

A SURRENDER OF VALUES?

(SCENE I)

In making their rounds through the wards of the Veterans Hospitals, the M.S.A. Field Agents frequently have patients confide in them that "I used to be a Mason." The ensuing conversation usually brings out that the patient was "Dropped for non-payment of dues." When MSA Field Agent follows up with a question of "How come?", the answers seem to fall into a pattern:

1. I moved and lost contact until it was too late.
2. I lost interest.
3. I couldn't attend.
4. Personality conflict.
5. One year I forgot to pay my dues and the next year it just seemed to be too much to pay, so I let it slip.
6. My wife paid all the bills and didn't think it was important.
7. (And way down at the bottom of the list.) I couldn't afford it.

So often, the person who has been dropped for NPD, has no knowledge of how to become reinstated or has the misconception that he must pay dues for all of the years he has been suspended. M.S.A. Field Agents have "salvaged" a great many by bringing them back into the fold.

(SCENE II)

In a telephone conversation, which is repeatedly encountered, a wife or other family member, requests assistance in getting a loved one admitted to a Masonic Home, nursing home, or hospital, and is chagrined to learn that he is not eligible because he had let his membership lapse.

(SCENE III)

Death is always a traumatic experience for the family. Knowing that Dad was a Mason, the family requests a Masonic funeral because they have been impressed with its dignity. Unfortunately, the Masonic service cannot be conducted because Dad was not in good standing at the time of his death.

(SCENE IV)

Johnny proudly tells his Dad that he has been "accepted" and will be initiated next month. Dad has to make all kinds of excuses as to why he can't be there that night. The truth of the matter being that he was "suspended for NPD. "

(SCENE V)

The Secretary reports: "Worshipful Master, there are seven Brothers who are two years in arrears. If their dues are not paid by next month, they'll have to be suspended for N . P. D. "

The Master's reply is: "Seven! Wow! . . . is there anything else on your desk?"

(Unfortunately, reactions such as this are all-too-frequent. It has become too mechanical; too much a matter of form.)

Many surveys have been conducted over the past few years to determine the cause of losses through non-payment of dues, and to determine ways of reducing the losses. The results of such surveys, for the most part, have been in conclusive and unrewarding. There has been insufficient follow-through to adequately find a long-range solution. In some communities, there are more "former Masons" than current ones. This is a sad commentary. Little more has been done other than to identify it as a problem facing the Fraternity. We are applying light bandages when we should be applying tourniquets.

We wring our hands and look around to see where to place the blame, when all we need to do is practice what we preach. Just like the church which was having problems in its growth. After trying socials and Bingo games, dances and chicken suppers--all without success--someone suggested they should "Try religion." Maybe it's time for the lodge to "Try Masonry . "

We proudly proclaim that we "take good men and make them better." We express our tenets as "friendship, morality and brotherly love." We announce our belief in "faith, hope and charity." We use the lessons and tools of the operative Masons to teach--symbolically--that we must place our designs on the trestle board so that the stones will fit with exact nicety. The trestleboard is translated to "life" and the stones to each of us as individual Masons.

We--each and every one of us--must make a renewed commitment to those precepts if we are to meet this challenge. It's a matter of education and communication. It's a matter of pride. It's a necessity for our existence as a "brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. "

"Taking good men" implies that we must be highly selective in whom we admit to our Order. Is the petitioner a "good" man? Is he "of good report?" Does he measure up to our moral standards? Does he truly believe in a Supreme Being? Does he have concern for his fellowman? Can he meet his financial obligations? If he has those qualities he is deserving of our brotherly love and our desire "to make him better" using the "working tools" as they should be used, so that he may have pride in himself and satisfaction with his new profession .

Once he has been given the working tools and taught to use them, we must ensure that he is "gainfully employed" in his new profession. There is nothing which will cause him greater

frustration than being put on "unemployment." He needs to be gainfully employed in meaningful work. There is a commitment when we petition a lodge that we want to be a part of the lodge--that we are willing to work at it. However, too frequently we are not given the opportunity. Communication -Leadership -and Education are the three keys to an effective solution. The instructive tongue can and should be one of the most effective working tools of Masonry. The Masonic leader must put it to use to instruct, to guide, to lead, to build and to translate the lessons of our ritual into meaningful applications in the lives of the Masons. With proper guidance and instruction, everyone can be inspired, motivated and involved in the affairs, operation and activities of the lodge.

An active Mason is involved. His involvement maintains his interest. He is part of the Brotherhood. By maintaining his interest and involvement, there is little chance that he will become an N . P . D . statistic .

There are instances when pride, false pride, or stupid pride, will prevent a Mason from admitting that he cannot meet his obligations. A careful and personal contact with those in arrears should determine if that is the problem. The cause is even more important than the result. We must be as careful--or even more so--in making these investigations as when we investigated him as a petitioner. He may need the compassion of his Brethren more now than ever.

A personal, face to face, contact with one in arrears will usually provide an indication if it is an oversight, or a sincere desire to sever "the mystic tie." It will also offer the opportunity to present the honorable option of requesting a demit once he is "clear on the books."

In the Short Talk Bulletin of March, 1943 ("Dropped N.P.D.") the causes, effects and solutions to the losses of membership are fully discussed. Thirty-nine years later, the same reasoning remains valid. We urge a complete re-reading of this important Short Talk Bulletin, and quote the final paragraphs which so succinctly define the challenge:

"The one and only way to keep them is to make the Lodge worthwhile. To many the mere fact of belonging; the right to see a degree; the thought of being a part of the Fraternity is enough. But others want more; more entertainment, more chance to take part; more good times, more Masonry in Lodge.

If the Master is sufficiently on his toes to appoint, inspire and put to work a committee which really works at the task of recovering the lost members, he should also be clever enough to plan interesting meetings and carry them through.

There is nothing the matter with Masonry; the matter boils down to the questions of leadership, sustained and interested planning, enthusiasm for the Fraternity and the Lodge. Given these and members will not drop themselves; begin with these this year and many who have dropped themselves will return--and be happy in their homecoming."

While some refer to this challenge as "membership retention," it is actually more a matter of meeting our obligations as Masons--of showing concern, both for our Brethren and our Ancient Craft. Losses through nonpayment of dues are a surrender of our values.