



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and
Accepted Masons of Virginia**



Committee on Masonic Education

Lodge Presentation Program Paper

WHY THE SLOGAN: “TO BE ONE, ASK ONE”

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Committee on Masonic Education

Many of us have heard a Brother complain about how much he regretted having waited so long to join the Fraternity, and how he wished that his father or other Masonic relative had talked to him about Freemasonry. Indeed, there are stories about a father actively discouraging his son from becoming a Mason and, as a result, it was many years later when the son asked a friend about the Fraternity that he finally received a petition.

Generally, the reason the father had not discussed the Fraternity with his son was that, in the past, there was a real reticence to talk about Freemasonry – everything was perceived to be a secret. And generally, the reason the father had discouraged the son when he did ask, was not because he didn't want his son to become a Mason, but because, in his view, his son was somehow required to ask three times before he should be given a petition, and the son had only asked once or twice. How sad.

Today we are urged to talk about the Fraternity, its moral values, and the good work that it does. We are urged seek out men we know from Church, or work or in social contexts, who we feel would be good Masons, and let them know about the Fraternity and how much we enjoy being Masons.

But one thing has not changed. We do not solicit members and that is the significance of the phrase, "To Be One, Ask One."

Although we want to inform colleagues and friends about our great Fraternity, we insist that the decision to join should be their own and not the result of arm twisting. We want the petitioner to be truly able to answer that his petition was submitted "of his own free will and accord."

There has been significant discussion as to what is meant by the phrase of his "own free will and accord." Let me share with you some of the explanations suggested by a couple of Masonic writers.

Brother Robert G. Davis in his essay titled, "Of My Own Free Will and Accord," suggests that when we say a person enters of his own free will and accord it "means that he is a man free from all prejudices and attitudes which are not based on his own self

examination; that he is prepared to judge all attitudes, including his own, with intellectual integrity; that he is free and ready to make a moral judgment and to defend it even when he is in the minority or under strain for holding such a view; and, even more important, that he is aware he must place limits on his own freedom, if he is to insure other men the same right to theirs.”

Brother Davis explains the problem that results if a non-Mason is **asked** to join. He says: “It should always be borne in mind that the candidate who comes to us not of his own “free-will and accord,” but induced by the persuasions of his friends – no matter how worthy he otherwise may be – violates, by so coming, the requirements of our Institution on the very threshold of its Temple, and, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, fails to become imbued with that zealous attachment to the Order which is absolutely essential to the formation of a true Masonic character.”

Dr. Joseph Fort Newton, Baptist minister and Masonic Historian, uses somewhat different language to explain why we insist that a man come to Freemasonry of his own “free will and accord.” Brother Newton states that “Free will denotes liberty of choice, self determination; and lack of restraint, while ‘accord’ implies wholeheartedness, free from inducement or pressure of any kind.”

Brother Miramon Nuevo, a California Mason, gives us a further explanation in an April 24, 2008 article from his blog "FREEMASONRY ETC." He states that "There is one peculiar feature in the Masonic Institution that must commend it to the respect of every generous mind. In other associations it is considered meritorious for a member to exert his influence in obtaining applications for admission; but it is wholly uncongenial with the spirit of our Order to persuade anyone to become a Mason. Whosoever seeks knowledge of our mystic rites must first be prepared for the ordeal in his heart. He must not only be endowed with the necessary moral qualifications which would fit him for admission into our ranks, but he must come, too, uninfluenced by friends and unbiased by unworthy motives. This is a settled landmark of the Order, and therefore, nothing can be more painful to a true Mason than to see this landmark violated by young and heedless brethren."

The Grand Lodge of Virginia states quite clearly on the membership page of its website that: "To become a member of this ancient and honorable Fraternity, a man must apply of his own free will and accord and with an open heart. Invitations are not issued to prospective members, nor are members solicited. If a person is interested in joining, he should ask a Masonic friend for more information or contact the Grand Lodge of Virginia."

In addition to the important point about applying of “his own free will and accord,” the Grand Lodge adds the phrase “and with an open heart.” Brother Carl H. Claudy in his “Old Tiler Talks” has the following portion of a Lodge Prayer: “Open our hearts that the eternal Masonic truth may find ready entry that we be enabled to make ourselves square stones, fitting in Thy sight for the great Temple, eternal in Thy heavens. We ask it in the name of the All-Seeing Eye, Amen.”

I hope all of this makes it clear that while we want to inform the public about our Fraternity, we do not solicit, and we always follow the dictates of that familiar slogan: “TO BE ONE, ASK ONE.”