

Three Challenges Unknown

A survey recently conducted in a member Jurisdiction of the Masonic Service Association of the United States asked the question "What is the most pressing problem facing the Craft today?" There were three predominant replies:

MEMBERSHIP

FINANCES

LEADERSHIP

These three topics are ones of a recurring nature in the Proceedings of the various Grand Lodges. They are subjects of discussion at various seminars, conferences and workshops. The "prophets of doom" use these items in their "actuarial studies" predicting the decline or demise of the Craft.

By referring to these as problems, we have a tendency to create monsters and stumbling blocks. We tend to wring our hands and develop negative attitudes and apply Band Aid solutions. "

There is a need to reverse that process of negative thinking. The most logical and effective way to do it is to approach it in a positive manner. By the simple process of correcting the terminology from "problems" to "challenges," we can target our approaches in such a way that we can transpose the "stumbling blocks" into "stepping stones."

In doing so, we immediately meet one of the greatest challenges – that of Leadership. A leader, in any field of endeavor, must set the example. He must think positively. He must lead. Just as in military leadership where there are various levels (strategic, tactical and individual) so it is in Freemasonry.

Grand Lodge leadership provides the strategy; establishes the overall goals. Grand Lodge Committees, District Deputies, Grand Lecturers, et al, establish the tactics and the Lodges provide the individual leadership. Whatever the level of leadership, there is a need to nurture, develop and hone the skills associated with the science of leadership. Your Masonic Service Association has a number of leadership-oriented publications designed to assist in that development. More such publications are on the "trestleboard," for the future.

It is only through effective, carefully planned Leadership that the challenges of Finance and Membership can be met. It is a long-range challenge which will take imagination, initiative and real understanding.

The challenges facing Freemasonry regarding finances are tied directly to economic factors, over which we have no direct control. However, in the majority of Jurisdictions, Masonry has taken the ostrich-approach of sticking its head in the sand and ignoring the real world. We continue to operate on a horse and buggy budget in the space age. We have failed to keep pace, using band-aids when we need tourniquets.

The financial challenge facing Masonic Leadership is one of meeting the needs of TODAY and planning for the needs of tomorrow. Financial management requires long-range planning. We need to apply some of the skills of architectural science in that planning. Our designs on the financial trestleboards must provide for foundations of sufficient strength to support a growing edifice.

Fifty years ago the fees for the three degrees were the equivalent of one week's wages. Dues equated to about one-half of a day's pay. Wages have increased considerably over the years. Fees and dues have remained relatively and constantly below par. Is the privilege of becoming a Mason not still worth a week's wages? Surely, in today's economy, with all of its "rights and benefits" Masonic Membership is worth one-half of a day's wages each year. The frequently expressed opinion that we "sell our Masonry too cheap" should be answered by "Putting our money where our mouth is." Having a "champagne appetite with a beer pocket book" is not the answer.

Some Grand Lodges experience a great deal of difficulty in increasing their per capita tax by as little as 25 cents per year, while others with imaginative and progressive leadership have experienced but little resistance in getting it increased by \$5.00 on one swoop. An informed and educated membership will meet any reasonable and attainable challenge.

Membership is the bottom line of the challenges. While the Craft has suffered immense losses in numbers for the past two decades, we are now at a point where initiations are keeping pace with losses through deaths. The challenge of membership can best be addressed by making logical – and personal – efforts to reduce the losses through N.P.D. That is the short-range goal.

Let's look down the road to the future. Membership retention is a constant factor. It is never the well-informed, involved, and dedicated Mason who is dropped for non-payment of dues. The challenge is now, as it has always been, to make Masonry a way of life in the heart of every Mason.

The vehicle we use to add members to our rolls is the ritualistic degree work. It provides the "skeleton" of a Mason. Through example, involvement and education we can add "meat and marrow" to that "skeleton" as we transform the member into a Mason.

Masonic leadership – at the lodge level – is the only place where this is possible. When we take a "good man" in as a member, we have but one goal in making him a Mason – we want to make him "better." We must lead him! We must teach him! We must inspire him! We must involve him! We must make brotherhood a living, breathing entity!

There are so many ways in which we can accomplish this. The immediate involvement of the newly-raised Mason in lodge activities is essential, whether it be ritual work, committees, food preparation or some other meaningful activity. This will make him feel needed and a part of the Lodge. We must also educate him in every aspect of the Fraternity. We must encourage him to ask questions – and we must be prepared to provide meaningful and factual answers. This is not only the job of the lodge – it is the duty and obligation of the lodge. If the newly-made Mason is not well informed about the Craft, he will be lost to the lodge. If, before he gains a good understanding of the symbolic Masonry, he turns to one of the appendant bodies, the chances are that he will be lost to them, too.

Many lodges have formed study groups or library clubs to serve as "educational tools." When provided with strong and dedicated leaders, these groups are very effective. In many of the larger metropolitan areas, the formation of Daylight Lodges has proved beneficial for older members and night shift workers who cannot enjoy Masonic fellowship in the evening. In some of the larger lodges, where the feelings of fellowship and brotherhood are not too evident, groups of members have formed new lodges with excellent results.

Lodge social functions which involve the family are an ideal forum for educating family members regarding their responsibility to notify the lodge of "sickness and distress." It helps to bring the family into the "Masonic family."

Extending the warm hand of friendship to a sick Brother is one of the basic duties of every Mason. It is also his duty to extend the hand of fellowship to the sojourning Mason. Masonic leaders have the constant duty of educating the Craft in these duties . . . by word and example.

We must never lose sight of the fact that each of us became Masons as a result of our own "free will and accord." Someone set the example which inspired each of us to seek admittance into this ancient society of friends and brothers. It is the active, busy, working lodge which produces the "role models" for tomorrow's Masons. By educating, involving, and making Masons of today's members we establish the "image" which will inspire potential applicants. By "putting into practice outside the lodge room those valuable tenets inculcated therein" a man becomes a respected member of society and an inspiring example of Freemasonry as a way of life. This is our goal. It is also our great challenge.

The Challenges of Membership, Finances and Leadership are challenges which each of us must meet. By choosing the leadership in our lodges we must be constantly alert to those who have the potential of vision, ability and dedication. It is our selection of leaders who will meet the

challenges of finances and membership. It has been aptly said that "Masonic leadership is changing the lodge room from what it is, to what it should be."

NOTE: This Short Talk Bulletin was adapted from three separate speeches given by Right Worshipful Brother Stewart M. L. Pollard, Executive Secretary of the Masonic Service Association of the United States.

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