

Thanks everyone for coming. It is really beautiful to see all of you here today. Right after Christmas and on this day of service of God, you manage to join us to celebrate brotherly love, friendship, and family. Thank you.

Many thanks to the Installation Team for your time and a great ceremony.

Didn't you guys think it was beautiful? Let's give them a round of applause.

Thanks the Wor. Vince Parell. You really raised us up today. What a voice!

I would like to thank the many volunteers who contributed to make this happen.

Linda Porter for the beautiful flowers.

Kitty Wilson, for your ideas and being the photographer

David Castillo for the catering and Chris Richards for the decorations.

The youth Organizations:

- The Elk Grove Chapter of DeMolay for the Flag presentation
- The Rainbow Girls for the beautiful Apron presentation
- The Job Daughters for the Cross Closing

At this time let me recognize the Junior Past Master for the fine work done under your leadership the past couple of years. Under the same circumstances not many of us would even entertain the idea of serving. And you did. Not one year, but two. Thank you Worshipful.

My thanks and congratulations to all the officers installed today. Some of you have been serving this lodge in various capacities the past several years and yet continue to serve. we appreciate your service. Some of you are joining the ranks now. I really appreciate you stepped up to the plate. We need you.

I want to thank the past masters. Your leadership and efforts have brought us that far. In the past several months, I have set down one on one or talk over the phone with most of you on the state of the lodge and how to expand our development. Please do not hesitate to drop me a holler and bring any issue to my attention. Thank you for your support.

I am humbled by the opportunity of being here today. I am eternally grateful for the vote of confidence you reposed in me to serve in the Oriental Chair. It is one of the greatest honors and privileges that can be bestowed on a brother. I am deeply moved.

I would like to dedicate this ceremony to my Dad whose health did not allow him to make the trip from Ivory Coast and to the memory to my late Mom. I know she is looking down and is with me today.

In preparing this ceremony, the most recurrent question many of you have been asking me is "How did you become Freemason and what it is to be a mason?".

Though I have answered some of you, it might be a good idea to use this platform to answer again as many of you still may have the same questions.

My freemason story is quite simple. I've always been fascinated by Freemasonry from what I came to know through my personal education and readings on the subject. So, early in 1998, I came to an information night by Washington Lodge 20 and the many answers I received from the many questions I asked were quite convincing. After additional research to corroborate their claims, I decided to turn in my membership application. As you now freemasonry does not solicit membership. You join in on your own free will.

After investigation, they unanimously voted on me. Since it is Freemasonry purpose to "make good men better", I guess they figured out that I was a good man. I don't know how they found out. But go ask.

After my initiation, I was assigned a coach to guide me through my progression. He was a retired Caltrans Engineer. I was starting my starting my career with Caltrans. That was not purposely designed. It was rather pure coincidence.

He was living in Davis like me. This was by accommodation.

I met him weekly, sometimes twice or more a week. He was old school. All the teaching was from mouth to hear. He introduced me the blue book only toward the end of my 3rd degree proficiency.

What that did was I had to meet him a lot. This created a special bond between him and I.

One day, I received a call from his wife who informed me that he was not doing well. I rushed out there to their home and as I got there she told me he was in the bedroom. When I got there he was in his bed. He looked unusually tired with a bottle of oxygen at the bedside and the hoses in his nasals and before I could inquire on his health, he asked me to recite my obligation. I was trying to insist that I wasn't there for practice but rather to inquire on his health, He said Joseph, would you recite your obligation. I conceded and started and 2-3 minutes after the blue book he was holding fell on his chest. I realized he fell asleep as he was not reacting to my mistakes anymore. Which he is usually prompt to correct me. Nevertheless, I went all the way and finished the

obligation. I sat by for a while, kissed his hand and left to meet his wife in the living room. She told me he just got back from the hospital where about two liters of liquid had been extracted from his stomach. Few days after, I was informed that Bob Boulware has passed that "bourne whence no traveler returns".

I know Bob you are looking down today. I am indebted to you for holding my hands in my baby steps in Masonry.

After Bob's passing away many of you stepped in his shoes to guide, coach and mentor me. I cannot name all of you who have helped and supported me throughout my walk to the oriental chair. My heart is bursting with gratitude for all you have done for me.

This is what freemasonry has meant to me. I joined it with high expectations, the oriental chair not being one of them. But each one has been met and exceeded.

This is what Freemasonry has meant to me. A place where men of different walks of life and of different creeds and faiths, yet guided by a shared belief in the Supreme Being, come together to fellowship and create a bond as strong and unique as only seen in Freemasonry: a bond of brotherhood and friendship just like between Bob and I.

This is what Freemasonry has meant to me. A place where men of different nationalities and origins but who partake of the same nature, and share the same hope come and call it Home.

This is what Freemasonry has meant to me. A place where we come as good men and strive to be better men, better family men, better neighbors, and better citizens.

This is what Freemasonry has meant to me. A place where we strive to better the place where we live and make the world a better place.

You sometimes wish the outside world can be just as Freemasonry has designed it. A world of universal brotherhood regardless of religious, political, or national differences. These are the ideals that Masonry embodies. These are the ideals that we need to continue to cultivate.

Washington Lodge No.20, over the past few months, we sent you a member satisfaction survey to hear from you on your interests, concerns, and ways to improve our membership service. We also submitted to your comments and input the draft of our strategic plan with its vision and mission statement and goals. I thank you for your participation in the process. Although we still waiting for some survey responses to get to us, some trends have been developed that can guide us as our GPS in the development of our program. Together we have crafted a strategic plan to reflect our lodge identity and its tradition of 158 years.

Our mission as defined is in part to “enhance the quality of life in our community”. That’s why in addition to the Grand Master theme “Freemasonry, the foundation of our country, the Blue Lodge, the Foundation of our Craft, Coming Home”, which he would probably talk about it later; the theme of this lodge year is “Return to the Community”.

Freemasonry has been characterized as a fraternity devoted to high ideals and admirable benevolence. Community service and charitable work are, in fact, principal Masonic activities.

This theme has two aspects. “Return to the Community” is not to imply that we’ve gone from it. It is to say that we can be more present and involved in our community. More present and involved in our schools for example, and be more visible and tell our story and inspire others to follow our example. Because those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.

“Return to the Community” is not to imply that we have not returned enough to the community. After all, this lodge ranks as no.22nd charitable lodge by individual giving in the past fiscal year out of the 338 lodges in California. You are great and I command you to your generosity. Return to the Community means there is not too much that we cannot do. It means we need to return to the Community more that we have ever received from it.

Here are some of the activities we plan on implementing:

- We plan to sponsor a youth organization. We have here today the DeMolay, the Jobs Daughters and the Rainbow for Girls. All of which we thank dearly. When they grow up, the young men on these youth organizations will likely become masons, and the young ladies will encourage their spouses to become masons as well. They are the future of our craft and deserve our attention and time in working together for the common good.
- Many masons have relocated to our neighborhood. We need to reach out to these Masonic Sojourners and welcome them in our Masonic community. We have much to learn from their Masonic experience and much more we can do together with them to improve the place where we all live.
- We plan to join the Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce. A way to make ourselves known better by spreading the word about who we are and what we do. This would strengthen our education not only by making their events and activities available to our brethren but also by inviting some of their members to speak on the many issues that might be of interest to our brethren.
- Along the same line, we plan to adopt a portion of a local highway in the Caltrans Adopt-A-Highway Program. This will provides us great opportunity to promote

civic responsibility and community pride as well as a way to tell the public about our sponsored projects with a roadside sign with our square and compass logo and the Lodge name.

- I will adopt 3 widows and invite each officer to adopt 2 widows each and each member one widow. We will be calling them periodically and sending them birthday cards and make sure they attend our ladies events. We need to tell our widows that they are not alone, that we care and are looking after them.
- We intend to continue to improve our ritual and we will participate in the upcoming statewide wide ritual competition.

My brethren, this is just few of the many things we have planned on top of all we are accustomed to do. Membership retention, Masonic Formation Program, and careful management of lodge affairs are our emphasis. Excellent ritual degree work, proficiencies, certification and good, basic lodge work will continue to be our focus.

This line of officers as enthusiast and motivated as they are cannot carry all this load on their own. Everyone will need to pinch in. I trust that together better days are yet to come. I know that we can count on your continuing support of our lodge.

As Ralph Emerson said: "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself". So let us help ourselves by stretching further a helping hand to our community. Let's get to work brethren.

Thank you