

A WORLD OF PRIORITIES

This paper was originally presented at the Southwest Masonic Conference, Dallas, Texas in September 1982, shortly before R.W. Bro. Brooks passed away. It's original title was "Youth and its Positive Effect on Freemasonry."

A small percentage of the youth today knows who are Masons, what they believe, and the teachings and philosophy of the fraternity. How could they know when we have, by our own election, kept ourselves out of the limelight in our society because we do nothing for which to be recognized? The younger generation thinks of Masonry as something to which their grandfathers belonged, something out of the past, that must remain in the past because they see or know of nothing which gives them cause to think otherwise.

We must stop and realize the vast amount of knowledge and ability our youth have compared to our own at their age when they ask, "What is Masonry"? A few indefinite answers are not acceptable to them. They want to know true facts with the supporting evidence which they are entitled to receive. Masonry is not a secret organization although we have a few secrets to set us up as a fraternity. When a Mason is asked about Masonry by a non-Mason, regardless of age or sex, he should be willing and eager to tell that person anything he wants to know-so long as secrets are not revealed. The majority of Masons, when asked about Masonry, will not say much because they are afraid to talk. Most of our brethren need to be educated to talk freely, without revealing secrets, when asked about Masonry.

There are many organizations, shows, games, entertainments, etc. knocking at the doors of our youth, therefore he must make a choice as to the best use of his time. This is a world of priorities -no one can do everything he wishes. I hope we have taught them to spend their leisure time wisely and to affiliate with organizations that are run smoothly and efficiently by competent people with leadership ability.

What young people know is what they do; what they are to be, they are now becoming. They are in their formative years and their minds are our most fertile soil. There is no such thing as uninfluenced youth. Bro. J. Edgar Hoover said the number one target of the Communist is our youth. One of the greatest potential forces in the world, for our nation and for our fraternity, is the minds of our young people.

All the younger generation really wants is a life of respectability built upon a sound foundation that can cope with the problems man has always faced. Masonry offers all of this-we have failed them and ourselves. The truest role of Freemasonry is to be of service to God, country and mankind. This is our role yesterday, today and in the future, for Freemasonry does not change. Outside the church, Masonry has more to offer the younger generation than any other organization.

Everything that Masonry and mankind can hope to achieve will depend upon the willingness of men and Masons to work actively on the "grass roots" level, with individual boys and girls. To Masons this should mean working with chapters of DeMolays, Bethels of Job's Daughters, and assemblies of Rainbow Girls to develop, by precept, association and example the mental attitude and moral fiber of our youth. How many times have Rainbow Girls and Job's Daughters begged for one Mason to attend their meeting so they could legally open for business? Next to the ministry of the gospel, what is the most honorable job a Mason can do? Could it be as a Dad or Advisor for a Masonic youth organization?

There are many bridges between the appendant youth chapters and the bodies of Masonry. As the bridges become stronger, each group will increase in strength and our civilization will come closer to fulfilling the vision and hope of a great kingdom of God on earth.

More than half of the DeMolays join the Masonic Lodge when they become of age. Many of them have become Grand Masters of Masonry-many have become famous in civilian life. Brethren, if we can sell the Rainbow Girls and Job's Daughters on Masonry, they will bring us many new members by canvassing their fathers, brothers and future husbands.

The younger generation is not interested in how much we know, not until they find out how much we care. They are not as interested in hearing us as they are in seeing us. They have a burning desire to find something on which to hang.

Several jurisdictions have Youth Committees with active, successful programs. These include Scholarship programs for youth. A few Grand Lodges and appendant bodies have booths at the State and County fairs which have been well received. They handed out pamphlets on what we can tell our friends about Freemasonry and appendant youth chapters. They felt the younger generation showed the greatest interest. Some jurisdictions sponsor such things as essay contests for youth. In Arkansas the "Alpha Foundation for Youth" has been organized with legal formalities to assure that gifts to it will be tax deductible. The purpose of the foundation is to promote Masonic youth chapters within the state. An appendant of the Foundation is the "One Hundred for DeMolay." Members of this group pay one hundred dollars (\$100) each year to the Foundation, the interest from which goes to support the DeMolay programs of Arkansas.

Public Masonic meetings such as family affairs, open installations, Masonic funerals, Cornerstone or Commemorative stone layings, Masonic dedications, etc., are a very necessary part of the successful progress of Masonry. These are our 'show windows.'

We can provide dollars for our youth organizations and we must do so in greater amounts than ever before. But the great, real need, my brethren, is not for one hundred dollars of your money-it is for one hundred hours of your time. You see if we become, by daily association, a part of their lives then we have every reasonable expectation that when they reach the years of maturity they will want to become a part of our heritage.

The number one problem of our Masonic Lodges and appendant youth chapters is the lack of adult leadership. The smallest of DeMolay chapters should have ten or more Advisory Council

members who attend each chapter meeting. We should want to do all we can all of the time to encourage and guide young people. This is a part of the philosophy of Masonry.

We must remember that our hopes for the perpetuation of Freemasonry, our ideals and philosophy, rest only in those who come to us voluntarily. These are prompted to come to us by having been favorably influenced by the good deeds and prestige of the fraternity and by their contacts with Masons. When youth programs or Masonic Lodges fail or drift it is because of a lack of leadership and support. One leader with a vision, enthusiasm and endurance can transform a Masonic youth organization or a Masonic Lodge.

We must cast our bread upon the waters by proving to our youth that we want to be part of them. In the years that follow they will want to be a part of us-they will want a portion of the heritage which Masonic ideals express.

The future of Masonry will become brighter and brighter if those who have come under the influence of Masonic youth appendant chapters should continue to bring to the Lodges of Masonry their youth, their inspiration and their vision.

Freemasonry will meet the challenge of the future. The greatest asset in Freemasonry is the spirit of friendship that exists between Freemasons in their relationships with one another and their attitude of thoughtfulness for the welfare of others.