

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
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MASONIC CHARITY IN OUR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

An Address to the 44th Annual Inter-Provincial Conference
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by R.W. Bro. D.W. WAKELYN, S.G.W., G.R.B.C.

Several years ago, I had the occasion to be involved as the coordinator of sports organizations in conjunction with the Lions' Clubs of Greater Victoria in arranging a "Telethon" in aid of the Lions' Easter Seal Campaign for the handicapped citizens of our community. At that time, it made me wonder about the present outlook on "Charity" and of course, because of my involvement in Freemasonry, I also wondered just what the term, "Charity", is, or should mean, to each of us as Freemasons. I am still very much concerned about this issue as it affects our Fraternity today.

Seldom does a day or month go by without the wide publication of information about fund-raising activities for a wide range of charitable organizations: The United Appeal, The Salvation Army Annual Appeal, Heart Fund, Conquer Cancer Campaign, Kinsmen's' Mothers' March and many other such campaigns

Unfortunately, the philosophy of today's society is to base its term, "Charity", as being the giving of money. Is it not unfortunately true that our modern day society is so "money-oriented"? Too many of our citizens are content to make a financial donation and consider that their obligation to their community has been fulfilled. We, as Freemasons, however, are taught in our rituals that "Charity should know no bounds save that of prudence." How can we forget the night when we received the Charity lecture in the First Degree? Who can fail to recall its lessons? But we do not reinforce that situation adequately throughout each Master Mason's search for light. We do not practice what we preach!

The meaning of the term, "Charity" to a Freemason may be found in an article from the B.C. Masonic Bulletin of November, 1961, entitled, "The Value of Man" and I quote: "A man's value to the world is the direct proportion to the unselfish service he renders. In the heart of every Freemason there is something;- call it instinct, principle, or what you may;- that provides him with more satisfaction in doing something for others rather than in doing something for himself."

We often hear a great deal of discussion within and without our Craft dealing with community activities and community service as they were practiced in the "old days" as compared with what appears to be a general apathy in today's world. We, as Freemasons, should certainly be ever conscious of our changing times and of our own personal philosophies relating to our contribution to our communities and to those with whom we come into direct contact. The obligation to serve our Brethren is one of the most important lessons to be found in our Masonic teachings, and really, there is no restriction to reserve that service to Brethren of the Craft but it could and should be extended to the service of society in general.

There is, however, a strong tendency amongst all of us, to put off until tomorrow what we could and should do today. There is a wellknown Spanish word

which carries a message of genuine value to all Freemasons: "Manàna" - Manàna is Tomorrow and, so often, Tomorrow never comes! Yes Brethren: Tomorrow - our path of thoughts is paved with good intentions. It is the little things that make the difference - that make life friendly and it's the little things that bring genuine happiness and so often they do not cost a cent. But surely we all have found, at times, that "Manàna" is really too late! These little things, my Brethren, represent the true meaning of "Charity" to a Freemason. Do not put them off until tomorrow.

An article reported in the February, 1959 Masonic Bulletin and entitled, "Why are we here?" may
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well describe what Masonic Charity is all about, and I quote: "Aiding others does not necessarily involve the distribution of material things. How much more potent in many cases, is the friendly handshake, the timely admonition, the word of encouragement, than the mere bestowing of alms. How much more important to give of ourselves."

But are we practicing these principles of Masonic charity today? No, we are not. At least, not in all cases. Are we not caught up in the treadmill of today's commercialized and materialistic age? A time to hurry and grab The report of the Grand Master's Special Committee on the economics of the Benevolent Fund included in the 1983 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba, probably sums it up best, and I quote a portion of the report. "Today we find that through government bodies and public charities, a large part of the charitable and compassionate activities that formerly were left to care of individuals, have now been absorbed by centralized authorities. We mention in passing, the assistance provided in such cases as unemployment, work place injuries, pensions, medical services, hospitalization and education. The centralization of these areas of public concern, in a manner that would not have been tolerated in the days of rugged individualism is now generally accepted." In this regard, the proposed Federal legislation changes involving the use of interest from charitable funds, could have a profound affect on the distribution of Masonic charity in the not too distant future. I feel sure that we will hear more on this subject from Most Worshipful Brother Gordon Thompson.

Is the Fraternity meeting its obligations to its members to teach and to stress its basic principles, particularly, as they relate to charity? In most cases it is not. Is Masonry being adequately explained to its members to ensure that a sufficient portion of a Mason's time is being made available for him to fulfill his Masonic obligations in this age of competition for time? Again, I say No, not in most cases. The difficulties brought about by a rapidly changing society and its demands on every individual's time was thoughtfully expressed at this Conference in 1962 by M.W.Bro. S.H. Dayton, Grand Master of Manitoba, when he stated, "Undoubtedly, never in the history of the world, has society had such a multiplicity of organizations. Wherever a quorum gathers, another organization is formed. Many with overlapping membership and purpose. To one who wishes to actively participate, there is just not enough time to do justice to all. The tendency then, is to give time to that body that has material evidence of accomplishment. Add to all of this the various forms of so-called entertainment that only require one to be a spectator - radio, television, etc. And we begin to see the magnitude of the difficulties we face." This competition for time demands that we re-evaluate the role of Freemasonry to establish new priorities in relation to this role. The late R.W. Bro. the Honourable Mr. Justice Victor L. Dryer, may well have addressed this problem when he stated in the keynote address at the Thirtieth Annual Banff Conference, and I quote, "The level of the Craft as a whole must be raised

What is needed is a re-evaluation of Freemasonry. We must place it higher on our scale of values, both, as to what we expect and will accept in the way of members, and as to the price in money and otherwise that we are prepared to pay for it." What can we as Freemasons do to improve the desire to extend Masonic charity through our membership and into our communities, especially in this age where competition for time becomes a prime motivator? There is no doubt that one of the major ills facing our Craft today is to be able to adequately establish as we as individuals value our Freemasonry. What priority does it hold in our daily lives and activities? I feel that we value it too cheaply, both in terms of dollars contributed, and time spent learning in applying our lessons. Other organizations require fees and dues far greater than we demand from our membership. Is it not true that none challenges us to practice what we preach? It is obvious that the answers to these questions are to be found in improved education methods. It is from the lack of instruction, rather than a desire to learn the meaning of Freemasonry that the Craft suffers today. This was mentioned also last night in M.W. Bro Melmych's keynote address. No one can communicate the deeper meaning in Masonry to another. Every man must discover and learn them for himself. Although, a friend or Brother may be able to conduct him a certain distance on the path to understanding.

Improved education of new members and, if we would take the time, of all members, in the basic principles and concepts spelled out for each of us in our rituals, would certainly reinforce the understanding and appreciation of our concepts of Masonic charity. These education procedures should

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commence with the receipt of the petition for initiation and extend through the various degrees and beyond into the Masonic life of the individual. Some Jurisdictions have already proceeded along these lines by the development of Mentor Plans. But we need much more than Mentor Plans. We need involvement of the membership and improved planning by Worshipful Masters and their Officers. This is an area where the Past Masters of a lodge can and should use their experience to provide the key for education and leadership by assisting the Worshipful Masters and his Officers by actively participating in such programs. Again, this would involve time. But, all Brethren, by their very involvement would be included in the education process. A process whose prime objective is to assist its members to establish their own individual interpretation of the Masonic Order as it involves them alone. Only when a member has established his own Masonic philosophy, will he become a true Mason and then interpret this philosophy into his everyday pattern of life; within his family, his private avocation, and community. We would not have to worry about the decline in the practice of Masonic charity in this society or any future society. To achieve this end, I mention the need for planning. But, what kind of planning? Planning that would ensure greater involvement of the membership, ensuring that all the work of the lodge in relation to education and charity are not just left to the officers. Planning that would have the membership take a more active role in lodge business committee activities, sick and visiting, which are all part of the Masonic education process. Planning to improve members' involvement by rotating committee membership throughout the year but under the guidance of a strong experienced Past Master, a Chairman of such committees. These are only a few areas of planning that would improve the present climate of most Craft Lodges.

The subject of Individualism in Freemasonry could form a Paper itself, but some impressions of the subject can be found in the keynote address to this Conference in 1962 by Bro. Dr. George Turpin, Past Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia, as follows, and I quote, "Masonry sets a man on a search for knowledge, through the lectures, the obligations of the rituals, the

truths from the great teachers of the past and from the Volume of the Sacred Law, we set a man out on a search of knowledge. Out of this wonder and knowledge comes a sound philosophy of life in which a Freemason sees meaning and purpose in life, and finds great eternal principles by which to live. In this sound philosophy of life a Freemason learns to subordinate all activities of life to the quest for goodness and beauty and truth. A sound philosophy of life will teach a man to know himself. It also means appreciation of fellowship."

It is interesting to note that Masonic scholars have for over two hundred years expressed concern about the future of the Craft, have written volumes on the problems of Freemasonry because the Brethren do not put into practice what the rituals preach. This includes much material on our present subject - Masonic charity. It would seem evident that we have not profited from their messages. But how do Masons and Masonic Lodges practice charity today? In our particular Districts in Victoria, Lodge charity consists of an annual monetary donation to worthy local organizations; an Annual Widows' Night when the widows of our late Brethren are honoured and entertained; Christmas gifts for the elderly Brethren and widows; perhaps, an annual picnic for the youngsters and families, and hospital or sick visits to ailing Brethren, that is, if someone reports their illness to the Sick and Visiting Committee of the lodge. It would, of course, be impossible to determine the individual contributions of members to their communities, Brethren etc. How be it - I feel that too many Masons today are quite satisfied to have the lodge fill their respective Masonic duties, as outlined above, on their behalf - quite unsettling, isn't it? But something that we should not be proud of, and certainly something we must rectify, if this great fraternity is to grow and continue its existence. We constantly hear the complaint that poor lodge attendance is affected by the lack of interest or the lack of something for the individual member to do. Hence, they find other ways to use their limited time. Again, we are faced with competition for time. I would suggest, and strongly recommend, that our Worshipful Masters and their Officers could and must make sure, with more imaginative and meaningful planning, combined with more efficient use of this limited time available, that every Brother in the lodge, and here I stress those who attend regularly, could be given a task on a monthly basis. Instead of an annual widows night, why not assign one or two Brethren to make at least a monthly contact with each widow? Or a monthly phone call, or a visit to an elderly Brother

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unable to attend lodge? Or, a follow-up on Brethren absent from the last lodge meeting? All too often we hear in our lodges of Brethren suffering lengthy illnesses, or being hospitalized for lengthy periods, without the lodge Visiting Committee being aware of the problem until after the facts are known and the Brother has returned home or is on the road to recovery. A terrible and lamentable problem for the Craft to suffer, but, oh, so painfully true. Here we see the need for basic education on the duties of our Sick and Visiting Committee. It is my understanding that Craft Lodges in England and Scotland practice these very simple acts of Masonic charity on a regular and permanent basis. Why not in our Jurisdictions? What happened to the application of our basic tenets? But what a challenge to our Masters and Officers. What a basic but useful method to educate our membership, and thus enable each and every one of us to truly establish a better and fuller philosophy of Masonic Craft. We, as individuals, as Lodges, as Grand Jurisdictions, and, most certainly our communities, would be true benefactors from such a program. No longer would we need to worry, if actually necessary in the first place, about our image in the community, our future attendance, our declining membership - no need to be negative at all about our Craft. We could be positive about our future, because we would be doing what our teachings tell us we should be doing, and we would grow accordingly

We have discussed, particularly last year, ways that the Four Jurisdictions involved in this Annual Conference could make a combined contribution to our beloved Craft. And from my experience with our first venture, it was a startling success, at least in our area, and I speak very quickly of the exchange of Brethren from one Jurisdiction to the other. And Alberta, so far, has made available to us, members from their Jurisdiction in my particular area, Lower Vancouver Island. It was an outstanding success in this respect, that everyone of those Brethren were contacted. It involved many members on our two districts, and it certainly involved the Brethren who are now living in our area - many have become active as a result of the contact. But the key to the success, in my opinion, and why we must extend this combined affect of the Four Jurisdictions, everyone included in that particular follow-up became the benefactors from the experience they had on a Brother to Brother contact. This to me, is a start towards, maybe, regenerating enthusiasm.

I say that we as leaders, are charged with responsibility to make Freemasonry work. I suggest that the contents of this Paper may, and I humbly stress - MAY, provide a guide to a further extension of our joint endeavors agreed to at last year's Conference.

I would close my remarks with a short comment made during the discussion at the Eighteenth Annual Conference of 1958. And I quote, "An Anglican minister said, 'I think Masonry is a good thing for society, if their members would live up to their teachings'." Thank you Brother President, Brethren.
