

MASONS: KNIGHTS OF CHARITY

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Politics, religion and secrecy -these are three subjects never discussed within any legitimate Masonic lodge or during any event of Masonic sponsorship. Our Craft is non-political in that it transcends narrow partisanship to exalt freedom and the full development of every person's human potential. The prohibition of sectarian concern is central to Freemasonry's acceptance of all men who express belief in a Supreme Being and who have dedicated themselves to His service. Most of all, Freemasonry is not a secret organization, but one that publicly announces its meetings and openly works for all types of civic, philanthropic and patriotic causes.

Given the multitude of beneficial activities and worthwhile projects going on at any given Lodge, there is no time--even if it were permitted--to waste on such unproductive matters as politics, sects, or secrecy. The "secret" purpose of Freemasonry is public knowledge--the enlightenment of society and the improvement of mankind.

Far from being a "secret society," Masons in America proudly wear their pins and cordially invite non-Masons to public meetings sponsored by Masons. Notices indicating the time and place of meetings are widely printed and in many places advertisements in the newspapers inform of such meetings. Although Masons seek no public approbation for their benevolence, the actual supportive facts are that the sum of \$1.3 million is made available every single day by the Masons in this Country for such benevolence. The figure of \$1.3 million per day is not a typographical error, but rather a conservative estimate by The Masonic Service Association that Masonic Bodies and affiliated organizations expend more than \$480 million per year in benevolent activities. About 60 percent of this sum is made available for public assistance, and 40 percent is oriented toward support of Masonic Homes for the young and the elderly - completely provided for by Masons without public assistance. No organization in the history of mankind has ever accomplished such a massive and high purpose on a continuing basis. Crippled children's bones are healed. Many persons once given up for dead are now returned to society because the Shrine became a catalyst in the treatment of second and third degree burns. The great Masonic Centers in Chicago, New York and elsewhere about the Country testify in the work of the Masons.

The Aphasia Program the Scottish Rite sparked has been for more than 20 years returning speechless children to society in lieu of incarceration in State institutions. Other charitable agencies are now taking on the work, but it was the Scottish Rite that initiated interest. Today thousands of youngsters live normal lives because the Masons of the Scottish Rite gave of their efforts and their substance.

More than 10 years ago at a Los Angeles Bodies Scottish Rite meeting, I concluded my remarks by referring to the great work of the Aphasia Program of the Mother Jurisdiction. Thereafter, a fine, clean-cut young man of about 18 years came up to greet me and said, "Mr. MacPhee, when you see the Masons of California thank them for me." I asked, "What did the Masons do for you?" He replied, "When I was six years old I could not speak; had never spoken a word. No one seemed able to help me. A friend suggested we try the Scottish Rite Aphasia Program which had been established at Stanford University. That program did the job for me. I graduated from high school last month as captain of the Debating Society. So please thank the Masons for me. " It was one of the greatest experiences I have ever had as a Mason. I think I stood twelve feet tall as I listened to that young man.

Millions of persons have been assisted by the Masons of the Knights Templar Eye Foundation in their expenditures for research, treatment, correction of diseases and problems of the eyes. The Knights Templar continue to make substantial grants to the Departments of Ophthalmology at many universities throughout the United States. An unsolicited letter addressed to the Knights Templar of Phoenix, Arizona, some time ago tells the story better than any words of mine. The letter read:

"One month ago I did not know of the existence of the Knights Templar Eye Foundation. Your making possible the corneal transplant precipitated decisions of lasting consequences. Nine days after the transplant in the hospital room, I heard these words, 'Mother, I see you, I see your eyes. I can see your lips moving, Mother, I see you. ' Gentlemen, what can a grateful mother and father say but thank you for making possible the return of our son's vision, for giving him eyes that he may see." Thousands of such letters over the years testify to this great work.

It is well within the mark to say that hundreds of millions of dollars are made available annually for deserving scholarships and leadership training programs for boys and girls and young adults of all races, colors and creeds by the Scottish Rite, York Rite, Masonic Foundations, Hi-Twelve Clubs and other Masonic affiliated organizations.

Today in this Country there are numerous laboratories where research is supported by the men of Masonry -all working to find the answer to cancer, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, leukemia, arteriosclerosis, schizophrenia and a host of other medical problems. Then we have the great work of The Masonic Service Association in providing funds and the manpower to continue each year the tremendous Hospital Visitation Program.

And there is more! Space is not available to do justice to all Freemasonry has accomplished and is accomplishing.

Masons in the early days of the guilds, before the Lodges were formed, recognized the importance of charity for the less fortunate, and on each Patron Saint's day they regularly provided funds for that purpose. For each Mason learns in the First Degree, "Charity extends beyond the grave, through the boundless ages of eternity."

Accordingly, we Masons recognize there must be a greater charity than that of giving of our substance. And there is. It is the gift that no one else but you can give. It is the giving of our

ourselves--the giving of time and talents in a thousand different ways to our churches, synagogues, our schools, our Lodges, hospitals, Little Leagues, Boy and Girls Scouts, Boys' Clubs, DeMolays, Rainbows, Jobs' Daughters and others. Through these acts we personally help the weak, the poor, the needy, the sick and those requiring our care and love.

Think for a moment of the giving of yourself by extending the charity of compassion to those with whom you may not agree. Or consider how Masons are the first to extend our hands in friendship to those who would spitefully use us. I once wrote, "The individual who would truly exemplify Brotherly Love comes closest to Heaven on Earth." I believe it!

It has been said that Masonic charity is the greatest of all virtues, for such charity is indeed the law of balance.

And it is entirely conceivable that the guidance of the so-called Patron Saints of the medieval Masons indoctrinated a concern for others, a responsibility to the guild and subsequent Lodge members.

Thus down through the ages came the importance to the men of Masonry in the giving of charity or relief in its many forms including financial help and relief for the distressed in body, mind and spirit. How proud these early Masons would be to see the great philanthropic work of their counterparts today providing extensive humanitarian service to all mankind in the giving of themselves and their substance in a manner unparalleled in the history of the world.

Masons do indeed have substantial cause to be proud of their heritage and their efforts today on behalf of all mankind.