

Solicitation
by George O. Braatz, P.G.M.

What is “solicitation” in a Masonic sense? Why is it so misunderstood?

For at least several generations of U.S. Masons, the reference to “solicitation” meant that you could say nothing positive about our fraternity to a non-member, thereby never influencing him to want to join. The previous sentence is awkward, and describes what has become a very awkward concept.

Supposedly, violation of this “solicitation” concept could lead to charges of un-Masonic conduct and possible banishment from the Fraternity. Therefore, few Brothers even considered violating this rule, which they did not fully understand anyway.

The “solicitation” concept was communicated widely to our Masonic forefathers at a time in the late 1940’s, 1950’s and 1960’s, when membership was not a problem. Virtually every Lodge had more petitions than it could handle, so no one questioned what they did not understand.

It was also a time when there was little education for the scores of candidates flowing into the Lodges. There was little effort to have every new Mason understand the intricacies of the Fraternity he was joining. The new member was told “Do not solicit members.” Over time, this advice evolved to mean: Don’t in any way encourage a non-member to join. This advice led to hundreds of situations where a father would not even discuss the Fraternity he respected with the son he loved.

In Ohio, an attempt to rectify the situation was formalized by an edict from Grand Master Hilmer W. Neumann in 1985. It said:

“There is no objection to encouraging a man to seek membership in our Fraternity who is considered to be a suitable candidate for Freemasonry. This procedure for obtaining membership in a Masonic Lodge may be explained to a potential candidate. After a full explanation of the purpose and goals of Freemasonry is made to a potential candidate, he should be left to make his own decision and come of his own free will.

“The use of “A Way of Life - Freemasonry” is encouraged as a means of explaining Masonry to prospective members. It is not our purpose as Masons to harass, entice or financially assist men to become Masons.

“It is the purpose of the Edict to encourage Masons to project a rightful pride in Freemasonry by speaking positively of it to non-Masons whom we feel to be “Masons at heart” and whom we would wish to join with us should this be their desire.”

In subsequent years, with activities like “Friendship Nights”, we have tried to refine attitudes about this still misunderstood concept.

Solicitation of members is still wrong, but solicitation means the asking, harassing, twisting of arms of potential members to obtain their petitions.

Discussing with a potential Mason what you find rewarding in our Fraternity should be encouraged. Don’t hesitate to tell a friend how proud you are to have been a Mason for the past ____ years. Present him with a copy of our new four-color pamphlet about Freemasonry. Stating flatly to a deserving individual that “You’d make a good Mason,” is fully acceptable and highly encouraged.

Education of the masses of our members about this still misunderstood concept is a challenge for all as we seek to show our pride in Masonry and make it possible for other good, like-thinking men of character to join us.