

A Short Address to Bon Accord Lodge
On 19th March, 2010
By Richard King, PJGW.

The Pareto Principle

Brethren, it is probably true to say that most lodges struggle in today's extra busy world. The most obvious 'struggle area' is in member numbers, for, without sufficient numbers of members, it is hard to be economically viable, and it's also hard to fill offices, and get things done in the lodge. Further, it is hard to adequately promulgate the Masonic life.

Who among you has heard of the Pareto rule? Who can say what it means? It is actually an economist's term, and is particularly referred to and used as a modelling tool in the business world. What it says, in effect, is that 80% of any business's profits will be generated by 20% of its product line. It has been observed that it applies in huge numbers of ways in not only business, but also throughout modern life. It is often called the "80/20" rule. Importantly, it seems to apply in the area of voluntary associations, and it is my thesis that its applicability is especially noticeable in Masonic lodges. However, I think it may be worse than 80/20; Masonically, it may be as bad as the '90/10' rule, or even the '95/5' rule. What I'm referring to is, of course, that 90% of the participation in, and contribution to, lodge doings comes from a mere 10% of the members. The other 90% of members contribute only 10% to lodge activities. It seems that these other 90%-95% are very erratically engaged with their lodges and the Masonic life, giving higher priority to such mindless activities as watching television, or playing games on their computers.

Most lodges have about 20-25 members, and there are in Queensland, well over 100 lodges below the 25 member line. This means that if the rule applies across the board, then only 3, 4, or 5 members are doing most of the work. These are what I call the indispensable men; without them most lodges would stagger steadily towards oblivion. Curiously, there is a quirk of human psychology which makes some members resent the vigour of these few, even to the point of saying things like 'those three blokes run everything'. If you have the view that there is not enough avenue in your lodge for you to be involved, just say so! Most of the 'few' would simply love it if some of the burden of lodge affairs were to be lifted off their shoulders. The problem of fewer and fewer actually conducting most of the lodge's affairs becomes worse and worse as member numbers fall. Might I remind brethren of the good old Australian rule that it is immoral to bludge on your mates. If you were all involved equally in lodge activities, just imagine the possibilities.

If I am correct in applying the Pareto Rule to as small an entity as a Masonic lodge, then it follows that the whole structure of Craft Masonry is being carried on the shoulders of a remarkably small number of our aggregate membership. Is it any wonder that these keen men are stressed by our plight, and mildly upset by the apparent apathy of the passenger members? I believe the answer is for lodges to work towards changing the participation dynamics. We must make lodge life attractive and important enough in members' priority lists so that it becomes the "60/40", or "50/50", or even better, rule. Member commitment is the key to participation. Happily, I am prepared to counsel and advise on how this can be achieved. Just ask.