

Masonic Charity, Benevolence and Relief

David T. Campbell Lodge No. 706, February 16, 2012

Once upon a time, a rich father who had made all of the right financial decisions thought that his 10 year old son should find out what it would be like to be poor and thus appreciate his luxurious life more. So he arranged for him to spend a few days in the country with a cousin whose parents had not made the same financial decisions and had few conveniences.

When the scheduled time came for the visit to end the father drove out to the cousin's farm in the country. On the return trip his father asked his son what he had observed.

His son replied "I can now appreciate the difference between those who are rich and those who are poor. Thanks dad for the opportunity to spend a few days with my cousin." His father, rightly so thought that this trip had been a great success.

The 10 year old son went on to comment on what he had seen. He commented to his father that their pool only went half way to the back of their property but the stream in the country went for ever and you could catch fish in it any time for dinner. He went on to say that their lawn was only a few hundred feet long but the lawn in the country went to the horizon. At night we look up at street lights but in the country they get to see the stars. We have a wall around our property but they have friends who watch out for them, he said.

Then he said to his surprised Dad "Dad why are we so poor?" Author unknown

From this story you can see that rich and poor can vary depending on your point of view. Some with large fortunes are indeed very poor when it comes to friends, life's simple experiences and the support of our fellow human beings.

I'm sure that you will all recall "--- no matter how small the amount, it will be thankfully received and faithfully applied." And then "Would you give if it were in your power?" Indeed a very powerful experience for most of us. For me the significant part is that you are prepared to give something and there is no suggestion as to the amount.

My first active period in the craft lodge was during the 1960s, when I became critical of our fraternity for not practicing what we were preaching. I believed that the charge had the right message and as I looked around I questioned if my church was doing an adequate job of practicing charity and so I joined a Lion's Club. I was unaware until recently that at that time an act was passed to establish the Masonic Foundation. During my second active phase in Masonry with the Colborne Lodge I have been pleasantly surprised to find the practice of charity now occurring at both the lodge and district level.

Charity is indeed a landmark of our ancient craft. It has been calculated that Masons worldwide give millions daily for charitable purposes. These millions are given to provide hospitals, retirement homes and to support many other worthwhile charitable activities. It creates a wonderful feeling when you have the opportunity to raise some money and see the benefits that it provides.

I'm sure that we've all heard some if not all of the following statements. "Charity starts at home." No one would argue that first our own families must be financial and physically sound if we are to activity attempt to help others. "The world is now a global village." This would suggest that we have more responsibility than just to our own country. Whatever happens in today's world is instantly felt around the world. We need to look no further than the financial crisis in Greece and how it affects our stock market. "You can only help those who help themselves." One should always be aware of to whom and to what you are donating. R. W. Bro. Keith Jones in a recent speech pointed out "Is the request one for a want or is it a need?" A want of course is something that would be nice in the future as opposed to a need that is desperately required now.

I've been arguing this issue from both sides. From my vantage point I'm seeing in Ontario District and Colborne Lodge a practical balance. In Ontario District we are raising approximately \$20,000 per year for a named charity. This works out to slightly over \$10 per member in our District. Colborne Lodge annually supports the District Project, a student bursary and has recently donated a bench and a bicycle rack to the community. Compared to service clubs a small amount however remembering "no matter how small the amount." We are practicing what we preach, getting some public exposure and "taking responsibility for change."

We use the terms charity, benevolence and relief almost interchangeably. This is not surprising as I reviewed the definitions in the dictionary. After doing a comparison of the definitions, benevolence seems to be more the helping of others not necessarily financial, while charity covers helping others both physically and financial while relief tends to more financial and refers to government assistance.

My concern has to do with - are we helping our brethren and our neighbours as we should. Let me share with you a quote from Kahlil Gibran in his book The Prophet "It is when you give of yourself that you truly give." When it comes to giving of ourselves we tend to forget the many opportunities that prevail. We should be thinking in terms of those that are lonely, those without friends or family, those that are shut in for physical reasons, those that are sick and elderly and those that could use a helping hand. Last year, on a rotational basis the Colborne Lodge brethren provided approximately 6 weeks of transportation for two of our members who were unable to drive due to a health problem.

Walt Whitman has carved on a rock on the shores of the Mazinaw "When I give, I give of myself." Have we been giving of ourselves enough to help our brethren, our friends and our neighbours. Sometimes all that is needed is a phone call to let them know of our concern and to offer help. Let me finish with a poem.

Around the corner I have a friend,
In this great country that has no end;
Yet days go by and weeks rush on
And before I know it, a year is gone.

And I never see my old friends face,
For life is a swift and terrible race
He knows that I like him just as well,
As in the days when I rang his bell.

And he rang mine. We were younger then
And now we are busy tired men,
Tired of playing a foolish game,
Tired with trying to make a name.

“Tomorrow” I say “I will call Jim.”
But tomorrow comes and tomorrow goes
And the distance between us grows and grows.

Around the corner --- yet miles away,
“Here’s a telegram sir” “Jim died today.”
And that’s what we get and deserve in the end
Around the corner, a vanished friend

Anonymous

Speech – R. W. Bro. Keith Jones
Stepping Up – John Izzo
The Work

R. W. Bro. Douglas E. Galt
DDGM Ontario District