

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 2003**

**Grand Orator
William J. Bray**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished and Honored Guests, Grand Lodge Officers, and my Brothers.

A year ago, I was honored to stand before you and be installed as the Grand Orator of the Grand Lodge of California. During the past year it has been a tremendous experience to be able to travel up and down this great State of ours delivering speeches on behalf of all the Masons of California. I was personally able to participate in 22 cornerstone and other ceremonies from the deserts of Southern California to the mountain communities in the North. Unfortunately during the last four weeks, I was unable to travel due to my health, and was limited to only writing speeches. I want to thank those Brothers who delivered the speeches for me. I also want to extend my thanks and appreciation to the many Brothers who sent their prayers and best wishes for my speedy recovery.

This year, the theme of Most Worshipful William Holsinger was "Masonry seeks good men and makes them better - tell a friend." This statement is a challenge to all Masons to be called to action for the benefit of our Fraternity. Brothers, "ask not what Masonry can do for you, but what can you do for Masonry? Of course, this call to action immediately reminds us of our 35th President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, who on his inauguration day called the citizens of the United States to action. Those who responded to that call can be considered modern day heroes. But what makes a person a hero? Is a hero someone who can leap over tall buildings in a single bound? Can anyone be a hero? What makes a person a Masonic hero? Which Brothers here today will answer the call to action and become a Masonic hero? I decided to start with the dictionary definition of the word hero. What I found were three definitions.

1. In mythology and legend, a man, often of divine ancestry, who is endowed with great courage and strength, celebrated for his bold exploits, and favored by the gods. To me, this seemed like a person who could leap over tall buildings in a single bound.

2. A person noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose, especially one who has risked or sacrificed his or her life. To me, this sounded like someone who changes the world.

3. A person noted for special achievement in a particular field. Now to me, this sounded like someone who doesn't try to change the world intentionally, but rather works so hard at what they are trying to accomplish that they end up changing the world along the way.

While I liked the dictionaries' definitions, I couldn't help but feel something was missing from the definitions I found. Yes, technically they had described some of the characteristics of a hero, but they didn't even come close to describing the emotion people feel when saying the word hero.

I visually tried to picture Masonic heroes. George Washington came to my mind and he certainly fits the person who changes the world. I was having more difficulty trying to think of Masonic heroes that worked so hard at what they are trying to accomplish that they end up changing the world along the way, and then I realized that we had a number of Brothers in our Lodges that fit this definition of a Masonic hero to a "T" and I list these Brothers in no particular order:

How about the Brother who for the last forty years comes to the Lodge, turns on the lights, makes the coffee, and in the winter sees that the heater is on and in the summer sees that the air conditioner is working properly. He is the last one to leave and makes sure the lights are turned off and the parking lot is secure. My Brothers, he is a Masonic hero.

How about the Brother who is the first one to volunteer for the hard jobs. Painting, plumbing, and electrical repairs are his specialty. He may be absent at times from meetings, but he is always there when you need a project done. My Brothers, he is a Masonic hero.

Then there's the Brother, who visits the sick and those in the hospital. He also sends cards and letters to his Brothers who are unable to leave their homes. My Brothers, he is a Masonic hero.

Or the Brother who donates his time and talent to the Shrine hospitals or local schools. My Brothers, he is also a Masonic hero.

And let us not forget the Brother who is a master of the ritual and coaches candidates two nights a week. In teaching ritual he is able to show his students the principles and ideals of Masonry. His job is so much more than just memory work. My Brothers, he is a Masonic hero.

This list could go on and on forever. I am sure each of you knows someone who is a Masonic hero. Glance at the person next to you and even around the room. I bet someone considers the Brother sitting next to you a Masonic hero.

These men do not think of themselves as heroes, but to me they are our Masonic heroes. How can we honor these Brothers? How can we assure that there will be future Masonic heroes in California? What action must be taken today?

The first lodges in California were established in the Gold Country in 1850. That same year the Grand Lodge of California was established in Sacramento. Today, there are more than 74,900 members and nearly 360 lodges throughout the State. We are one of the largest Grand Lodges in the world and yet we need to take action today.

We need to respond to the call for ACTION. WE NEED TO TAKE THOSE STEPS NECESSARY FOR THE SURVIVAL OF OUR CRAFT.

While preparing my remarks, I researched and read books and magazines about our craft. One author wrote about how Masonry needs each one of you to give your time, effort, and support to your Lodge. I would like to share some of this Brother's points of view with you.

As Masons, we may all reach the place where we realize that unless we do something to help our Masonic Fraternity survive, the Fraternity we all treasure and hold dear, will in the end perish. So what can we do?

I would like to present to you what I believe are serious considerations that may instill new life in our Masonic Fraternity for anyone that is serious enough to change their old way of thinking and are willing to "do" some personal adjusting within themselves.

Of course, whenever you want to experience change you need to start by acknowledging that change cannot occur unless YOU, my fellow Brothers, are willing to think and do something entirely different from what we have done in the past.

Begin by getting clear about what you really want. When I talk about getting clear, pay attention to the way you and your fellow Brothers have thought and talked about making changes. I am sure that the thinking and talking have prevented changes from being made.

Wake up! Most people talk themselves out of being successful in making changes, all the while complaining they were discouraged by others. Be clear - others cannot influence your decisions unless you decide to give them the authority. This is precisely why you need to pay attention to how you handle the input of others and the pep talks you give yourself and your fellow Brothers.

Do not fall victim to saying things such as, "I know it isn't apt to happen" or "I know this seems reasonable, but" and other such statements that immediately undermine your commitment to change.

Use statements such as, "We will", "We can" "We will not stop until" and other types of messages that confirm to yourself and your fellow Brothers that you are committed and don't intend stopping until you succeed in making changes. It may sound unusual, but you can and generally do stop your successes from happening right in the thinking stage before you ever take one deliberate step. Reassess your thinking style in order to poise yourself for success. Always consciously commit to saying encouraging and reinforcing types of statements that you would use with a Brother that is trying to create new and good things for our Fraternity. Remind yourself that if you can conceive it in your mind you can make it happen, one step at a time.

Get committed! Make change a must. Here are a few prompts to keep you on line with your goals:

- Refuse to consider any seduction to quit, keep using those "We can, We will" messages.
- Look carefully at what may be holding us back in any way.
- Find new courses of action that will get us beyond the place where you are stuck.
- Do more research to enable you and your Brothers to get clear about what you need to do in order to achieve.

And keep going until you and your Brothers achieve what is desired.
There are no other options! Decide consciously and deliberately as to what actions are needed to be taken to keep our great Fraternal family alive and well into the next decade.

Only you, my Brothers, can learn from the past. Do not let it suppress the future. Having failed in the past does not determine the way your future endeavors will turn out.

Always look for a gentle approach to resolving any holdups in your goals of revitalizing Masonry in California. Sometimes, the habit of "toughening it out" or doing things the hard way make us believe that anything of value to be achieved must be hard won. Not so. You can decide to forge a new path for you and your Masonic Brothers. It is entirely up to you and your fellow Brothers to decide what you want. Just so, is your ability to make it happen.

If you find you are thinking about quitting, imagine how you and your fellow Masons' life will turn out if Masonry does not survive. It will help you keep your resolution to "refuse to stop". Shake off any notions you have of failing. There is no such thing as failure. Every situation allows opportunity for education, inspiration, and new insight.

Generally speaking, most Brothers, if not all, wish for Masonry to continue in California for years and decades to come. They hope that circumstances will change to allow such longevity. Each Brother must show a willingness to attempt new behaviors and thinking in order to create a self-sustaining Fraternity. Although there is much over which we have no control, there is also much that each Brother can do to help the brotherhood survive. It is not always easy, although the premise is simple.

I am sure all of us have a vision. Here is my vision which was adapted from a fellow Mason's vision.

Twenty-five years ago a Mason had to wait for an opening in the "line", sometimes for years. Thirty was the average age of a Mason. He was considered honorable and notable in the Lodge and the community and Masons were respected individuals in their neighborhoods.

Look at us today. Gone are the events that swelled our banquet halls. The parades and pageantry of the old days are gone, fallen prey to community indifference. Some Lodges are barely able to achieve a quorum. The average age of the membership is double than what it was 30 years ago. Every year, our organizations suffer net losses. The occupation of the average Mason is "retired". The average Mason's service history is "Been there - done that". Due to the lack of new members, chairs are hard to fill. Some members cannot serve because they are too old, too infirmed, can't see to drive, and so on

So, what will the future of Masonry be like? I believe we stand at a crossroad - choose one. The boulevard to failure or the path towards success.

Imagine: Lodges again filled to capacity. New petitions will be read at every meeting. There will be a waiting line for persons to fill chairs. The average Mason's age is once again 30. His occupation is blue collar, white collar, and retired. Childcare is offered for children downstairs during the meeting. Internet access is available on computers in the lodge for spouses during meetings. Computer games for the youth. Large screen televisions in reception rooms with cable TV for entertainment. The Lodge is open for aerobics on meeting nights for member's wives. Pre schools are available during the day for the children of Masons. Baby-sitting services are available during Lodge events. Vans are available to bring Lodge members to attend meetings and social events. Does this sound Farfetched? Not to me.

If we did nothing and expected change, what would our organizations look like then? To be successful, we will need a new strength and strategy.

So why doesn't what we did in the past, work today? Maybe its because times have changed.

How many Brothers here today have or had fathers who were Masons? Grandfather's who were Mason's? How many of you joined because you had a friend in a Lodge? How many Brothers here today have children that are 18 years or older? Of those Brothers how many of your children are Masons?

The point is, that we also need to look at our own family for future members.

Lifestyles have changed: In 1960 the man worked, the wife was a homemaker. He came home, ate dinner, visited with the kids, and then he was off to his Lodge meeting. Today, both the man and wife work. Dinner is fast food or the parents take turns cooking. Both come home to homework, laundry, and bills. The wife is just as tired as the husband and watching the kids just so he can run out to a Lodge meeting is a burden.

The complexity of the family has changed. Single families abound.

Parents of the breadwinners may have to be cared for.

Community life- is non-existent. There is no civic pride anymore. Life is too transient.

Technological advancements abound. The world now comes to our doorstep. E-mail and Internet services is where the world shops, communicates, and gets involved.

We now live in a 24 hour society. While the world runs around the clock, the lodge is open only a few hours each week. Why?

Have our norms also changed?

In a few years, the largest majority by age will be those over 65 years.

So, what is the answer? It comes from us, you my fellow Brothers. We need to change and adapt to current trends. But, change is not easy. We need to go where the candidates are in order to reach them and then connect with them in some way. In doing so we have to be careful that we attract men that meet our Masonic standards. Those men who will become our Masonic heroes and have the utmost **INTEGRITY**.

Our commitment to integrity occurs whether or not there is a system of checks and balances peering over our shoulders. Are you the type of person who only pauses at a red light, rather than coming to a full stop, when it is 2 in the morning? Are we, as a part of the Masonic family, assuring that this organization will remain standing for generations to come? Do we accurately assess our participation in this organization so that our grandchildren's children will know the wonders of the Masonic Fraternity that we know?

For instance, Masonry cannot continue into the next generation unless we have a plan for bringing qualified candidates into the Fraternity. As a United States Navy man, I know, for example, that our young veterans would make ideal candidates for membership. They have already made a commitment to uphold the Constitution of the United States and the principles hammered out by our brethren Founding Fathers. Depending on each other while in service to our country, these veterans also understand the concept of a Fraternal organization. The analogies between the experiences of our veterans and of the types of candidates we seek to join the Fraternity go on and on. This is but one example of a job that we need to do well, so that like a well-built house, the Masonic Fraternity will have a strong foundation to carry it beyond this generation.

We also need to work with the other Fraternal Organizations that make up our Masonic Family. A commitment must be made to each of them to insure their continued survival.

When we look at protecting the legacy and future of the Masonic Fraternity, we have some choices. We can choose the Masonic Lodge where we would like to belong; or we can choose whether we want to wear a black or white tuxedo jacket to a function. At the same time, there are some things that are not optional, such as assuring a credible future membership. We cannot hope to rest on the laurels of our many years of existence. The continuation of our Fraternity is dependant on our exemplary work, our dedication to the craft, and our ability to adapt to the changing world.

If we are to move into the 21st century in a proactive way, we must start making changes now. Now is the time to commit to the survival of Freemasonry in California. Let's look for those who will respond to the call for action and become our future Masonic heroes.

Brethren, I thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

William J. Bray III, *Grand Orator*