

GRAND ORATION

By: R.: W.: Michael G. Juett, W.: Grand Orator

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Elected Grand Lodge Officers, Distinguished Past Grand Masters, Distinguished Guests, and my fellow Brother Masons:

First, I would like to thank Most Worshipful Dale I. Goehrig, who has been a friend and Brother for many years, for allowing me the opportunity of serving The Grand Lodge of Florida as your Grand Orator. It is quite an honor and I hope I have been worthy to fill such a prestigious position.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our Military Service Men and Women, who are away from their families dedicating themselves to making sure that we can live our lives without fear and to remember those Veterans, on this Memorial Day, that have lost their lives for the purpose of guaranteeing our Freedom.

Being up here on this Memorial Day reminds me of**Being in church one Sunday morning**, the Pastor noticed little Alex was staring up at the large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. It was covered with names and small American Flags were mounted on either side of it. The seven-year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the Pastor walked up, stood beside the boy, and said quietly, "Good morning Alex." "Good morning Reverend," replied the young man, still focused on the plaque. "Reverend Curtis, what is this?" Alex asked. "Well, son, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service." Soberly, they stood together, staring at the large plaque. Little Alex's voice was barely audible when he asked, "Which one, the Church or the Sunday School Service?"

Be careful what you say and do!

Actually, this is an opportunity to share with you the excitement that I feel about the greatest Fraternal Organization in the world. I love being a Master Mason!

Several years ago, I had the privilege of working for my father-in-law, Right Worshipful Bob Fiedler. Many of you here today knew him well. Bob was active in Masonry for many years in many different capacities, including Grand Lodge and the Grand Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star. He stood in this position that I am in today while serving as Grand Orator for M.: W.: Samuel M. Lewis, Jr.

Early on, Bob earned my respect as an honest, sincere, and generous individual. At the time, I had never heard of Masonry, but out of respect and, of course, wanting to stay in good graces with my father-in law, I attended several Masonic functions that he was involved in.

I was impressed with what I saw, but still did not understand what it was about. The more I got to know him, the more I admired him as a good example of the type of person I would like to become or be affiliated with.

In 1982, because of Bob's activity serving as District Deputy Grand Master, his son, Allen, and I were exposed to several Masonic activities that year. It was obvious to me that this man affected many people and was loved by all who came into contact with him.

From what I had seen, and the people I had met, I remember thinking that this must be a premier organization. I held a lot of respect for Bob and since he loved being a member of Masonry so much, my curiosity got the best of me and I asked him what this was all about. He told me I could find out and I finally asked the long awaited question, "how?" I think R.: W.: Allen and I had Petitions in front of us in less than 24 hours! That was all it took and the rest is history!

The purpose for telling that story is to give an example of an area that I feel is very important to helping us to thrive in Masonry and to bring in new members.

As all of us in this room know: "Freemasonry builds and advances the character of men to make them better." Masonry was built on the principals of morality and Brotherly love. The foundation and structure within the walls of this Fraternity has been established for many years, and has proved its effectiveness with its valuable teachings. There is no doubt in my mind that I am a better man because of the teachings of Freemasonry over the last 27 years. The point is that the system works and definitely holds its reputation of taking good men and making them better.

Now that we realize the success of our Fraternity, we are faced with the problem of attracting potential members that can benefit from what we have to offer. Like me, many people do not know much about Masonry and are not likely to want to join an organization that they are not familiar with.

In today's society, there are many new factors that we have to compete with, especially with the latest technology. Computers, online gaming, iPods (and now iPads), Facebook, Twitter, and an over abundance of plush movie theaters are only a few of the technological advances that we have to compete with for people's time.

Another important area is the fact that, in these hard times, the challenges with keeping jobs, making mortgage payments, expensive child care, outrageous medical costs, increased property taxes, and rising utility bills are sometimes overwhelming and impossible for a single income family. Therefore, it is necessary in most families for both spouses, or partners, to work full time jobs to make ends meet. In these situations, by the time the day ends, there is not much time for socializing or joining organizations such as ours, especially one that they do not know anything about. It goes without saying that, with what little free time these individuals have; they certainly do not want to waste it.

I believe that people want to feel good about themselves and be a part of something that they find worthwhile. They like being around others that are a good influence and have a positive outlook on life in general. That is where we have an important responsibility to our great Fraternity to help others know what we do and what we have to offer.

In many cases, we have a natural and effective tool to recruit new members and may not even know that we possess it.

Being a Mason is not a part time commitment. It is a lifestyle that we live 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Someone who is a true Mason and lives accordingly has no idea how many people are influenced by their actions and personality. I am sure all of you in this room have certain individuals in mind that you respect and admire as a good person. That is because of the examples that they set in their daily lives. Their principals, sincerity, and high morals sometimes influence others in ways that can change the way they choose to live their lives. These are the

people that others want to be with, because they feel good about themselves when they are around them.

That was one of the main reasons that I joined this Fraternity. I was influenced by my father-in-law, by his every day actions and the way he lived his life. He was loved by everyone and I figured that if Masonry was something he loved so much, it must be a great organization.

So, every Mason should take advantage of every opportunity in their personal and business lives to let everyone know that they are a Mason, and be prepared to answer questions such as: “Who are the Masons?” and “What do they do?” I think there are a lot of people out there looking for a purpose in their life and your prepared answer could help influence them to inquire further, and possibly want to become a member. Also, do not forget to mention the ladies organizations and Youth Programs. These areas are bound to enhance interest since young families are looking for things they can participate in together.

A good example of letting people know of your involvement in the Masonic Fraternity happened to me just a few weeks ago. I have been attending classes at Valencia Community College Criminal Justice Institute. One evening in class, our Instructor brought up a subject that involved teachings and the importance of learning. He asked if anyone in the class was a Mason. Of course, I raised my hand proudly. Understand that most of the individuals in my class are much younger than me and are at a very influential age. The Instructor was well educated in the composition of Masonry and proceeded to explain some of the purposes and teachings of the Fraternity. This caused curiosity among the students and I was asked several questions. Who knows, we may gain some new upstanding members because of that event.

A very important area of concern is within the walls of our Lodges. The leaders of each Lodge should make every effort to keep the Lodge Meetings interesting and provide a variety of special programs. One very effective idea is to work with the local communities and get involved in some local projects, and become visible outside of the Lodge in the public eye. This is consistent with what our Grand Master has been talking about in his travels around the State. Working outside the four walls of the Lodges is a very effective way of being noticed in the community and to stir up interest in what we do.

Freemasonry has so much to offer. There are many different areas that a member can be involved in. Scottish Rite Masonry, York Rite Masonry, Grotto, Heroes of ‘76, and the Shriners are just a few of the choices that members have to become active in.

Several times, I have heard of situations when Candidates were advancing through the Lodges with the idea of becoming active in another Order, such as the Shrine. Some of the members of the Lodge were not happy about that and would voice their opinion. They felt like the Blue Lodge was being used as a stepping-stone to get somewhere else.

As I stated previously, Masonry has several ways to be involved. I think everyone should be exposed to all facets of Masonry. Once they have had a chance to see what is available, they can choose an area that interests them and become active. People have different interests and different personalities. What I like to do may not appeal to you or someone else. Regardless of what arena they are participating in, they are still Masons and can be effective in influencing others.

Sometimes, others choose to join with the intention to be active in a certain area of Masonry, because the friend who influenced them to join is a member of the same. That is the only area that they know anything about, because of that friendship or acquaintance. I have seen times when a new member, while going through the Lodge to get to his intended destination, realized what the Blue Lodge had to offer and instead became active in his Lodge. The fact that a man makes that step to become a Master Mason is the most important part of his travels. Therefore, it is important for the Lodge Officers to keep the Lodges interesting, to keep the Brother coming back and participating. Why not involve them by placing them in active parts of our Degree Work. Having Brothers be greeters at our meetings to welcome visiting Brothers and get to know others is another way of keeping them active.

As I stated earlier, technology has made great advances and offered many means of entertainment for the families. We, as Masons, like technology, have to make changes and advancements to suit the interests of groups of all ages. We need to think, "outside of the box." Take advantage of the powerful Internet to promote Masonry. Utilize the ideas and input from your members to come up with interesting and fun ideas to promote participation. Why not form some groups in your Lodge that share common interests. Some may be for those with young children. Others may be a more mature group, (You notice I was careful with my words on this one!), and maybe go to dinner together or start a camping club. Your creativity is the only thing limiting what you can do to promote activity in the Lodge.

Education is an area that is very important and necessary in our Fraternity. While we may be successful in recruiting new members, we must educate them in order to understand the history and principals Masonry was founded on. The Lodge Officers should utilize their senior members to help illustrate and explain the history and customs of Masonry to our newer members. With this knowledge, they will understand how and why we have some of the symbols and ceremonies that we still use today. It will also assist them in being confident in their answers to potential members that may inquire about who we are. There are many valuable materials provided by Grand Lodge and associated groups that are available to the Lodges.

Of course, there are other ways to help with recruiting members; however, I wanted to remind you of the powerful tool that many of you possess; your positive influence on others and a positive outlook on life, and the way you live it. Remember that you never know who you may affect in your daily life. By living your life upon the morals and principals of Freemasonry, you are bound to gain the respect of many, and could very well cause someone to want to be a part of this great Fraternity, because of the person they know you to be.

Speaking of influence and impressions, that reminds me of one of the Lodges that was holding its meetings in the Ballroom of a local Hotel, because of a major renovation to their building. One night a man who was staying at the hotel asked the clerk what was going on in the Ballroom. The clerk told him that they were Masons. The man said "I always wanted to join the Masons....do you think they would let me in?" The lady at the desk said "Oh no! They are awful exclusiveyou see that poor guy standing out side the door with the sword.....He has been knocking for six months and they still won't let him in!"

So you never know what impression you may be giving someone!

In closing, I would like to say that joining Freemasonry was one of the highlights of my life. Not only have I become a better man, but I have met many of my best friends through being a

member and have a bond that can be equaled by none. Masonry is like a family extension to me. When I meet another Mason on the street, I immediately connect through our strong bond. When I see one of my Masonic Brothers that I have not seen for a long period of time, it is like we only talked yesterday. This is a great feeling. I am so proud to be a part of the greatest Fraternity in the world!

Isn't it great to be a Mason?

Thank you very much!