

WORK, WORK, WORK

By Bro. Alphonse Cerza, Grand Historian of the Grand Lodge of Illinois.

Work always has been an important concept and word to Americans and to Freemasons. Our pre-eminence among nations of the world is the result of a superabundance of natural resources, the willingness of our people to work converting these natural resources into useful things to make life comfortable, and a governmental form which encourages individual effort in a climate of freedom to develop one's inherent abilities. The most important of these factors is the utilization of one's talents at work. In Freemasonry we utilize the work constructing King Solomon's Temple as a symbol to build character. It takes work to prepare to teach the candidate the catechism; and it takes work by the candidate to learn the catechism and secure the needed proficiency to advance from one degree to the next. All terms connected with the tools and work of the operative masons are used as symbols in the Craft .

Therefore, work is the foundation stone in Freemasonry and the work ethic is the foundation stone of the American Way of Life. As a practical matter, it is well to observe that everything is the result of work by someone. The food we eat, the clothes we wear, the shelter we use to protect us from the elements are all the result of work engaged in by many persons. It involves planning, the securing of the natural resources, and work to convert the material into the finished product. Likewise, it is work that makes a candidate into a member. First, it takes work by many members to prepare themselves to be able to confer the degrees with skill. It takes work by one or more members to learn the catechism and to teach it to the candidates. It takes work by the candidate to learn the catechism to gain proficiency to advance to the next degree. And, if the lodge is doing its work well, it will retain an interest in the new member after he receives the third degree and will teach him many fundamentals about the Craft, its philosophy, its heritage, and its organization and work. This is the method whereby the lodge can convert a member into a Freemason. There is a vital difference between being a member and being a Freemason. Following the formalities of receiving the degrees makes the candidate a member, but he does not become a Mason until he has learned about our heritage, has an understanding of the philosophy of Free- masonry, and has adopted the lessons of the degrees into his everyday life. It takes much additional work to bring this about, but it is a necessary part of the work of every lodge which has been neglected for too many years in too many places.

Conferring the degrees does not complete the work of Freemasonry. It is just the beginning. Unfortunately, for too many years the word "work" when used by Masons has described only the ritualistic work conducted by the lodge. And in most places lodge instruction on ritualistic matters, ritualistic schools, teach- ing by Grand Lecturers and other instructors have done a creditable job in this area of Masonic work.. Some have been critic of our Masonic leaders on the basis that there has been too much emphasis on perfecting the ritualistic work of the lodge with the thought that this is the only thing that matters in order for the Craft to be successful. There is no question that the ritualistic work of the lodge is of vital importance for it contains the philosophy of the Craft and is the vehicle used to teach the candidate the Lessons that are the

foundation of Freemasonry. Doing good ritualistic work is important because it is the first exposure of the candidate to the Craft and the first impressions are always lasting ones. The trouble is that so much emphasis is placed on this phase of our work that everything else is neglected. Placing so much emphasis only in the form has caused us to neglect the substance contained in the degrees. It has been the easy way out for many officers who find it easy to work by rote and to give no attention to the meaning or to the purpose of the ritualistic work.

There is a need for additional work with the candidate before he is initiated, after he has received each degree, and after he has completed all the formal steps to become a member. Some Grand Lodges have recognized this need by establishing Educational Committees which have devised programs to give each candidate additional instruction beyond the ritualistic work of the three degrees. Many of these committees have prepared booklets for the candidates which are excellent and serve a useful purpose. (See M.S.A. Digest, "Tried and Proven.") Placing these booklets in the hands of the candidate is fine, but what assurance do we have that the candidate will read the material and that when he reads it he will fully understand it. What we need is more time spent with the new member either personally or in group meetings to answer their questions and to inform them about the nature of the Craft and its work. These additional activities are valuable to the candidate and new member, but they are also important to the lodge, because they enable the officers to set additional members to work. A working member is always an interested member.

It is the duty both traditional and expressed of the Worshipful Master to set the Craft to Work and to give it proper instruction. In too many places for too many years this duty has been interpreted too narrowly and has been confined only to the conferring of the degrees. As a result of this attitude and interpretation there has been too much Masonic unemployment among our members. The apathy that has existed within the Craft in recent years and the continual net loss of members year after year would seem to indicate that more work is needed to make the Craft an important part in the lives of its members.

As in the business world where productivity has been declining each year for some time, we are paying the price with loss of members and apathy. When productivity is reduced in the market place, we have fewer good results from the lesser work performed. It will eventually mean fewer jobs because persons cannot afford to pay the resulting higher prices. With fewer goods purchased, social tensions increase. Reduced profits result and we have more inflation. Everyone is hurt as a lower standard of living results. There has been too much under-achievement per worker in the United States for too many years. Likewise, there has been too much Masonic unemployment because we have not utilized the talents of each of our members by putting them to work on projects that will make him an interested and involved member working for the benefit of the lodge and its members. (See June, 1980 Short Talk Bulletin, "What's Your Line?") There seems to be a contagious co-relation between the causes that reduce productivity in the market place and in the Masonic organization. So it is worthy of note that if we can bring about an increase in productivity in the market place and in the Craft everyone in our country and in our Fraternity will receive valuable dividends. In the words of Brother James A. Garfield, twentieth President of the United States, "If the power to do hard work is not a talent, it is the best possible substitute for it."

How can we improve this situation within the Craft? It all boils down to the fact that more work will have to be done by everyone involved, apply themselves with diligence in the performance of their duties; to be determined to do a better job than has been done in the past; and to expand the scope of their work and that of the lodge. It means that the officers should consider ways and means of improving conditions in the lodge and its work. It means that the officers must change their point of view that the word "work" is restricted to the ritualistic effort of the lodge. The officers must take a genuine interest in each resident member as these two elements will give some indication of the abilities of the members and what their individual interests may be. Each person is different and is not interested in the same thing. We must recognize that not all of our members are interested in the rote learning of the lectures and the degree work and will not spend the time doing something in which they are not interested. When these individual interests and talents are ascertained they should be utilized by the lodge by assigning proper work to the member. It is surprising how members favorably respond to requests to work for the lodge within the areas of their interests. To be singled out to perform a task and to be recognized for the abilities that one possesses is always flattering. This will make the member a better member and the lodge also will benefit from the work done. As the skills, abilities, and talents of the members are explored, it is likely that the lodge may find it necessary to adopt new beneficial programs to put these members to work.

It cannot be said at any time that we have all the workers we need and that there are no new programs or work to be done by the lodge. The use of a little imagination will often disclose new important areas in which the lodge can function for the benefit of the members, the lodge and the community. There is always room for Masonically unemployed members to become employed. Specific suggestions cannot be made that will apply everywhere. To be taken into consideration is the type of members who belong to a specific lodge, local conditions, what has taken place in the past, and how much the unemployed members can be motivated to take an active part in the work of the lodge. There may be a need of having new committees appointed. It is also likely that the committees that exist must be converted into working committees rather than existing in name only. Giving the member a title and duties to perform plus a bit of recognition may be enough to get him to work.

It should not be hard to find things that need attention. You can start by considering the physical condition of the premises where the lodge meets. Do the premises need to be painted? Do the grounds need to be spruced up with a lawn, flower beds, bushes, a flag pole, etc.? Are there widows of deceased members who have been neglected? Are there sick members who need some attention? Does the lodge need a library with Masonic books? Are there members with hobbies such as stamp and coin collections with items of Masonic interest that ought to be put to work in organizing a display of these items at an open meeting? Do you have a member whose hobby is gourmet cooking who can be put to work preparing fancy dishes for lodge dinners? Do you have able members who are students who can be put to work preparing talks on Masonic subjects? These are some of the questions that come to mind at once as one explores areas to create work for the Masonically unemployed members.

Here are some suggestions that might be considered. If you have a number of retired members with time on their hands, why not adopt the "welcome wagon" idea of the business community? Form a Welcome Committee in your lodge, arrange to get the names and addresses of all new

families which move into the community, and have these retired members call on them to welcome them as neighbors. Visit with the new family and let them know that if they need any help or information that the lodge is ready to help. This sort of project will create much good will with the new residents and the working members will get a "lift" from the work.

Hospitals are always in need of volunteers and this area should be explored with the thought of having some of the lodge members act in this area. If there is a Veterans Administration Hospital within a reasonable distance with an M.S.A. Field Agent there, a talk with him may disclose areas in which he can be helped in his work. He may need help in wheeling patients to church services Sundays. He may need Masons to visit with patients who seldom get visitors.

There is always need for expanded educational activity in our lodges. The scholars, teachers, and readers of Masonic literature have been neglected by our lodges. These members should be put to work studying various phases of Masonic history, the lodge records to find interesting items, the philosophy of the Craft with the view of having them present talks to the members. Study Clubs might be considered on the lodge level or community level. Forums and round table programs should be considered as a means of creating work for Masonically unemployed members.

There is much work to be done by the lodge and its members. And with the increase in the amount of work done everyone will profit.