

Serious Accusations

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How the matter of suspensions for nonpayment of dues is handled by the various Grand Lodges is a matter of continuing interest. This Short Talk Bulletin discusses what the Grand Lodge of Colorado encountered.

Prologue: In 1984 The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge A.F.& A.M. of Colorado sent the following letter to all Masons who were suspended for non-payment of dues.

"The Grand Lodge Office has received notice that you have been suspended from Masonry for non-payment of dues.

You have spent considerable time and money in becoming a Brother Master Mason. We wonder why you have chosen not to continue your membership in the Craft.

If you would answer the two questions on the back of this letter and return it to us in the enclosed stamped and self-addressed envelope we would be most appreciative."

The two questions on the back were:

1. I have decided to discontinue my Masonic membership because:
2. I would be interested in renewing my affiliation with Masonry if:

A similar letter was mailed to all candidates who became non-affiliated because they had not advanced in the prescribed time frame (2 years). The replies received form the basis for this paper. (It should be noted that nearly 40% of the inquiries mailed were answered. Another 10% were returned by the post office as "addressee unknown").

Why do Masons quit? Each year in Colorado (as well as in other Jurisdictions) we lose nearly as many members through non-payment of dues as we gain through degree work. Nearly a third of all men who are initiated into Masonry are never raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason. Why?

From the replies our Brothers have given us these are the reasons:

1. Non-understanding of Masonry

2. Lack of money.
3. Lack of communication
4. They're dead
5. We don't care enough
6. We're boring
7. Complaints against Masons

1. Non-Understanding Of Masonry

The replies made it evident that there were many Masons who just didn't grasp what Masonry was all about. Some should never have been initiated. A Brother who responds, "Masons is not what I'm looking for in a lodge. I have become an Elk' probably had no pre-initiatory education. The investigating committee's work might be questioned also. It does us great harm to initiate members who will later feel they joined under false pretenses. We must give an honest assessment of what we are and what we do to a prospective candidate. It is better not to initiate them than to lose a Brother through disenchantment. (See STB 5/83-"Diligent Inquiry.")

We have harped on lodge meeting attendance so long and hard that we are now losing members because they cannot attend meetings. Witness these replies: "Bad health and have been unable to attend meetings." "I moved to (blank) where I know no Masons." "I haven't attended a meeting after joining the lodge, so I feel that it would be best to discontinue my affiliation with Masonry."

Who first decided that to be a contributing Mason you had to attend meetings? Well it seems that point has been made – but instead of getting increased meeting attendance, we're getting drop-outs with "meeting guilt" complexes.

Some replies show how very little continuing education we have – "I didn't get my 25-year pin which was due in 1979." Due?

"We live in (blank) and use the facilities there."

I would be interested in renewing my affiliation with Masonry if: "I were needing the social contact." "I couldn't see any value to retaining my membership."

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

First, more training of investigating committees – and critical selectivity of applicants. Second, an honest and comprehensive pre-initiatory education, if you will, explanation program. Third, continuing education past the Master Mason Degree. We need to re-emphasize that the

selfmaking of a Mason is never complete and does not necessarily need to take place in a Lodge room .

2. Lack Of Money

Surprisingly, there were far too many answers to this category: "Out of work for two years."

"I just cannot afford it."

"I live on \$449.00 a month." "I have not been able to work since 1981." "I couldn't find a job at my age, it is pretty hard to do but I am still trying."

"I don't draw enough Social Security to live on."

Our lodges have an obligation which these replies seriously question. Not knowing who among us needs help is nearly as bad as knowing and not helping.

SOLUTION:

Somehow we must be more thorough in caring for each other. Brothers who need help must be found and helped. The techniques are simple – teaching Brothers to care for each other is not so simple. But if Masons do not love one another then Masonry can never teach the Brotherhood of Man. If they do not communicate, they cannot know.

3. Lack Of Communication

There were far too many replies stating:

"Send me what I owe in dues."

"Not realizing that my dues were past due."

"Let me know what I owe to catch up."

"I thought I had paid my dues."

"Please send me the amount of dues I'm behind."

Granted the postal service leaves much to be desired; granted some Brothers ignore their mail or don't write the checks, but still these Brothers were suspended N.P.D. The depth of interest in their membership on the part of the lodge has been questioned.

SOLUTIONS:

1. The telephone – "reach out and touch someone."
2. Personal calls and the right hand of fellowship.
3. Bright colored envelopes or stickers, or a stamp of some sort saying "Masonic – Open Now."

In short, positive communication before suspension.

4. They Are Dead

It is possible for a lodge to lose contact with a member, but many statements from widows such as, "ill for a long time," "after a long illness," questions the integrity and concern of a lodge for its members. Too many times each of us shirks our duty and blames the Secretary or the Master or the Senior Warden. How can a Brother be ill for a long period of time, die, and then be suspended N.P.D. if we care for one another?

5. We Don't Care Enough

The solutions are the same as for the preceding category. The conditions are as pitiful. A letter received from a Brother's wife saying her husband was proud to be a Mason – was in an Adult Blind Home undergoing rehabilitation. How can a whole Lodge of Masons either not care or not know?

6. We're Boring

A passel of replies stated simply, "lost interest." Either we didn't teach well in the first place or we didn't offer enough additional material to retain interest. In either case, the solution rests with lodge programs, study groups, discussion and an exchange of ideas. Communications are what we call our meetings. Often we communicate nothing.

Which of us can truthfully say we haven't from time to time been bored with Masonic meetings ourselves? Imagination and initiative are the keys to solving this problem. Also remember the most interesting thing we have to offer is Masonry, not entertainment, social welfare, or socialization. Self-improvement and enlightenment are our goals.

7. Complaints Against Masons

Some people, of course, enjoy finding fault. Not all complaints are valid, but all complaints are worth considering. Reoccurring reasons received were:

1. Members do not live by the rules of Masonry.
2. Masonry is anti-Christian.
3. Masons do not visit the sick and shut-in.
4. Lodges are "cliquish."
5. Politics take precedence in lodges.
6. Non-monetary brotherly support is lacking.

True or not, these are serious accusations and each of us should examine our own actions to see if we might stand suspect of any of these complaints.

And so we arrive full circle.

Why the drop-outs? It appears we have no one to blame but ourselves. Perhaps our Masonic practices must be better than those who came before us. Perhaps society now is more critical than it was then. Few question if Masons are good people; but are we good enough, in this day and age to, with credibility, convince society we are what we say we are?

Each Mason who drops out denies our claims and is more harmful to the Fraternity than if he had never heard of us.

The solutions are simple: live and act as our principles teach we should. The enactment of the solution is an obligation incumbent on each of us. For Masonry today is the sum of all who today are Masons.

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