

Masonic Relief, Charity And You

Unknown

We hear all sorts of figures bandied about concerning how much Masons contribute to Masonic Charity. Trying to prove or disprove these figures is a monumental nightmare. Each jurisdiction and Masonic organization has its own peculiar accounting system. Some figures are not a matter of published record. Various accounting periods contribute to the confusion.

Recent estimates which stand the scrutiny of conservative verification, indicate that more than One Million, Four Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,400,000.00) a day are expended in Masonic benevolences in the United States. That's just a little more than One Half Billion Dollars a year!! In anybody's language, that's a lot of money!

But, is it?

When you break it down, it represents just about \$152.07 per year per each Master Mason in the United States. Or, to reduce it even further, it represents less than the cost of a cup of restaurant coffee per day for each Master Mason in the United States.

The term, "Masonic Benevolence," encompasses a wide spectrum of the acts of Brotherhood. It is a traditional example of "the Masonic Way." The first recorded act of Masonic Charity is found in the minutes of The Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel) No. I of December 27, 1729. "And lastly The societie upon applicon from one David Mitchell, a poor distrest journeyman mason appointed Henry Wilson their former Warden to give him three pounds scots And to take credite therefor in his accompts."

Since that time Masonic Lodges throughout the world have dispensed charity to poor and distressed Brethren and extended it to their widows and orphans. Charity contains the lubricant and the cement of life. It is an essential ingredient of Masonry. It has been said that "the Masonic Way is to give without remembering and to receive without forgetting."

There are countless instances of Masonic charity that are never recorded. The "charity box" was used in many lodges, with Brethren contributing according to their conscience and abilities, and the funds being used at the discretion of the Master or by a Committee. We find clues in old minute books of these funds being used for such things as firewood for a Masonic widow, crutches for a Brother's invalid daughter, or a horse so a Brother could do his spring plowing.

Even today, lodges perform thousands of acts of charity which are not recorded. For specific needs, the hat is still passed. To aid the distressed is a duty incumbent on all mankind, but especially an obligation of Masons.

Grand Lodges have Charity Funds which are used in a variety of benevolent ways. Some of these funds amount to millions of dollars. In more than half of the Grand Lodges, specified amounts of the Grand Lodge per capita tax is prorated to charity. For instance, in Connecticut, the Grand Lodge per capita tax is \$14.00, with \$10.50 of that earmarked for charity. In other Jurisdictions, such as Idaho and South Carolina, the prorated portion is only twenty-five cents.

An interesting account of the Masonic relief provided after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 was presented to The Illinois Lodge of Research by Illustrious Brother Samuel K. Zipp. Extracts from that paper follow:

"In 1871 Chicago was a city on the move and the move was forward. Often called the Queen City of the North and West, it was also thought by many to be one of the wickedest cities in the land.

"It had a population of 334,000 and was six miles long and three miles wide. The Fire destroyed more than half of the city area, and sent many thousands into the streets homeless, penniless and desperate. At the time the fire started, Freemasonry in Chicago was flourishing, and there were quite a few Masonic Halls in operation. DeWitt C. Cregier was Grand Master and there were six hundred forty- nine Lodges working in the state; thirty-one of them were in the City of Chicago.

"When the fire ended many of the members of the Masonic fraternity were in dire straits; their families scattered, and their homes gone with everything they owned lost. The leaders and responsible members of the fraternity realized at once that many of their brethren were in desperate need. They also knew that this was not necessarily the same type that would be distributed by the state, county and city. These brethren went into action and a number of separate committees were formed to administer Masonic relief.

"Among the first reports received was the one telling of the loss by eighteen Lodges of their charters, records, jewels, and paraphernalia. Other losses of Masonic items occurred to R.A.M. Chapters; R. & S.M. Councils; and the Grand Council of the State; and Commanderies of Knights Templar. All of the appendant bodies of the Scottish Rite and the entire contents of the Grand Master's office were destroyed.

"As word of the losses spread to the Masonic Fraternity, contributions amounting to \$83,089.06 in cash and \$7,545.44 in supplies were received by the Masonic Board of Relief. It is interesting to note where the contributions came from. As an example, five lodges from the State of Maine sent \$450.; the Lodge of Columbia, a small town of 12,000 in southeastern Pennsylvania sent \$75; the Craft of Louisiana sent \$400; the Lodges of Illinois sent \$15,897.85; the Dakota Territory contributed \$60.50; and, British India sent \$26.65.

"Perhaps one of the most drastic losses suffered was by the Scottish Rite Bodies of Chicago. Everything they possessed was consumed by the flames, and the reports were that the loss was upward of \$10,000, and insurance covering only about 5% of this total.

"Once again the response was immediate, and the amount was generous. Illustrious Josiah H. Drummond, Grand Commander, issued a circular to all Bodies in the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction asking that aid be sent to the distressed brethren of Chicago. The Supreme Council remitted all unpaid dues to that day, and contributed \$1,300 for the relief of the various Bodies. Another source of support came from the Grand Commander of the Southern Jurisdiction, Illustrious Albert Pike, by contributing from his own limited resources, as well as asking the Bodies in his Jurisdiction to help. An additional \$2,799.59 was received from the Committee for Relief of Knights Templar and Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Masons and divided among four Scottish Rite Bodies.

"One lesson learned from the Great Chicago Fire was the knowledge that in time of need, others do care. The response to these appeals to the Masonic Fraternity at large was so great that on February 1, 1872, it was decided that sufficient funds had been received to meet all legitimate demands. A special report telling this, as well as the progress that was being made, was sent to every contributing Lodge in Illinois and other states. Contributions kept coming in even after this notice was sent.

"What were some of the principal kinds of aid given individual Masons and their families? Groceries, wooden ware, dry goods, flour, clothing, stoves, hardware, boots, shoes, fuel, tools, furniture, crockery, labor, rent, doctor bills paid, medicine, cash and railroad tickets. Very little actual cash was given. The value of the largest amount issued by the Masonic Board of Relief was \$365., and the smallest amount \$1.25

"The final report states that 645 applications were received, representing 3,145 persons. This does not include aid given to lodges or appendant bodies for the purchase of furniture and paraphernalia."

The many charity and benevolent programs of the appendant, concordant and affiliated bodies and organizations are more visible manifestations of Masonic relief. The Shrine Hospitals for Crippled Children and the Shrine Burns Institutes have captured the imaginations of everyone with the truly great benevolent work which they accomplish. Their combined operating expenses amount to something like One Million Dollars a week. The Shriners' Hospitals are for the treatment and care of children afflicted with crippling diseases, deformities, or dangerously acute burns, and the research facilities and related training programs. What a wonderful effort. So many of their accomplishments with children of all races, creeds and colors border on the miraculous.

The benevolences of the Scottish Rite of both Southern and Northern Jurisdictions are among some of the greatest of unheralded acts of Masonic concern. The Scottish Rite Hospitals for

Crippled Children in Decatur, Georgia and Dallas, Texas, in operation for more than fifty years, have annual budgets in the millions of dollars. Tens of thousands of children of all races have been returned to useful living as a result of these great charities.

The Scottish Rite Foundation of Denver was founded in 1952, the first of its kind. It followed the discovery and development of new medical therapeutic techniques which can bring the gift of speech to brain- injured (aphasic) children. Formerly, most of these children were doomed to a life of silence, and perhaps classed as imbeciles.

The work of the Foundation is to assist in rendering the therapy treatment to afflicted children through the facilities of the renowned Children's Hospital of Denver. Treatment of such cases may run from one to three years, and most of them completely cured.

The members of the two Denver Valleys support this program by their contribution of \$2 per year, or a \$50 Life Membership, plus earnings from the endowment fund. There are no salaries, office expenses or administrative costs. The Foundation assumes about 60x10 of the cost of the program; parents who are in a position to do so, with the assistance from charity funds at the disposal of the hospital, cover the balance of the cost. Several Masonic and appendant organizations have adopted the Foundation as their favorite charity project, by making substantial contributions to its efforts.

A plan to interest members to include the Foundation in the preparation of their Wills, begun a few years ago, is bearing fruit. A number of handsome bequests have come to the Foundation. From the earnings of these bequests, and the support of Scottish Rite Masons and friends, the perpetuity of this program is assured. The future looks bright indeed for the speech-handicapped child. Scottish Rite Masons everywhere may point to this program with pride.

In the Northern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite, the benevolent effort is primarily centered on their Schizophrenic Research Program, which deals with the cause, nature, prevention and cure of schizophrenia. The Supreme Council of the Northern Jurisdiction is an acknowledged leader in this important field of medical research. An impressive number of distinguished doctors and researchers have been supported by the Scottish Rite in their research.

An increasing number of Masonic bodies are granting scholarships to deserving students in many fields of scholastic endeavor. As one Grand Master reflected, "It's an insurance policy for the future."

Many Grand Lodges maintain and operate Masonic Homes, Orphanages, Hospitals, and Infirmarys. This is a major effort representing many millions of dollars of investment and is a multi-million dollar annual expenditure. (For a complete description of these facilities, see Masonic Digest, "Masonic Homes, Orphanages and Charity Funds.")

The Knight Templar Eye Foundation of the Grand Encampment, Knights Templar, is a multi-million dollar activity providing research, surgery and hospitalization for individuals with

diseases or injuries of the eyes which could result in blindness. A unique feature of the Eye Foundation is that it has "no investment in bricks and mortar."

There are many other benevolent activities worthy of note, including the Royal Arch Research Assistance Program of the General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons International; the Knights Templar Educational Foundation; The New York Masonic Foundation for Medical Research and Human Welfare; the Illinois Masonic Medical Center; the Tall Cedars of Lebanon's project for Musuclar Dystrophy victims; the Eastern Star Training Awards for Leadership (ESTARL) program; the "Grotto" cerebral palsy-spastic program; the support of youth groups, such as The Order of DeMolay, The Order of Rainbow for Girls, The Order of Job's Daughters and others. These fall under the "umbrella" of Masonic benevolences. The good works they provide to humanity can be related to dollars and cents, but cannot possibly be measured by the money expended.

Suffice it to say, that Masons Care! The "price tag" can best be measured in the length of each individual Mason's "cabletow," which stretches and stretches.

Masons are not asked to "give 'til it hurts. " Masons give 'til it HELPS. You, as a member of this great Masonic Fraternity can take pride in the knowledge that you and your Brethren are part of this great Masonic benevolent effort.

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