

What is the Purpose of the Masonic Fraternity Now and In the Future?

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The United States of America is, once again, facing a perilous time in our history. Tensions are increasing throughout our society, seemingly for all topics and issues - religion, race, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and gender. It seems like people with different opinions are no longer able to engage in civil and constructive discussions. We see aggressive confrontations occurring on what seems like an everyday basis. These incidents are happening both online and in-person. What happened to Americans being able to have different political views and still able to be friends? What can be done to remedy the climate in our country? I humbly submit that what is so desperately needed in our society is the proliferation of Masonic ideals.

The modern version of our Fraternity was borne in Europe in the Age of Enlightenment. During this time period, society began to embrace the role of science and reason over the influence of faith and superstition (Hodapp, 36-37). Prior to that time, the idea of people of different religious faiths and socioeconomic backgrounds meeting with each other as equals was virtually unheard of and very rare. Our Fraternity provided a foundation on which the seeds of Enlightenment Philosophy could grow and flourish. Men were able to meet on the level and share ideas from diverse perspectives. Philosophical ideas were openly discussed in Lodges. After Lodge meetings, the Brethren gathered for meals where they reinforced the bonds formed during meetings and degrees. This was all extremely revolutionary at the time.

Our country's Founding Fathers applied the concepts of the Fraternity when they crafted documents like the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. The Declaration of Independence says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The United States Constitution begins, "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and

establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” The governing institutions of the country are based on reason and logic, looking at the inner qualities of the people instead of their outer qualities. Of course, our history is not perfect. As with most institutions, our country has had high points and low points in its life cycle. There are multiple times when our country strayed from the ideas of brotherly love, relief, and truth. We have had dark times like the Civil War, slavery, forced internments, etc. Still, we have had other great moments like ending the evil of the Holocaust, the societal changes stemming from the Civil Rights Movement, landing on the Moon, and the end of the Cold War.

We are facing troubling times in 2018, but there is hope. Freemasonry is a shining beacon, like the shimmering rays from a lighthouse piercing the darkness, and reaching out to a troubled ship caught in a storm savaged sea. Our concepts such as tolerance, rational thinking, charity, and brotherhood are desperately needed today and in the future. Our society has made progress over time, but we don't live in a perfect world. For example, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, there were 7,175 hate crimes reported in 2017. Sadly, 2017 was the third consecutive year of increased hate crime activity, and it was a 17% rise when compared to the numbers from 2016 (Eligon). A hate crime, as defined by the FBI is a ““criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.” I believe that Freemasonry is the solution to these kinds of issues.

The elected leaders in our country could benefit from the lessons of Freemasonry. How often have you heard people refer to politicians as being corrupt and only interested in money and power? Where are the honest, ethical, and fair leaders? Rather than practicing partisan tribalism, it would be refreshing to see people that were willing to sit down with opponents from across the aisle to compromise on bills and legislation in the best interest of the majority of Americans. According to research published by the Pew Research Center on April 26, 2018, “Americans express little confidence in elected officials to act in the best interests of the public.

Just a quarter say they have a great deal (3%) or fair amount (22%) of confidence in elected officials." What is the solution to help people to trust their elected officials more? Perhaps those statistics improve if more Masons were serving in public office.

The Masonic Service Association of North America keeps statistics for the number of Masons in the United States going back to 1924. According to that data, the membership rolls of the Grand Lodges in the United States reached a peak in 1959 and fell to the lowest point in 2015 (the last year of data posted on their website). As of 2015, there were 1,157,987 Masons in the United States. According to the United States Census Bureau, our country has a population of over 329,000,000 people. Roughly 0.35% of the U.S. population are Masons. Imagine how much stronger and respectable our society would be if that number was increased!

Lastly, the fraternal environment of Freemasonry can be a tool to aid our military veterans and help them adapt to life at home. While bravely serving our country, service members form close knit bonds in harsh and difficult conditions. Their shared experiences create connections that many people at home can never understand. Then, when they return home, the veterans find themselves lacking that fraternal environment and structure. Freemasonry, as the world's oldest and largest fraternity, can easily fill that void for the veterans and provide them with quality male friendship, community service opportunities, and mind expanding educational programs. Just as Freemasonry was a home to many World War I and World War II veterans, it can also serve the veterans of Afghanistan, Iraq, and the other War on Terror campaign locations.

Regardless of what some people say, our Fraternity is not an ancient relic whose time has past. It is not an irrelevant institution that needs to be morphed into a different form for today's world. Yes, our numbers have declined over the years, but I believe that Freemasonry is at a tipping point. It can be the answer for many issues currently facing our society. The time has come for our Craft to show the world that we have the tools, knowledge, and wisdom to lead our country. This is the purpose of Freemasonry now and into the future.

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