

OPEN LETTER FROM THE GRAND MASTER AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REGARDING THE “SNAKES”

Dear Brethren,

For more than two years, a number of lodges in California have experienced significant disharmony due to the negative influence of certain lodge members who are also members of an organization commonly referred to as “the Snakes.” Recently, we made a request that each of the 2008 lodge officers affirm in writing (form provided) the fact that he is not a member of this organization or its successors. Our request resulted in several questions being asked and it is our intention to address these issues herein.

Formally named the Grand and Glorious Order Knights of the Creeping Serpent, the Snakes is believed to have been organized by a group of Masons who wanted to continue certain types of hazing in an initiation ceremony which had been prohibited by the Shrine. Originally, the so-called Snakes were Masons who had all received this secret degree. Over time this informal, degree-centered association of Masons transformed into something more organized and dangerous to Freemasonry. Masons participating in any form of hazing ritual place our fraternity in great jeopardy and subject it to litigation due to intentional assault and battery. This was an important reason for the Shrine to prohibit hazing. Adding to the gravity of the situation, the motives of the now more developed Snake organization threatens the stability of our lodges.

When this problem was called to the attention of the Grand Lodge in the summer of 2005, Grand Master David R. Doan ordered a thorough investigation of this organization. While we were able to gain some information about the organization in Arizona and the Philippines, no one would come forward to speak on behalf of the organization which was reported to have at least two units operating in California. Yet some of our members came forward and spoke out about what this organization was secretly plotting. We received a copy of a message reportedly from a leader of the Snakes directing its members to infiltrate the officer corps of our lodges so that they could gain influence over the lodge’s decisions and control of lodge funds. Some lodges have

officers who have advised in open lodge that unless a brother is a Snake he will not be eligible to be an officer in that lodge.

Many attempts have been made to communicate with the Snakes organization with no response. We asked the leadership of the Snakes organization to furnish our Grand Lodge with records of their members, facts about their initiation ceremony, and other information that would allow us to gain a better understanding of the organization. Our requests were ignored. Grand Master Doan was left with no choice but to declare the Snakes a clandestine organization and he directed all Masons in California to cease their membership in the order if they were members. This was done according to the Grand Master’s responsibility in the California Masonic Code concerning other Masonic organizations which include any organization wherein membership in Masonry is a prerequisite for membership. *(This applies to Snakes, but could not ever be applied to an organization like the Elks, Odd Fellows, etc. that do not have the Masonic prerequisite.)*

Since that time the problems have grown worse. Embezzlement of lodge funds has occurred, violence has been perpetrated upon Masons, threats have been made against family members of Masons, and factions have developed in our lodges as the result of the continuing negative influence of Masons who are believed to be members of the Snakes. This is a serious issue.

As a measure to raise awareness of the problem, give pause to any Mason who may still be a member of the Snakes, and provide the necessary evidence if requested, we have asked all of our lodge officers, beginning with the upcoming Masonic year, to make the above mentioned affirmation to the Grand Master. It is necessary to have this affirmation in writing because any officer that is proven to be a member of the Snakes after he has signed the affirmation will be subject to Masonic charges. An oral affirmation may not be sufficient evidence in a subsequent Masonic trial. This affirmation process has been agreed upon by all of the members of the Executive Committee and we are committed to seeing that this process is continued in successive Masonic years.

Any California Mason who is a member of the Snakes and who wishes to disassociate himself from the Snakes may do so by writing a letter of renunciation and delivering it to the Grand Master at the Grand Lodge office. The letter can simply read, “I hereby renounce my membership

with the Grand and Glorious Order Knights of the Creeping Serpents.”
The renunciation should be signed and the full name of the member should be clearly typed or written. The letter should be mailed to the Grand Lodge office at 1111 California Street, San Francisco, CA 94108. No action will be taken against any Mason who renounces his membership in the Snakes before he signs the affirmation.

We know that to many of our members this request seems odd and perhaps overly cautious. The fact is that the Snakes pose a serious danger to Freemasonry and every effort must be made to end any influence the Snakes organization or its members may have in our lodges. Asking for the affirmation may seem like punishing many for the actions of a few. We understand this concern. However, if we raise our awareness of the problem, make it known that membership in the Snakes will not be tolerated by our brethren, and subject to Masonic charges any member who deceives his lodge or the Grand Lodge about his membership in the Snakes, we might end this threat to the fraternity. We’re asking you to help us break the code of silence of this dangerous organization and remove from our ranks those who are destroying our beloved Craft.

Thank you for your understanding in this matter.

Yours in service to Masonry,

Melvyn B. Stein
Grand Master

Richard W. Hopper
Deputy Grand Master

Larry L. Adamson
Sr. Grand Warden Jr.

Kenneth G. Nagel
Grand Warden