

## What of Masonic Charity?

By WB Julius W. Brown Jr.

What of Masonic Charity? Giving of your money should be enough. Shouldn't it? St. Paul wrote: "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing". Wikipedia describes Charity as "The practice of benevolent giving." Benevolent means - "intended for benefits rather than profit". I gather that Charity means giving for the benefit of receiving greater pleasure than that of wealth.

Hmm, I can appreciate that. I have always been one to give with the pleasure of knowing it's more important to give than to receive. It warms my heart and makes me feel a little less important than I sometimes think I am. There, but for the Grace of God go I, had I turned a few different corners in my life. So it humbles me.

Although Masonic ritual varies between jurisdictions, a consistent message conveyed to every candidate is that charity is an essential part of Freemasonry. From this philosophy comes much of a 'Mason's work', given freely and willingly. Charity comes in many forms, both large and small.

In the Middle Ages each lodge of operative masons, who built the cathedrals, abbeys and castles, maintained a charity chest to help widows and orphans, or members in distress. In addition, they assisted a fellow mason by giving him a day's work or the means of traveling to the project of a neighboring lodge.

A study of Masonic Charities is a study of the evolving needs of American society. When food and shelter were immediate and almost daily concerns, Masons responded with firewood and the fruits of their harvests. When care of the aged, widows, and orphans were worries, Masons erected retirement homes and orphanages. When education was needed, Masons built schools, and when these basic needs moved ever farther from common experience, Masons turned their philanthropy to crippled children, burn victims, the speech and language impaired, cancer patients, and others.

I wonder though, if today our Masonic Charity is enough or is it stagnated from lodge to lodge, from district to district. Are we giving enough to our communities that they know we are there and they know we are a resource that they can turn to? Is your lodge being run by programs that will enhance your coffers and make you a bigger asset to the people who need you most? Are the funds of your lodge invested and nurtured with the hopes that they will sprout roots and begin to grow into a tree that will give back continually? Not just one time or another.

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, you are in a Lodge or Chapter with a bright future. If you can't answer any of that in the affirmative, you've got some work to do.

Growing up in Philadelphia, very close to the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, it was easy to see the Masons sponsoring the local teen programs and sports activities. There were times when they paraded down Broad St. to show the community the ties they had with them and that their ideals were being put to use. They were in the Churches as Deacons, Laymen, and even in the schools volunteering as Coaches and Mentors. They were Masons. Men of Valor and status. Good men. None of them did it for status. In fact, most of them didn't think they would be worthy of a Grand Lodge Position. I beg to differ.

These are the type of Masons we need today. These are the Masons of lodges who give back to their communities without hoping to gain something in return. Is your lodge giving back? There are Worshipful Masters and Worthy Matrons of Lodges and Chapters all over America who are working in their communities. City Hall knows who they are and know they can go to them for leadership in the community. It's important that we tie the responsibility of community concern to the job of being a Worshipful Master or Worthy Matron. It's important that these leaders know that it is not just incumbent of them to make more brothers or sisters for the lodge or chapter or to teach the mystic order in the old ways. It's just as important to have an Adopt-A-Street Program and a clothing give away program for the less fortunate people in your neighborhood. It's just as important to feed the homeless and visit the elderly homes to play bingo with the Senior Citizens. They really love it when you do things like that.

In some cases though, we don't have those programs going on in some of our lodges. I can't say how many do or don't. I can say, that those with these types of program don't have a lot of the back biting and undercutting as those that don't. Give your craft missions that they must accomplish. Set goals and destinations and grab all of those who want to go with you and bring them along. Those who want to sit on the sideline and down talk your ideas, give them something else to do if they can't get in line with this mission. But whatever you do, don't get stagnant. Keep something on your Trestle Board so that your craft is busy all the time. At the same time, let them know that you have a plan and show them the directions and where you are trying to go. Get them to ingest that plan and take ownership in their part of it. Watch how hard they work when they feel like their input is a major part of the wheel rolling.

Lodges and Chapters with Worshipful Masters and Worthy Matrons with that mindset, enjoy a comfortable time in the East. Their coffers increase and with increased income come increased opportunity to provide Charity. See; it's a two way street.

French Actor, Playwright, and Writer Moliere sums it up as such; "Every good act is charity. A man's true wealth hereafter is the good that he does in this world to his fellows." So we are no more than what we give back to each other. Our own blessings are tied into the amount of giving we do to our own fellow man. And what more could you give than that which one needs. The bare essentials of life are the things that no one in need can turn down. Food, water, clothing, and sometimes, just a

hug will reap you benefits you have not imagined yet. Medicine for the elderly who can't afford it can spark a cause for concern that raises the roof of your lodge and pours its blessings out to the community it should serve. How can we not provide when we know this to be?

Charity though, starts at home. Let's make sure that every member of our lodges and chapters are doing okay. Let's talk to them and question their welfare for real. Not just the casual conversation when we pretend to care. Let's open the lines of communication so that each member knows that they can approach the house when they are in need of anything. Let them know that Charity swings its head into each and every home at one time or another. I to am guilty of pride. Yet, we have to provide an atmosphere where we know that confidentiality is key and sacred. If I come to you and ask you for something, I shouldn't have to hear Brother or Sister So-N-So down the street talking about me. That isn't Charity at all. That's malicious and spiteful and done by people who need to be reminded that they are better than others.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

**Source: *I Corinthians (ch. XIII, v. 13)***

The greatest of these is Charity. What motivated Paul to make the case that Charity was the greatest of the three? Therefore the theological virtue of love (charity) is the highest of all virtues and the sins against charity are the greatest sins. God is love. Love is Charity. Therefore, God is Charity. To not be charitable is a sin against Charity. Therefore, to sin against Charity is to sin against God which is the highest sin. Being that as it may, we have to give back.

I have on good authority the knowledge that the Prince Hall Grand Chapter Order of the Eastern Stars of Washington & Jurisdiction, have begun a Charity Committee to gather information and direct their members to charitable events. During my time as the Worshipful Master of Daniel "Chappie" James Lodge # 72, I made sure that I kept my brothers informed about charity events and I was never let down as to attendance. I'll be the first to say, when people know about things, they participate.

As the Chairman of Community Development for the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Washington & Jurisdiction, I have begun looking into the possibility of beginning a Charity Hospice for our senior citizens, widows of Master Masons, and Masons themselves who get up in age and can no longer care for themselves. This program will take a lot of funding and will require the assistance of everyone in every Lodge or Chapter within the jurisdiction. I have no idea yet, what all of this will encompass, but I do know that we are bound by our desire to be good sisters and brothers, to do something to assist those who made the same sacrifices as we are making now. Taking time away from our families and sometimes work to practice the art and charity we hold so dearly.

Even with increased availability of governmental social assistance, there remains a pressing need for Masonic benevolence and charity. Kindly acts of remembrance toward older members, the infirm and widows are always required. Practical assistance for those in distress is still the responsibility of those who can help. Therefore, every mason through his private efforts, his lodge and the other avenues of Masonic charity, ought to consider what he should, can, and will do to assist others.

I'm sure there is enough charity in this Masonic Jurisdiction to pull off something like this. Yet there exists outside resources who can assist in an endeavor like this. Imagine a place strategically located and fully funded by Masonic Resources. I see it working in other places and I know if it works for them, it can work for us. No doubt in my mind. But let's not get caught up in my dreams right now, I want to continue down the road of why Charity is so important.

Masonic charity has always been somewhat secret unlike civic charity whose administration made the entire town privy to the needs of each recipient. Thus a researcher can only capture the data from formally organized and public Masonic activities, but even that doesn't tell the whole story. Masonic charity is plentiful. Yet because we don't advertise it all, sometimes it goes unnoticed. Yet we are responsible to know that we are giving. Each Lodge, each Chapter, should have a record of their giving that they can be proud of at the end of the year. That's what it's all about. That's what it's all for.

Measure your Charity. From this day forth, when someone asks are you giving enough, be able to tell them how much you do for your community. The most important of these are Charity. Remember and make it known for these are the things that attract the type of people we want in this organization. Not those who will do whatever, whenever to obtain a seat in the Grand Lodge or Grand Chapter. Be ready to serve your community with the things they need. Food, Clothing, assistance for the elderly, or just a buddy system for those who you serve. Make charity the most important thing on your Trestle Boards. You will reap the benefits. Your lodge will reap the benefits. Your Grand body, will reap the benefits. It's a win win situation for everybody. If you need a charity to get involved in, check with someone who is out there doing things on a regular basis. I'm sure they can point you in the right direction. Now that's true Masonic Knowledge.

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