

## **Practical Solutions to Assist the Lodge**

### ***Membership Awareness***

Some of these ideas will cost money, and most will take commitment. I do realize the average age of the Fraternity, but all it takes is two or three dedicated Brothers to be the catalysts to excite and involve others. What we are trying to accomplish is to restore Masonry to its preeminence among the community, political, social, civic, and educational leaders. And, as a result, to attract increased numbers of good men to the Fraternity and to hold and engage them in the work of Freemasonry.

The Lodge should make a survey of its members, capturing:

- ✓ Name
- ✓ Address
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Masonic anniversary
- ✓ Officer positions held
- ✓ Grand Lodge appointments
- ✓ Spouse information
- ✓ etc. for the member

The file should also contain the name of the member's spouse, if applicable, the profession of the member (or what his profession was), hobbies/special interests, and such other information as the Lodge may deem to be useful and appropriate in finding ways to "activate" that member and connect him to a program the Lodge will start or has started. The ideal software to capture this data is available to you. WinMason has been developed for the Lodge Secretary to assist in the management of the Lodge.

The Lodge should make full and effective use of materials developed by or for the ACACIA+ Program. In practical terms, this means that such materials will not "sit on the Secretary's desk," rather they will be explained to the Lodge members and implemented. Materials such as the Masonic Membership Development Kit published and available from the Masonic Renewal Committee of North America. Included in this kit are three very good video tapes.

There are several things we can do to improve interest and attendance in our Lodges:

- Focus on Fellowship.
- Encourage those who attend regularly to give you their ideas about improving fellowship.

- Stress the importance of fellowship, and get their good ideas on how to make improvements.
- Give someone the job of greeting all members as they enter the lodge.
- Make sure this person knows that it is his job to make the members feel welcome when they enter and to steer any new member or guests to someone so he is not left alone.
- NEVER allow a new Mason to sit alone in the Lodge room.
- Make sure the WM and officers circulate among the members before Lodge is opened.
- Make all introductions during Lodge warm and personal.

***Use the time after closing lodge to reinforce the fellowship that was present before opening lodge.***

- ✓ Thank your members for attending.
- ✓ Ask for feedback. How satisfied were the members and guests with the quality of fellowship they received.
- ✓ Follow up with a personal note to a new member or guest thanking him for being with you in lodge.
- ✓ Include the names of new members in lodge communications with a brief summary of their interests and the names of their wives and children.
- ✓ Place a suggestion box in a prominent place in the lodge. Give members a questionnaire they can use to evaluate the level of fellowship or lodge activities.

***Do not waste time***

The leading cause of dissatisfaction with a lodge among members is that the meetings were boring and that too much time was wasted. A lot of our senior members come to lodge for relaxation, fellowship and fun. The reason to be concerned with the use of time has more to do with future members as it does with those you already have. If your lodge is typical, more than 85% of your members are not active. We all strive for better lodge attendance, and since we do not necessarily want longer meetings, then we must pay attention to the importance of time. By shortening the amount of time required for minutes, reports, etc. we have more time to be committed to programs such as Masonic education, or special programs.

- Summarize minutes, correspondence and communications that are not of major importance to the lodge.
- Begin your meetings at the time they are scheduled. Increase the overall pace by which events occur. There is no reason why responses to questions from the Master to the Wardens should be dragged out.
- Make sure each presenter is prepared to act in an efficient and professional manner. Being prepared saves time, increases the responses of members, keeps their interest and adds to the satisfaction.
- Post or publish the minutes and Treasurers report. Only read a summary in lodge.

- Hold introductions to a minimum. Most members see long introductions as a waste of time. Recognition of new members and guests should be warm and personal - make them feel welcome. Limit remarks at the end of lodge. Call on one Past Master to speak as opposed to calling on each one.

By making your lodge meeting more of an event, adding some excitement and interest to the meetings will help bring members back. Consider the interests of the youthful and mature members equally. When you plan for a meeting keep the needs of both in mind. The older Mason may want things to remain unchanged; the youthful member may expect variety and excitement. Try to plan your evening to accommodate both. Remember that newer members are determining whether they did the right thing in joining. They will evaluate your plan for the evening on their terms. Make sure you know what they expect.

Focus on quality. No matter what you do, do it well. Nothing works as well as high quality to achieve member satisfaction. Force yourself to plan in detail for the meeting. By doing this forces you to consider the needs of members.

Make something special happen at least six times a year during a meeting. Plan at least six months in advance so you have your choice of a good speaker or guest. Involve your members in the program and in the planning. Call on individuals in your community who can help you provide excellent programs for the lodge. The principle of an elementary, middle, or high school can speak about the scholarship needs of students or ways the lodge can help improve the school. A financial planner can help members discover the important financial or retirement services available to them and answer their questions. A travel agent can speak about trips that are available to individuals or groups and how to save money. etc. Show any number of video tapes that will interest the lodge. Arrange through a local library, a local university or a lending library. Good films are: I've Heard the Name, What does it Mean? (part of the membership development kit), Getting the Most From Your Fraternity - produced by the Masonic Renewal Committee, and For Many Reasons - produced by the Shrine. Invite a strategic planning expert or futurist available through a local college or consulting firm to meet with your lodge to talk about how the needs of men will have changed by the year 2000. Ask every member to be involved by accepting an assigned date to lead a discussion on Freemasonry. MSA Short Talk Bulletins are one source for help. Have fun.

### ***Communicate with your members.***

Dress-up and spruce-up your existing publications and communications to members. Consider at least a quarterly publication mailed to the member and his family. Develop a list of men who have been raised to Master Mason in the past three years and ask the officers or volunteers in the lodge to contact each by phone and invite him to a special meeting, a dinner, or a friends night. Members will respond to a personal invitation from a Brother quicker than you might expect. Mail to members and their wives on behalf of the lodge on significant holidays, or birthdays.

Remember every time a communication comes into the home from the lodge, it raises the awareness of the member. Maintain an attractive bulletin board, and keep it current with member related news and information. Improve the quality of the photographs you use. Find a member who may be a designer or graphic artist with desktop publishing experience and let him review all lodge communications. Listen to his recommendations.

***Attendance is directly related to the good feelings a man has about being with other men in a fraternal setting. Attendance is also related to him having a good time. If they do not find fellowship, friendship or the connection they expected in lodge, they will not come back.***

Assign every man who is elected to the lodge a buddy. This can be his recommended or a fellow Mason about his same age who agrees to be at each stated and special meeting for six months. To personally call and invite the new member to each meeting. To provide transportation if required. To follow-up after each degree to answer any questions. To personally introduce the new Mason to men in the lodge. To contact the family and answer any questions they may have. Introduce the new Mason to other Masons. A new Mason should be introduced to more and more Masons who are encouraged to become part of his circle of friends. This way he might connect with others of his age, career, interests in sports, family, children, etc. Buddy-up outside of lodge also. Ask a new member to a ball game or other sporting event. Keep it light, only discuss the lodge or Freemasonry if he raises the question. Get to know him as a friend. If he agrees, take his photograph and post it on the bulletin board along with his hobbies and interests. Watch for any loss of interest. If attendance starts to lag, get in touch with him right away and determine the cause. Don't let more than several meetings pass before contacting him. Nothing works as well with members as personal contacts. If you can't meet face to face, then the telephone works best.

Reach each of the newest Masons. Men who were raised during the last three to five years, but who have been absent from lodge.

Reacquaint them with the lodge and with the last time you know they were there. (check the lodge registry)

Listen to them tell you reasons why they have appeared to lost interest.

Share with them your intentions to rebuild interest in the lodge and your goals for attendance and membership.

Determine if there are reluctant to attend because they cannot recall the proper signs and words and offer to assist them.

A man joins an organization with the expectation that he will somehow be involved with the members, involved in the leadership, and involved with the community. Identify the skills, talents and interests of each of your members (this is where the database you created, comes in handy). Understand that involvement means using a man's talents. Match their involvement with their gifts and talents. Ask new members how they want to be involved when you visit them during the home visitation (investigation). Ask again following each degree. Make the new member feel that involvement is expected.

Provide new and existing members with more information about the plans and goals of the lodge. Solicit their input. Make the request genuine and sincere. Listen to what they say. Use their ideas in the decision making process. Let members know who contributed and how important that contribution was. Hold a meeting and invite those members who are usually not part of the decision making process. Seek their advice and get them involved. Seek their involvement by asking them to join a team or committee. Give them assignments that matches their needs to their talents. Empower them and hold them accountable. Reward real performance and real contributions in some meaningful way.

### **COMMUNITY AWARENESS**

Today, any lodge that is not connected with its community needs to consider becoming involved for the following reasons:

- Future members are in the community and when the lodge is involved, they will discover what Masonry is all about.
- Future members demand that any organization they join be active in community outreach.
- The community is the responsibility of everyone - including Masons.
- The lodge is a perfect community-service organization.
- Masons will be proud of their role in the community.
- Any organization, to grow, needs to be able to involve all its members in some way. Community involvement is one way to do this.

The best way to get members involved is to respond to a need in the community. Here are some ideas:

- ✓ A Library needed a computer. Hold a special dinner in the lodge and accept contributions from members. Members can also man a booth outside the local supermarket and raise money as well as distribute information and answer questions regarding Masonry.
- ✓ Give a Scholarship. Host four events during the year on weekends for members and guests. Members can prepare food, run games and hold a collectibles auction.
- ✓ Meals on Wheels route. The lodge can adopt a route that would serve two meals a day for eight families for a year.
- ✓ Roadway beautification. Masons can join with youth groups (DeMolay, Rainbow, Jobs, etc.) to maintain a section of the roadway in town.
- ✓ Fix-Up a playground. The lodge could take on the fix-up, paint-up , clean-up of a local playground.

I am not saying to turn Freemasonry into a service club. The real importance is not to change what the lodge is doing, but to increase member interest, participation, awareness and pride through family and community involvement. Local government is trying to establish partnerships with organizations in the community that can solve

community-related problems without a lot of fuss. Individuals in the community tend to evaluate the relevance of organizations by the degree of their involvement.

But, you say we have a smaller lodge. These are things that a small lodge with less than 100 men can accomplish.

- ✓ Sponsor the 4th of July celebration and picnic every year.
- ✓ Sponsor a grade school basketball tournament.
- ✓ Provide medical supplies for a local EMS unit.
- ✓ Provide funds and labor to renovate a local ball field.
- ✓ Sponsor a local youth to a Shrine Bowl Band Camp.
- ✓ Raise funds to assist a public library.
- ✓ Adopt a needy family at Christmas.

*Lodges that are larger can:*

- ✓ Adopt a local elementary school, meet with the PTA to determine a schedule of volunteer events and other support you can provide the school.
- ✓ Volunteer to raise \$10-20,000 for three to five significant awards for teaching excellence in a school where the lodge is located. Present the awards at an assembly that includes teachers, students, parents and the local media.
- ✓ Partner with another civic organization in the community to solve a problem that may be larger than the resources available.
- ✓ Develop ten \$500.00 awards for learning excellence and make these presentations during the school year.
- ✓ Develop a major senior-center volunteer effort to help the aged in some area of need.

These are but a few of the many ideas that will establish your lodge as a relevant force within your community. The idea is to create favorable public awareness of our Fraternity, who we are, and what we do. This in turn will begin to attract good men, who will want to join an organization committed to making a difference.