

A Mason's Charity

**By Brother Stephen Suratos
Junior Deacon, Naomi Lodge No. 87**

In closing a Lodge on any degree, we invoke the blessings of the Great Architect of the Universe with these words: ***“May we daily increase in Faith, Hope, and Charity; but more especially in that Charity which is the bond of peace and the perfection of every virtue.”***

It is also explained in the Entered Apprentice's lecture that we claim the vast dimensions of the earth to represent the universal nature of Freemasonry and its relationship to the unrestrained nature of a Mason's charity. We also learn that the greatest round in Jacob's theological ladder is **CHARITY** for it ***“extends beyond the grave throughout the boundless realms of eternity.”***

But, what is charity? The dictionary defines charity as:

1. Benevolent goodwill toward or love of humanity;
2. Generosity and helpfulness especially toward the needy or suffering, for example:
 - Aid given to those in need;
 - An institution engaged in relief of the poor;
 - Public provision for the relief of the needy;
3. A gift for public benevolent purposes; for example:
 - An institution (such as a hospital) founded by such a gift;
4. Lenient judgment of others;

A very common concept of charity is giving time, money, or property. However, a deeper and more significant meaning of charity is defined as being (*from 1 and 4 above*):

To have a benevolent goodwill toward or love of humanity, and to have a lenient judgment of others.

Thus, CHARITY doesn't only mean or focus on donating money or services but having a pure and charitable HEART. By this is meant, we should wish for, and be willing to encourage, the best in our Brethren and disregard our irregular passions. We should always be sincere in exercising the tenets of our profession – that of **BROTHERLY LOVE, RELIEF and TRUTH.**

The two doctrines of Brotherly Love and Relief can be construed as **outward expressions of Charity**, for “**we are taught to regard the whole human species as one common family....to aid, support, and protect each other,**” and, “**to relieve the distressed, to sympathize with their misfortunes, to compassionate their miseries, and restore peace to their troubled minds**” which is “**the grand aim we have in view.**”

The following is a beautiful story depicting Charity extending beyond the grave and also reinforces our charge to not side idly by while our fellow man is in need. Some of you may already know about this story, but it is worthwhile hearing again.

In a small town in mid-19th century America, a young man said to his wife, “Mary, you have a shawl you never use. May I have it?”

She was puzzled for a few moments, but got the shawl. He thanked her and left the house. She was suspicious, because several evenings during the past few months he had left after dinner without any explanation. He was never gone long, and when he returned he seemed to have an inner peace about him. He said nothing, and neither did she.

About a week later, Mary was shopping in the village when she saw her shawl again. She was shocked. It was on the shoulders of a beautiful young lady. Angrily Mary followed the girl to a shabby shack. Mary knocked on the door. The girl opened it and smiled when she saw the visitor. She held the door open and Mary stomped in.

As Mary looked around, she saw an elderly lady propped up on a cot. The lady smiled and said: “How nice of you to visit us.” Mary was stunned. She did not really know what to say. The girl asked if she could fix her a cup of tea. Mary nodded and the girl turned to put a kettle on the stove. While the water was heating, Mary said, “I do not know exactly what to say, so I will tell you the truth. I saw my shawl on your daughter, and I was furious. Last week, my husband asked me for it but didn’t tell me why. I still don’t understand how you have it.”

The mother said “We have no idea who left it. We have no idea who has been doing some nice things for us for the past several months. Perhaps now we can solve the mystery.”

It started soon after my husband died. We had no money, and I am unable to work. And Nancy couldn't find a job. We were desperate. We had no food and no fuel.

Then one morning when Nancy opened the door, she found several packages of food, clothing, and coal on the doorstep. You have no idea what that meant to us. A short time later, along with more packages, Nancy found a note telling her to see Mr. Tompkins, the lawyer, if she would like a job. She did and Mr. Tompkins hired her. He also sent a doctor to see me, who has been coming regularly ever since, and he won't take any money. And we still find packages, but have no idea where they come from.”

They drank their tea and chatted pleasantly for some time. The mysterious packages were mentioned from time to time.

Suddenly Mary asked: “Was your husband a Mason?” “Yes, he was,” said the lady. “He loved his Lodge. I don't think he ever missed a meeting.”

A short time later Mary left, promising to visit often. After dinner that evening, Mary worked on a quilt she was making while her husband read.

She looked up from her work and said, “I think I learned the great secret of Masonry today.” Her husband looked at her with alarm and asked, “And what is it?” Mary answered: “To do good and not say anything about it.”

Now, as I said, this is a beautiful STORY, but our job as Masons is to make it more than that.

It should inspire our lives and our actions. It should encourage us to do a little more than we would otherwise do and to be a little better than we otherwise would be.

Of course, we cannot meet every need or help everyone all of the time. We also know that our charity should not cause material injury to ourselves or our families, but there is so much more we can do that we don't.

Sometimes all that is needed by someone who is sad, or lonely, or in distress is a kind word or gesture, a smile or handshake; a pat on the back or a hug. We know these little things can mean so much, so what stops us from sending that card, or making that call that we were thinking about? What stops us from making that visit or doing that favor that we could so easily do? Are we too tired, too distracted, or too engaged in our own enjoyments?

We are human and none of us is perfect, but our Masonic philosophy, the teachings of our ritual, and our Masonic obligations are there to help us when we find ourselves being morally lazy or selfish. That is why we say:
“FORGET NOT THE DUTIES.”