

Forget Not The Duties

By Chip Bennett, Area Provost- Masonic Division VI

President Andrew Jackson said: "Freemasonry is an institution calculated to benefit mankind." These benefits are achieved through the diligent fulfillment of the duties of its members – faithful Masons who strive to live by a moral code exemplified allegorically through the degrees of Freemasonry and explained in its three Charges. By their conduct, they serve as an example to all mankind, and by their courtesy, kindness, and benevolence, they provide more tangible assistance.

This year our Grand Master, Most Worshipful William Earle Rorer, Jr., has chosen as his theme the words used by the Master in the Charge delivered at the close of the Master Mason's Lodge: "Forget not the duties."

What are these duties?

In general terms, a Mason is obliged to abide by the constitution, laws, and edicts of the Grand Lodge of his jurisdiction or where he is present, and the by-laws of his particular Lodge. He is to maintain and support the Landmarks and ancient usages and customs of the Fraternity. He is to be loyal to his Lodge and to the Fraternity, to pay his dues promptly; and to keep the obligations which he undertook during the degrees.

More specifically, the duties that are incumbent upon all Masons, from the newest Entered Apprentice to the oldest Master Mason are as follows:

1. To God: Although Freemasonry is not a religion, no atheist can be a Mason, and the Fraternity seeks to strengthen each Brother's reverence for God, the Creator and Architect of the Universe. In its rituals and symbols, Freemasonry encourages us to seek greater understanding of the Creator, and seek also to improve our character so as to be more worthy of our Great Creator.
2. To Your Neighbor: The three main tenets of Freemasonry are: Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

Brotherly Love teaches the Mason to regard the whole of humanity as one great family, and to approach all men with an open heart, judging each man as an individual, and without prejudice or for the honors that he may bestow.

Relief is an application of Brotherly Love. By contributing to the relief of a person in distress, the Mason demonstrates Brotherly Love in a very concrete – and often a very private way. For when contributing to someone's relief, the Mason does not seek attention or plaudits, but simply acts out of a true love for humanity.

Key to the first two tenets is the third: Truth. The Mason avoids deceit and hypocrisy. It would be expected that one would treat his friends and family fairly and honestly, but the Mason goes beyond this. He adopts this same standard in his dealings with everyone. He gives everyone a square deal and is always on the level. Indeed, these very Masonic

ideas have come into popular usage as an expression of plain dealing and fairness.

3. To Yourself: A Mason also is taught that he has a duty to himself. He is to be industrious, to pursue a vocation, to increase in knowledge and understanding, and to provide for his family. Since God gave men the capability of rational thought, Freemasonry encourages its members to increase their education, particularly in the seven liberal arts and sciences. By pursuing these fields, the Freemason enriches his mind and gains a greater understanding of God's creation.

Freemasonry teaches us to temper our zeal when pursuing these first three goals. It is important to find a balance or equilibrium. This sense of balance brings us to the fourth duty:

4. To Keep your Passions within Due Bounds: The most recognized symbols of a Freemason are the Square and Compasses. The Square teaches the Mason always to act towards others as he wishes they would act toward him; while the Compasses teach the Mason to temper his actions, to avoid excess, and not overstep his bounds in any of his endeavors. By keeping the lessons of these symbols in mind as we live our lives, we ensure our good reputation and uphold the honor of our Fraternity.
5. As a Citizen: Just as the Mason is to follow Masonic law, so too he is to be a loyal and law abiding citizen. Freemasonry has always been found

on the side of democracy and individual rights and against tyranny and wrong; on the side of merit rather than privilege; and on the side of the rule of law and not anarchy. Being a good citizen is a Masonic value, and this means being an active participant in our democratic institutions and following its laws.

Just as it is said that Freemasonry is an institution calculated to benefit mankind, so too, it can be said that adherence to these duties is what makes a man a Mason. If we deviate from them, we debase ourselves – and our Fraternity. If we live these values and “forget not the duties,” we enrich ourselves, our communities, and the world.

The most valuable contribution of Freemasonry is to be found in the lives of its individual members. If Masonic ideals are eventually to prevail in the legislative halls of our country, the houses of commerce and trade, and the places of industry, they must be carried there by individual Masons, for whatever good Masonry may accomplish in the world will be the sum of the worth of its individual members.

In many respects, it all starts in the Lodge. A prudent exercise of Masonic privileges within the Lodge enables men to become more useful members; and the closer they get within the Lodge to demonstrating the virtues of courtesy, kindness, and generosity of heart, the better Masons they become. The wider their service to the Lodge and to their Brethren, and the closer they adhere to the obligations and tenets of the Fraternity, the more they grow in Masonry, and the more respected they will be.

But being a good Mason does not stop at the door of the Lodge, nor are Masonic principles and duties limited to the Lodge. Freemasonry always has been actuated by a broader sense of community. It has succored the helpless, aided the unfortunate, and given assistance of a broad and practical character to all classes and creeds. It promotes a genuine disposition of unselfishness, and elevates the standard of moral conduct from the Lodge to the local community, and to the world.

The Brother who carries his Masonry into the outer world and expresses its tenets in his daily life, most effectually promotes the great ideals we cherish. Every Freemason should feel a sense of personal responsibility to promote the good of others, and cultivate a charitable consideration for the common good of humanity. Indeed, the highest aim of a Masonic Lodge is to so develop men that they may go out into the community and become a living force in the active arena of public life.

As Masons in this country, we are particularly fortunate. We have nearly unlimited possibilities to study and work, and prosper. We can do much not only for ourselves, but for our country, and we can to work to promote peace, prosperity, and happiness of all mankind. The field is so wide that every Brother can find something useful to do. There should be no drones in the ranks of Freemasonry, for it comprises a body of carefully selected men whose individual and collective efforts should accomplish something useful in every walk of life, and for the common good.

In short, a Mason carries out his responsibilities of citizenship when he keeps faith with his fellow men, with himself, and with his God; when he shows the world that he is a man of honor and reputation, preferring his duty and the dignity and honor of his country to any degree of popularity and personal advantage. And by doing all of this, a Mason also carries out his responsibilities to the Craft, for he will have, by his exemplary character, both in public and private life, convinced mankind of the goodness of Freemasonry, and of what it means to be a Master Mason.

So as we contemplate what our Grand Master means when he says “forget not the duties,” and as we contemplate what it really means to be a Master Mason, let me share with you the words used by a distinguished Masonic author and scholar, Joseph Fort Newton, to end his great book, “The Builders.”

Here is what he said:

"When is a man a Mason? When he can look out over the rivers, the hills, and the far horizon with a profound sense of his own littleness in the vast scheme of things, and yet have faith, hope, and courage which is the root of every virtue. When he knows that down in his heart every man is as noble, as vile, as divine, as diabolic, and as lonely as himself, and seeks to know, to forgive, and to love his fellowman. When he knows how to sympathize with men in their sorrows, yea, even in their sins knowing that each man fights a hard fight against many odds. When he has learned how to make friends and to keep them, and above all how to keep friends

with himself. When he loves flowers, can hunt the birds without a gun, and feels the thrill of an old forgotten joy when he hears the laugh of a little child. When he can be happy and high-minded amid the meaner drudgeries of life. When star-crowned trees, and the glint of sunlight on flowing waters, subdue him like the thought of one much loved and long dead. When no voice of distress reaches his ears in vain, and no hand seeks his aid without response. When he finds good in every faith that helps any man to lay hold of divine things and sees majestic meanings in life whatever the name of that faith may be. When he can look into a wayside puddle and see something beyond mud, and into the face of the most forlorn fellow mortal and see something beyond sin. When he knows how to pray, how to live, how to hope. When he has kept faith with himself, with his fellow man, with his God; in his hand a sword for evil, in his heart a bit of song – glad to live, but not afraid to die! Such a man has found the only real secret of Masonry, and the one which it is trying to give to all the world."