

The Benefits of Masonic Membership

By Alphonse Cerza

With pleasure we present this Short Talk Bulletin prepared by the noted Masonic scholar and author, Brother Alphonse Cerza. He brings into perspective a variety of the answers we can all use in answering the title question.

Occasionally a member is asked by a non-Mason "What benefits do you receive from your Masonic membership?" Most members when asked this question for the first time have difficulty knowing what to say. This is especially true if the member has not given the matter any thought or he has had no experience explaining things to others. The situation can be further complicated for the member who erroneously believes that Freemasonry is a "secret" society and that the answer he may give might be disclosing a Masonic "secret." We also must recognize that Freemasonry has so many facets and attractions that each member has sought membership in the Craft for a reason personal to himself. Each has entered the lodge in search of something that is probably different than another member.

It is hoped that he has found in Freemasonry that which he was seeking. This facet or attraction is intimately connected with the specific benefit which the member logically would explain in his answer to the question if he is not prepared to answer the question as a result of careful thought and consideration of all the possible benefits that have come to him as a result of his becoming a Mason. Every member should be aware of the possibility that such a question might be asked of him and he should be prepared to answer it fairly, truthfully, and completely. Here are some observations on the matter that will help you answer the question under consideration.

A benefit may be considered as anything which is helpful, profitable, favorable, and advantageous to a person. A benefit may take many forms such as improving a person in some way, promoting his happiness, raising his status socially, increasing his personal contacts with others, or assisting him in any number of other ways. In a general way the benefits of Masonic membership are both tangible and intangible.

Here are a few of the tangible benefits that come to mind at once. Many Grand Lodges maintain a Home for the needy members in their Golden Years. Some maintain a Home for the children of deceased members. It is a comfortable feeling to know that if you have minor children, and

with an untimely death that your children will be taken care of by the Craft; and if you are unable to take care of yourself in your declining years, it is a calming feeling to know that there will be help available for you and your wife. In some areas the Craft maintains a hospital for the public and takes care of the needy members of the Craft as well when they require medical attention.

Most lodges have sick visitation committees. When a report is received of a sick member, steps are taken to have someone visit him. These visits are good for the person who is sick as well as for the one who is doing the visiting. If you are sick in bed or home bound, it is a great feeling to know that out there is someone who cares enough to take time to visit you. All members are taught to be charitable in word and deed. The word "charity" is used in the Craft in its broadest sense. When visiting a sick Brother you are urged to listen to his troubles, sympathize with him, and to help him unburden himself. Often the faithful breast and the listening ear can do more good than all the medicine in the world to improve one's spirits.

Many lodges have Low Twelve Clubs in which members make a nominal payment each time a member passes away. The money is deposited in a bank account and when word is received that a member has died, the treasurer immediately presents the family with a check for the prescribed amount so that it may be used to meet expenses at once.

Some lodges and some Grand Lodges conduct a blood bank program. Members of the lodges volunteer to give blood to the bank. When a member or someone in his family are in need of blood to regain their health, the blood in the bank is made available to them without cost.

If a Mason finds himself stranded in a strange place and is in need of help, there is always available help not too far away. In some areas there are Masonic Boards of Relief to help in such cases. In other places the needy Mason can contact the local lodge which will render whatever assistance is necessary.

Many illustrations can be given of how Masonic charity has been dispensed to members and their families. Here are a few of them. A widow of a deceased member was in need of her house being painted and she called the secretary of the lodge for a recommendation of a painter who could do the job at a reasonable price. Knowing the tight financial condition of the caller, the secretary informed the Worshipful Master and a meeting was called at which the officers met to discuss the matter. As a result, several members donated the necessary material to paint the house for the widow. In Canada several years ago a widow called the Masonic Board of Relief and requested help in an unusual situation. A family of skunks had settled in the crawl space under her house and she needed help to remove the new tenants. A number of lodge members were enlisted to bring this about.

(Many fascinating examples of Masonic Charity can be found in prior Short Talk Bulletins. Indexes are available at no charge.)

Clearly, the intangible benefits predominate over the tangible ones. In some instances the benefits defy classification because they are a blend of both general benefits. The first benefit received by a candidate for the degrees is the contacts he makes with those that recommend him and those who investigate his petition. The next benefit is the receiving of the three degrees and the friendships that develop with the poster and others connected with his securing the needed proficiency to advance from one degree to the other. The ceremony of receiving the degrees together with the lectures is a new experience and hopefully the candidate has come to the meetings in the spirit of anticipating an important event with a receptive heart and mind. The impressive presentation is bound to have an important effect on him. He is bound to observe that he is the center of attraction, that the degree is conferred on him alone, and that we are concentrating our attention on him. This should convince him that we are devoted to the importance of each person who joins us in our work.

There are a number of intangible benefits that do not readily meet the eye, but they do exist in ample measure. Freemasonry is a selective organization and not everyone is accepted as a member. The mere fact that an application for membership has been filed indicates a desire to belong to something and to be associated with something worthwhile. He may not recognize this intangible element but he is seeking to "belong" to a worthwhile organization and to make his contribution to the work of the group. Let us recognize that there is nothing more destructive of one's happiness than the feeling of being alone, of not being a part of anything worthwhile. When he becomes a member he acquires a large number of new Brothers bound by a solemn obligation to do everything possible to make this a better world in which to live. I know of one case where an only child joined a Masonic lodge and after he became a member was filled with joy for he was no longer an only child but had acquired Brothers that he did not have before.

Joining the Craft immediately gives the new member a new identity. He becomes a member of a world-wide fraternity dedicated to the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Non-members are aware of the many fine charitable projects supported by Masons, and when a member is identified as such it is bound to reflect favorably in the eyes of the non-member. There is also the matter of securing identity with other Masons and creating warm friendships. Each member knows that in common with all other members he has taken a solemn obligation to be a good man and true. As a result, when meeting another Mason there is immediately established a close sense of friendship resulting from the unexpressed knowledge that they both have a common philosophy of life which makes them better men and that they can help and trust one another. This matter of identity is indicated by the many Masons who wear a Masonic pin and thereby tell the world of their identity with the Craft.

The member who becomes active in the work of the Craft acquires some degree of leadership and eventually develops a feeling of "importance" because he is serving the organization in worthwhile activities. Every person, in order to be happy, must feel that he is important to his family, his employer, his community, or some other group. The more experiences exist in one's

life the happier that person is bound to be. Sometimes we complain about the many persons who are introduced at Masonic meetings, but this is one way that we show our appreciation for work done and making the worker feel important because of services rendered.

Even the inactive member who pays his dues and attends Masonic functions occasionally will get a glow of satisfaction as he hears of the many activities being supported financially and otherwise by the Craft.

One of the most valuable benefits that is secured by being a Freemason is the unlimited opportunity to make deep and abiding friendships. Working with other good men on worthy projects has a way of developing into close friendly relations with a feeling of mutual respect for one another. You know that in case of need you can speak safely in confidence with a brother Mason. In case you are dejected you know that you have someone to speak with and unburden yourself as you pour your troubles into a sympathetic ear. I know of two cases of bachelors who lived in a single room each in separate boarding houses. Each night they went to a different lodge meeting with regularity so that over a period of time they virtually adopted certain lodges as their own. The friendships that they developed and the visiting they were able to do each night enriched their lives immensely and saved them from the boredom of sitting in a single room looking at four walls night after night.

Active members receive the greatest benefit from their connection with Freemasonry. Opportunity is afforded to develop one's memory, working with others, learning to organize projects, develop speaking ability by making reports and presenting lectures, and learning how to work with others. There are many members who have no opportunity for an extensive formal education to thus secure considerable educational training.

The intangible benefit that is often overlooked is that the Craft teaches its members a philosophy of life. The importance of this benefit should not be overlooked because every person needs a philosophy of life to guide him or her in the journey through life. In past years a great deal of the turmoil with our youth was the confusion relative to an absence of a philosophy of life as they floundered around seeking something but not knowing what it was. Sometimes these young folks spoke of high ideals but really had nothing that would guide them into meaningful activities to make these ideals a reality. If we could only reach the minds of these young people they and the Craft could profit greatly.

Another intangible benefit is the opportunity which the Craft offers its members to become associated with worthy projects that help make this a better world in which to live. These consist primarily of the many charitable projects that are supported by the lodges, the Grand Lodges, and the appendant bodies of the Craft.

Non-members are aware of the spirit of friendship that exists between members of the Craft. The question is sometimes asked out of curiosity whether Masons are required to patronize other Masons in their business transactions. Every Mason knows that there is no such rule of the

Craft. But we must recognize that when one is considering entering into a business or professional relationship he is more likely to select someone that he knows and trusts. If you need the services of a real estate broker, for example, and you have been working on a project with a fellow member of your lodge, there can be little doubt that all things being equal your Masonic friend will receive your patronage. Personal contacts, working together, developing friendships is bound to result in business and professional relationships in many instances even though no Masonic law requires this to be done.

For the member who is interested in intellectual pursuits, the reading of Masonic books especially in the area of Masonic philosophy and history, can be a valuable experience. These books, of course, can be read by non-Masons but they will not be able to receive full benefit of the material in these books because of their lack of complete information about the Craft .

Each member, if he gives this matter some thought, undoubtedly can recall instances in which his Masonic membership has proved to be a benefit to him. Above all else, it is well to be prepared to answer the question should the occasion arise, "What Benefits do you receive from your Masonic membership?"

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