

Investigations

WBro. E. Albrecht

"How well are we guarding our West gate?" This is the gate through which the uninitiated must pass in order to become a member of our great fraternity. Some may feel that we are permitting too many to pass who can pay the fee and contribute little else. I submit there are three categories of Tyler for this west gate, and the responsibility of guarding it must be shared equally among them. The categories of Tyler are: sponsors, lodge members, and the investigating committee.

Sponsors

Sec. 308 of the Constitution indicates they must be two Master Masons in good standing. Our obligation to the candidate begins the day he approaches the Lodge for an application. He should not be left alone until he, himself, has determined that he can continue alone. Too often it has been said to the newly made Mason, "You get out of Masonry what you put into it". This may be very true; however, would you throw a drowning man a pamphlet on how to swim and then walk away? Certainly not; yet we do it daily in Masonry.

I think the time for questioning the petitioner is before the application is signed; and every sponsor should know or get to know him before he signs the application. The sponsors should begin by resolving to be the guide of the prospective candidate. Then they should have a heart-to-heart talk with the man. The questions asked should include these:

1. Why do you want to become a Mason?
2. What benefits do you expect from membership?
3. Does membership in the higher orders influence your decision to become a Mason?
4. Can you afford the initiation fee and annual dues?
5. Can you afford the time to attend the meetings?
6. Do you expect the same type of activities in Masonry as in service clubs?

Receiving suitable answers, the sponsors should proceed to explain as much about the Craft as they can, being sure to emphasise that Masonry is not a charitable organisation in the usual sense, but charitable in the greater sense of giving of oneself. Once the sponsors are satisfied that the man is making an earnest request, the application can be processed in its next logical sequence.

Lodge members:

Sec. 349 of the Constitution indicates that if two or more black balls are present, the ballot is unfavourable to the applicant.

If you recall, the logical steps in processing an application are:

1. It is read out in open lodge and an investigating committee is appointed by the WM
2. The details of the application appear in the lodge summons
3. The notice for ballot appears in the subsequent summons

This procedure gives each lodge member adequate notice and time to speak up early, should he have anything to say about the applicant. Do not wait until balloting time to express an adverse opinion

through the silent and secret casting of a black ball. Your knowledge of the applicant's character could reject him before it gets to a ballot (which is as it should be), whereas one black ball will not reject him. The lodge members should expect that by the time an application is read in open lodge, the applicant is as well informed about our Order as he can reasonably be. Remember; don't wait for the ballot to express your 'silent' opinion. That is the easy way out. Speak up or shut up.

Section 318 of our Constitution indicates that the investigating committee must consist of three or more M.M.'s in good standing. This committee is to ensure that no unworthy person may be admitted to our fraternity. Their recommendation, usually through the Committee of General Purposes, will influence the further processing of the application. Usually, if it comes to a ballot, there should not be any rejection.

It is difficult to define the duties of the investigating committee with much clarity. The necessary direction of one investigation does not dictate that of another; yet we can make an attempt to be more specific than we have been in the past. The following may help as a guide:

1. Visit the petitioner in his home
2. Ask his family to stay. There is nothing that can be told to him that cannot also be told to his wife. Ask her if she has any objection to his joining Masonry.
3. It should be made clear to both that Masonry is not a benefit society
4. Do not be afraid to ask personal questions

Some qualities to watch for when investigating an applicant are:

Internal Qualifications:

1. He must come of his own free will and accord
2. He must not be influenced by mercenary motives
3. He must have conceived a favourable opinion of the Order
4. He must know that he will be asked to conform with cheerfulness to the established usages and, customs of the fraternity

External Qualifications:

1. What are his living habits?
2. Does he believe in a Supreme Being?
3. Can he conform to some of the requirements of the ceremonies? If not you must report to the WM, who must notify the DDGM
4. Can he understand and will he appreciate the ceremonies?

The book 'Meeting the Challenge' outlines some thoughts that can be applied to the work of the investigating committee. Ensure that you are fully conversant with the sections of the Constitution:

- Sect.312- Residence requirements
- Sect.322,333- Concerning a previous rejection, if any
- Sect.331- Regarding a Central Masonic Bureau

Encourage questions from the applicant and answer the questions as fully as you can. Don't turn them aside as if they are hidden under a veil of secrecy. Talk about the different orders of Masonry which require Masonic status to join: Royal Arch and the Scottish Rite. Be careful who you recommend as a

candidate for membership; one false step at this point can be fatal. If you introduce a disputatious person, confusion will be produced which may end in the dissolution of the Lodge. If you have a good Lodge, keep it select. Great numbers are not always beneficial. The good report of your Lodge rests with you. Think well before you recommend anyone for initiation.

There is little more that can be added at this time. Remember that we do not expect perfection in the applicant; yet he must possess a foundation on which to build an intellect; and character, to grasp what masonry has to offer. We are neither a reformatory nor a halo society: but we are dedicated to some basic principles and tenets which are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. It is imperative that we make the applicant a well informed man, even if he chooses not to follow through with his application to become a member of our fraternity.

By W.Bro. E. Albrecht of Rideau Lodge No.595