

## Get A Life

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### Get a Life

"Get a life!" It's a phrase you hear a lot these days. Usually it's directed at someone who is spending time worrying about the trivial or too much concerned with the insignificant. Get A Life! It's probably good advice, but it isn't easy. Getting a life- a life which gives the individual room for personal growth and development, which is filled with rich relationships, which benefits others, which helps to make this world better, and which focuses a man's attention on those outside himself as an expression of his inner growth - is the work of Masonry. Getting a life -- a life which extends beyond this world into eternity, which fulfills a divine promise, which is based on the specific theological tenets of faith - is the concern of religion. Not that those are mutually exclusive. Religion, for most people, has a this-world claim, too. But, for a good many people, organizations, in addition to their religious institution, play a vital part in their experience.

### Existence And Expectations

Existence itself isn't too hard for us to accomplish. A minimal amount of food, air, water, shelter, and instinct will do it; that works for everything from bacteria to wolves. But if a man is to have a life, expectations have to be added to existence. We have to have expectations of ourselves and others, and we have to meet the expectations others have of us, as well as those we have of ourselves. There are many expectations which turn an existence into a life. A short list might include:

- We expect ourselves to be honest, and we expect others to be honest with us;
- We expect ourselves to be able to love and to be loved by others;
- We expect to be trustworthy, and we expect to be trusted;
- We expect to follow our own faith and others to follow theirs;
- We expect to have our right to freedom of thought respected, and to respect that same right in others;
- We expect to improve our world for the betterment of all and hope that others will do the same;
- We expect to have relationships with trusting, dependable, compassionate friends who share our values; and,
- We expect to be such a friend.

These expectations form the foundation of civic life and moral conduct. Learning these life-enhancing expectations and how to meet them is the essence of creative living. And, for the Mason, both his fraternal organization and his religious congregation play critical roles in building this foundation for a fulfilled life.

### Like Home And School

In some ways, it's like home and school for a child. Learning overlaps. Long before entering school, the child will have learned to speak. Often he or she will have learned to read. Certainly, the child will have learned survival skills - looking both ways before crossing a street, not playing with strange dogs, knowing what telephone numbers to call for help. And the child will have learned values, too. From the way the child sees adults interact, from the way they are treated, from the things the parents consider important, the child will have formed expectations about the way the world works and how they and others should think and act. "Getting a life" begins there. School is different. It's a continuation of learning, of course, but with a different thrust and purpose, and with some additional expectations. Children learned language at home, but now their vocabulary expands. They learn the formal rules of the language and how its grammar works. Put in an environment with others, children learn social skills and independence. Their range of ideas enlarges. Ideally, the values learned at home are strengthened. As children learn history, they take pride in their heritage and the sacrifices others have made for them. They learn the tools of research and the value of critical thinking. The enrichment of the child's life happens here. And when the system works well, the home is there, too, reinforcing the things learned in school, providing a background against which that learning takes place. The home and school are not in competition. One is not a substitute for the other. Much the same is true of Masonry and religion. Each has its purpose, each does a different "thing," but both teach complementary expectations and both teach how to meet these expectations.

### What expectations do Masons have of their Fraternity?

Freemasons have many expectations of their individual faiths, but these are entirely personal matters outside the scope of a fraternity. What a man expects of the Masonic fraternity is clear.

- An opportunity to form friendships with men of different backgrounds - education, occupation, religion.
- A way of learning about himself, of taking a personal inventory of his strengths and weaknesses among friends
- Opportunities to make a difference in the community
- Friends to whom he can "let off steam" or discuss his problems
- An opportunity to develop self-confidence and learn leadership skills in dealing with people
- A journey of self-development which includes all aspects of his nature
- An affirmation of values derived from the human experiences of many cultures over many centuries
- A sense of being connected with other men who share his values
- Help and support in times of personal crisis
- Basically, help in "getting a life" of excellence and fulfillment in this world.

Of course, the Masonic fraternity is not the only source of a man's expectations in life. He certainly has expectations from his family, religion, and profession. When a man has several sources which help and challenge him to meet his expectations, everyone benefits. No one ever has too many friends. There's an obvious advantage in having the potential for forming friendships provided both by Masonry and by one's familiar religious setting. It is useful for a man's development to have both a sense of ethics drawn from all human experience and a sense of morality drawn from his faith - and that is especially true as we move into the global marketplace of the 21st Century.

It is good to belong to an organization which constantly reminds you of the importance of faith. The leadership skills learned in Masonry can let a man be of special service to his community of faith - that's why so many men have been leaders in both. Those same skills can help a man have a more successful professional life, too.

That's why Masons get so frustrated when some well-meaning critics or others try to insist that Masonry is some sort of religion. Masons know the obvious differences, and it's hard to see how someone can overlook them.

No Masonic organization holds itself forth as a religion. No Masonic official claims to lead a religion. No Mason should think he is joining a religion when he joins a Lodge. Even the IRS recognizes the distinction between a religion and a fraternity. The title of this booklet, in fact, came from the frustrations of one young Mason. Asked how we could best communicate the differences, he said, "A fraternity is a fraternity, a religion is a religion, and if you can't see the difference, get a life!" He has a point. Freemasonry is a fraternity - not a church, not a synagogue, not a temple or mosque, nor some sort of substitute for them, and certainly not a religion. The Master of a Lodge is the President of a Club - not a Priest, not a Minister, not a Rabbi. Masonry and religion have shared the same world for a long time. After all, our stone-mason forebears used to build the churches and cathedrals. But it's like the home and the school - they're not the same thing, but they support the same things. It is worth taking the time to clarify some of the more common misunderstandings about Freemasonry.

Is it true Freemasons aren't allowed to mention the name of God inside a Lodge? No, it's not true. In Masonic ceremonies, God is usually referred to as the Great Architect of the Universe. This term is taken from the great religious writer and reformer John Calvin whose teachings are the foundation of the Presbyterian Church. Masons use this language because Brothers of different faiths may be present, and we seek the most inclusive language in our prayers. But the Supreme Architect of the Universe is also referred to in the ritual as "God," "The Supreme Being," and by other, similar terms. Any Brother may refer to God by whatever term his faith holds proper.

Is it true Masonry teaches that all faiths are equal? No. It would be out of place for a fraternity to do so. Freemasonry does teach respect and toleration - that all human beings have an equal right to follow their own faith and that no one has the power to deny them that right. So does the Canadian Charter of Rights and the United States Constitution, but that does not make the Canadian Charter or the American Constitution religious documents.

Is it true Freemasonry subscribes to a works-righteousness doctrine of salvation? No. The idea that one can merit salvation through good works alone is a personal, not a Masonic issue. Masonry doesn't teach any path to salvation. That's the province of a religion, not a fraternity. Masonry teaches it is important to do good in this world and to help others, but that is a matter of one's duty as a human being - a matter of those expectations of ourselves which help us "get a life" - not a pathway to heaven.

Is it true Masons have their own Bible? No. A Masonic Bible, frequently given as a gift among Masons, is what anyone thinks of as a Bible (usually the King James Version) with a presentation page and, sometimes, a special concordance showing the scripture passages quoted in Masonic ceremonies. Some also contain reference sections on Masonic terminology, history, and the like. A Masonic Bible is as generic as the Gideon's Bible found in nearly every hotel room in the nation.

If a man has his Church, why does he need a Lodge? Some people feel that if they have a church, they have no need for any other organization - not the Boy Scouts, nor civic clubs, nor public libraries, nor credit unions, nor anything else. But most of us feel the need for other associations and groups in addition to our religious congregation. We feel that some other needs are met by camping clubs, and golf foursomes, and softball teams, and civic clubs, and investment clubs, and Masonry. As we saw earlier, Freemasonry and Religion meet different needs in different ways. Masonry gives a man a special chance to spend some worthwhile time in positive surroundings with other men. Many men, just as many women, derive great satisfaction from spending time with friends of their own gender. For many, it's a basic emotional need for a balanced, healthy life. Masonry gives a man additional opportunities to be useful. What community couldn't use a little extra care and compassion? The activities of the Lodge, from the beginning, have always included charity. Masons are always ready to find a way to help. There is enough need in the world to occupy the best efforts of both a man's religious association and his fraternity.

### **Thoughts of religious leaders about Freemasonry**

Reverend Dr. Norman Vincent Peale *"Freemasonry is, for its members, a supplement to good living, which has enhanced the lives of millions who have entered its doors. Though it is not a religion, as such, it supplements faith in God the Creator. It is supportive of morality and virtue.... I think that a good Mason is made even more faithful to the tenets of his faith by his membership in the Lodge."*

Bishop Carl J. Sanders United Methodist Church *"In a day of mistrust, suspicion, discrimination, separation and even hatred, Freemasonry removes the distance between men. Friendship, morality, and brotherly love are the hallmarks of our relationships. There is a basic integrity in the Fraternity so often lacking in many of life's relationships.... Let me quickly and emphatically say that Freemasonry is not and has never been a religion; however, Freemasonry has always been a friend and ally of religion. In 50 years as a minister and as a Mason, I have found no conflict between my Masonic beliefs and my Christian faith."*

Rabbi Seymour Atlas *"I was brought up in a religious home, a son of a Rabbi with seven generations of Rabbis preceding me; and yet with this religious background, I felt I could still derive much from and give much to this Fraternity for the good and welfare of mankind.... My experience has shown me that Masons are for the most part religious men. I am proud to be a Mason and proud to be a part of an organization that is devoted to helping widows and orphans primarily, and also those who are in need without question or embarrassment.... I am proud to be a Mason who believes in the dignity of God's children and opposes hatred and bigotry, and stands for truth, justice, kindness, integrity and righteousness for all."*

Dr. James P. Wesberry Fmr. Executive Director and Editor of The Southern Baptist Publication Sunday *"I have had the privilege of being a member of many organizations, but none outside of my church has meant more to me than Masonry.... All Masons obligate themselves to help, aid and assist the poor, the distressed, the widows and orphans. Nor is charity restricted to fellow Masons only, but extended to all. It shares the common bonds of race as children of one great Creator, and seeks to unite men of every race, color, sect and opinion. Masonry practices the Golden Rule and seeks always to eliminate divisive forces which build walls between people."*

The Reverend George W. Truett Long-time Pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, and President of the Southern Baptist Convention *"From my earliest recollection, sitting about my father's knee, who was a Mason, and hearing him and fellow Masons talk, I imbibed the impression in early childhood that the Masonic fraternity is one of the most helpfully mediating and conserving organizations among men, and I have never wavered from that childhood impression but it has stood steadfastly with me through the busy and vast hurrying years....and when one calls to mind the vast array of great men linked with this institution, his appreciation must be greatly magnified."*

The Reverend John A. O'Brien, Ph.D. *"As a Roman Catholic, a research professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, and a priest for more than half a century, I want to pay a long overdue tribute to the Freemasons for the distinguished contribution they have made to the civic, commercial, scientific, cultural and spiritual life of our nation. They have given us some of our greatest presidents, generals, legislators, statesmen, citizens and patriots. If that rich and many-faceted contribution were withdrawn, our nation would be impoverished indeed."*

### **How does Masonry benefit the Mason, helping him develop and meet the expectations of himself which are central in "getting a life"?**

One of the greatest threats both to society and to religion is the increasing tendency toward materialism in our world. Both Masonry and religion teach that man is a moral and spiritual being. Masonry teaches that man's success in life is measured by his growth and self-development as a thinking, compassionate, and ethical individual. It encourages him to expect these qualities of himself and to strive to develop and refine them. It reminds him of his duty to make that voyage of development. 0Dr. Peale was not alone among ministers in observing that Masons are usually among the most active workers in the church. Masonry reinforces the commitment of the man not only to his religious beliefs but also to being an active worker in his community of faith. It isn't easy to live by the tenets of one's religion and by the ideals of one's Masonic fraternity. Meeting high expectations of ourselves becomes harder and harder. Modern life, as depicted in the media, often treats the good man as a figure of scorn and jest. Freemasonry contradicts that perception by offering a support group for moral values and ethical behavior, a fellowship which does not sneer at a man's attempts to do what is right, but which encourages him in that effort. Family and school, thought and study, music and words, work and planning, even salt and pepper - many things work together to bring about good results without being the same thing or being in competition with each other. Masonry and religion are also like that, complementary and often mutually supportive. Together, Masonic Lodges and religious groups have helped many people to "get a life" or to put one back together after it has been devastated by natural or man-made disasters, by economic loss, by mental illness, by drug or alcohol dependency, or by the many other things which can ruin hopes and crush the spirit.

Get a life? Yes! Get the richest, fullest, most productive, creative, ethical, value-based life you can.  
We're the Masons, helping build -- with faith -- the future.