

DEDICATION THROUGH EDUCATION

MORE LIGHT IN MASONRY (VIII): DEDICATION THROUGH EDUCATION by Allen E. Roberts

It is evident that THERE CAN BE NO DEDICATION WITHOUT EDUCATION. We certainly can't be enthused about something that we know little or nothing about.

On a recent camping trip I discovered more evidence of the lack of dedication in Masonry. I was typing a manuscript and had a couple of Masonic books spread out on the table. An elderly camper was curious. He asked me what I was doing, and I told him. "I don't understand how you can do that," he said. He was visibly puzzled.

"What don't you understand?" I asked, just as puzzled.

"How you can write about such a secret organization? For many years I've thought I would like to be a Mason, but every time I ask someone about the organization, I get no answers. In fact, everybody I talk to makes me feel like I'm intruding into something sacred. I really don't see how you can have any members at all, if it's that secret."

That disturbed me. Unfortunately, I've heard similar statements over and over again. And they disturb all those who are dedicated to the progress and prosperity of Freemasonry. They trouble us because we are making members but are not teaching them to become Master Masons.

I explained to my camping acquaintance that Freemasonry is definitely not a secret organization. It does have a few secret words which help to identify those who are Freemasons from those who are not. It does have a ritual that helps teach a man to be a better man. We discussed Freemasonry at length. Then I gave him a copy of *Key to Freemasonry's Growth* and suggested he read Chapter I, "Freemasonry in Perspective".

Too often we forget that every member of an organization is important. One uninformed man can destroy years of work by the leadership. In the degree work, the man with a non-speaking part is just as important as the Worshipful Master. There just is no such thing as an unimportant member or worker.

For some time my wife wanted a new living room suite. I wasn't a good member of the "team." I ignored her. Then my conscience got the better of me - and there were other reasons. We decided to get the suite for her birthday. Off we went to a host of furniture stores. The receptions we received were amazing. In a couple we were greeted graciously, but in most, the sales personnel appeared to be annoyed because we were there.

We finally found what we wanted, in a store where we were told which floor the furniture was on, but were then left to shift for ourselves. I was about to find a salesman to write up the order

when my wife discovered something sharp at the base of the sofa. It was an improperly driven staple. So we examined that furniture carefully and found several other slight imperfections. We left the store and looked elsewhere until we found what we wanted.

Undoubtedly the fellow whose responsibility it was to staple the fabric to the frames of sofas didn't realize how important his job was. But his workmanship lost a sale. He wasn't alone in his carelessness, though. The foreman, the superintendent, the head man, as well as the inspector must share the blame. So must the furniture store in which the sofa finally was received. It should have checked for defects and corrected them.

My camping friend proved, if any proof was needed, that there are careless workers in the quarries of Freemasonry. "Material" is being turned out that is defective. All who profess to be Masonic leaders must share the blame.

What we can do about correcting the shoddy workmanship Masonry has been practicing is what this series of Short Talk Bulletins has been all about. But it won't help to discuss goals, planning, communication, teamwork, and the other principles of leadership, if we don't put them to work. So, let's put them to work.

Practically every Grand Lodge has an Education Committee (called by varying names). These Committees are created to work with lodges and groups of Masons to further the cause of Freemasonry in their Jurisdictions. Call on them.

The Masonic Service Association, the servant of Freemasonry, has always been ready to assist Grand Lodges, Lodges, and interested individual Master Masons. It has an abundance of Short Talk Bulletins, Digests, and other material to instruct members how to become Master Masons. It has been in the "business" of Masonic education since it was formed in 1919.

Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, Richmond, Virginia, has been serving Freemasonry for well over 100 years. It has numerous books on every phase of Masonry. It now has a series of films designed to train Masonic leaders, similar to those available for industry. These films, along with the Leader's Guide for each, can help grow the leaders Freemasonry must have to survive.

Many Grand Lodges maintain Masonic libraries where useful books about the Craft may be consulted. Some of the larger ones, as in Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas make books available on loan by mail. No responsible Mason needs to remain "in darkness."

There are numerous Research Lodges throughout the country and the world. These Lodges are doing a tremendous job in spreading factual Masonic information, as well as speculative interpretations of Masonic symbols and philosophy. Many of them, publish their proceedings regularly and make them available to interested Brethren.

In fact, there is an inexhaustible supply of Masonic literature and information available for the asking. Ask, and ye shall receive.

Once you've got the information, what should you do with it?

There are some folks who enjoy studying alone. Most of us, though, would much rather work with others. We find that a sharing of ideas and thoughts aids the learning and retainin2 process. So, for the majority of us, MASONIC STUDY GROUPS is one answer.

Actually, Masonic study is not a chore - it's an adventure! Freemasonry takes us into fields and realms formerly undreamed of; its romance is unparalleled in the history of the world; it is an important part of the world's history. Once really begun, such study will never stop. The pleasure of it will be too great.

The formation of a Study Group can be the most important step that your Lodge will ever take. It can develop a continuing corps of Masonic leaders. It can develop "Mentors" or "Big Brothers", - Master Masons dedicated to Freemasonry more than willing to work with and teach the newly initiated Mason. It can do away with "shoddy workmanship", thereby sending Freemasons out into the world who are truly "worthy of their hire." Money can't motivate these workmen. Only dedication can.

Here's what the formation of a MASONIC STUDY GROUP can accomplish:

- More interest in the teachings of Freemasonry
- More participation in the activities of the Lodge and Grand Lodge
- More enthusiasm for Freemasonry
- More dedicated Master Masons
- A knowledge of the history, philosophy, and symbolism of the Craft
- The development of speakers for Lodge programs
- The growth of Masonic leaders
- The development of Masonic teachers, writers, and researchers

It's impossible not to become interested in the teachings of the Order when groups get together and intelligently discuss the principles that have made it great for centuries. Participation in study groups will bring members closer together. They will become supporters. They will attend Lode functions regularly. They will have more of a stake in the accomplishments of the Lodge.

The enthusiasm will become contagious and extend to other Lodes in the area. Even the community will be a beneficiary. And the more that is learned, the greater will become the dedication of the members to Freemasonry. Such dedication will uncover Masonic interpreters and teachers, men who might remain hidden for years, or not be discovered at all, if it weren't for the active study group.

How do we form a Study Group? Easily. All we have to do is get a few interested Master Masons together and talk about Freemasonry. We can't get more informal than that. But if we want to be a little more formal, here are a couple of points to consider:

- Select a leader, preferably one who has a knowledge of Freemasonry other than the ritual
- Let the officers and members of the Lodge know that a Study Group is going to be formed
- Invite all who are interested to attend the organizational meeting

The first meeting (or any meeting) may be held anywhere, someone's home, a Lodge hall, a hotel room. Study Groups seldom discuss the few "secrets" that Freemasonry has, so there is nothing to hide. The important thing is to have the meeting. Get the Group off the ground and into action.

There are no hard and fast rules that can, or should, be followed for the organization of a Study Group. But much of its success will depend upon how well it is organized. This holds true for everything that is started. The points to cover in the organizational meeting are suggestions only. Every Lodge is different; every locality has its peculiarities; every Jurisdiction has its own rules and regulations that must be followed.

- Elect a president (or chairman); then let him conduct the rest of the meeting
- Determine the number of members to be admitted to the Group
- Decide how often and where the Group will meet
- Determine the scope of the Group's activities
- Select the method of study
- Appoint a Team to draw up simple bylaws
- Determine whether or not the members should pay dues
- Decide who will be responsible for planning courses of study or programs

Individuals participating in small groups will learn more than they can in larger ones. By limiting the number, however, you may deprive some really interested members from learning what they ought to know about the Fraternity. You should take this into consideration when a maximum membership is determined. One Study Group set its membership limit at 25. So many Masons clamored to participate, the by-laws were amended and the limit removed. Within a year, 200 were meeting regularly, and the participation in the discussions was excellent.

Circumstances will determine how often your Group should meet. Where it will meet must also be determined by local circumstances. But, the more comfortable the surroundings, the more

participation can be expected. The scope of the Group's activities should be unlimited, as long as it acts within the laws of its Grand Lodge. It would be best to exclude the ritual, though. That's a field in itself. Don't hesitate to teach and learn about the meaning behind the words of the ritual. This is definitely within the scope of Masonic education.

There are many, many methods that can be used for study. A combination of several will usually be in order. A panel is always interesting and informative. Three or four men answer questions from the floor on a given subject, or several related subjects. Using a certain Masonic book as a text works well. Here every participant purchases a copy (or is given one) to study. At each meeting the leader covers a chapter, using the question and answer method. Speakers from the Group or outsiders discuss a particular phase of Masonry, then answer questions from the floor. Color motion pictures (as mentioned earlier) are now available, along with pertinent suggestions for Workshops (another name for Study Groups). Your creativity and the ideas of your members can extend this list indefinitely.

The matter of dues will be an independent interpretation. The Lodge may determine to underwrite the small cost when it learns of the many benefits it will derive from such a Study Group. It should be taken into consideration, though, that most of us who get something for nothing seldom appreciate it.

Without an organization that has leaders and a flexible policy to follow, the chances for long range success are limited. Simple by-laws should be formulated and adopted for the Group's guidance, so that it will have a name, a purpose, a set of officers whose duties and terms of service are defined, a simple dues structure, qualifications for membership, etc.

The Study Group will take on more meaning if it has a special name. It might honor some Master Mason, now deceased, who worked in the quarries of Freemasonry. If he was well-known in the community, so much the better. The Group's purpose might be stated in this manner: TO LEARN ABOUT and SPREAD MASONIC LIGHT and KNOWLEDGE THROUGH the STUDY of the VARIOUS PHASES and PRINCIPLES of FREEMASONRY. You must have a purpose for existence that the members can "buy" if the Group is to be successful.

And here are some more proven points to follow on the road to success:

- Start on time; never wait for the latecomers.
- Have a subject to discuss and stick to this subject - DON'T RAMBLE.
- Keep the papers or speech short; leave plenty of time for discussion.
- Adjourn at the pre-determined time-not a minute later!

Here's another program that you may or may not want to follow. Hold a couple of meetings every year that your ladies can attend. Whether we realize it or not, our ladies play an important part in the success of our fraternal activities. The more they learn about Freemasonry, the more they will encourage their men to participate.

Many years ago the Senior Deacon of my Lodge came to my home with tears in his eyes. He said that his wife refused to let him continue in line. This was a great disappointment to the whole Lodge. He was an excellent ritualist and interested in all phases of Masonry. No amount of persuasion could change his wife's mind. He not only dropped out of line, but out of attendance, although he remained a member. Not long ago I met him at another function. He told me that his wife was now sorry she had made him drop out of active participation in the Lodge. She had seen several instances of Freemasonry at work and had learned that the Fraternity is good-that men are better for belonging. But the damage had been done. And this is by no means an isolated case.

During the past several months we have been discussing the principles of leadership. You will be putting these principles to work in the formation of a Study Group. You will be determining a PURPOSE for the existence of the Group. This Purpose will tie into the Purpose for the existence of Freemasonry--to Make Good Men Better.

You will be setting a GOAL or GENERAL OBJECTIVE--the formation of the Study Group to teach members how to become Master Masons. You will be inculcating the principles of Freemasonry. You will be PLANNING continuously for improvements, after your original plan has been put into effect.

You will be ORGANIZING, STAFFING, COMMUNICATING, and the leaders of the Group will be CONTROLLING the action.

So by doing only one thing - organizing a Study Group - you will be proving that you are a Constructive Masonic Leader. Do it. You will be amazed at the results as the years go by.