

## **Masonic Formation in California Most Worshipful Grand**

### **Masters, and Brethren:**

It is a pleasure to join with you for the World Conference of Masonic Grand Lodges and bring fraternal greetings from the over 66,000 Masons in California.

American Freemasonry has re-discovered concept of "European-style" Lodges which require a commitment to the ritual of initiation. Such Lodges require candidates to establish that they understand the Degrees through which they pass by study, examination, and a presentation of papers before advancement. The term "European-style" Lodge may be a misnomer. This format is the norm in most of the world, though not in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia. These "European' style" Lodges are frequently characterized by excellent performance of the Masonic ritual, high standards of dress for meetings and festive boards that exhibit a commitment to true Masonic fellowship.

California now has two "European-style" Lodges. We have combined this concept with our existing program to create a paradigm called "Masonic Formation." It transforms ordinary Freemasonry into a powerful expression of "Applied Masonry" which will be subsequently defined.

For many years California Degrees were singularly divorced from actually teaching a newly made Mason to apply to his daily life the Masonic lessons he had learned. For the greater part of our history candidate education was based solely on the memorization of lengthy and later shorter catechisms by the candidate prior to advancement. As a result, candidate education was not only incomplete, but then largely forgotten once a man was Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

In 1999 our Grand Lodge made an attempt to require an Entered Apprentice and a Fellow Craft to read a small booklet and answer a few written questions about the Degrees. A close survey of our Lodges indicated that many ignored even this minimal requirement. Apart from this offering there has been no program to assist a new Mason to understand the essential lessons or philosophy of life taught by Masonry. Few materials were provided to him through his Masonic journey. This is now changing.

California's new program blends candidate education and subsequent Master Mason Education in a lifelong commitment to explaining and then understanding the applicability of Freemasonry to a Brother's daily life. The end result of this new program is called "Applied Masonry." Its goal is to assure that each Mason understands enough about Freemasonry so that he may live by its virtues and that its teachings make an indelible imprint on his life, his family, his community, and on mankind.

The concept is encompassed in what a California refers to as "Masonic Formation." In the days of Operative Masonry the great strength of Gothic architecture was the application of the principles of physics. Giant cathedrals were supported by flying buttresses and soaring arches, each using the principles of thrust and counterthrust to free a building from the need to have walls of massive blocks of stone. These arches and flying buttresses were not constructed simply by piling one stone upon another. They were built around wooden forms which supported the arch or buttress until all the stones were in place. The removal of the wooden forms then allowed the cathedral to stand on its own in such a manner that it was graceful, full of light and space, tall and free. Masonic Formation emulates this process. The Lodge works with living stones: Entered Apprentices, Fellow Crafts and Master Masons. Instead of a temporal building, it builds a lasting edifice within a Mason's heart and mind.

The Brethren will no longer be left on their own to discern the meaning of Freemasonry. "Masonic Formation" upholds and supports them until they are strong enough to live by the virtues taught in our Degrees without the need for external support. As a cathedral stands on its own once the flying buttresses and arches are complete, so the Master

Mason should be able to stand on his own. "Masonic Formation" shapes and molds a living stone for that internal spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

"Masonic Formation" begins when a man first seeks admission and is interrogated as to his true intentions. The process continues through election to membership and the subsequent conferral of the Three Degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry. It then shapes and forms a Brother in the years which follow his Third Degree so that in due time he will be able to stand on his own as a Master Mason. Only then he will be truly prepared to take his place as an integral part of the greater Temple of Humanity.

Today there are jurisdictions practicing portions of "Masonic Formation," while others have emphasize the intellectual aspects of Freemasonry. In many countries Masonry is not essentially an organization for the common man. The contribution that English-speaking Freemasonry has made in the past is its availability to all men. We do not seek to create a Freemasonry just for the elite or well-educated or intellectuals. Masonic Formation takes the best of "European-style Freemasonry" and makes it available to all. We firmly believe that every Mason, regardless of his academic attainment or his social background can truly exemplify Freemasonry in his own life. "Applied Masonry" teaches each Brother to take with him out of the lodge the great moral lessons that are inculcated within it.

We anticipate that Masonic Formation in California will permit the building of moral and spiritual leadership among all who enter our door of Freemasonry irrespective of race, creed, religion or economic status. This process can be adopted by those jurisdictions desiring to do so. We believe that "Applied Masonry" can bring all of humanity into a greater brotherhood of fraternalism and free thought based on relief and truth.

Melvyn B. Stein

Grand Master of Masons in California