



## Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

### A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

## Fred & Charlie ask



## What is charity?

Its relevance as we face up to the coronavirus crisis

***Although I have all faith...and have no charity...***

***I am nothing!***

[ Fred's wife was concentrating on her cross-word with mid-morning coffee. 'Seven down, ten letters including M' was proving troublesome. She became vaguely aware of the phone ringing. However on hearing Fred say '*Morning , Charlie, how're things?*' her hand as if by reflex simultaneously switched on the kettle, reached for the Ken-co jar, drew the milk jug forward and poured some chocolate digestives onto a plate. She knew her place in Fred's understanding of Divine Creation.]

Charlie was his usual cheerful self. '*All that protective gear for the Coronavirus nurses. That'll be a good charitable cause for Masons to support. Freemasonry must surely be the richest charity in the country so we've got the dosh.*'

Fred paused, not wishing to dampen Charlie's obvious enthusiasm. '*I don't think we have ever claimed to be a charity, Charlie. Yes, we practise charity and it is a core principle... but what you refer to is really support for a good cause by fund-raising. That's not Freemasonry's real aim and purpose*

Charlie protested. '*We all subscribe to the Masonic Charitable Foundation. What's that if it isn't a charity?*'

Fred was thoughtful. '*It's not easy to explain quickly, Charlie. The word charity has many meanings; for example 'charity' as used in our ritual or the public's understanding of charity or in a Grand Lodge charity are all completely different animals. Let's just say they represent very different levels of personal involvement.*'

*'As I explained in Lol the word 'charity' in our ritual comes from the Latin 'caritas' or 'agape' which simply means 'Brotherly Love'. There is nothing complicated or ideological about it, It is simply showing genuine care for the well-being of a fellow human being through personal involvement.'*

Charlie quickly interjected: "*The raffle tickets for the Charity are bought with our own money, no one else's, so isn't that a form of caring?*'

Fred paused. *'Not necessarily. Remember our principles are brotherly love, relief of another's sufferings and being true to one's own conscience. ... these feelings all flow from the heart. Love can only be offered to fellow human beings. It can't be given to a fund, to a building repair, to a set of protective equipment or even to an anonymous good cause, however worthy'*

Charlie couldn't accept this. *'No, Fred That's far too narrow. For the general public the word 'charity' means putting the hand in the pocket and buying a copy of 'The Big Issue' or slipping some coins into the charity bucket or alms plate and, yes, extracting the wallet and buying a strip of raffle tickets. That's what most of us consider as charity'*

Fred came back: *'That's all very commendable, Charlie, but I say again at the end of the day it is just some shrapnel which we don't really miss. The decision to give that was made by the head, not the heart. Love or caring isn't involved so it can't be Masonic charity.'*

Charlie seemed unpersuadable. Pausing for thought Fred hopefully held his mug out for a refill of coffee. The other hand wandered towards the chocolate digestives. A sharp cough from across the room accompanied by its owner's right eyebrow, chin and finger all rising in unison in a nod towards the lunch-time clock persuaded both hands to smartly return to base, unladen.

Charlie finally broke his silence. *'It's all too deep for me, Fred. Are you saying there is nothing worthy about the millions that Grand Lodge send to good causes on our behalf?*

*'No, Charlie, but look at fund raising this way. Whether we are in Rotary or Freemasonry - or whatever - we raise our funds and happily send it off to a central committee. We may never even know the committee's members. They then consider all the applicants, weigh up the merits of each case and following agreed guidelines allocate our funds sometimes to a cause that the original donor may never have heard of. This is a hard-headed business decision, not an expression of love. Whether or not it goes to say famine relief, an irrigation scheme or a medical centre it may be commendable but In what possible way does it flow from a Brother's direct love for a fellow human being.?'*

*'Charlie, for Masons, people must always come first. Money may sometimes be helpful but it is human compassion, human friendship, human caring...human contact... that always matters most. That is the essence of Freemasonry. That is what being a Freemason is really all about.'*

Charlie at long last saw the point. *'Well, Fred, Coronavirus has given us unlimited opportunities to care for those in need. The NHS volunteer drivers' scheme, making regular contact with the Lodge's widowers, queuing up at Tesco for a neighbour's groceries...the sky's the limit. Masons can make a difference.'*

Fred smiled. *'And that's true Masonic charity, Charlie – doing something with your heart and soul to show you care for a fellow human being.'*

They finished their phone call thoughtfully. Both had a lot to reflect on.

[Fred's wife hearing the phone go down looked up from her crossword. In that daily advancement of Masonic knowledge she'd played her part as a coffee-making aide - then lightning struck. That was it. Seven down. Ten letters including M – she'd been a 'maison-ette']

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**Note from the editor:** At the time of publishing this article, the country is experiencing a period of unprecedented restriction on individual freedoms; all brought about due to the spread of an insidious virus called Covid - 19. The United Kingdom Government in line with many others has imposed strict lifestyle restrictions on all of its citizens, including enforced isolation, closure of non essential workplaces and leisure facilities.

In March 2020, the United Grand Lodge of England, in conformity with the law, suspended all Masonic activity for a period of four months.

The Freemasons of Wiltshire, not to be daunted in their zeal, or prevented from making a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge, have embraced the opportunities to learn more about our fraternity by reading papers such as this one.