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DDGM Talks

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CHARITY

In light of the fact RW Bro. Patrick McGrenere is the District Chairman of Benevolence, a former Director of the Masonic Foundation of Ontario, an affiliated member and officer of Ivy Lodge No. 115, it is only fitting that in deference to his multiple responsible roles that I should, on my Official visit, talk on the virtue which may justly be denominated the distinguishing characteristic of a Mason's heart—I mean Charity.

I'm sure each and every one of us remember that particular moment when we, because of our circumstances at the time, were unable to provide a charitable offering, and that we assured all present that we would certainly provide it if we could, or had the opportunity to do so in any future circumstance.

Many of our Niagara "A" District Lodges provide for a school bursary, scholarships and awards programmes at the local level, as well as funds for other community projects. Ivy Lodge in particular, is a supporter of the West Niagara Community Care. Add these to our personal charitable donations and we find Masons doing a good job to keep their word from the North-East Angle.

We also have, at the Grand Lodge level, the Masonic Foundation of Ontario, which through its collections is able to provide significant assistance to university students, to the funding of various drug programmes throughout the province,

and to assist, in company with individual Lodges or districts, Masonic families which have fallen on difficult times. Since its inception fifty-five years ago, the Foundation has made donations to numerous causes in excess of \$15,000,000.00.

These are all excellent examples of charity at work in the lives of Masons—however money is not the only form of charity which we can provide. Indeed, a man may have all the money he needs, and yet be destitute of faith, of hope and of courage. It is our duty, in such circumstances to share our faith, our courage and our hope with him. There are times when a “hand laid upon the shoulder in a friendly sort of way” is worth more than all the money on earth. It may be the hand of companionship, the hand of sympathy, the hand of security, the hand of guidance or the hand of love. The value of any one of these at a particular time is beyond calculation.

Blood or organ donations are further charitable and life saving gifts which for the recipient is truly a good send.

Other acts such as ensuring a ride to a senior to watch his grandson or granddaughter play hockey, or providing a freshly baked loaf of bread or home-made cookies to the widower or senior who cannot function quite well on his/her own but misses out on the little details that make life much more enjoyable, though not necessarily life-saving are greatly appreciated.

None of these can be measured in dollars and cents but they qualify as charity with a capital “C”.

Yes, charity is practiced by us all, I'm sure, but hopefully it is not only provided when there is a receipt forthcoming to be used to reduce our income tax payable, or to be recognized with a picture or story in the newspaper or on the radio or television, as a worthy philanthropist or humanist. If this is the main reason for the gift giving, then I wonder if the act even qualifies as "charity" in the purest sense of the word.

Some time ago, I came across a little story in a bedside reading book, "Chicken Soup for the Soul", and I knew at that time, that I would use it as a basis of a talk in my year as District Deputy. I'd like to close my presentation tonight with that story. In my mind it displays that form of charity—that virtue we all profess to admire—that I hope we as Free and Accepted or Speculative Masons, would be prone to practice.

The story is entitled "The Circus", and I quote:

Once when I was a teenager, my father and I were standing in line to buy tickets for the circus. Finally, there was only one family between us and the ticket counter. This family had made a big impression on me. There were eight children, all probably under the age of 12. You could tell they didn't have a lot of money. Their clothes were not expensive, but they were clean. The children were well-behaved; all of them standing in line two-by-two behind their parents, holding hands. They were excitedly jabbering about the clowns, elephants and other acts they would see that night. One could sense they had never been to a circus before. It promised to be a highlight of their young lives.

The father and mother were at the head of the pack standing proud as could be. The mother was holding her husband's hand, looking up at him as if to say, "You're my knight in shining armour". He was smiling and basking in pride, looking at her as if to reply, "You got that right".

The ticket lady asked the father how many tickets he wanted. He proudly responded, "Please let me buy eight children's tickets and two adult tickets so I can take my family to the circus".

The lady quoted the price.

The man's wife let go of his hand, her head dropped, the man's lip began to quiver. The father leaned a little closer and asked, "How much did you say?"

The ticket lady again quoted the price.

The man didn't have enough money.

How was he supposed to turn and tell his eight kids that he didn't have enough money to take them to the circus?

Seeing what was going on, my dad put his hand into his pocket, pulled out a \$20 bill and dropped it on the ground. (We were not wealthy in any sense of the word!) My father reached down, picked up the bill, tapped the man on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, sir, this fell out of your pocket."

The man knew what was going on. He wasn't begging for a handout but certainly appreciated the help in a desperate, heartbreaking and embarrassing situation. He looked straight into my dad's eyes, took my dad's hand in both of his, squeezed tightly onto the \$20 bill, and with his lip quivering and a tear streaming down his cheek, replied, "Thank you, thank you, sir. This really means a lot to me and my family".

My father and I went back to our car and drove home. We didn't go to the circus that night, but we didn't go without.

It was William Wordsworth who once said, "The best portion of a good man's life is his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love".

In closing brethren, at the 1974 Annual Proceedings of Grand Lodge, MW Bro. Robert E Davies made the following statement during his address;

"In this confused and busy world in which we live we must recognize that each of us has a personal responsibility to those around us that cannot be discharged by cash donations. Much can be done with our hands to make life more livable for those less fortunate but there is far more we can do with our hearts to relieve the deeper pain of loneliness and despair of many elderly people in every community".

Thank you, W. Bro. Haner, members and visitors of Ivy Lodge No. 115 assembled here this evening. Your hospitality has been most charitable. Take care.