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FEBRUARY 9, 2017 BY JOHN LAWSON

Masonic Civility and Personal Opinion in the Age of Social Media

All of us know the importance of civility in our interactions and conversations with our brothers. We have been famously counseled in regard to the discussion of politics and religion among brothers at masonic activities in order to prevent ill will or hurt feelings. We need no reminders that we are to respect one another, and keep our tongue when our words would do more harm than good. These are all just common sense and we all have those unfortunate memories in our minds when that line of courtesy and politeness gets crossed and damage to the craft and individuals results sometimes with unintended consequences.

Certainly our parents, teachers, and society in general spend time teaching us throughout our lives why we need to be kind,

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courteous and attentive in regard to our communications with one another and provide us a framework of family values and rules.

Our workplace has a Human Resource department for these matters, our churches have theological tenets, our schools teach social behaviors to follow such as sportsmanship and our community leaders create civil laws to make certain that we treat one another respectably, regardless of age, creed, color, gender, special needs, etc. So why is this of particular concern to the mason if it's already being handled? Why it is that "civility" takes a *unique role* in our masonic world when it seems to be a part of everyone else's concerns?

As initiates and as brothers, each of us has been set apart and additional expectations have been placed on us both between one another and our sphere of influence to every human being through our masonic obligation that we agreed to when we stood before our great common alter. Our masonic life lived should stand out as man's ability to love one another regardless of the differences we may have and it is in the ability to find civil agreement between those differences around our alter that causes our unique example to shine through and above the rest. The world needs an example of what it is to work together without tyranny or oppression. To show by our example, how we can disagree and yet remain not only tolerant but affectionate towards one another.

Anyone with a television, radio or newspaper knows that civility in our nation is being challenged. The rules established in many of the categories mentioned have broken down. The divorce rate is up, violence plagues our schools, dogma attacks one another's sacred beliefs openly, even violently and we all know what has happened to a government divided by opposing values who appears as though it has lost its ability to work with civility at all causing gridlock and then fanned by the news media who thrive on conflict, we are bathed in examples of discord, anger, hostility, and fear. As never before, masonry's example of civil discipline is needed and its great message of working together civilly is the answer that society needs now above all other examples.

Having said all of this, it is an important reminder that we have been set apart for this great work of creating a perfect society, a temple built without hands and that through our example, we will

lead the world to its golden potential. We must examine ourselves in this day of Twitter, Facebook, email and text and be conscious of the fact that not only the words we share mouth to ear need to be filtered through our grand obligation but that every hashtag, Facebook post, email forward, or text associated with us requires our attention and scrutiny. When we wear the square and compass as a part of our identity we take on a larger persona than just that of our own personal opinion. We represent a philosophic empire that spreads across the globe. Each of us are obliged to one another and to the craft that we represent to communicate with respect, the highest degree of integrity, and the deepest concern for the feelings and welfare of others.

Certainly each brother is welcome to his own personal opinions and sharing those publically and clearly is the right of every free man but the manner in which the opinion is expressed is where civility needs to be checked. We must ask, are we being reasonable, kind, intelligent and beneficial? Are we allowing comedy, sensationalism, or cleverness to supplant our concerns not to be divisive, cruel, or mean spirited? Are we more concerned about respect for our personal views than we are about the views of others?

Masonry is an ancient a beautiful craft whose higher standards have the opportunity through each of our mindful efforts to be the guiding example in our social media world that is in great need of our philosophic teachings and inclusiveness, especially today when even our leaders have not been the examples of civility we would like. It makes it ever more important to be the higher example to others that masonry calls us to be and is something we can do every day to create the world we all know we all want and need and as masons, have been charged to create. Let's all pause and examine how we express our opinions in the maelstrom of social media and ensure our rhetoric is something we are all proud of for our craft and others to imitate.

May the Great Architect give us wisdom and strength to be the light and example for others to follow.

Most fraternally,
W. B. John Lawson
Grand Chaplain,

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Jan 9th, 2017

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