

Masonic Minutes—July One

Cycles of Time

There are two occasions when the public will most likely see a gathering of Freemasons working together, an installation of officers and the Funeral Ceremony for a Brother. These two aspects are at opposite ends of the cycle of time that surround our Masonic careers; one positioned where we set forth our Masonic labor and the other where our labor ends. In this edition of the Masonic Minutes, we will look at the funeral services for our departed brethren, beginning with the By-Laws of the Grand Lodge of Missouri:

Section 24.010. FUNERAL SERVICES. *Masonic Funeral Services may be conducted for a Master Mason in good standing or a Fellow Craft or an Entered Apprentice. In the event of extenuating circumstances satisfactory to the Master, Masonic Funeral Services may also be conducted for a Master Mason who was suspended for nonpayment of dues, or a Fellow Craft, or an Entered Apprentice. (Amended 1978-57, 2008-64, 65)*

Our Masonic Family—A Masonic Funeral Ceremony is performed at the request of a departed Brother or his family. Hopefully the Brother had told his family that he wanted to have a Masonic service conducted, but it is possible that the family is not aware that a Masonic Funeral is an option. Once the Lodge learns that a member has passed, it is not out of line to make contact with the family and after extending heartfelt condolences, offer the Masonic Funeral Ceremony as this is the last ceremonial opportunity we will have to honor our Brother. We must demonstrate to his loved ones by our physical presence that we are true to the promise of practicing the principles of Freemasonry.

The Logistics of a Funeral Ceremony—Conducting the Ceremony is normally the responsibility of the deceased Brother's "mother" Lodge, however it is not unusual to find that the Brother was part of a Lodge that merged or closed, or that he moved and resided in another area at the time of his passing. Use sound Masonic judgment in remembering that our first priority is to support the family and honor the deceased. You may need to ask for assistance from another Lodge in the location of the deceased or coordinate with Lodges in your area to make sure that the Fraternity is able to perform this Ceremony. In any case, the DDGM should immediately be informed at the passing of any Brother in the District, and then invited to participate. This notice and invitation should extend to the Grand Secretary if the deceased Brother is a past or present Grand Lodge Officer.

The service may be held in a chapel, home, church, synagogue or Lodge room. The committal portion of the service can be conducted at that same location or at the graveside. The circumstances around each funeral create challenges such as physical limitations of space and the number of Brethren in attendance. Remember that in Missouri the Funeral Ceremony is in fact a ceremony and not ritual. Your best Masonic judgment should govern your preparation for and performance of the Ceremony. The Masonic service can be held in conjunction with a religious service and/or other fraternal service such as the American Legion or Elks. This is at the pleasure of the family. The only restriction is that once the Masonic service has started it must be completed without interruption.

Brethren need to remember that the Funeral Ceremony is for the Brother and his loved ones. "Masonry regards no man on account of his worldly wealth or honors; it is, therefore, the internal and not the external qualifications that recommend a man to Masonry." With that said, Masons attending the ceremony should dress in dark suits with minimal Masonic Jewelry (i.e. no pocket jewels, medals, name tags, ect). All Masons should wear plain white aprons to illustrate that we started our Masonic life without stain and that we hope to stand in front of the Supreme Architect of the Universe in like manner.

How It Is Received—It is at and during this somber service that many people will form their opinion and perception of our Fraternity. Not being members of our Ancient Craft and generally knowing very little about Freemasonry, they are often very curious as to who we are, what we stand for, and what we believe as an organization.

One of the first observations non-Masons will make is the size of the turnout. If it is small, they may conclude that his Lodge did not hold the deceased Brother in very high esteem, or even worse, that Freemasons are much too busy with their personal lives to practice the tenets of Charity and Brotherly Love. In other words, they may conclude that we do not practice what we preach. If the turnout is large, the non-Mason is likely to come away with a very positive impression of both the Fraternity and the deceased Brother. Bear in mind that when you appear in public, every pair of eyes in the room will be watching you. Anything you do, (good or bad), will be noticed and remembered. Every cough, every scratch, every inappropriate remark, every laugh; and whether you conducted the service in a confident or a confused manner.

This is one obligation and commitment that each of us should earnestly strive to fulfill even if we cannot always attend Lodge meetings. Let us demonstrate before the world that we are men who practice the principles of Freemasonry as our Brothers move from labor to rest.