

MASONIC TRADITION IN TODAY'S WORLD

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Today, we live in a global village, with interconnected economy, financial markets and information systems, which makes globalization a fact of life. This situation has created a world in which different cultures, political entities and religions are no longer separated by the traditional borders and as a result, there is much friction due to misperceptions, misunderstandings, and a general mistrust of each other. This is the fundamental root of the anti-globalization sentiments around the world.

The global conditions of today's world have produced unpredictable consequences, which the world was not prepared for. This has affected drastically, the position and relevancy of our Freemasonry. On the one hand, people are pursuing a faster lifestyle, affluence and personal pleasure, which have resulted in the pursuit of personal profit and power as the central point in the individual's life. Technological advances have not helped to further the welfare of human society, and a huge percentage of the world's population live in utter poverty and is faced with myriad diseases, civil war, and injustice in daily life. Consequently, the world is divided between rich and poor, and through the erosion of moral and social values, our world is faced with new religious, social, and political intolerance. In such an atmosphere of turmoil, chaos and crisis, no one can consider himself outside of this tragic situation.

The mission of Freemasonry, confronted with these circumstances should be to adapt herself to the new conditions and strive to create a "Global Civil Society", to be used as a model to bring back balance to the present chaotic situation. A civil society can only exist in secure and free environment with individual liberty, security and wellbeing, without social and economic dislocation or community upheavals. To succeed, we must change many of our existing forms of operation and so called traditions.

Freemasonry does not have a socio-economic or political platform and does not seek to influence the politics of a country. However, it is concerned with the problems of humanity and society, and it can and should stand for the betterment of human society, resulting injustice, liberty, peace, harmony and prosperity for all. It promotes these ideas as an institution and enjoins each mason as an individual, to perform his civic duty according to his obligation and judgment as a citizen. This can be achieved only if there is a radical paradigm change in Masonic mission and philosophy, adapting itself to the new world conditions and the contemporary society. We must go back to our mottos, and as our forefathers, stand up for human dignity and freedom, and make our Fraternity a dynamic instrument of change for the betterment of human society. Freemasonry can play a unique role in bringing about these conditions. Given the universality of Freemasonry and its presence throughout the civilized world, Freemasons as individuals and leaders of society can be a powerful force to encourage the building of civil societies. They can use their universal connections to promote a global effort for greater understanding, tolerance and peaceful co-existence among diverse people, cultures and religions.

The reality of the present suggests that the future of our Craft will be determined in large part, by what we will do today and in the immediate future. We must come up with an inspiring vision and a practical mission

This can be done through projects such as the creation of private philanthropic efforts, charities and educational NGOs. Many great leaders of nations in the past were Masons. They were truly builders of the future, intent on serving both the present and the future of their society. We must come up with a vision and a mission, avoiding short term fixes and make plans for long term

strategies, to produce leaders to face and resolve existing problems and face the future. This will need a deep appreciation of our position and obligations as masons and our concern for the problems in our societies.

Masons are not visible in the daily life of our communities and their identity is often misunderstood by people or misrepresented in the media and by their religious and political adversaries. For Masonry to grow and become strong, influential and relevant, it must provide value and challenge for its membership, and a positive image in the society, so that to attract quality applicants for its leadership. To achieve these goals, we must have the following action plan:

Rather than trying to employ useless efforts to increase the level of membership in Masonic fraternity, we need to bring in high quality candidates from all segments of society, and provide them with real Masonic information and education, ritual proficiency, inspiration, moral values and challenges, to create a deep sense of duty in their private and public life.

The recent statistics in the US show that the average age of Masonic membership is declining, indicating that if this trend continues we may very well drop to the level of around 30-40 years, in near future. The older generation has ignored the needs of the young members and in fact is resistant to change. The generational change gives us an opportunity to start our work from schools and universities, and through interaction and projects, attract a new generation to our principles, values and conduct as a fraternity, thus creating a dependable resource of potential candidates when they enter the society, with ample opportunity to generate new ideas and take responsibilities.

In today's world where every body is so busy with their profession and work, the family plays an important part in our lives. Therefore, it is necessary that our activities involve the family as much as possible, to establish a greater social and fraternal bond between our membership.

In the global society of today, communication plays a very important role, and we should use IT systems, CDs, websites and e-mail groups for education and propagation of our information and projects to communicate within and without our Fraternity; working with media to publish articles, produce TV programs in order to inform the public on Freemasonry.

To be more visible in the community, by organizing open meetings and discussion forums, involving masons and non-masons and field authorities to discuss issues important to people and society. Getting professional help to make the public aware of masonry, their projects and service to community.

Effective public relations and inspiring positive publications to make the image of Freemasonry one of value and respect, with easily accessible and attractive Websites, to inform masons and non-masons on Freemasonry and their stand on social and moral issues affecting humanity and society, such as freedom, human rights, equality, poverty, education and environment.

Establishing a close relationship with the civil authorities, through public events, such as corner stone laying, wreath laying, or celebrating events of national importance. Two years ago we established the Medal of Freedom in Washington, and so far it has been awarded to two members of US Congress, who have helped the cause of freedom.

Organizing Masonic exhibitions, as we have done, through Octagon Museum of architecture in Washington under the tile of "Initiated Eye" which received a very wide public and media exposure and is now going around in the country.

Effective charity programs, such as helping poor neighborhoods, schools, sports, war veterans, etc. Grand Lodge of Washington DC has recently initiated a number of such projects, Special Olympics, teachers training for poor public schools, and renovation of Veterans hospital, to name a few.

Reaching out to other communities outside national country, by organizing NGOs with participation of civil organizations for common projects with Masons and non-masons in those countries. Such projects have been initiated through our lodges in Africa, Cuba and Philippines

I hope this presentation will provide some ideas to evolve as a fraternity in order to adapt to new environment and become relevant in today's world, and subsequently, become an effective institution to shape and influence the future of humanity.