



## Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

### A Preceptor:

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

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

Charity  
and money.

## Charity shouldn't be just about money!

**Here's a question you won't hear raised too often in the Lodge** "Have Freemasons become obsessed with raising money and has charitable giving become the overarching aspect of our fraternity, and has this led to a lack of understanding of the real meaning of charity?" And yet it's a perfectly legitimate question to ask especially as 63% of media coverage is related to 'what Freemasons give' as opposed to 'what Freemasons do' and I believe there is a difference which we need to consider.

We are first made aware of charity at our Initiation when we are challenged to 'exercise that virtue which can justly be denominated the distinguishing characteristic of a Freemason's heart'. But what is charity?

The word itself entered the English language from the French *charite* which is derived from the Latin *caritas* meaning 'generous love' which you might agree is a little different from 'generous giving'

The VSL uses the word charity which is often translated as love which is taken from the Greek word *agape*; this is the same word used to describe brotherly love which of course is the first of the three grand principles on which Freemasonry is founded.

We are reminded of the importance of Brotherly Love in the third of the sublimely beautiful addresses given at the Installation of a new Master. The exhortation could not be clearer 'Let Brotherly Love distinguish us as men and as Masons' – that is how important Brotherly Love is; it shows to the world the happy and beneficial effect of our Ancient and Honourable Institution.

Indeed, I would suggest that without Brotherly Love being present in a Freemason's Lodge and in a Freemason's life it is impossible to function as a Freemason. Very simply, you cannot subscribe to the truth that Freemasonry is founded on three grand principles of which Brotherly Love is pre-eminent, and then fail to practice that practise which you profess to admire – charity or love for one another.

A Freemason cannot ignore the teaching inherent in the twenty four inch gauge, whereby his actions in life are directed to supporting a Brother in time of need. For that is the essence of benevolence, the private or public relief of a friend or Brother and moreover it must be extended further and include society in general, for as we are reminded 'every human creature has just claim on your kind offices'.

A Brother I spoke with recently told me that as he was newly retired he intended to do more for charity; when I asked him what he meant he replied "I want to give more than just money, I want to actually do something, so I am going to become a volunteer".

Sadly, the important connection between the word charity and the word love has become blurred as society and Freemasonry has managed to create the illusion that charity is centred on raising and giving money.

The incoming Master wants the Lodge to support his chosen charities and guess what, he is really determined to beat the amount collected and donated by his predecessor, In fact it becomes a point of honour to do so. The need to raise money becomes important, so much so that it often overshadows the need to learn ritual and understand what is meant by the term 'making a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge'. The desire to collect as much as possible frequently leads to undue pressure being placed on others to give and whilst such pressure is often open, it can also be covert in nature.

Indeed, for some Brethren, charity seems to mean raising as much money as possible, often by whatever method is deemed necessary, even if that means embarrassing or pressuring a Brother by 'persuading' him to buy the regulation £5 strip of raffle tickets sold with gusto at the festive board. Little, if any thought is given to whether the Brother can afford another £5 it is simply assumed he can.

Do we ever stop to think whether what we are asking corresponds with the caveat that giving should be 'as a Brother's circumstances in life fairly allow'. Should we be surprised that some Brethren report they feel intimidated,

harassed and even bullied into giving; and should we be further surprised to learn that some Brethren leave Freemasonry as a result of the financial expectations made of them.

Oh and by the way, don't think that becoming a member of our fraternity makes a man charitable in nature, far from it. Let's just remind ourselves of a truth we sometimes ignore. In the Charity Charge we remind the candidate that charity – *is the distinguishing characteristic of a Freemasons heart*. And we go on to say *doubtless it has been felt and practised by you*. From this we can safely assume the candidate is already known to be someone to whom charity is a virtue they admire.

The secret is not to 'kill the golden goose' by taking advantage of a Brother's charitable instinct, but rather rely on his innate sense of morality and depend on his desire to be charitable, which may mean much more than just giving money to a worthy cause.

Making time to help someone who requires 'a helping hand' – undertaking a task in support of the work of an organisation, be it a charity or good cause often requires we give of a very precious commodity – time, which can be inconvenient but totally rewarding.

Should we ever need reminding, let us be clear that Charity and Brotherly Love are but different words for the same sentiment.

And charity really isn't always about money!

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