

## **Freemasonry Youth and You**

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Youth--those all-important formative years--is one of the few things in life that all mankind has had in common with one another. Indeed, it might be the only common denominator all mankind has shared!

All of us, including all the heroes and villains of the world today, were young people not many decades ago. For many, it was only a few years ago. The things that we do and the attitudes that we have now reveal much about our upbringing and identify dominant influences that shaped our values and attitudes during the early years of our lives.

Based upon my experiences as a youth leader for 33 years, both at the rewarding level of local groups but also including state, national, and international leadership posts as well, I have become convinced that we in America have the finest group of young people anywhere in the world.

I have found them to be every bit as good, and not one bit worse, than any generation that has preceded them. We do our nation, and especially today's generation of youth, a great disservice if we yield to the unfortunate temptation to join a chorus of Jeremiahs who com-plain continuously about young people.

Based also on my association with and talks before Masonic-related youths' groups all over America and abroad, I have found that young people today, all over the world, are far better informed, and consequently more intellectually influenced, at much earlier ages than any generation in the history of mankind.

We must exercise spiritual and moral leadership for the benefit of young people now, or that privilege and opportunity will be lost to us forever. Those golden years of youth come but once!

Among some segments of today's generation, it pleases me to find evidence of a growing and strengthening appreciation for what I like to call the invisible things of life: love of God, love of home, love and respect for parents, and love for our great country. Fortunately for all of us, the pendulum seems to be swinging more and more in that direction among an increasing number of young people at this point in our history. That is encouraging, and bodes well for the future of our nation, and of our Fraternity as well.

However, that situation makes it even more important for young people in your community and mine, to know that they have Freemasonry's understanding, help, encouragement, and moral support. They especially need to know that we are appreciative of the good things they believe in and do, because a relatively small percentage of our youth population, commonly referred to as "bad kids" seem to get higher visibility in a media system that oftentimes seems to benefit more, both in ratings and in dollars, by supplying a constant barrage of sensationalism than it does from reporting news about decency.

In one of his last speeches before the House of Commons before he gave up his Premier-ship, Sir Winston Churchill spoke of the problems of young people and what would lie before us if God wearied of mankind. Because of what is happening in the world at this point in history, his remarks are perhaps more sobering today than they were some 30 years ago. Our only ground for hope is that God does not weary of mankind. Unless young people are properly influenced and guided, there really is no ground of hope for freedom, democracy, Freemasonry, our own personal brand of religion, and everything else that we cherish.

That is why leadership, real dedicated leadership, of young people is so vital to us at this very moment. Freemasons, as individuals and collectively as lodges have a unique opportunity to supply that leadership by actively providing sponsorship or support for DeMolay, Rainbow and Job's Daughters groups. And we must do it on a continuing basis!

One of these days you and I will retire from our livelihood, our civic duties, from active leadership in the Craft. Today's youngsters will step into our positions, we

know. How well they are prepared to fill those positions depends upon the training they are receiving and the attitudes they are developing today. And listen to this: they will control the economy into which we retire and the philosophies which will shape the destinies of our nation, as well as the destinies of their children and grandchildren. They will man the controls of all the devices that mankind can conjure up for peace and destruction. How well they are prepared to exercise good judgment over the use of those devices depends in a great measure upon the set of values they are adopting now.

So, who trains our young people really is important to us? It is vitally important and, un-fortunately, more so than many decent people realize. I believe it is immoral not to be concerned about the kind of young people we are producing in our neighborhoods, in our cities, states, and in our nation.

I believe also that the greatest number and the most important unexplored areas in the world today are neither under the seas nor in outer space; they are in the minds and hearts of young people.

Too often, parents and others who exert influence over our younger folks, tend to preoccupy them with a narrow goal of becoming "successful." We ought to be teaching them to place more stress on becoming "useful!" Useful in a society that will place human moral and religious values higher on a list of priorities than material acquisitions. No person, young or old, can become truly successful until he or she first masters the art of being useful in the society from which we draw our daily existence.

A close look through the pages of history since the beginning of civilization produces adequate proof that those persons who are recorded as having achieved true greatness (not fame, but greatness) became great because of what they were, of what they believed and the causes in which they spent themselves, and not because of fortunes or power they amassed. We need to constantly stress upon that fact when leading young people.

"I am too old," "too busy, to become involved in youth work," I often am told by people who have been asked to become involved in youth activities. Not so! The older the leader the more knowledge and experience we may be able to impart to

our youngsters. Too busy? Young people need an hour of our time more than they need a dollar of our money! So, if we feel we are too busy, then perhaps we should re-examine our priorities. Only by devoting our precious time will we be able to help them to realize their ambitions and to evaluate their achievements, to bolster their self-esteem, and to help them to soften their hatreds. We simply must not stand idly by and let subversive and other undesirable influences dominate the thoughts of our younger generation. If we abdicate that duty, we become a significant part of the problem and contribute nothing to its solution.

What are some of the needs of young people today?

1. Leadership. Real, dedicated leadership.
2. A set of values. Something substantial.

Something that has eternal value. I am thinking now of honesty, integrity, love of home, reverence for God, courtesy, faithfulness to high ideals, cleanness of thought, word, and deed, a desire to associate with other young people who have similar high ideals, a belief in the dignity of mankind, the immortality of the soul, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

3. They need to be encouraged to develop themselves physically, morally, and spiritually, to achieve their highest capabilities, to raise themselves to their full stature.

We can give those things to young people only if we are willing to give of ourselves and of our time. We cannot provide them simply by the expenditure of funds, although that is needed, too.

Writing in *The Indiana Freeman* in March 1969, Past Grand Master Dwight L. Smith said it better than I can say it when he wrote,

"It was written of Sir Winston Churchill that 'he behaved like a prince at a time when princely behavior had gone right out of fashion.'

"Indeed, such behavior has gone out of fashion, to the distinct loss of our country and society at large. But there is no reason to suppose that lofty standards have been dispelled entirely or that they will be scorned for long.

"To restore emphasis on values that are more than momentary is the job of us all. Freemasonry cannot do it alone, but it can do its part.

"If during these years of the world's turmoil, our Craft should do nothing more than to raise up and encourage, under the protecting wing of its Lodges, a few thousand young men committed to princely behavior--even though such behavior temporarily might not be 'in'--that in itself will be significant contribution toward re-establishing the wholesome atmosphere we need to desperately. And the mighty role it plays thereby will be in the best of Masonic traditions."

What a golden opportunity we have as

Freemasons to help all young people to live by the standards of those great virtues we cherish so much; virtues that Communism and other negative influences are bent on destroying.

As young people progress through their formative years, either with or without our Fraternity's influence, let us recall to mind the words of Julius Caesar as he crossed the Rubicon:

"The die is cast!"

A night follows day, so adulthood follows youth.

Kids grow up!

"The child is the father of the man," said Wordsworth.

Freemasons might term youth as the cornerstone of life, a stone well-laid being a life well-begun.

For the world, and for Freemasonry, it is during those precious, un-reliable years of youth that "the die is cast!"