

Masons' secrets revealed

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SOUTH Australian Freemasons are in crisis with the state leadership facing a serious revolt from a faction of disaffected members.

In a sign of deep division at the secretive all-male society, the position of Grand Master of the South Australian/Northern Territory Jurisdiction will be contested for the first time in over 30 years.

The Advertiser has been told the dispute, brewing for almost a year, is centred over the sale of Masonic Homes for \$75.8m and the control over the establishment of a charitable trust containing \$60m in funds. Masons traditionally identify each other through secret handshakes and have elaborate initiation ceremonies that date back hundreds of years.

The Grand Master of Freemasons SA/NT, Most Worshipful Brother Stephen Michalak, is accused of causing dissent among the membership by stepping into the battle for his position and backing one candidate over another.

Current Deputy Grand Master Bill Merrill faces a challenge for Grand Master from renowned Adelaide doctor Neil Jensen.

In a letter to the membership, Mr Michalak said the October election would be held "without electioneering and rancour."

However, opposing members claim the election process is already compromised by Mr Michalak's deci-



SA/NT Freemasons Grand Master Stephen Michalak. Picture: BIANCA DE MARCHI

sion to back his current deputy and accuse Dr Jensen's supporters of not having "Masonic values" and "focused on causing discontentment among the fraternity."

Mr Michalak wrote in his letter: "I am confident that our current Deputy Grand Master's standing, abilities, and track record – as demonstrated in his current Term of Office – will stand him in good stead to continue his succession to the role of Grand Master."

A leading Mason told The Advertiser yesterday Dr Jensen was "an impeccable first-class candidate with bullet-proof credentials" and that Mr Michalak would need to retract several "assertions" made in his letter or could face defamation action.

"Dr Jensen's been a Mason for 50

years and the other candidate for less than 20," he said.

"This is about mates helping out mates and a significant proportion of the membership won't let that stand."

Disaffected members have questioned why a new company, Masonic Charities Ltd, with a different board, was required to oversee the \$60m trust fund when the organisation already had the Freemason Foundation performing the same role. They have also questioned why board members of the new company will be paid a substantial stipend.

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