



The Masonic Funeral Service

Originally published in The Missouri Freemason
"Nuggets From The Quarry" column
by RWB Phil Elam, MMBBFMN #408

Regarding Masonic Funerals, Article 24 of the Missouri Grand Lodge Constitution and By-Laws reads thusly:

"Masonic Funeral Services may be conducted for a Master Mason in good standing or for a Fellow Craft or Entered Apprentice who shall not have not received such degree more than one (1) year prior to the date of his death, provided, however, that in the event of extenuating circumstances satisfactory to the Master, Masonic Funeral Services may also be conducted for a Master Mason who shall have been suspended for nonpayment of dues for not more than one (1) year immediately prior to the date of his death or for a Brother who shall have been a Fellow Craft or Entered Apprentice for more than one (1) year prior to the date of his death." Section 24.010. Funeral Services (Amended 1978-57).

With that bit of obligatory "legalese" out of the way, let us examine the more important aspects of our Masonic Funeral Service. For it is not our Masonic Law, but our actions and deeds that are of any real significance when the Great Architect of the Universe calls one of our Brothers to the Celestial Grand Lodge on High.

There are few occasions when Freemasons may perform their public ceremonies, e.g., cornerstone layings, open installation of officers, the periodic public educational program, and so on. By far, the most common is our Masonic Funeral Service. It is at this time that most non-Masons are introduced to Freemasonry -- perhaps, for the very first time. It is at and during that somber service that most people present 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 is it that we believe in as an organization.

Conducting Masonic Funeral Services is as old as the Fraternity itself. In the days of Operative Masonry, stonemasons buried their own with great solemnity and reverence. The deceased Brother was a man they had worked with side-by-side for years -- perhaps, even their entire lives. They extolled his virtues and the contributions he had made to the Craft's work. They spoke of the Eternal Life after death, and the need to perform "goode worke" toward all humanity throughout the course of a man's life. The entire guild and all of their families turned out in force to mourn their Brother's passing, and to express their sympathies to the Brother's family. This tradition has been carried forward for centuries to our present day Speculative Masonry.

The first thing any non-Mason will observe 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 own private lives and interests to practice the tenets of Charity and Brotherly Love of which we so loudly boast. 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 different impression of both the Fraternity and the deceased Brother.

Always remember that a Masonic Funeral Service is the final tribute we can pay to our fallen Brother. That is the appropriate time to thank the Brother's family for allowing him to share his time on Earth with our Fraternity. No, you may not have known the





Brother personally, but if he was a member of your Lodge, he certainly deserves your presence at his funeral service. If he was a Brother, then he is entitled to all of the "lights, rights and benefits" of being a Freemason -- and that certainly includes a well-attended Masonic Funeral Service. Attending these services are, in many ways, just as important as attending Lodge meetings -- perhaps, even moreso, because, as we can do nothing more for our Brother, the Funeral Service is really for the benefit of the deceased Brother's family and friends, and it exhibits our genuine care and concern for one of our own.

For those that may have forgotten, the Masonic Funeral Service is one of the most beautiful pieces of literature ever written. Simple, honest, and straight-forward, it offers each of us an opportunity to reflect upon our own mortality, and to reaffirm our individual faith in the Supreme Grand Master of Heaven and Earth. It draws forth its inspiration and words of comfort not only from our Volume of Sacred Law, but also from many of the world's greatest literary geniuses. No one can listen to our service and not be impacted by the gentle, yet powerful, words that touch the heart of every person present -- both Mason and non-Mason alike.

Consider the sobering passage from our Masonic Funeral Service: "One by one they pass away, the Brothers of our adoption, the Companions of our choice. A Brother whose hand we have clasped in the bonds of Fraternal Fellowship is now passing from our sight, and we know that we shall meet him on Earth no more."

One day, and we know not when, each one of us will be that Brother who has passed from sight. One day, each one of us will have ended our journey in this life. As your then cold and lifeless body is commended to the grave eternal, will you want your Masonic Brethren to be present and among those that mourn you, and to offer comfort and consolation to your loved ones?



As stated in our funeral service, you can do nothing more of a material nature for the departed Brother. Nevertheless, you can cherish his memory, and offer the tribute of respect and love to the late Brother's memory. Of even greater importance, you can be there to extend our fraternal sympathy to our Brother's deeply afflicted and sorrowing family in their bereavement. We must tell his loved ones, and demonstrate it by our physical presence, that our promises to be true to them are not hollow or empty words. We owe our Brother something, and this may be the very last opportunity we will ever have to repay that debt.

Brethren, if you receive a call from your Lodge or see a Masonic Funeral Notice in your local newspaper, take the 20 or 30 minutes out of your busy lives to make this final act of respect and tribute. No, you may not have personally known the Brother, but he was your Brother and that alone is enough to justify making the effort to attend and to demonstrate to the world that we Freemasons do, in fact, sincerely care about each other -- both in life and in death.



Each of us will one day cross death's threshold. After spending years in the Masonic Fraternity, how would you feel if most of your Lodge Brothers were too occupied with their own self-interests to attend your Masonic Funeral Service? How will your loved ones feel about the organization you belonged to for so many years cannot even muster more than a small handful of members to stand around your casket?

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 Brotherly Love -- all the way to the grave's edge.

Reprinted through the kind auspices of The Missouri Freemason.