

A DECLARATION FOR MASONIC ACTION

by
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Let me open by saying that I realize that the A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Research Lodge #1949 is normally engaged in passive research. That is to say that its usual preoccupation lies in the collection, collation, and interpretation of past and present events with Freemasonry for the use and benefit of future generations.

However, our Fraternity now faces a serious national decline in membership of alarming proportions. It has been entrenched for at least 10 years. In 1974 national Blue Lodge membership stood at 4 million. At the end of 1984 membership had declined to about 3 million, a straight-line attrition of about simple 2.5 percent per year. This is the most optimistic analysis. More likely, this decline is tracing a parabolic curve, like a mortgage wherein the remaining balance reduces to a near vertical descent in the latter years of the mortgage term. On this basis, national Masonic membership could well be near only 500,000 within the next 35 years. Consider the consequences against the backdrop of positive growth in national population! This means that Freemasonry is in crisis. It also means that strong and appropriate corrective measures must be implemented as quickly as possible.

Our present Grand Master is most concerned with this problem. He is certain to be receptive to a well-conceived composite plan of action by this Research Lodge. At least 75 percent of your membership must comprise an impressive array of leadership titles and experience which range from Worshipful Master to Past Grand Master. Therefore, this Research Lodge represents a unique reservoir of ingenuity and Masonic capability within The Grand Jurisdiction of Virginia.

The greatest of all Spiritual Masons, the Nazerene, pointed out an eternal TRUTH which applies to all here and now present: "By their works, ye shall KNOW them." In view of the

gravity of this Masonic hour, I urge you to depart from passive to active research and development. What other Masonic body in Virginia is better equipped to perform this most important task? Our Grand Lodge has already taken certain steps in the right direction. This means there already exists a problem awareness and receptivity to a well-conceived composite PLAN OF ACTION.

The Supreme Architect needs your best present effort. Your Most Worshipful Grand Master severely needs your present help. It is a situation similar to the Soviets' first launch of Sputnik. It is comparable to President John Kennedy's call for a U.S. space effort to be the first to land a man on the moon. So, then was pressed into service a massive pool of ACTIVE research and development such as the world had never before seen.

With these thoughts in mind, let me urge that this august Research Lodge seriously ponder and develop a complete blueprint of procedure from the following Declaration for Masonic Action. Let what comes forth be an equitable and honorable blueprint to achieve the correct goal of renewed Masonic growth by equitable and honorable means.

Our membership decline has TWO basic causes. (1) The first is that negative attitudes and practices within the ranks of past Leadership have been, too long, allowed to infect the general membership. (2) The second cause is that this Leadership has failed to ascertain and to positively apply appropriate corrective changes in the outer workings of The Craft. You must accept as axiomatic that the inner condition which causes the outer manifestation can only be changed by a persistent and habitual effort to modify or change the outer FROM WITHOUT through presently-established centers of control. This will slowly induce the eventual cleansing of the inner causes so as to

stabilize the renovated exterior Masonic structure. Remember the LAW: "As within, so without"! The leverage we must employ is conscious EFFORT toward changing the present effortless drift of destructive negativism into positive, purposeful, and prolonged constructive outer ACTION.

Nine (9) Items for Action

No. 1. Freemasonry must cleanse, overhaul, and rebuild its various levels of Leadership by proven techniques of reprogramming, so long as these techniques remain within the parameters of the Masonic value system as to both The Spirit and The Letter. Our Grand Lodge has already established a Leadership training program that can probably be further refined. We also must be prepared to accept the probability that adjustments must be made in administrative policies and recorded Laws and By-Laws.

No. 2. Freemasonry must effectively deal with the fact that its future rests solely upon the quality of today's YOUTH and all of the hereafter tomorrow's. To that end, let me suggest that the Grand Lodge of Virginia officially and actively supports the growth of "The Order of DeMolay." This includes the lowering of DeMolay admission into the Blue Lodge to 18 conditionally. The condition should be that the DeMolay member agrees in writing not to petition any other Masonic Body for a period of 6 years. Let me also suggest that every Blue Lodge be required to establish and maintain the DeMolay required Masonic Committee to recruit and develop DeMolay chapters throughout the Grand Jurisdiction.

No. 3. Every newly-raised Master Mason, age 21 and older, should be restricted from petitioning any other Masonic Body for 3 years, during which time he will be expected to complete the Grand Lodge Masonic Education course. Also, let it be known to him that, during this 3 year period, he will be expected to be reasonably active in Degree Work; or, some Masonic Community Service of his choice. Admonish him, as well, that failure to do so will

mean that when he is eligible to petition other Masonic Bodies he will have to do so WITHOUT the written commendation of his Worshipful Master.

No. 4. We should also adopt a two-fold plan of Indirect Recruitment. Part A: Wives and other female members of each Masonic family should be encouraged to invite male relatives of their families and friends to request of a known Master Mason a petition for membership to a DeMolay Chapter or Blue Lodge. Part B: Each Master Mason should, likewise, be urged to request the female members of his family, and those of his friends, to petition Job's Daughters and/or The Order of The Eastern Star.

No. 5. We should encourage the establishment of Daylight Lodges; or, daylight stated meetings by existing Blue Lodges in those areas or Districts where there exist sufficient numbers of Brethren who cannot, because of their occupation, attend evening meetings.

No. 6. Within each Lodge a system of "buddy" committees should be established. The function of these committees should be to make personal contact with inactive members. The committee member would make personal contact with inactive Brethren to invite them (or him), with spouse, to his home for an informal Masonic family evening or afternoon. At least, the Committee Member could telephone such Brethren two or three times per year simply for a friendly chat. Such occasions should be especially directed to the ascertainment of that Brother's special personal interests and skills. Then the suggestion should be made that these attributes would be most helpful to Lodge activities. Ask the Brother to come and share them with his Blue Lodge program.

No. 7. Every Blue Lodge should be encouraged to produce at least one Masonic Family event per year, such as a pot luck dinner which would feature an after-dinner speaker or entertainment program. Outside talent could be used, of course. However, it would be especially interesting to utilize whatever family talent that might be available. There should also be

appointed Brethren as Hosts who would mix with the group and see that everyone is personally welcomed and introduced to those who are not well known!

The remaining two items deal with the most important principle of PROJECTION. That is to say that Freemasonry must first seek and discover the most essential needs and constructive wants of the locale or communities where its Blue Lodges operate. Freemasonry must then send forth its membership into the community to assist in the development of resources and means to operate the machinery of the chosen objective. The utilization of this vital principle is what enabled Freemasonry to function as "Builders" of the Government of the United States and the Society which is supposed to direct and to control that government. Such was the character of Freemasonry in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was this precise purpose for which the Ancient Brethren originated Freemasonry in the first place.

Throughout most of this 20th century, thus far, this purpose and function has been abandoned by Freemasonry. It is, in this century, how the WORD of the Master Mason, the "Builder," has been all but lost! Even worse, for too long, two Bodies of the Masonic Tree have been allowed to use and abuse the auspices of Blue Lodge Freemasonry for their own ends. This has resulted in projecting a negative image upon the mind of the general public. These conditions must be brought under control, and reversed, if efforts to regenerate the desirability and positive influence of Freemasonry in the culture and society of America are to succeed.

No. 8. Each Blue Lodge, or a group of Lodges within a Masonic District, should promote and execute at least one Masonic community event such as a Masonic Fair. It should feature competitive exhibitions of arts, crafts, entertainment, etc., awarding ribbons and/or prizes for the best.

No. 9. Each Lodge should develop a project of community service, designed to best utilize its reservoir of membership and

membership/family skills and talents. For example: (a) Our communities have a growing number of single-parent households. We must realize the severe handicap that these families suffer. We should seek them out. We should share with them our own family attention and help them to the extent of our cable-tow. By so doing as Blue Lodge Masons and Masonic Families, we serve God, Country, and greatly enrich our own lives with Spiritual fulfillment. Example (b): A most tragic development of our time is the alarming growth of teenage suicide. Each Lodge, or groups of Lodges within each Masonic District, should establish a Youth Problem Counseling Service. The function of that service would be to offer our Youth adult special help toward the realization of their constructive ambitions and dreams and desires for self-fulfillment. The service should solicit volunteer assistance by professional help such as educational counselors, psychologists, and social workers who are already within the locale or community.

If we as Masons, and Masonic Families, make a serious commitment to such service projects within our communities, our Masonic and Eastern Star membership problems will soon begin to abate and eventually disappear. Outsiders will want to become a part of our Orders. We shall then be sowing good seed upon fallow ground. We shall then be cultivating with Diligence and Patience. And we shall, with certainty, harvest the Good Fruit to the benefit of ourselves, our Fraternity, our families, our Country, and to the Glory of God, our Supreme Architect. "As ye sow, so shall ye reap," said the Shepherd of Bethlehem. This is another aspect of the Law of Duality. And, as we first do so in the "outer", from the living unconscious within each of us shall eventually come forth The Light which shines from within The Temple Not Made with Hands. This great Truth is also eloquently expressed by Portia, the lady attorney in Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice." She refers to the power of a single candle which shines forth from a sea of darkness.

Let me now finish with this contemplation:

Every human life must choose to ignore or to learn from the failures and accomplishments of the Past. The Energies of Life demand that we respond to the Present with positive richness of sharing and caring hearts; or, with negative emptiness, barren and stark. Of the Future, we must all await a Time with patience until, at last, we discover what we, today, upon Mother Earth have cast!

So it is with Freemasonry. The shadow of declining membership continues to lengthen. Is this the growth of tomorrow's fruitful womb? Or, is it the opening of Freemasonry's tomb?

The answer to ONE of these questions will characterize the future of Freemasonry. This is the late Hour when Masonic Leadership must choose which price is to be paid:

- (1) the administration of strong medication and, perhaps, some surgery; or,
- (2) the tragic loss and cost of a great fraternal funeral.

The Supreme Architect has decreed seasons wherein we must die for His Greater Causes. But, He has also provided sowing and growing seasons wherein we may choose to LIVE and labor and to create our very own lesser causes.

Brethren, which course shall we choose to take? High-Twelve, now past Meridian, forces upon us a choice to make. Must we not return to labor until the Sun has set upon the Station in the West when, then, we may adjourn to rest and to celebrate?