

WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER?

by Bro. Jeff Young

This evening's Masonic Education involves a personal experience that caused me to rethink what it means to be a Mason.

A few years ago while visiting my oldest son, who is a Mason; he invited me to attend a Lodge meeting with him. As we were leaving the Lodge, a young man in his mid-20's, walking by the Lodge stopped and asked me if I was a Mason. When I replied that I was, he asked me what has to be the most difficult questions I have ever been asked. He asked "What do Mason's do?"

My mind was flooded with possible responses – supporting charities, working in the community, the Children's Rite Care and Burn Centers - however; I didn't feel any of these responses answer his question. I think the question he was really asking was "What are the Mason's?"

I don't know about you, but this presented me with a real challenge because of the realization that there is no simple answer that easily comes to mind. What he seemed to be asking is for a comprehensive explanation about what organized Freemasonry is, what its principles and purposes are, what programs it is engaged in, how it carries them out, and what satisfactions the individual Mason derives from his Masonic membership.

Your first instinct may involve some level of fraternal doubt, thinking "you can't tell that," or "that's secret." If so, your reply will be marked by hesitation or reluctance to explain.

Puzzled by the difficulty of knowing which of the vast subjects of Freemasonry the questioner is really inquiring about, you just don't know where to begin, and too often may avoid a simple statement of facts.

As well-informed Brothers, we must prepare ourselves for the possibility of being asked such a question. Even though no one may ever ask it, you will have the confidence of knowing what Freemasonry means, especially to yourself.

So, how did I respond to this gentleman's question? I thought about what the real meaning of Masonry means to me, as a spiritual force, as "a way of life" which seeks to improve men morally and spiritually, by associating with other idealistic men who want to improve the quality of life around them by means of a brotherhood which emphasizes the existence of a Supreme Being.

After all, there are really so few "secrets" which a Mason is required to keep, and so much that we should be proud to proclaim to others, that your principal concern in answering questions is probably the doubt that you can give an adequate reply.

Components of the ritual work, the grips and pass-words of the three degrees, are the real "secrets" which should be kept inviolate. Because it is impossible to communicate to the uninitiated the satisfaction you acquire with other Brothers as experienced in "the labors of the lodge," this too becomes a secret because it is inexpressible.

But there is so much that you can tell about Freemasonry, about the particular lodge, about the individual Mason, that the real problem in answering the question, "What do the Masons do?" is to say only enough to satisfy the questioner without boring or distracting him.

You can point out that Freemasonry is an educational organization. By means of the ritualistic ceremonies and other educational programs, Masons learn and teach the truths of morality, justice, patriotism, and the necessity of brotherly love to achieve those universal ideals.

You can explain that Masonic meetings, while resembling the meetings of any organized society, have a distinct character. They are opened and closed with prayer. They are patriotic because the nation's flag is kept in an honored place in the lodge and properly saluted with the pledge of allegiance. They are opened and closed with Masonic ceremonies to remind each member of the principal purposes of the Fraternity, which are to develop brotherly love and respect for truth which guides a man to live happily and harmoniously with his fellow man.

You are also free to explain that Freemasonry is a charitable organization, which acts to relieve the distress of local individuals and that it has created programs and institutions to care for its needy senior citizens and children alike, or to provide scholarship aid for worthy and needy young people. Masonic Homes and Hospitals, Scholarship Programs, Charity Funds, and the Hospital Visitation Program of the Masonic Service Association are examples of such achievements.

There is so much that you can tell about the Fraternity. But the way in which you tell it is more important than what you tell. When you know that your lodge is a spiritual force, when it is learning and teaching its members the ideals of the Craft, when it is actively promoting charitable programs, you will tell what Freemasonry is with conviction and enthusiasm.

When you are asked the question you must decide on how much or how little to say. A brief but adequate reply is probably best, for if the questioner is not satisfied, he will undoubtedly ask for further information. What can you say when asked this question?

"Masons are men who voluntarily asked to join a lodge. They were accepted because they were good men who believe in a Supreme Being and hold high ethical and moral ideals. They go to meetings which they call the lodge, in order to learn and to teach what 'friendship, morality, and truth really involve, and to practice on a small scale the reality of brotherhood. They also have meetings open to their wives, children, and friends where they promote an understanding of the serious nature of the Fraternity by entertainment and sociability. Practical programs for charity and relief are planned and executed. The special kinship they feel for each other as a brotherhood is their deepest satisfaction."

If our response is positive and filled with conviction, then the Fraternity will be stronger and flourish and fellowship among all men will be improved.

So how did my experience end? Was my answer adequate and informative? I guess so, because this young man asked for a Petition and is an active member of my son's lodge ... and a personal friend and Brother as well.