

## *Around This Sacred Altar*

*by: Worshipful Frederick F. "Rick" Cazenave, Jr.*

Of all the benefits life has offered me, and all the joys and gifts of grace I have received; being elected into this Fraternity, and rising to serve my Lodge as its Worshipful Master, has been a source of particular pride for me, as it must be to all who attain, or strive to attain that honor.

From this chair, I observe how frequently we, the body of Masonry, sit on the sidelines and joke about or critique the performance of our Brothers, who are attempting to fulfill the obligations of their Offices. How precisely we remember the finest nuances of the ritual and, in noting occasional errors and omissions of performance, forget how tongue-tied we ourselves can become when sitting in one of those chairs.

Let me be clear, I, like Jubalum, see myself as more guilty than you, and I am making a concerted effort to correct this deficiency in myself. Why? Because such activities are un-Masonic, and they often cause more confusion than they correct, and those critical interruptions and asides from the North and the South detract from the great lessons our ritual could teach us, if only we would stop to listen, contemplate, and learn.

**A Mason can, and should learn something new each time he sits in Lodge, and hear things that excite his curiosity, and cause him to search for a clearer understanding of what our ritual is trying to convey to us from the distant past.**

This is precisely what Masonic education is, and why I choose to give the following presentation:

In quiet moments just before the close of a Master Mason's Lodge, as the lights grow dim, and in the comforting gloom of that enveloping darkness, we are all wrapped in a symbolic blanket, intended to foster closeness, fraternity, and retrospection and then we hear a mere 6 sentences, consisting of 140 words, 670 characters (without counting spaces) that move us from sanctuary of the Lodge to mix again with the world. What's the big deal? The big deal is the great lessons that those words are trying to convey.

So, sit back and listen, and discover more light in Masonry together, as we look at the closing charge.

### **Around This Sacred Altar**

#### **Brethren;**

- - Individuals who share a common ancestry, allegiance, character, or purpose with another or others, especially: A kinsman. A fellow man. A fellow member, as of a fraternity, trade union, or panel of judges on a court. A close male friend; a comrade. - -

Do we not share a common allegiance, character, and purpose? Are we not members of a fraternity? Are we not close male friends, comrades?

A single word, but with so much meaning, and demanding so much from each of us, who claim this distinction, that it alone must give us pause for thought.

**We are about to quit;**

At this time, as we prepare to leave the company of, and depart from....

**This sacred retreat;**

This venerable period of group withdrawal for prayer, meditation, and study.

**Of friendship and virtue;**

Good will, and manly courage and valor.

**To mix again with the world;**

To bring us once more into social contact with the public.

As with being born again, we are renewed and strengthened by our social intercourse and prepare to set forth to face and surmount the trials and tribulations of life.

**Amidst its concerns and employments;**

Surrounded by those situations of interest or importance that engages one's attention and those activities to which one devotes time.

**Forget not the duties;**

Remember the acts or courses of action that are required of one by position, social custom, law, or religion. And ones own oaths and obligations.

**Which you have heard so frequently inculcated;**

Impressed upon the mind of another by frequent instruction or repetition.

**And so forcibly;**

Effected against resistance through the use of force.

**Recommended;**

Made attractive or acceptable or committed to the charge of another; entrust.

**In this Lodge;**

Masonry offers us the tools and guidance to live good and virtuous lives, but we are the vessel and projection of those tools and that guidance, both toward each other and the profane.

**Remember that around this sacred altar,**

Remember that around this SACRED Altar.

As you stand before this structure, typically a table, before which the divine offices are recited.

What compelling image that should call to the heart and soul of each of us, regardless of our religion, to recognize the demands of sacrifice, devotion, dedication, and obligation.

**You have solemnly bound yourselves;**

You have, individually and independently, taken oaths of honor with full ceremony and invoking the force of religion to establish unbreakable ties and limits. Let me repeat: and invoking the force of religion to establish *unbreakable* ties.

**To befriend;**

To behave as a friend to.

**And relieve:**

Help and aid.

**Every Brother who shall need your assistance;**

Your fellow Brethren, who may require your aid and help, remember, that around this sacred altar, and in close proximity to the emblem of that demands we set aside our petty squabbles, our bigotries, and our self-involvement; because our God is here with us, watching us, and watching over us.

**You have promised;**

Given an oath backed by one's personal honor.

**In the most friendly manner;**

You must provide in a kindly way without rancor.

**To remind him of his error;**

Put in mind or call attention to a mistake of omission or commission.

**And aid a reformation;**

You must assist to cause your Brother to give up a harmful or immoral practice, and persuade him to adopt a better way of life.

We have obligated ourselves not to judge: But to assist, not to disparage;  
But to nourish and cherish, not to condemn,  
but also to sustain.

**These generous principles;**

These are rules or standards, especially of good behavior, and characterized  
by magnanimous nobility and forbearance in thought and behavior.

**Are to extend further;**

Must expand beyond supposed bounds.

**Every human being;**

All of the people of the entire world.

**Has a claim.**

A rightful demand.

**Upon your kind offices;**

The humane and considerate, beneficial acts YOU perform for another. We  
are bound, by our FREELY taken Oaths of Honor to our Fraternity, and, as  
the greatest teacher once said, “Do unto others as you would have them do  
unto you.”

**Do good Unto all;**

Do the right, kind, generous thing to all the people of the world.

**Recommend it more especially;**

Applied with particular zeal.

**To the household of the faithful;**

Our Fraternal Family, who, like us, are true and steadfast in support of the set of Masonic ideals. We never lose sight that our Oaths of Honor have formed a very special and closer bond to our fraternal Brothers. If we are to extend our kind offices to all, it becomes obvious that WE must be ever more diligent in applying those offices to one of our own.

**Finally, Brethren;**

As a last point, my Brothers.

**Be ye all of one mind;**

Let us all join in this single set of ideals.



## **Live in Peace;**

Be in harmony with yourself and others.

## **And may the God of peace and love;**

That divine being in whom you put your TRUST, and who provides tranquility and expressed affection to your soul.

## **Delight to dwell with;**

Find joy in honoring us with HIS presence.

## **And bless you;**

Apply His kind offices to each of us. A benediction, a prayer, a supplication, a charge, a call to action, an obligation? This statement is all of these, and a fitting end to this ritual fragment. It exemplifies the labors we have performed while in the Lodge, and the goals of Brotherhood we must always strive to achieve.

After all, we attend each Master Mason's communication to reinvigorate ourselves, to encourage ourselves, to motivate one another, to excite our minds and our souls, to go out into the world, and perform our obligations throughout our daily life.

**A mere six sentences, 140 words, 670 characters.... But, oh so much assistance to help good men become better.**