

TO BOLDLY GO WHERE NO CRAFT HAS GONE BEFORE

By David C. Wells, PM
Committee on Masonic Education

Worshipful Sir: What if one of our newer Brethren proposed to the Lodge that we no longer use mechanical pencils to record our minutes and that we should begin using the fountain pen for all such clerical matters immediately? Its advantages are obvious, there are fewer chances of inadvertent erasure, and India ink would not fade as quickly as pencil. Brethren, as Worshipful Master, I call for discussion of the matter before the Lodge. What be your pleasure? Worshipful Sir, as a long standing Past Master of this Lodge, I would respectfully disagree with the esteemed young Brother making such a motion. This proposal if adopted, would give the appearance to many Brethren that we are a bit of a "High Hat" Lodge, preferring, as such an elite writing implement as the fountain pen to a practical alternative as the mechanical pencil. In addition, are we not straightforward men? In a time when some of our Brethren are facing perilous economical times, who will pay for these pens, who will pay for the nibs and ink?

Now that I have your attention, I freely admit that scenario is a bit preposterous, and I am being slightly tongue-in-cheek only to direct your attention to the concept of tools. What I propose is no more preposterous than doing away with the modern trestleboard printed in our local papers and reviving the old use of drawings on a chalkboard. Consider the argument presented in Lodges to do away with trestleboards, which has occurred due to "perilous economic times." Should we return to the chalkboard of the past or just not communicate with our Brethren? Brethren, our job is to make good men better. We do this not by trestleboards or computers. We do this by establishing and maintaining relationships with one another by using the best interpersonal communication tools. No matter if it is the pencil, pen, trestleboard or the computer, they are just that, tools we employ like the setting maul, common gavel, and twenty-four inch gauge of our elder Brethren. As the fountain pen became the better tool, so did the disposable pen, so too came the advent of the computer still frowned upon in many Lodges. To modify the signature line of Captain James T. Kirk, fictional character of STAR TREK it is time, we BOLDLY GO WHERE NO CRAFT HAS GONE BEFORE.

The computer is now old news, like it or not. They are in all modern offices and most homes. I remember discussions among Brethren within the past five years about having a Grand Lodge homepage, and IF one was really needed? Many of the younger petitioners to our Lodges today have never known a world without

computers or the Internet. Where do we look for the new communication tools in use today? We look to our youth as we have in the past. What new tools are they using? They use cell phones, text messaging, picture messaging, Facebook, Twitter, iPods and blogging, just to name a few. Imagine your message on Facebook, David "is attending Lodge tonight at Taylor No. 23 Masonic Lodge," or David "is visiting Harman Lodge No. 222 tonight." These messages go out to everyone who you have chosen as a "friend" on Facebook. It creates an opportunity when one of your friends asks what is Lodge or where do you meet? The same is true with Twitter. Twitter allows users to send "updates" or "tweets" as they are called; (text-based posts, up to 140 characters long) to the Twitter website via short message service by cell phone or instant messaging, from their computer at home or work. Twitter reports your "status," or what you are doing. Some use it to post interesting links and some use it as a marketing tool.

One great tool that I have used for personal Masonic education this past year is podcasts. A podcast is an audio file that can be listened to in real time or downloaded by an RSS (Real Simple Syndication) feed to an iPod. Podcasts are free to download and simple to set up. One of the best Masonic ones that I have found is a weekly podcast called Masonic Central located at:
<http://masoniccentral.blogspot.com/>

They interview many Masonic authors to include Stephen Dafoe, Christopher Hodapp, Brent Morris, Paul Bessel, J. J. Miller, and one of my new favorites, musician Howie Damron, who has a wonderful mission called Masonic Pride. Masonic Central was begun by two Brethren, who are not representing any as they say "regular or irregular Grand Lodge," just their thoughts and the interest in Freemasonry. What a wonderful service to the Craft at large that Greg Stewart and Dean Kennedy perform. What does it cost, you ask? It only costs about an hour each week of your time to listen to the show and an open mind on your part. As with any good education, some parts you will disagree with and some you will not, but what is important is the ability to see what other jurisdictions think about a topic and what some of the premier Masonic writers say. To me, this is currently one of the best Masonic education tools on the Internet. You can download the show and play it on an iPod as you drive to work or at your leisure.

If you type "Masonic Blogging" in a Google search, you will see hits for 707,000 as of February 2009. This number has steadily increased over the last two years and will increase greatly in the coming years. What is a blog? The word "blog" is short for weblog. It

is a website, usually maintained by one person, and is a commentary on popular events in which the person is actively involved or feel is of importance. It is like an online diary of the person's activities. More and more Brethren are starting personal blogs talking about Freemasonry. Many are dedicated strictly to Freemasonry. They tell you about their Lodge, what they are doing in the community, and what direction they feel the Craft should be taking. Of course, in using methods of communication accessible by the public, we must adhere to the ageless admonitions and strict obligation to keep inviolable the secrets and mysteries of the Order and comply with the rules and edicts of the Grand Lodge of Virginia.

Cell phones, text messaging, picture messaging, Facebook, Twitter and iPods are just tools of communication used in our prevailing world to stay in touch and aid in exchange of ideas. These tools inform, facilitate dialogue and interest in a variety of topics. Contrary to what Dr. Marshall McLuhan would direct, we must view these tools not as the communication, or message itself, but as the means to help aid and assist the Craft in dispersing the vital message of Masonry. It is up to us to know what these new tools are and how we can use each for the right topic to formulate effective communication. Relationships and friendships are the glue that binds us together as a community and as a Craft. Relationships are our "social cable tow" Freemasonry is not a tool — it is, as we say in our mission statement, a fraternal organization promoting values of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God. Without application of new tools to maintain one-on-one relationships, our vision of being the premier organization composed of men of integrity and character who are honest, true to their word, believe in God, devoted to family, charitable in their community, and courteous and helpful to each other, is not possible.

Brethren, be bold. This week and in the months ahead, I personally challenge each of you to make Masonic education and our modern tools your frontier, to make it the purpose of your voyage, your quest, your mission **to boldly go where no Craft has gone before.**