



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and
Accepted Masons of Virginia**



Committee on Masonic Education

Lodge Presentation Program Paper

Why Mentoring?

By Right Worshipful Jack W. Bonniwell

Committee on Masonic Education

When we hear Grand Lodge and Blue Lodge leadership stress how important it is to mentor the new Mason, we generally agree. Indeed, most of us think we know what mentoring means and probably feel that it's no big deal to mentor someone. But, perhaps some of us may be confusing acting as a friend or as a Brother with the mentoring relationship, and we may not fully understand what it is to be a mentor or what the responsibility of mentoring entails.

So let us discuss what is mentoring and who is a mentor.

The roots of Mentoring reach back to Greek mythology. The word itself was inspired by the character of Mentor in Homer's Odyssey. Mentor in the story is actually the goddess Athena who takes on the appearance of an old man in order to guide young Telemachus in his time of difficulty. Because of the nature of Mentor's relationship with Telemachus, and the encouragement and practical plans Mentor provides for dealing with his personal dilemmas, the name Mentor came to be adopted in English as a

term meaning someone who imparts wisdom to, and shares knowledge with, a less experienced colleague.

Generally, when the new Mason is asked who his mentor was and what mentoring he had received; he will probably answer “it was Brother X who taught me the catechisms.” It should be more than that, however, and thus, in addition to appointing a catechism coach, the Lodge should seek out Brethren who have a wealth of knowledge and understanding of Masonry. These Brethren should be charged to assist the catechism coach and help take the new Mason beyond the ritual, so they learn who Masons are, what Masonry is, and what Masons do. The relationship that develops between the mentor and the new Mason, the encouragement and the transfer of moral and Masonic knowledge, is what we call mentoring.

But why is it so important to mentor new Masons? There are several good answers in the “Mentoring a New Brother” brochure produced by Most Worshipful George Bernard Dungan, Jr. First, we must remember, the new Mason knows relatively little about Freemasonry. He is in a sense an empty book whose pages we are to fill. In addition, if we fill those pages with worthwhile information and provide the proper understanding of our Fraternity, we can develop in him a greater interest in the Craft, a desire to learn more, and willingness to participate in the work of his Lodge. Second, without the guidance and influence that mentoring provides, many new Masons tend to drift away from the Lodge, not participate in the meetings, or contribute anything to the health of the Lodge. The Catholic Church has always said, “Give us your child for his first six years and we will have him forever!” We need to adopt a similar approach and spend

quality time mentoring our new Masons, and then we too can build a bond that will last forever.

In the Forward to the Mentor's Manual in the Presentation Volume, which is published by the Grand Lodge of Virginia, we find that a mentoring plan was conceived "to produce interested Masons by means of a well-rounded education in all phases of the Royal Art." Also, if we take the time to read the Mentor's Manual, it can provide us with a wealth of knowledge to use in mentoring the new Mason. Of course, there is, in addition, a great storehouse of Masonic knowledge consisting of the work of so many Masonic scholars, which we can draw upon to pique the interest of the new Mason. Sometimes sparking that interest is as simple as giving the gift of an introductory book about the Fraternity, such as "Freemasons for Dummies, which despite its tongue-in-cheek title is a comprehensive compilation of information in an easy to understand format."

The value of mentoring works both ways. The Brethren who take on the mentoring responsibility soon find that they too are learning more about Masonry and developing in themselves a yearning to learn even more. This interest in learning about Masonry is a key component of the mentoring process, and as the mentoring relationship continues to develop, it provides the opportunity to discuss those things in Masonry that are not written down and only passed from one Brother to another, and also the opportunity for each to bounce ideas off the other.

But mentoring is, of course, more than book learning, it is learning about life and is as practical as it is useful. Through the mentoring relationship, we come to see that Masonry is more than the ritual and the

meetings, it is more than the friendships and social interaction. It is a brotherhood that translates into a way of life. And through mentoring we begin to learn how to live an authentic Masonic lifestyle.

So, what's the bottom line when it comes to mentoring? We believe that the two Masons who know the candidate and sign his petition should mentor that Brother, particularly at the beginning of his Masonic experience. We believe that the Lodge should appoint a learned Mason to instruct the new member on ritual and catechism. And, we believe that the Lodge should appoint another learned Mason to mentor the new member in the history and traditions, the philosophy and values of Freemasonry. In sum, the new Brother should have no less than four Masons who can provide training and guidance and serve as his mentors. And we also should remember that it is not just the new Mason who needs mentoring, all of us do.

In the 2011-2012 Masonic Year in Virginia, our Grand Master's theme is "Spreading Masonic Light." This is a charge to all Virginia Masons to spread the "Light of Masonry" to all we know and meet, and through our actions and behavior create a favorable impression of the Fraternity in the larger community. But it also means developing and deepening our relationships with our Brethren and we can do this, at least in part, through teaching and mentoring. So in the end, "Spreading Masonic Light" requires that we look inside ourselves and ask "What can I do to be a better mentor to my Masonic Brethren, and particularly to the Brethren for whom I signed a petition.

- - -