

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1991**

**Grand Orator
James McDonald**

It's been quite a year. When the Most Worshipful Grand Master first asked me if I would serve as one of his appointive Grand Lodge Officers, I had absolutely no idea what it would entail, but I said yes anyway. As it has turned out, I've never regretted my decision. I hope that Most Worshipful Brother Sherod hasn't regretted asking — at least not too often.

After preparing the first couple of orations, I discovered a totally unexpected benefit of my responsibilities. I was thinking more about Masonry than I had done since when I was trying to learn my candidate proficiencies back in 1981, and as a result, I started to develop a better answer, at least for me, to the question of what it means to be a Mason. I believe that my answer has validity for everyone, even if only as a basis for further discussion. Freemasons are builders. The Freemasons of today are the spiritual descendants of the Gothic architects of the European middle ages. Those highly skilled builders of the magnificent stone cathedrals of Gothic architecture were the historical forerunners of our fraternity. The Master builders, the architects who designed those structures, were indeed a closely-knit fraternity of respected craftsmen wherever they traveled.

The Freemasons of today, however, are not often the actual architects or stonemasons. We no longer build with stone, today we build with much more enduring materials.

The Freemasons of today build with ideas, and our product is not buildings or cathedrals, but men's minds!

The guilds of Gothic Europe cared for their members, and taught them to live lives of moral character designed to bring honor to the guild itself through the actions of the guild's individual members. Although the need for operative stonemasons diminished in the mid to late sixteenth century, the need for men of upright character in society did not. Freemasonry changed from an operative, or working craft, to a speculative, or philosophical organization.

Freemasonry is **not** a religion. Freemasonry does not claim to be "**The**, way, or **the** truth, or **the** life", just **a** way **a** truth and **a** life. We as Freemasons, whether speaking of Blue Lodge Masons, or Scottish Rite Masons, or York Rite Masons, or Shrine Masons, or, for that matter, members of the Order of the Eastern Star, or the Amaranth, or DeMolay, or Job's Daughters, or Rainbow Girls, or any organization which is a part of the Masonic Family, " we as Freemasons don't believe that you must be a member of our organizations in order to live a moral and upright life, just that if you are a member of the Masonic Family, you should live your life in a moral and just manner.

Neither is Freemasonry some Satanic cult! The Masonic family is merely a group of individually devout men and women who are striving to make the entire world a better place for everyone to inhabit.

One of the earliest lessons that a Mason is taught is that to relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent on all men, but particularly on Masons. Vast sums of money are contributed by the various Masonic organizations of the United States to many different charities sponsored by them.

There are the justifiably renown Shrine Crippled Children's Hospitals and Burn Centers. Over three hundred twenty-five million dollars per year are spent to maintain these hospitals alone, and no patient ever pays anything.

The York Rite Masons support the Knight Templar Eye Foundations to research and treat eye disorders. The Scottish Rite operates its 77 Childhood Language Disorders Clinics, which diagnose and treat such disorders as Dyslexia and Aphasia, again at absolutely no cost to the patient. The Grotto has programs, which aid the Cerebral Palsy Child, and other programs to provide complete dental care for Handicapped Children. Still no cost to the patient.

Various other Masonic Medical Research Programs provide support for the medical community's struggle to find new treatments for, or even better, cures for such ills of mankind as

Muscular Dystrophy, Schizophrenia, Leukemia, Parkinson's Disease, Heart Disease, Diabetes, geriatric disorders such as Alzheimer's Disease, Cancer research, Arthritis ... and on, and on, and on!

Here in California, this Grand Lodge through its California Masonic Foundation, has in just three years contributed over \$500,000 toward a program to educate our elementary school children about the dangers of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and it appears likely that the Freemasons of California will contribute about \$250,000 more this year!

In all, the Masons of the United States contribute over two and a half million dollars per day... each and every day ... to various charitable needs of society.

We must remember, however that that \$2.5 million figure is reached only if we consider all donations by all members of the Masonic Family. Our Masonic Youth Groups, Job's Daughters, DeMolay, Rainbow Girls. The Eastern Star, York Rite, Scottish Rite, Shrine, Grotto, Sciots, Amaranth, High-Twelve Clubs... all these organizations and more. All require either membership in a Masonic Lodge, or relation to a Mason, or sponsorship by a Mason. And all of these groups are founded upon the same Masonic moral and ethical teachings.

Our Masonic teachings inform us, however, that even if we bestow all our goods to feed the poor... and have not charity, it profiteth us nothing. I suggest to you, my friends, that Charity must, therefore, be more than the mere donation-of-dollars.

The English word "charity" is derived from the Latin word *caritas*, which is also translated as "love." The particular connotation of the translation is that of Brotherly Love.

The tenet of Brotherly Love, is the concept that the whole human species should be regarded as one family, (derived from the same source) which, as inhabitants of the same planet, should aid, support and protect each other, in order to preserve the world in which we all live, and to unite men of every country, sect, and opinion. This has been taught to Masons "since time immemorial" as one of Freemasonry's principal tenets.

I submit to you that Brotherly Love, Relief of the distressed, non-hypocritical Truth of action, are all bound together into a concept that can be called Charity. It is NOT the giving of money that makes the programs I described to you charitable. It is the act of endeavoring to assist those who are afflicted to have the best life possible for them, which has elevated the aforementioned relief of the distressed to a level, which encompasses the true meaning of Masonic Charity. Let me emphasize that again. It is the reasoning, which induces the donation, which causes that relief to take on the character of Masonic Charity!

So just where does this "revelation" lead us? Perhaps we must consider just what difference there is between being "a Mason" and being "Masonic in character."

Seated in the East this afternoon, are four very exceptional young men and women. Skip Wahl and Loren Southard, who are the Jurisdiction Master Councilors respectively of the Northern and Southern California Jurisdictions of the Order of DeMolay, Miss Sabrina Webb, the Grand Bethel Honored Queen in California, of the International Order of Job's Daughters, and Miss Jennifer Conwell, Grand Worthy Advisor in California, of the International Order of the Rainbow for Girls.

Jurisdiction Master Councilors Webb and Southard. I have no doubt that, when age and circumstances permit, you and those of your DeMolay Brothers who choose to join our Fraternity, will be welcomed with open arms to full membership in some Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, wherever that Lodge may be located. You and those whom you lead, have overwhelmingly demonstrated your devotion, both personal and as an Order, to the principles upon which our Fraternity is based.

Grand Bethel Honored Queen Webb. You and your Sisters are our literal relations. You are our daughters, our Granddaughters, nieces and sisters. You are, both in fact and by your actions, a part of our Masonic Family. You, although you are all eligible to be members of the Order of the Eastern Star, will not ever be members of a Masonic Lodge, yet to those of us who are members of the Fraternity, you will forever be a part of us.

Grand Worthy Advisor Conwell, — Jennifer. Because of my involvement with Rainbow, and my membership on the Rainbow Grand Executive Committee in California, I have been privileged to get to know you, and many of your Rainbow Sisters on a personal basis. You and those, whom you lead, are not necessarily related to any Mason in any fashion other than through your membership in your Order. You, like the Jobs Daughters, will never be members of a Masonic

Lodge, and you may or may not even be eligible to join the Eastern Star, unless you happen to later in life marry an man who is or who becomes a Mason. Your organization's connection to Masonry is the most tenuous of the three Youth Groups, yet your Order's goal of Service clearly shows all of Rainbow to be Masonic in character.

These three Masonic Youth Groups, and the thousands of members of those organizations, are not Masons. They are, however, Masonic in character. The ladies of the Eastern Star aren't Masons either, but the Order of the Eastern Star is Masonic in character. For that matter, many of the members of the Salvation Army are not Masons, and the organization itself is not sponsored by Masons. But I ask you to consider whether, perhaps, just perhaps, the Salvation Army might also be Masonic in character.

At certain times during our ritual, every Mason is asked two questions. "Where were you first prepared to be made a Mason?" and "What makes you a Mason?" We Masons know the answers dictated by ritual, and I am not permitted to state those answers here today. I do, however, challenge every Mason to consider, not the words of the ritual, but what is meant by those words.

I offer now, for your consideration, one interpretation of those ritual answers. I believe that what makes a person a "Mason", is, in part, that person's choice to dedicate his or her life to the betterment of the society in which all of mankind must live.

The Sisters of Love, Religion, Nature, Immortality, Fidelity, Patriotism, Service of Rainbow. The Five Messengers of Job's Daughters. The Seven Preceptors of DeMolay. The Star Points of the Eastern Star. Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice. Faith, Hope, Charity. All of these lessons are the same, even though diverse in ritualistic presentation. Masonic organizations, however, don't have a proprietary "lock" on these universal truths. Many organizations, and many individuals who don't belong to any organization recognize the universality of these moral and ethical concepts. And the target of these truths is also the same. The target is some person who in his or her innermost self, believes that he or she can make a difference.

A healthy society, one which values freedom and healthy growth, can't exist without certain moral and ethical tenets to support and guide those of whom it is composed, anymore than a Gothic cathedral could have been erected in a satisfactory manner without a properly formed and laid cornerstone to support the stones of which it was built.

Freemasonry, as well as each of its concordant and appendant bodies, is composed of men and women who have chosen those moral and ethical tenets to be their guide during their lives. We need not try to convert others to our way of thinking through words. We need only to live our lives according to the principles to which we obligated ourselves at the altars of our various organizations, and by example we will attract those of like mind. But whether they join one of our Masonic organizations or not, everyone, — I repeat, — everyone who lives their life in accordance with those moral and ethical concepts which we chose to call "Masonic ideals", is a part of that "living stone" which serves as the cornerstone of our society.

With apology to our Ritual Committee, I would like to share with you the mental interpretation, which I hear every time I listen to the Master's Benediction, which concludes every full form closing of a Masonic Lodge.

May the blessing of Heaven rest upon us and all who live their lives in accordance with Masonic principles! May the Masonic tenet of Brotherly Love prevail throughout the world, and every moral and social virtue cement all who so live their lives! Amen.

My friends, we - all of us, whether a part of our great Masonic Family or not - have the potential to be the moral and ethical cornerstone of the world in which we live. We - all of us - are the builders of the society of tomorrow in which our children (so wonderfully represented by these Youth Groups) will live, as well as the builders of the society of today. The future can't be anything other than what the present builds it to be.

Let's Build Well!