

## THE NEED FOR MEMBERSHIP

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Membership in Freemasonry has always been an interesting issue to consider. We have always prided ourselves on being a fraternity that good men sought, and that we, as holders of the true and pure teachings of Freemasonry, must sit and consider admitting only the best. Thus, if only the best were admitted, then the true and pure teachings would be the most important topic when discussing membership. The question has always been, “Where do we find good men who will be true and pure to the teachings?” Aristotle, the Greek philosopher and teacher, was asked after a class on ethics and honor, “Teacher, where do we find the good men to practice ethics and honor?” His answer was simple – “We must continue looking each day for good and true men.”

Somewhere down the road, Masonry got caught in something else- numbers; numbers would make us better – if we were the biggest, ergo, we must be the best. “The world’s largest fraternity” – this is a prideful boast of Freemasonry. So what must we be? The best; or, the biggest? Can we be one without being the other? Can we be both?

Let us look first at our roots. How did we come about? How did we attract good men? What did we do to become well known and respected?

We all know that the year 1717, in London, England, is historically the beginning of modern Freemasonry. Where it existed before that date, and in what form, is conjecture argued by the greatest of historical authorities and the most learned of Masonic scholars. Freemasonry has been a structured organization of like-minded men who wanted to be better. At first, better craftsmen, better workers, better artists, better at whatever they undertook. Then, realizing that other good men around them could increase through this brotherhood enjoyed; they “accepted” other good men. The broadened scope of Freemasonry attracted many good men not just builders and craftsmen, but men of law, men of business, men of commerce, men of government, men of letters, scholars, teachers – all good men who were true, moral and pure to their beliefs. They believed in God, and at first were all Christian men; they believed in treating each other fairly; they believed in supporting each other, and each other’s families: they believed in their country and sovereign; they believed in living their teachings. They further sought out men who were like-minded and could live by these beliefs, and who would show all about them these beliefs in their daily lives. And they formalized these beliefs with a ritual (a procedure), and they met regularly – always in a social setting – where they could enjoy each other’s company and bond with the strong ties of their beliefs. Good works and relief to others became a hallmark and a tradition. Giving support to good causes, dispensing aid to those who were in need, being respectable through their daily lives - these made Freemasons known and revered. The leaders of the community, the most respected citizens - these were the Freemasons of any city, town or hamlet.

Knowing from whence we came many times allows us more clearly to see wither we have come. Today, what are we about? Who are we attracting? Are we well known and respected? Are attitudes, traditions, and “landmarks” helping or hurting? (At this time, the BUGGY WHIP exercise will be used. See Table A.)

The purpose of the exercise is to impress upon our minds the idea that tradition can kill any good organization. Change can be made for the betterment, improvement and continued existence of an organization – without losing the good quality and traditions. Distinction must always be made between good and useless tradition. Just because “it has always been done that way” does not make it right or good. A good example of “tradition” is knowing that George Washington, our first President, revered by all Freemasons throughout the world, and whose picture proudly hangs in almost every Masonic building in the United States, would be considered an irregular and clandestine Mason today if he came into one of our lodges since he was initiated prior to being 21 years old, and in a lodge that was not regularly chartered by the Grand Lodge. Ignorance of old traditions could create problems in today’s world. So knowing what “tradition” is, and should be, is important in today’s world of Freemasonry.

We come back to the question of membership. How many of you have recently looked at your Grand Lodge “Handbook of Masonic Law” – or whatever you may call it in your Grand Jurisdiction? How many pages in that book are devoted to assisting or suggesting or pursuing new members? Other than telling you how to record new members, or advance new members during degree work, probably not one page is going to tell you anything about how you can gain members. On the other hand, probably 15% - 20% of the entire book is devoted to punishing or removing members who have fallen, tailed or forgotten their duties as members. A strange phenomenon in a fraternity that is pledged to help, aid and assist, and which is obliged to help a weak and fallen brother. Do we perform the proper “front end” on membership so that the Law Book’s 15% - 20% wording never need be used on the “back end”? Quantity versus quality?

As the exercise showed, we have forgotten many of the original goals of quality and we have run for numbers or quantity. Bigger is better. If we are the largest, then we must be the best. If we have members everywhere, then we must be the greatest fraternity ever. Obviously, this is not the case. Somehow, we must get back to what we were originally about.

How many times do you attend Lodge in a year? How often do you attend Chapter? Council? Commandery? Are you blessed and anointed to belong to one of the honor groups? Do you attend every time those doors open? What really happens in all of these meetings – think about that? Do you gather in some uniform or paraphernalia that denotes your position or station in the organization? Do you arrive early and visit with your brethren and drink coffee and have a cookie or piece of cake? The next time you gather for some meeting, are the same people there in a different outfit? Are the same people coming to the same meetings week after week after week? Do you go into the meeting, open on form (many reading) read the minutes of what you did two weeks ago, have the sick report, argue about finances, talk about the next district or state gathering, close on form (reading faster), and then go outside into the reception area to drink more coffee and eat the last cookies? Does any of this sound familiar? Is that all that you are doing? (See Table B).

Einstein, the great physicist, developed one of the most famous and oft quoted formulas in the world:  $E = M C^2$  Energy equals the mass times the constant squared. Constant could be referred to as velocity or momentum. This is the formula used in group dynamics, also. We can adapt the formula to Masonry and our membership activity to: energy equals membership times active programs. The formula works – activity creates enthusiasm, enthusiasm creates interest, interest creates involvement, involvement creates more activities. The cycle re-creates itself and gains momentum. New people are interested because they “see” what is being done. They want to be a part of the energy. Is it that simple? No. Involvement, interest, activities do not just happen.

Leadership is necessary. Everyone present today in this room is a recognized leader. What are you doing to exert your leadership? What energy have you displayed recently in your organization? What enthusiasm have you generated? What programs have you established that are exciting and innovative and interesting? Are you being a leader? Are your members following you? Are you inspiring people to join by having so much energy and excitement that your programs are attracting others?

Membership is the lifeblood of any organization. But activities are the fuel for membership and leaders who guide and direct. No one enjoys doing nothing for very long – they just stop attending. Every organization started with a purpose. Too often that purpose has become obscure or completely forgotten.

In Louisiana, Masons and Masonic Lodges started the first public schools, organized the first public libraries, offered the first free health care, donated the first grave plots for the poor, assisted the orphans. Louisiana Masonry never tells that story to anyone. For many years, the Grand Lodge of Louisiana used the Children’s Home as the focal point for charitable donations. No one ever questioned whether the Home was needed or not. No one ever suggested that better systems were available for neglected children; because in the end, none of the children were orphans; not one was without some means of existence and support in the outside world. We had “always” had a Home, and rather than the 100+ children that the Home was designed to assist, only a handful resided in an out-of-date, anachronism of social welfare whose day had faded. Yet, in Louisiana we used the Home as a justification for assessments and donations and attempted to show the outside world that we were performing a needed charity. Perhaps it would have been better to bring together all of the leaders and talk about what charity could be useful in today’s world. After the Home was finally closed, Louisiana Masons searched for several years and has recently decided to adopt dyslexia as the new most worthy charity of choice. Perhaps this new activity will excite Masons in Louisiana to assist the needy, contribute financially to its success, and induce good men outside of Masonry to step forward and want to be part of our worthwhile activity.

We must again visit the question – are members important to the success of our Fraternity? Is having many thousands of meetings going to make Masonry a better organization? A quality program will attract the quality members that are needed to make a quality organization.

Have we limited our success as an organization by limiting our ability to seek out the quality members? Have we limited our exposure as an organization by meeting in obscure, old, out-of-the way buildings? Have we hidden our good works by subsidizing other organization and not wanting any publicity for making generous contributions? Christ in Matthew 5 talks about showing our good works for all to see, and asking if we would light a candle and place it under a basket? No, we should show our good works to the world. Have we been hiding our good works, professing that we should perform and keep quiet; contributing and allowing credit to come only when recognition is offered?

We can do better in the area of letting people know who and what we are. We do perform good works. We do good deeds. We must get out and tell more about our projects. Masons contribute close to a billion dollars a year through various charities – that is not quite \$3 million a day. The most visible is the Shrine Hospital system where almost \$400 million a year is spent. Masonry is that group of people who extol charity as the crowning jewel of our Fraternity.

I personally found my Masonic charity – if you want to call it that: my primary interest in Freemasonry is the Masonic Youth Movement – most notably DeMolay. The international Order of the Rainbow for Girls, and the International Order of Jobs Daughters, both wonderful organizations for the young ladies, should not be overlooked for their good work; but, DeMolay, the fraternity for young men, is very important to each of us here today. These young men can follow in our footsteps.

Knight Companion R.J. Henwood of Arkansas, the DeMolay Executive Officer in that state, has stated with great knowledge: “The perfect ashlar of the temples of Masonry tomorrow are hewn and squared in the quarries of DeMolay today.” He is so correct in that the young men that we have in our DeMolay Chapters are the perfect material for our Lodges, Chapters, Councils, Commanderies, and all other organizations within our great Fraternity. Those young men are waiting to join. The men who join are excited about their good works in DeMolay, and want to continue those good works in the lodge. DeMolay is our “Bridge” to the future. The members of DeMolay alone cannot solve the problems of Masonic membership, but the young men of DeMolay bring something to us that is important – enthusiasm, energy, excitement. They know how to plan and execute activities and events. They know how to go out and recruit good men. They know how to conduct interesting, exciting meetings. They are not so bound in traditions that they have forgotten how to have fun and enjoy fellowship, and how to become good and true Brothers.

Membership is important. Activities are more important. Leadership is essential. The group dynamics of energy come from a membership excited about programs and events. We must not forget to look to our original purpose for being, and we must not forget to look to the resources in front of us, particularly our young men of DeMolay. Events, activities, new enthusiasm, and our good works, tells the world who and what we are. We have the organization – it needs minor adjustments and some fine-tuning – but the reason for being, the purpose of existence, is there. We must use what we have with energy, enthusiasm and interesting and exciting activities – the members well come.