

A LODGE AT WORK

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A Lodge is a certain number of Masons duly assembled, with the Holy Bible, Square, and Compasses, with a charter or warrant empowering them to work.

Ask a brother how his lodge is doing, and his answer is very apt to be either that things are going well because there has been a lot of work to do or that the life of the lodge is at a low ebb because there hasn't been much work lately. Ten to one, he is talking about degree work. There is no doubt that performing degrees is a vital part of the work of a lodge, but it is a common short circuit in our Masonic thinking to conclude that exemplifying our degrees constitutes the work of our lodge. Degree work is a means not an end.

Another possible and closely related short circuit lurks in the word jurisdiction. In our everyday Masonic usage, this term signifies the geographic area from which a lodge draws its candidates. Just as the work of a living lodge embraces much more than doing degrees so there is more to the concept of a lodge's jurisdiction than the place a lodge draws its candidates. The working of a lodge of Freemasons is a many faceted business which takes place, not just within a lodge hall or just among its members, but within the lodge's jurisdiction of compassion and service.

Suppose we find ourselves standing outside "Builders Lodge" in a place called "Needsville, " Here, according to our ritual, gathers a certain number of masons duly assembled, inspired by the Sacred Book and guided by the compasses and the square. They are, by a charter, empowered to work-that is they have the honor of laboring as Freemasons. On reflection, we realize that Builders' Lodge, like all Masonic lodges, exists even when there are no masons meeting in the building. It exists in the shared belief system of the brethren and in their united endeavor to give concrete evidence of their beliefs through their service to others.

Every Mason who has received his training in Builder's Lodge should know that the dimensions of his lodge spread symbolically to the ends of the earth and that nothing short of universal compassion is the aim of the Fraternity. In more immediate terms, the dimensions of Builder's Lodge spread across Needsville to the borders of the lodge's jurisdiction. Jurisdiction defines a certain community of lodge members and wayfaring brethren alike. It is a community within the community at large, a community of the Craft, alive and operative.

As in the case of the Masonic terms work and jurisdiction, the word "lodge" with its varied meanings may cause confusion. Your wife asks you if you will be at home this evening. "No" you answer, "I am going to lodge. " In this response "lodge" means a place and an event. You are signifying a communication of the officers and brethren at the lodge hall. Such usage indicates a partial manifestation of the lodge, but, in this last instance, "lodge" identifies an entity neither

limited to a particular place or to a special event. Put simply, lodge meetings represent a vital and special function of the larger lodge which is the local community of Masons. The lodge hall houses the operating and training center for this larger lodge. It houses the nerve center, if you will. From this place of focus, the leadership of the Master, assisted by his officers and his committees, radiates outward and assumes the responsibility for "putting the Craft to labor" within the lodge's jurisdiction of compassion and caring. [These officers are the future masters in training. It is in leadership training, instruction on how to build an administrative team, and in schooling Masonic educators that our Grand Lodges play their most essential role.]

Consider the extensive dimensions of the lodge's mission! This labor falls into three categories all of which are interrelated and partake of the vision of the Craft.

- (a) Care for the Masonic family
- (b) Serving the needy and building a better community
- (c) Training the builders

"Take care of the widows and the orphans' " this is the great charitable charge we have received from our operative predecessors. This noble charge still stands, but it has been expanded to the entire Masonic Family. Our obligations have enlarged with our growing conception of what we as Freemasons came here to do and as new needs have demanded. We feel it our wider calling to support the aging members, the young Masons laboring to bring up their family amidst an enlarging circle of dangers, and our youth who may find their first introduction to the great beliefs of humanity within our youth organizations.

Who are we as Masons if we do not look after our own? But there is more. What do we understand about our work if we curtail our mission within our own Masonic house? We come to work upon a fairer city of humanity; this is what we intend to do. It is our vision to bring a new era of hope and joy within our lodge's jurisdiction of compassion and service. It is the result of our calling as builders within our given jurisdictions of compassion and service which constitutes the work of our lodges.

We all like to see a large number of brothers out to our meetings, for, after all, fraternal companionship is one of the great joys of Freemasonry. However, it is not the primary business, or even the business at all, of the master or his officers to entertain the brethren in an attempt to populate the "sidelines. " Lodges at one time may have served as places of entertainment, they may properly do so now, from time to time, for happiness is part of our business, but lodges are not primarily about "sidelines." They are about mainlines of action and vision. Masons, even those who seldom attend lodge meetings, are duty bound to practice and to live Masonry within their own Needsville.

Recently I had the opportunity to present a fifty year veterans medal. As so often is the case, the receiving brother began to apologize for not having come to lodge more often. When he was done, a young mason rose and said, "Don't you apologize. I watched you all the years I was growing up in this community, and I wanted to be like you. You and your life are why I am here."

It is the master and his officers' duty to see that the living of Freemasonry throughout the jurisdiction is not haphazard. Every member according to his time and his capabilities should be given some part to play in the work of the lodge, as it promotes the human conversation, as it conciliates true friendships, as it stands for justice and equality, and as it "restores peace to troubled minds." It is from the "nerve center" of the living lodge that such direction and leadership of the Craft must come. All this is implied in the phrase "a lodge duly assembled"-assembled, coordinated for the accomplishment of its work.

All successful lodges are operative lodges. Find such a lodge and you will discover leaders (or a leader) who knows how to bind the brethren in a significant expression of the Masonic enterprise, and who has the skill to set them to accomplishing this purpose for themselves. Perhaps we have not given enough thought to how much skill, how much informed art such leadership demands. [And this too must be primary in the concern and the services of a Grand Lodge to its lodges.]

Perhaps we have not sufficiently considered how much sophisticated skill is demanded if we are to help create within the community that communication, networking, and coordination which is now required in the building of a better world. Certainly we all tend to forget that below all that we do, welling up and giving strength to all building endeavors, are those moral principles which illuminate and stimulate the Masonic vision.

So now we return to where we began this exploration of a lodge and its work. We find ourselves realizing why our degree work is a vital means and not an end in itself. At the "nerve center," the officers and those members who possess the special gift of being ritualistic teachers assemble to set another man upon the degree journey-that greatest gift which the lodge has to give a brother. One man at a time, heart to heart, mind to mind, the Craft builds its working force. The meaning which gives significance and purpose to the builder's life and to his labors must be discovered; it must be journeyed after. This is the purpose of the degree journey, and this is the work of the degree givers, to share the old guideposts, to go in companionship as far as a brother can go, and to celebrate the new understanding and dedication found.

The brethren of Builders' Lodge have a vision to give to Needsville. In giving that vision, the brethren, themselves, will come to understand its immense value. Through the work of the lodge which is going on within its jurisdiction of compassion and service, the brethren will be drawn back to that "nerve center." In that "sacred retreat of friendship and virtue," they will find the quiet joy of renewal. When the Sacred Book is spread and the working tools displayed, there will be created a special place apart from the press of time and the urgency of life's demands. It is a place we name "our lodge." It is a place from whence we go out renewed and shoulder to shoulder to work again.

"Wherever they came:" writes Mr. Hope in his Essay on Architecture, "in the suite of missionaries, or were called by the natives, or arrived of their own accord, to seek employment, they appeared headed by a chief surveyor, who governed the whole troop, and named one man out of every ten, under the name of warden, to overlook the other nine, set themselves to building temporary huts for their habitation around the spot where the work was to be carried on, regularly organized their different departments, fell to work, sent for fresh supplies of their brethren as the object demanded,

and, when all was finished, again they raised their encampment, and went elsewhere to undertake other work."

From: The Builders