

On Dwindling Attendance

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If there is anything pathetic to see inside a Lodge, it is when two or three or a handful of dedicated members gathered together seemingly waiting in vain for other members to come to warrant a quorum and start their labors. This situation seems to be a perennial and persistent problem in many Lodges. Why must this happen? If there is an effect there must be a cause, or, if there is smoke there must be fire, so to speak. In short, there must be several reasons why this sad and lamentable situation of poor and dwindling attendance happens now and then. Let us try to analyze the situation.

Causes Of Poor Attendance

1. It is possible that a member must have been induced to join Masonry for some selfish or ulterior motives and as such, right at the beginning there is no genuine and sincere interest on his part in the varied activities of the Lodge, hence, his continuous absence from Lodge meetings.

2. The ceremonies and rituals during initiation must have been done unimpressively that a candidate's feelings and thinking may not have been touched or impressed at all, and so, there is no appreciation of the rites and rituals.

3. Some members do not find anything different or any improvement in what they used to do or witness every meeting time.

4. Some members due to their inability to participate in ceremonies or rituals for fear of being assigned to take part in Lodge activities, avoid coming to escape embarrassment or humiliation if and when corrected.

5. Other brethren avoid lavish ex-

penses on food and drinks due to limited financial resources at their command. To avoid embarrassment they prefer to be absent.

6. Businessmen especially, and other professionals cannot leave their jobs, customers, clients, or patients for fear of losing them which simply means that love of money is foremost in their minds and Masonry just secondary.

7. Others might have some kind of a misunderstanding with some brethren sometime in the past and would want to avoid such fellows inside the Lodge.

8. There are those who believe that since there is no suspension anyway for non-attendance provided all fees are paid, they can afford not to come.

9. Others do not feel any close fraternal relation or brotherhood with other members or even the officers themselves. They are only remembered when there is something to be collected.

10. Sometimes there are domestic problems at home where a member of a family might be sick or might have met an accident; or maybe some wedding, birthday celebration, death anniversary, wedding anniversary or the like, and the brother might be performing an important role, hence, could not physically be present in the Lodge meeting.

11. Often times the distance of the Lodge from the residence of a brother plus the extreme inconvenience of getting a ride sometimes discourages a member to proceed to the Lodge to attend the meeting, not to mention the risk of losing his own life while traveling at night.

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I am quite sure, brethren, that there are many more causes, alibis or justifications for being absent that can be theorized but for the meantime, these are what I consider to be the principal or common ones. With all these seemingly difficult and unending causes of poor and dwindling attendance before us, how should we attempt to minimize these if not entirely eliminate them? Here are some possible remedies for all concerned:

Proposed Solutions

1. Master Masons must be sincere, honest and true to their fraternity by observing the rules and regulations; by not sponsoring anyone to our privileges unless they have a strong reason to believe that the applicant or the candidate will contribute honor to their ancient and honorable fraternity.

2. Every Lodge must have a specially trained team and enough substitutes where each member of that team must be a master of his part so that during ceremonies, degree or floor

work, these are done in the most impressive way. When the ritual or degree work are impressively performed, some candidates cannot hold back their tears, a token of their seriousness of purpose and sincerity of intentions. Impressive ceremonies leave a lasting imprint on the minds of the candidates and once a candidate is impressed from the beginning, he will be inspired to seek for further truth and light in Masonry, and hence, will always look forward for opportunities to attend a tiled Lodge meeting.

3. The Master must schedule the activities of the Lodge in such a way that members attending meetings will learn something new and different every stated meeting. Every member's capacity to perform some role in the different activities of the Lodge should be challenged. The Master of a Lodge must be in a position to know each individual's capacity or ability and these members must always be given opportunities to prove their abilities.

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This practice might give encouragement to members to attend Lodge meetings regularly.

4. There should be group teaching and constant discussions about the ceremonies and reading of the monitor so that everybody will be familiar with all portions of the degree work including the lectures for the three degrees. A member who is proficient in reading the monitor should assist the less capable brethren. When one is well acquainted with any ritual, ceremony or degree work, then, there should be no reason at all why he should be afraid to be assigned any part or be intentionally absent from Lodge meetings.

5. We must avoid lavish and unnecessary spending for food and drinks. Incidentally and unfortunately, not all members of the craft have the same paying capacity or ability. While others are blessed with good earnings from some business or the practice of some professions, others do not have the same blessings or abilities. When one's pocketbook is affected very much at every stated meeting, that particular member concerned will always have a negative instead of a positive attitude towards stated meetings.

6. It should be an ideal practice to mark immediately in our calendars in the home or in the office our stated meetings for the whole year to remind us in advance about our engagements in our lodges. Let us also be reminded that we have only one stated meeting every month and so we should schedule other activities in such a way that they will not be in conflict with Lodge activities.

7. Hatred towards a brother should not be a sufficient ground for not attending Lodge meetings. In the

first place, hatred should not find room in our hearts or minds, because if we entertain this, we become hypocrites of the highest degree. Misunderstanding with any brother should not be allowed to last long. This problem should immediately be settled by the Worshipful Master of the Lodge or some elders to the satisfaction of both parties.

8. It is a wrong attitude that because there is no suspension for non-attendance in Lodge meetings that one should not attend Lodge meetings anymore. This attitude should be changed. lest, there will be no progress in our membership in Freemasonry. Payment of dues is not enough but the physical presence of every member in all Lodge meetings is equally important. While the ordinary holo will remain sharp only by constant sharpening on a grindstone, so will a member of the craft remain proficient only by a constant and continuous participation in all Lodge activities. The moment a member ceases to attend Lodge meetings, he is likely to forget the signs, the passwords and other things he is expected to know.

9. The Worshipful Master as well as the other members present should exhibit the usual eagerness in welcoming the other members by offering their warm and friendly greetings and handshaks. When a brother feels that his brethren had been missing him in Lodge meetings, that shows that his brethren not only care for him but that they are miserably missing him in the Lodge and their various activities. Naturally, the brother missed in Lodge meetings will endeavor to be always present as he is equally important and dear to every brother.

10. Every brother must always be on the alert regarding any misfortune

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that may come to another brother or any member of his family. If some accident befell a brother or a member of his family, gets sick seriously or dies, the brethren should be the first group of people to come and share with the sorrow and to offer financial help automatically, because this is a part of our sworn obligation before the Altar. When every Master Mason does his sworn obligation to all concerned, more especially to a brother, we encourage everybody to be active in the Lodge and be conscious of their duties.

11. A well-to-do or much-better-off brother having a car, a pick-up or a jeep, should go out of his way to find out if some brethren are ready to go to Lodge meeting and can be accommodated in his vehicle. This, in-

deed, is an ideal which we might call real Masonry in action and a fine gesture of brotherly affection and love existing only among individuals with such a close fraternal relations. No doubt this system will improve and promote attendance in Lodge meetings.

Brethren, how about giving a try of these solutions to poor attendance enumerated above? Is it not inspiring to hear and to note that in some Lodges, attendance is "overflowing" so to speak, and that if some brethren happen to be a little late in coming, seats and spaces become a problem? If it can be done in other Lodges, why can it not be done right in our own Lodges, too?

Brethren, here is a real challenge for you and me. As for me, I accept the challenge. Do you? △

PHILOSOPHY IN . . . From page 6
complete gentleman. . . And the complete gentleman is the man passionately devoted to friendliness. . . When you see two friends, you see two bodies with a single soul.

The 13th century philosopher and theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas maintained with "pagan" Aristotle (4th c. B.C.) that "every man has within him the form, or the urge, to turn himself into an angel, just as every acorn has within it the form, or the urge, to turn itself into an oak tree."

Saint Thomas played a central role in the assimilation of Aristotelianism in Christianity. There was a time when Church officials warned against the teaching of the Aristotelian treatises — probably because of the Mohammedan route by which it had come. Eventually, they decided that the thing to do was not to outlaw Aristotle or to burn his books but to study him with all due care. Thus, Christianity has been enriched with his philosophy since the thirteenth or fourteenth century. △

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To both Religion and Masonry, therefore, the altar is indispensable, it being the pivotal point and source of divine light for all the activities in both. It symbolizes the throne of the Supreme Being, whereupon He presides over and oversees all the labors taking place around Him. Finally,

it will undoubtedly be for the best interest of the Order, if only the brethren, especially those whose interest in Masonry are waning, will come to recall what they pledged before the altar of obligation, that they may once more fully realize the important duties they owe to God, country, the Lodge, the brethren and mankind. △