



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

Alms and the man.....



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Alms and the man.....

Alms (SOED): *'Money or goods given as charity to the poor'*

We wrote recently about lotteries. I have been asked if there is comparable guidance about the giving of Alms. Indeed there is – but it is tightly bound up with the subject of Charities and on this subject the Lodge Charity Steward is the complete master. He will know the 1993 and 2006 Charities Acts and is therefore wise and shrewd enough to channel as much as possible of our charitable donations into the Relief Chest Scheme. (In this way the rather time-consuming Inland Revenue tax recovery can be taken care of by Grand Lodge rather than him!)

For the layman or new Master it is important though to have a basic understanding and be able to distinguish between **giving to charity** and **giving to a Charity**. Giving to charity is a matter of the heart, giving to a Charity is a matter of both the chequebook and the law. A benevolent fund may become a Charity when, as defined in its Trust Deeds, it serves the public interest and is devoted exclusively to, say, the relief of poverty or the advancement of religion or education or comparable purposes beneficial to the community at large – and these can be wide ranging. (This exclusivity of the proposed charity becomes one test for deciding whether or not the Inland Revenue grants tax relief.)

Grand Lodge advises that:

'Money from charities may only be used for charitable purposes as defined by law. Christmas gifts for widows of deceased brethren or flowers at funerals are both in the best Masonic tradition but they are not in law regarded as charitable purposes and must not be drawn from any fund which in law is a charity' [see above]

But charity is instinctive in Freemasons and we all want to satisfy the charitable wishes of the heart - so how do we go about giving those Christmas gifts to our Lodge widows? Nothing could be simpler. Grand Lodge goes on to say:

*'It is the responsibility of the Master to make a clear announcement **before the collection** – in the Temple or at Dinner – that the Alms or other collection are to go to (say) the widow's Christmas gifts or to a named charity e.g. to the Lodge's Charity Fund or to any other benevolent fund.'*

We then have to keep three things in mind. The destination of the collection has to be clearly identified **before the event**; charitable and non-charitable funds need to **be kept totally separate**; and, thirdly, if we have stated that the collection is going to a specific and legally established Charity then we must not be tempted to siphon off any part to another worthy cause such as a Ladies' Night or even our beloved Lodge Widows.'

May I conclude with a quotation from John Ruskin?

'To give alms is nothing unless you give thought also.'