

Service & Commitment

By: W. Douglas M. Setzer, 5/2/2023

My dear Brothers, Sisters, family, and friends:

It is an honor and privilege to speak to you today about the importance of service and commitment within our beloved fraternity. As Masons, we are called upon to exemplify the virtues of brotherhood, charity, and truth in all aspects of our lives. Our commitment to service is a reflection of these values and is essential to our mission of making a positive impact on the world around us.

Throughout the history of our craft, there have been many Masons who have demonstrated a deep commitment to service. These individuals have dedicated their time, talents, and resources to making the world a better place, and their legacy serves as an inspiration to us all. Let us consider the teachings of some of the most famous Freemasons, including Albert Pike, Albert G. Mackey, George Washington, Paul Harris, and Winston Churchill; then, explore how their commitment to service can inform our own efforts to make a positive impact.

Albert Pike is widely considered one of the most influential figures in the history of Freemasonry. He was a lawyer, writer, and soldier who served as a Confederate General during the American Civil War. After the war, he devoted himself to Masonry and became one of the most prolific writers on the subject. In his book "Morals and Dogma," he emphasizes the importance of selfless service as a fundamental tenet of the Masonic philosophy. Pike believed that the true Mason is one who has learned to serve others, without thought of reward or recognition. He wrote,

"The greatest reward is the satisfaction of knowing that he has made a positive difference in the lives of others."

In his book "The Book of the Words," Pike wrote:

"Freemasonry teaches us to be industrious, to work with zeal and with a willing heart, to serve the community in which we live, to aid and assist the distressed, to sympathize with the unfortunate, to practice virtue and promote morality, and to endeavor to make our lives useful to mankind."

Pike's words remind us that service is not just a duty, but a privilege, and that we must approach it with humility and a genuine desire to help others. Pike's contributions to Masonry continue to be felt to this day. His emphasis on the importance of service and commitment has inspired generations of Masons to use their knowledge and skills for the betterment of society, and his writings continue to be studied and revered by Masons around the world.

Another influential figure in the history of Freemasonry is Albert Mackey. Mackey was a physician and author who dedicated much of his life to the study and promotion of Masonry. He is widely regarded as one of the most important Masonic scholars of the 19th century.

Mackey's most significant contribution to Masonry was his work as an author and editor. He wrote dozens of books and articles on the subject, including the influential "Encyclopedia of Freemasonry," which is still widely used as a reference guide by Masons around the world. Mackey's writings were characterized by their thoroughness and attention to detail, and they helped to establish Masonry as a respected and legitimate field of study. In his book "The History of Freemasonry," he describes the Masonic commitment to service in similar terms as Pike. He writes,

"The true Mason is one who is dedicated to the welfare of his fellow man, and who is willing to make sacrifices in order to help others."

Like Pike, Mackey believed strongly in the importance of service and commitment in Masonry. In his writings, he emphasized the role of Masons as agents of positive change in the world. He also wrote:

"The great aim and object of the Masonic institution is the promotion of the happiness of the human race. It has for its mission the development of the great principles of brotherly love, relief, and truth, which underlie all social and religious systems."

Mackey's words remind us that our commitment to service must go beyond mere words, and that we must be willing to take action and make sacrifices in order to make a positive impact on the world around us.

The commitment to service is not just an abstract concept, but one that has been demonstrated by many famous Freemasons throughout history. George Washington is perhaps the most famous of all Masonic presidents. He was initiated into Freemasonry in 1752, and he remained a devoted member of the Craft for the rest of his life.

Washington believed that service to others was the highest calling and he devoted much of his life to serving his fellow man. He served as the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army during the American Revolution, and later became the first President of the United States. But despite his many accomplishments, Washington always remained committed to the idea of service, and he believed that it was his duty to help others in any way he could.

One of the most notable examples of Washington's commitment to Masonry was his involvement in the laying of the cornerstone of the United States Capitol building in 1793. As a Master Mason, Washington played a central role in the ceremony, which was attended by thousands of people and included Masonic rituals and symbols. The event was seen as a powerful symbol of the influence and importance of Masonry in the early years of the United States.

Another example of a Mason who dedicated his life to service is Brother Paul Harris. Brother Paul Harris was the founder of the world-renowned service organization known as the Rotary Club. Born in Wisconsin in 1868, Harris grew up in Vermont and attended Princeton University before beginning his career as a lawyer. It was during his early years in Chicago, however, that Harris became involved with the Masonic Fraternity and discovered his passion for service.

Harris was initiated into the Masonic Lodge in 1900 and quickly became involved in the organization's charitable activities. He was a strong believer in the power of community service, and he worked tirelessly to promote this value within the Masonic Fraternity. It was this passion for service that eventually led to the foundation of the Rotary Club in 1905.

In recognition of his contributions to the Rotary Club and to the world of service, Brother Harris was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964, the highest civilian honor in the United States. Today, he is remembered as a pioneer in the field of community service and a shining example of the power of Masonic principles to effect positive change in the world.

Another example of a famous Freemason who demonstrated the importance of service and commitment within the fraternity is Brother Winston Churchill.

Churchill was a British statesman, writer, and orator who served as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945 and again from 1951 to 1955. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest wartime leaders of the 20th century, and his speeches and writings continue to inspire people around the world.

Brother Churchill was initiated into the Studholme Lodge No. 1591 in London in 1901, and he remained an active member of the fraternity throughout his life. He was a strong believer in the power of service and commitment, and he often spoke about the importance of these values in his public addresses.

One example of Churchill's commitment to service was his involvement with the Royal Masonic Hospital in London. The hospital was founded in 1933 to provide medical care for members of the Masonic Fraternity and their families, and Churchill was a vocal supporter of its mission. He often visited the hospital and gave speeches in support of its work, and he served as the hospital's Vice President from 1937 until his death in 1965.

In addition to these well-known examples, there are countless other Masons who have made significant contributions to their communities through service. Whether it is through volunteering in their local communities, supporting charitable organizations, or simply helping their fellow man in whatever way they can, these individuals have shown us the power of service and the impact it can have on the world.

So, what does service mean for us as Masons? How can we best serve our communities and our fellow man? Let me offer a few ideas:

Masons can best serve their communities and fellow man by living out the core values of the Masonic Fraternity: Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. These values represent the foundation of Masonic philosophy, and they provide a roadmap for Masons to follow in their daily lives.

Firstly, Brotherly Love is a value that emphasizes the importance of caring for one another and treating others with kindness and compassion. Masons can best serve their communities by embodying this value and by seeking out ways to help those in need. This might include volunteering at local charities or non-profit organizations, participating in community service projects, or simply reaching out to those who are less fortunate and offering a helping hand.

Secondly, Relief is a value that focuses on alleviating the suffering of others. Masons can best serve their communities by actively seeking out opportunities to provide relief to those who are in need. This might involve donating to charitable organizations, participating in disaster relief efforts, or simply offering support and assistance to those who are going through difficult times.

Finally, Truth is a value that emphasizes the importance of honesty and integrity. Masons can best serve their communities by embodying this value and by being models of ethical behavior in their personal and professional lives. This might involve standing up for what is right, speaking out against injustice, and being a positive role model for others to follow.

In conclusion, the Masonic Fraternity places a strong emphasis on the values of service and commitment. Masons are taught to live out these values in their daily lives, both within the Masonic community and in the wider world. By practicing Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth, Masons can make a positive difference in their communities and in the lives of those around them. Ultimately, the service and commitment of Freemasonry is not only about making a positive impact on the world, but also about building strong bonds of brotherhood and fellowship among Masons. By working together to serve their communities and uphold the principles of the Masonic Fraternity, Masons can build lifelong friendships and make a lasting difference in the world around them.