

## Masonic Investigators

We have often heard discussions in Lodge about the need for the Fraternity to grow, and this is true. We also have heard the debate about whether we should be concerned about quality or quantity. This is a false distinction. We should never sacrifice quality for quantity, but there are **many** quality men who are waiting for an opportunity to join. Of course, all of this conversation boils down to the need to “guard the West Gate.” And that is why the role of the Investigating Committee is so important, and why we need to seriously consider the qualifications of investigators.

As we all know, the Worshipful Master refers the petition to an Investigating Committee that he appoints. It is the role of that Committee to conduct its investigation and report to the Master, or to the Lodge, on the moral and physical qualifications of the petitioner no later than the first stated communication after the expiration of eight weeks from the date the petition was presented in the Lodge.

Although we realize that the investigation of an applicant is an important Lodge matter, we sometimes forget the fact that the qualifications of investigators are equally important.

When the Master appoints a Lodge member to an Investigating Committee he is saying, in effect, to that member, "You know the type of man the Masonic Fraternity accepts. The sponsors on this petition say the applicant qualifies. Now I need your objective judgment."

From then on, it becomes a matter for that Brother, acting not only as a member of that Lodge, but as a representative of the entire Masonic Fraternity to investigate the petitioner as sincerely and as honestly as he is capable of doing. It is a serious matter and should not be considered a merely routine undertaking that can be handled in a casual or perfunctory manner.

Let's stop a moment to evaluate the assignment. First, think of Freemasonry. It is an organization composed of men who believe in a Supreme Being, who believe in righteousness and justice, who live by and adhere to a strict moral code of ethics, and, who practice a philosophy of life that is second to none. In it are men from every walk of life, who form a brotherhood of virtue

and honor. They are men recognized in their community for morality, social consciousness, and decency. They are men who believe in and assist each other. And here is a petition from a stranger who wishes to become a member of this fraternal brotherhood. WHO is this stranger?

Experience has taught us that this world of ours has plenty of good men in it: men who are God loving and who know, understand, and practice a code of ethics that requires them to treat each person with dignity and respect. In the business world, you often hear them referred to as men whose word is as good as their bond or as men who do business on the square. This then, is the type of man the investigator hopes the applicant will prove to be.

When this type of man approaches Masonry with a petition, Masonry is interested!

We do not and should not seek men of questionable morals or integrity. Freemasonry was never intended to be an organization to reform or remodel a man. That is a matter for the man and his clergyman, not Freemasonry.

We are all aware that when the Federal Bureau of Investigation or other government bodies investigate an applicant for security clearance or employment, it is not considered to be a routine matter. Each applicant has to be individually examined and his entire life rigorously scrutinized and checked. Where there is the slightest doubt about the qualifications, the integrity, or the honesty of the applicant, they resolve that point against the subject to protect the Government or the employer.

We need to be as careful and as diligent.

But some of us may not take the job as seriously as we should, and because of a lack of time or energy just go through the motions.

Some of us may feel awkward about being critical, and give in to the softer side of our nature. We think why should we deprive someone of membership? After all, it is just a fraternity.

And some of us are inclined to feel that we are just considering an application for membership in our own Lodge, that we know the two sponsors, and that they would not recommend anyone who was not qualified. This is only partially true.

We are actually considering the petitioner for world-wide Masonic membership. A Master Mason has the right to visit and associate with Masons everywhere. Each visitation he may make, in any Lodge in the world, will be as a member and representative of our Lodge. Therefore, he should be the type of man we can be proud of, and someone whom we would want to represent us and our Lodge.

And remember we are not just any fraternity. We are members of an Order with a distinguished past and a proud tradition, a Fraternity that played a critical role in the War for Independence and in the formation of our great Country. Then as now our Brethren participate as leaders in business, civic affairs, and government. The Masons in our towns and cities are universally recognized as good men, who can always be counted upon to do the right thing.

From this perspective, you come to see that you are an important link in a chain that stretches back through time and realize just how critical is your role as an investigator. Upon your shoulders rests the responsibility to help ensure that only the right type of man is accepted. This is essential if the Mason of

today is to be as well regarded as his Masonic forbearers, and if he is to play as integral a part in the life of his community and nation as they did. In a real sense, the future of our Fraternity and the future of the country lie in your hands.

In fulfilling your responsibilities as a Masonic investigator, you need to take your job very seriously. Therefore, every investigator should, at a minimum, read the petition form in preparation for the interview, be appropriately dressed, and be polite, unbiased, and an effective representative of Freemasonry to the petitioner and his family. The investigator also needs to understand, that the investigation is not a ten-minute deal – at its conservative best – it is an hour interview. If the petitioner is the type of man you hope he will be, your call may stretch into two or more hours, but when you leave, you will find yourself feeling that you have spent a very pleasant and enjoyable evening, and the petitioner's opinion of Freemasonry will have jumped 100 percent.

Some Lodges appoint committees that collectively interview an applicant, generally at his home, and meet with his wife and family. Masters of Lodges, when selecting the individual members of the Investigating Committee, sometimes endeavor

to select, for the convenience of the investigator, those living in closest proximity to the applicant. This may be to the advantage of the investigator but not necessarily to the Fraternity.

For instance, why send three 70-year old Masons to talk with a 25- or 30-year old petitioner and his young family? It is far better to have younger Brethren interview this petitioner. They will likely have young families, children in school, local business associates, and probably mutual friends or acquaintances.

The same holds true for older petitioners. Why send three young new Masons to interview a 50-year old professional or businessman? They may have nothing in common on which to get acquainted except the subject of Masonry.

So the simple solution is to select a mix of ages and experience. It is wise to select investigators with a more comparable professional, business or vocational background to that of the petitioners, and to select members of the Investigating Committee within a relatively similar age span as that of the petitioner. But a combination of younger and older Brethren is best. The older investigators will have the knowledge of Masonry and the experience needed, and can

help to train the younger investigators. The younger investigators will often have the enthusiasm the petitioner needs to see, and will be able to relate particularly well to younger petitioners.

The rapport between the petitioner and the investigator should continue, and if the petitioner is elected to receive the Degrees, the investigator should endeavor, if possible, to attend some of the candidate's Degree work. A firm and friendly handshake or the sight of a familiar face is always a most welcome occasion when a man is in new or strange surroundings.

Finally, I strongly recommend that each investigator read the new Grand Lodge pamphlet, "For the Investigating Committee." It contains additional specific tips to help you. The Lodge Secretary has a copy, and you can get your own copy by calling Grand Lodge or simply by going to the Grand Lodge website. Double click on Committees – one of the blue bars on the left, then double click on Masonic Education and Publications – which will take you to the Masonic Education Committee homepage, double click on Publications – one of the blue bars on the left – which will take you to an alphabetical list of available publications – including the one titled, "For the Investigating Committee." You



can read it on line or print it out.

So how do we sum it all up? Well, every Masonic investigator should take seriously the trust and faith placed in him by the Master of the Lodge in giving him this assignment. He is the eyes and ears of the Lodge and Freemasonry as a whole, for in large measure, the Master and the members of the Lodge will be guided by the investigator's report to accept or reject the applicant's petition.