

Renaissance of Responsibility by C. Michael Watson

In response to the question, “What do Masons do?” the reply, at the very basic level, is “Masons help those in need”. The service of helping those in need is indeed an essential part of Masonry. Whether it be a weekly luncheon with several dozen members, or a national organization with hundreds of thousands of members, the universal feature among Masons is in the sense of duty in supporting charity. Even a look back in the early times during the formation of the United States shows Masonic charity abounding.

When food and shelter were daily and immediate concerns, Masons responded with firewood and the bounty of their harvests. When care of the aged, widows and orphans were worries, Masons erected retirement homes and orphanages. When education was needed, Masons built schools and established scholarships. When basic needs moved even further from common experience, Masons turned their philanthropic service to crippled children, burn victims, the speech, language, and sight or hearing impaired, the mentally ill, cancer patients and numerous other causes.

During this same period, individual acts of service by Masons were performed out of love for their fellow man as well as out of a sense of responsibility as a Mason. When a Mason was ill, his brothers would visit his bedside, taking turns in shifts. When a brother passed away, his fellow Masons felt an obligation to make sure the needs of his widow were provided. Her home was kept in good repair. The outdoor work was taken care of. She and any children certainly would not go hungry. Masons performed these acts of service because they felt it was their obligation and duty as Masons to do so.

Somehow over the years this sense of duty or responsibility as Masons seems to have diminished. Could it be due in large that the government has intervened in our charitable works? When government has intervened over the years with funded projects, Masonry’s participation was no longer recognized, nor actually needed. In those earlier days we didn’t have a public assistance or welfare system paid with tax dollars and run by the government. But, if true, this is only an excuse.

What is so desperately needed today from Masonry is a “Renaissance of Responsibility”, or a rebirth of a sense of duty in providing service to our fellow man. Since the early 1960’s was considered the peak in Masonic membership, consider the following: Television viewing - The average American watches two hours more TV per day now than three decades ago. In 1992, the daily viewing average was seven hours and four minutes. Single parent families - The percentage of children living in single-parent homes has more than tripled in the last thirty years from 9.1 percent in 1960 to 28.1 percent in 1991. The father is the missing parent in about nine of every ten of these homes. Births to unmarried women – Since 1960, out-of-wedlock births have increased more than 400 percent. Child poverty - In 1991 according to federal

standards, 21.8 percent of the nation's children were poor. Children on Welfare - The percentage of children being raised on Aid To Families with Dependent Children has risen from 3.5 percent in 1960 to 12.9 percent in 1991. SAT scores - In three decades, the average SAT score has dropped nearly 80 points. Crime - While the population has increased only 41 percent since 1960, the violent crime rate has increased more than 500 percent, and total crimes more than 300 percent.

By the exercise of Brotherly Love we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family and as such are admonished to aid, support, and protect each other. To relieve the distressed is not only a duty incumbent on Freemasons, but it is the great aim everyone should have in view.

In times when help is provided to the needy, succor to the poor, and relief to the distressed is when, as a Mason, you really become a builder and true Mason in the Holy House of the Temple.

We just have to listen and respond to the needs of our friends and brethren. "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life," Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

It is time to help ourselves by helping others. The world, more than ever, needs a Masonic "Renaissance of Responsibility" to provide service to our fellow man. We must give back to Masonry the same sense of commitment, service, brotherhood and family and community involvement it had decades ago when we were the best known and fastest-growing organization in town.