

A Study in Building Relationships Based on Freemasonry
Right Worshipful John Shroeder

A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.
Proverbs 17:17

The term “relationship” is probably more familiar to us in the context of the association between members of opposite sexes or in businesses and career networking than in the context of Freemasonry. As a result, perhaps few think of building relationships based on Freemasonry because we are a male-only fraternity and are abjured not to use our Masonic fraternal relationships to build a customer base for our businesses. In fact, there is a Masonic lecture, sometimes referred to as the Oklahoma, or Canadian Mountie, Walking Lecture, which particularly stresses that any man who seeks to become a Mason in order to further his business interests is unfit for membership.

Although, there are degrees in Freemasonry, outside the Craft Lodge, in which the ritual requires the candidate to agree to give business preference to those who have also taken the same degree, as a rule we deal with Masons generally because there is a mutual trust. But as Masons we are also taught to deal fairly with all, and we also know that conducting ourselves in accordance with Masonic principles outside the Lodge by following the Golden Rule will cause us to be better Church members, husbands, fathers, and citizens of our communities. It will also improve our relationships with God and with all others with whom we come in contact.

Our Masonic friendships are an ancient and basic form of relationships, and in our earliest Masonic documents we are told by the Reverend Brother James Anderson in his *Ahiman Rezon*, or Constitutions of Masonry, that “Masonry becomes the center of union among the Brethren, and the happy means of conciliating and cementing into one body those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance; thereby strengthening the divine obligations of religion and love.”

Friendship is the soul and the cement of the Lodge. It is the main reason that we can say, without fear of contradiction, that it is our purpose to take good men and make them better. This is because, as Reverend Anderson has noted, friendship is the cement that holds Brothers together in a fraternal bond which mutually influences improvements in values, thoughts, and behavior.

We do not seek to emulate the conduct of our enemies, but, rather, of our admired friends. Without friendships in the Lodge, we would not be inclined to pattern ourselves after our Brethren as we work together toward becoming more perfect ashlar.

Bonds of permanent friendship are formed through close Lodge relationships. Note, for example, the close bonds formed between ritual coaches and students, between mentors and mentees, and among the line officers who work together to improve their Lodge. Many times these bonds extend also to the families of the officers,

who work and socialize together because of their mutual commitment to common goals. These lasting friendships are very rewarding and constitute much of the wages of a Master Mason.

Our ritual is replete with references to friendship and reminders of its core importance – from the time of our first introduction into the Fraternity until at the end of our lives when we are laid to rest with Masonic emblems of friendship.

The Entered Apprentice says in his catechism that he was led to the door by a friend, and only later did he learn that he was a Brother. We pray that he will become a “true and faithful Brother among us” and all are reminded of the Psalmist’s observation “how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity.” He also is taught that the tokens of his degrees are certain “friendly or brotherly grips,” and is reminded that “by the exercise of brotherly love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one common family.” Thus, “linked by an indissoluble chain of sincere affection... we form our friendships and establish our connections.” We could as well say “relationships” instead of “connections.”

In our final and highest degree, we are taught that we should use the trowel, the working tool of a Master Mason, to spread the cement of brotherly love and affection to unite us into one sacred band or society of friends and Brothers.

Annually, when Lodge officers are installed, the installing officer reminds all attending the ceremony that all officers and members are to “have but one aim, to please each other, and unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness.” We are reminded that in our Lodges “no contention should ever exist, except that noble contention, or rather emulation of who can best work and best agree.” These are sure ways to cement life-lasting friendships.

At the closing of every Virginia Lodge’s stated communication, we are reminded that “we are about to quit this sacred retreat of friendship and virtue.” Those meaningful words remind us that it is friendship that makes the Lodge a sanctuary for us.

Finally, when a Master Mason has laid down his working tools, in the Masonic funeral service, a glove is deposited with the body of our Brother, and all are reminded that it is an emblem of innocence and a token of friendship.

Permit me to close with a short, but meaningful, poem.

THE LODGE WHERE I BELONG

Though my Lodge may lack the splendor
Of a temple or a shrine,
Nor possess the gaudy fixtures
That are classed as superfine—
Yet the fellowship it offers
Is in price beyond compare

And I wouldn't trade it ever
For life's treasures—rich or rare!
The hand-clasp firm, the word of cheer,
Oh, such meanings they impart:
The mystic ties of brotherhood
That links us, heart to heart!
You'd really have to travel far,
For the friendships quite so strong
As those one always finds right here
In the Lodge where I belong.
When all my earthly travels end,
And at last I'm borne to rest
Where mortal hands no longer toil
And I cease life's endless quest
Why there's nothing I'd like better—
Should I join the heavenly throng—
Than to meet with all the Brothers
Of the Lodge where I belong!

By Arthur R. Herrman