a mistaken idea.<sup>ii</sup>

Well I certainly have had a mumpsimus, or two, over the years on a variety of subjects, and I’m constantly working not to continue to have a mumpsimus, and to eliminate any that I might have.

What is a Grand Lodge? A Lodge is a certain number Masons duly assembled with the Holy Bible Square and Compass and Charter or Warrant empowering them to work. But what makes a Grand Lodge Grand?

Grand in this sense means first, principal, or most important; much in the way we use the term Grandfather, or Grand Total. It doesn’t mean Grand in the sense that the Lodge is grand being big, impressive, or beautiful.<sup>iii</sup>

Every once-in-a-while when I’m speaking with a Brother Mason, the idea that the Grand Lodge is some separate thing way off in the big city, and detached from the average Mason will come up. One brother told me once that the Lodges in the far-flung regions of our jurisdiction feel disenfranchised by the Grand Lodge. That may sound familiar to something you may have heard, and it sounds like a mumpsimus to me.

This thinking about the Grand Lodge being a separate entity is not new it has been around for a long time. It was written about back in 1946 by Brother Elbert Bede in the Philalethes,<sup>iv</sup> he called it “A Mistaken Conception,” and he went on to offer two reasons for this “Mistaken Conception.”

One of the reasons Brother Bede cited for this line of thinking was that Grand Lodges for the most part called the Lodges in their jurisdiction “Subordinate Lodges,” which would indicate a subservient place for the Lodges. But here in Minnesota a number of years ago our Grand Lodge changed the wording from subordinate, because the Lodges in Minnesota, as in all Regular Grand Lodge Jurisdictions, control the Grand Lodge. So, instead of being subordinate they are in fact Constituent Lodges. Every Grand Lodge Officer is first and foremost a member of a constituent Lodge and in most cases if not every case, an active member of his lodge.

Every constituent Lodge is an important member of the Grand Lodge. In order to open a Lodge Communication there needs to be at least seven members of the Lodge present, and in order to open a Grand Lodge Communication there needs to be a majority of the member Lodges represented, or present. So if there are less than 7 members present a Lodge cannot open, and if there are less than a majority of the constituent Lodges present a Grand Lodge can't open.<sup>v</sup>

Since every Lodge in the Jurisdiction is a member of the Grand Lodge the Master and Wardens of each constituent Lodge are also members of the Grand Lodge. In fact that is stipulated in the Masonic Law of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, and it is number 13 of the Landmarks adopted by the Grand Lodge of Minnesota on January 9, 1856.<sup>vi</sup> Here is what item 13 says, "That the Master and Wardens of every chartered Lodge are of right and inalienably representatives in, and members of, the Grand Lodge."

There are other members too, like those the Constituent Lodges elect as the elected officers of the Grand Lodge, and those who have been elected in the past, such as Past Grand Masters, and also the officers appointed by the Grand Master. These include the line officers, non line officers, Grand Lodge Representatives, and the like.

So here is the bottom line: No legislation may be enacted, no change in any law, rule, or regulation may be made, no Grand Lodge Officer may be elected or installed unless the representatives of a majority of the constituent Lodges remain present to maintain a quorum. By the way, the number required for a quorum was set by the representatives of the Lodges while they were assembled as a Grand Lodge a long time ago.

The Grand Lodge Officers are powerless to proceed as a Grand Lodge unless the constituent Lodges make it possible for them to do so. As Brother Bede said in his article, "In my opinion, it might with more truth be said that Grand Lodge is subordinate to the constituent Lodges than the Lodges are subordinate to the Grand Lodge." I agree with that statement, which is a "sumpsimus," and means "a correct expression for replacing an erroneous one in familiar use." Or "a correct but undesired substitute for a habitual error."<sup>vii</sup>

The Second reason cited by Brother Bede, that the Grand Lodge is perceived a separate entity, is that the representatives of the constituent Lodges have so frequently played such a small part in the proceedings of the Grand Lodge Annual Communications.

This is an easy thing to correct. It possibly comes from the fact that the representatives of the Lodges are unaccustomed to voicing their opinions in such a large assembly as a Grand Lodge Communication. So how do we correct this? It's easy enough to do. For one thing, become familiar with the proposed amendments submitted prior to the Grand Lodge Communication, discuss them in your Lodge, find out what the members of your Lodge desire, write out something to say to contribute to the possibility of passing or defeating the motion, and be willing to let your fellow representatives of the constituent

Lodges know what your opinion is. Another way to correct this is to become involved with the Grand Lodge in some way, and one way is to volunteer to serve on a committee.

Here is what the Minnesota Masonic Code says about Committees: “Those members of a constituent Lodge of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Minnesota who shall have attained the rank of Master shall be eligible for appointment on any committee. The aforementioned requirement shall be waived for Special Committees or Committees handling programs and projects set forth by the Grand Master or the Grand Lodge. The members of these committees shall be Master Masons of this jurisdiction.”

Also if there is something in the Masonic Code of our Jurisdiction, which a Grand Lodge member thinks should be corrected in some way he may draw up a piece of legislation, (the Resolutions Committee will help him with it if he would like it,<sup>viii</sup> and our Grand Secretary will put him in touch with the committee,) and submit it so that it will be discussed and brought up for a vote at the Grand Lodge Communication.

When, and if, you see the only changes to legislation proposed are by Grand Lodge officers the reason is, no one else is doing it. The Masons we elect would prefer that the representatives of the Lodges take an active part in the workings of the Grand Lodge Communication. But as our elected representatives they also will do what we have asked them to do, and that is to continue to run our Grand Lodge effectively. If we don't participate in the proposal process that is our choice.

The Master, and Wardens of the constituent Lodges, as well as the other Masons who are members of the Grand Lodge, control the acts of every session of our Grand Lodge. They have the power to propose, enact, or not to enact, by their approval or disapproval on any motion, or proposed legislation. We who are members of our Grand Lodge need to be active and informed on the workings of the Grand Lodge so that we may do the best job in representing our Lodge Brothers while we are in Grand Lodge convened.

Also we who are members of our Grand Lodge should know that any criticism offered by us on any action of the Grand Lodge is a criticism of ourselves,<sup>ix</sup> because we as Masters and Wardens of our Lodges, or having been elected as a Grand Lodge Officer, or having been appointed to a job for our Grand Lodge by our Grand Master, possibly have not done what we should have done as a member of our Grand Lodge.

It's kind of like the old saying my Mother used to say to me when I was a kid; “Remember when you point your finger at someone else you have the rest of your fingers pointing back at you.” (Well, that may not be an exact quote, I didn't write it down I'm only going from memory, and of course I only heard it once or twice as a kid, if it weren't for my very good memory I would have forgotten it.)

One Grand Master has said at the beginning of the Grand Lodge Communication in his Jurisdiction, to the representatives of the Lodges assembled, as soon as the communication was opened, that they are the Grand Lodge. He urged them to participate and gave them every opportunity to do just that.<sup>x</sup>

“Grand Lodge is not a separate entity. It is composed of constituent Lodges which, through their representatives are responsible for all its acts.” And I will add that when you as a member, or attendee, of Grand Lodge participate as much as you are able you will enjoy the Grand Lodge Communication a whole lot more.

So who makes up our Grand Lodge, and what is the Grand Lodge? It is the governing body of Freemasonry within the Jurisdiction of Minnesota. It is composed of its officers, and its permanent members, (usually past Grand Lodge officers,) and the Masters and Wardens of the all the Lodges Chartered in the Jurisdiction, which are the Constituent Lodges of the Grand Lodge, and the Chairmen of the Grand Lodge Committees who are not otherwise members of the grand Lodge.<sup>xi</sup>

I have just a couple of additional points to make just in case there is a mumpsimus floating around out there somewhere. In the Minnesota Masonic Code the powers and duties of the Grand Lodge are listed, and it says; “The powers of the Grand Lodge are executive, legislative, and judicial; and the Grand Lodge is supreme in all Masonic matters, limited only by this constitution, which it may amend or change, as provided therein, and by the ancient landmarks. The executive powers are such as will make effective its legislation and enforce Masonic usage and custom, and shall be carried out by the Grand Master.” So all of the members of the Grand Lodge make up the group, which is the Grand Lodge, and the Grand Master carries out their wishes.

The communications of the Grand Lodge are of three types. The three types of Communications may be Annual, Special, or Occasional. I think we all know what the Annual Communication of a Grand Lodge is, because we have been talking about that.

The Grand Master may call a Special Communication at any time for the transaction of such business only as he may name in the call thereof, but no business affecting the constitution, the general regulations, or landmarks shall be transacted. And 30 days notice shall be given by mail of the Special Communication to each Lodge, and to each officer and past officer who is a member of Grand Lodge.<sup>xii</sup>

The Grand Master may open an Occasional Grand Lodge at any time or place, for the purpose of Masonic funerals, dedications, cornerstone layings, breaking ground for Masonic buildings, constitution of new Lodges, and other strictly Masonic ceremonial occasions.<sup>xiii</sup>

So the Master, Wardens, and possibly other Brethren, of your Lodge and mine are members of the Grand Lodge, they together with all the other Masters and Wardens along with the other members of Grand Lodge work on our behalf to take care of the business of our Grand Lodge.

I hope this might clear up any mumpsimus that might be around concerning our Grand Lodge.

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- <sup>i</sup> New Century Dictionary
  - <sup>ii</sup> Kinder Brothers
  - <sup>iii</sup> Minnesota Counselor's Guide
  - <sup>iv</sup> Philalethes, a publication of the Philalethes Society 1946- Bro.Elbert Bede, M.P.S.
  - <sup>v</sup> Minnesota Masonic Code
  - <sup>vi</sup> Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia 1995 edition
  - <sup>vii</sup> New Century Dictionary
  - <sup>viii</sup> The Secretary's Handbook, the Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of MN
  - <sup>ix</sup> Philalethes, a publication of the Philalethes Society 1946 – Bro. Elbert Bebe, M.P.S.
  - <sup>x</sup> Philalethes, a Publication of the Philalethes Society 1946 – Bro. Elbert Bede, M.P.S.
  - <sup>xi</sup> The Secretary's Handbook, the Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of MN
  - <sup>xii</sup> Minnesota Masonic Code
  - <sup>xiii</sup> Minnesota Masonic Code