

# MASONIC CHARITY



Benevolence and charity are basic principles of Freemasonry. Every Mason is expected to maintain an attitude of benevolence toward all mankind and to perform acts of charity for those in need. This distinguishing characteristic of its members is a foundation stone of the fraternity.

In the Middle Ages each lodge of operative masons, who built the cathedrals, abbeys and castles, maintained a charity chest to help widows and orphans, or members in distress. In addition, they assisted a fellow mason by giving him a day's work or the means of traveling to the project of a neighbouring lodge.

## LODGE ACTIVITIES

In the same manner, Masonic lodges of today have an account reserved for charitable purposes to which every member is expected to contribute. these funds are used to quietly assist members in need, send remembrances to widows, or special greetings to brethren confined by age or illness. Many lodges extend their benevolent activities by supporting worth-while community projects.

## DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITIES

To assist the individual lodges and to encourage benevolent and charitable activities, each Masonic District has a Chairman of Benevolence. He receives, investigates and makes recommendations on requests for Grand Lodge benevolent funds. His knowledge of the availability of social services and health programmes can be of valuable help to the lodges in his District.

An increasing number of Districts are becoming involved in community fund raising projects such as disaster relief, specialized hospital equipment, vehicles for the handicapped or additions to hospitals. In planning these undertakings, Districts are urged to contact The Masonic Foundation for counsel and administrative advice.

#### MASONIC BOARD OF RELIEF

In previous years, Boards of Relief existed in 19 Ontario centres to assist in administering Grand Lodge benevolence. With changing roles, the number has decreased and the few remaining primarily address local Masonic and social needs. Some operate under the title of Masonic Service Guild.

#### GRAND LODGE COMMITTEE ON BENEVOLENCE

While each lodge has the first responsibility for benevolence toward its members and their families, further assistance may be available through the Grand Lodge Committee on Benevolence.

This committee has the entire revenue produced by the Memorial Fund, currently about \$85,000 per year, with which to assist Masons and their families in Ontario. In years when the Memorial Fund revenue has not met the needs, additional funds have been provided by Grand Lodge.

To request assistance on behalf of one of its members, a lodge submits an application to the District Chairman of Benevolence. The Grand Lodge Committee reviews the request and advises the lodge of its decision. Before submission, each application must first be approved by the lodge, anonymously if appropriate. The lodge is expected to provide some financial help in each situation.

Committee grants are made in one sum or over an extended period depending on the need and are distributed through the requesting lodge. Individual grants, which tend to be modest, are designed to provide a measure of comfort beyond that available through governmental agencies.

#### MASONIC FOUNDATION OF ONTARIO

The Masonic Foundation of Ontario is a registered charitable organization and receives gifts and bequest from lodges, individual Masons and others who wish to share in its work. It was founded in 1964 by Grand Lodge as a means of extending Masonic charity beyond helping only members and their families. The Foundation's capital fund, initially endowed with \$160,000 by Grand Lodge, was over four and one half million dollars in 1998. The fund alone provides in excess of \$400,000 annually for contribution to a broad spectrum of activities and projects in Ontario. Certain programmes are continuous in character while others may be short-term and receive a one-time contribution.

One long-standing activity concerns non-repayable bursaries to Ontario university and college students who need help. In the first 34 years of this programme 2,600 students received in excess of one and one half million dollars. During the 1997 – 1998 year, 80 students received bursaries totaling in excess of \$100,000.

The Foundation has a strong interest in youth related projects. It presently supports Voice, a provincial organization that assists hearing impaired children. Financial help goes to Autistic Homes of Ontario, an expanding organization providing homes in which small groups of adolescents with this severe learning disorder receive instruction and guidance. Other youth groups to receive assistance include the 40H Council, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Mentally Challenged Children and the C.N.I.B. Camp for Children.

The Foundation is a major partner in the deafness and implant programme of the Ontario Deafness Research Foundation. During the past few years well in excess of one million dollars has been raised, which has allowed for sizable financial support of two organizations, "Parents Against Drugs" and "Council on Drug Abuse". These organizations currently train teams of students in their upper years of high school on the dangers of drug abuse, and then have them present educational programmes to the younger students.

## INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS

Masonic charity extends well beyond our provincial borders. Often Grand Lodge is called upon to support many worthwhile causes from disaster relief to assisting a member in difficulty while outside our country.

All communication with other Grand Lodges must be done through the Grand Secretary's office and this practice is to be followed on all matters including benevolence beyond our jurisdiction.

## PARTICIPATION

Total Masonic charity in Ontario, in all forms is currently well over a half million dollars each year. This is an achievement in which every member can take pride, and in which every member can take part.

Within his own lodge a Mason can contribute to the benevolent fund and participate in work projects to help widows and the indisposed, visit those confined to home, hospital or care centre, and be a member of a phone contact committee. He can support Masonic worship services, the offerings from which are used for benevolence.

Every member should take an interest in District fund raising projects, contributing and participating within his ability to do so.

Available to each mason is the opportunity to support the Grand Lodge Memorial Fund and the Masonic Foundation. Gifts to these capital funds are frequently in the form of bequest, annuities or life insurance policies. Information on this or other items concerning Masonic charities is readily available from the Grand Secretary's office.

Donors should be aware that the Masonic Foundation, most District fund raising projects, some Boards of Relief and some lodge benevolent funds are qualified as registered charitable organizations and may issue income tax deduction receipts.

## THE NEED CONTINUES

Even with increased availability of governmental social assistance, there remains a pressing need for Masonic benevolence and charity. Kindly acts of remembrance toward older members, the infirm and widows are always required. Practical assistance for those in distress is still the responsibility of those who can help.

Therefore, every mason through his private efforts, his lodge and the other avenues of Masonic charity, ought to consider what he should, can, and will do to assist others.

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