

FRATERNITY

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The Collins Word-finder defines Fraternity, as an association, brotherhood, camaraderie, circle, clan, companionship, company, comradeship, fellowship, guild, kinship, league, order, sodality and union.

Fraternity is a society formed on the principle of brotherhood.

Tonight I shall address you as *fratres* in an endeavour to stress the aspect of fraternity in a more specialised form.

It is important to note that the Latin word 'fratre' means brother, and 'fratres' (the plural), brethren.

In this sense, Freemasonry can be viewed as a society formed on the principles of brotherhood and fraternity.

All of us, from the Grand Master downwards, have in our Obligations promised to uphold and maintain the ideals of brotherhood and fraternity both within and without of the Lodge.

Brotherly love, relief and truth are some of the most important lynch pins in the whole masonic structure.

However, not only the masonic brotherhood places such a high value on fraternity. Another Order, states in its manifesto, "Great stress is laid on the ideal of fraternity. The potency of fraternity has ever been an essential factor in an esoteric order, apart from the altruistic aspect, there are also the religious and the spiritual. Any breach in the harmony of the Lodge will permit the entry of an opposing force."

These words were to become prophetic. This order was eventually rent with slander, court actions, recriminations and a total collapse. It should be noted that, in our correspondence, we always sign off with the expression 'yours fraternally', not 'yours brotherly'.

Fraternity, I suggest is more than just brotherhood. It is brotherhood with two added dimensions - spirituality and a belief in the Lord of the Universe.

Now spirituality, in the sense that I am referring to, is that of relating to the mind, the higher faculties, and highly refined thoughts and feelings. Freemasonry has done itself, and still continues to do so, a great disservice by continuing to downplay its spirituality by insisting that it is a type of club or society where one gets together with one's mates, so that the distinction between our lodges and other service organisations, no matter how good they may be, is seriously diminished.

Maybe this is why in part some men join us and do not stay.

We must ask ourselves, do we readily practice fraternity in our lodges? How many of us, if we were totally honest with ourselves, would entrust the five points of fellowship with another brother, with the utmost confidence? How many, so entrusted, would scrupulously abide by them.

From another perspective, fraternity is a deeper layer of brotherhood, difficult to define, but, if we all sense when it is lacking, even if we are unable to say in what way, in its more grosser aspects, the lack of fraternity becomes obvious. In its more subtle ways, only a vague feeling of unease is evident.

Of course, fraternity is easy to practise, when everyone plays by the rules, it becomes more difficult to abide by when brethren have lost their perspective and continue to be a disruptive element within the lodge.

This does not mean we should not be critical constructively. It is damaging criticism, which becomes wearying and destructive.

To bring about fraternity, the change must come from within each one of us. It is imperative that we, at all times, must endeavour to bring about fraternity both within and without of the lodge. It is only by example that we will encourage other men to join us, and having joined us never want to leave.

The concept of working together for a common goal is not seen much these days, but, when a group of people do pool their resources and work collectively, the results can be impressive.

The warning signs of a lack of fraternity, are painfully clear. As we lose the caring side of our society, destructive energies, which result from such lack of care, are likely to be infiltrated into our fraternity. Freemasonry has a duty to see that the flow is always outwards so that our lodges should be protected from harm.

Gross materiality continues to eat at our society at large and we should be vigilant to ensure that the base practices of the world do not cause injury to our ideals. Finally, it is important to be mindful of fraternity in its purer aspects. It is difficult to define, but its lack is often very painfully evident.

We must, from ourselves, maintain the practise of fraternity. Easy to say. Hard to do.

As a fraternity, we must move away from the delusion of separateness, and play an even greater part in our society at large.

To see in our brethren that essence, which is in all of us, even though difficult to recognise.

And at the end, be able to say to our God, these are the things I have done to assist in bringing about the brotherhood of man.