

CHURCH SERVICES.

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MASONIC HALL

WORCESTER

1. The model, entirely undenominational and indeed almost un-Christian, service was held at the Royal Albert Hall in 1917 to celebrate the bi-centenary of Grand Lodge. Great care was obviously taken to ensure that no feelings should be ruffled by allusions to any particular faith but, even so, a protest was voiced against the inclusion of the Lord's Prayer.

It was clearly a suitable liturgy only for a locality where there was no religious authority and where no exception could be taken by such an authority to the exclusion of any reference to its own faith or denomination.

2. This order of service, however, became generally accepted as the authorised (and sole) Masonic Service, and in London at any rate for over thirty years it was regarded as the essential basis for all such services, regardless of where they were taking place.

Indeed no dispensation to wear Masonic clothing would have been granted except on the distinct understanding that it was being closely followed.

3. It is irrelevant to consider at this point whether a bi-centenary act of thanksgiving by some 7,000 Brethren at the Albert Hall was ever going to be a suitable form of worship for smaller and annually recurring events in parish churches, for in 1952 a basic change of policy occurred.

At the height of the 'Hannah-Box' controversy, which petered out when Convocation and Church Assembly alike refused to engage in the battle, a Grand Officer, since deceased, created a new crisis by insisting on the removal of the Cross from the Altar of a Church at which a "Masonic Service" was to be held - by an ironical coincidence the Church in whose parish Freemasons' Hall lay for a century or more. His action gained a wide degree of publicity, and was naturally repudiated by the Masonic authorities; the pliancy of the incumbent earned him, it is believed, a severe rebuke from the Archbishop.

4. Shortly after this event a meeting was held at Freemasons' Hall between some of the principal Freemasons and certain Church leaders who held high Masonic rank: the main topic of discussion was "Masonic Services."

The upshot of the conference was that -

(i) the expression "Masonic Service" was to be dropped as being properly applicable only to the type of gathering for which the 1917 Order of Service was produced.

(ii) the type of service must be in accordance with the faith to which the building in which it was to take place was dedicated.

(iii) the ceremonial side of the service was left to the Masons and the liturgical to the incumbent, each being responsible to their own authorities.

(iv) Masonic responsibility began and ended with the issue of the dispensation for the wearing of Masonic regalia.

(As a matter of interest the office instruction dealing with the matter is attached.)

5. This system appears to have worked perfectly well in London since that time, and where requests for advice have been received from provinces it has been given on these lines; no attempt has been made to impose it upon them.
6. Recent publicity has, however, reopened the matter, and advice is sought from the Board as to whether it is ever desirable that members

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of the Craft should parade their Masonic standing in public - for however well organised may be the clothing arrangements to prevent them appearing in the open air in their regalia, it cannot be denied that a church is a public place or that many non-Masons are present.

7. It is arguable that if Freemasons wish to indulge in a corporate act of worship they can do so equally well without regalia, and that no justification exists for giving dispensations for them to wear regalia, this applying with equal force to services held in the greatest cathedrals or the smallest churches, and that to encourage them to hold such functions with the inducement of being allowed to show off their regalia is doing service neither to God nor to Freemasonry.

On the other hand, it appears to be a matter of long-standing custom in many parts of the country, and more harm than good might ensue if dispensations were to be suddenly discouraged; it could even be argued by enemies of Freemasonry that this change of practice has been brought about by the objections ventilated in the press by the Bishop of Southwark's recent action, which attained far wider notoriety than his comparatively minor objections to the actual form of service warranted.

8. It should be added, as a minor consideration, that incumbents as well as local Freemasons are in favour of these functions, not only on the ground that they may bring to church some who would otherwise be unlikely to come at all, but also because it is usual for the church to benefit by at least some part of the collection. It is a matter of conjecture how well attended a service would be if no dispensation for regalia was granted and the procession lost such glamour as regalia, wands, Tylers' swords, Lewises carrying bibles, and the like provided.
9. It is therefore suggested that if there is a feeling in the Procedure Committee that Church Services for Masons are being overdone, or that there is no need for them to be held in Masonic regalia, an enquiry should be made of provincial Grand Secretaries as to the prevalence of Church Services in their provinces and the practice with regard to regalia at them.

November, 1961.

OFFICE INSTRUCTION.CHURCH SERVICES

1. It has now been agreed that dispensations will no longer be granted for wearing Masonic Regalia at Masonic Services under that name.

The expression "Church Service to which Masons are specially invited" will be used; together with the place, date and time, these words will appear on the front page of the service paper:-

"A dispensation has been granted to the Lodge, No. .. permitting the wearing of Masonic Regalia at the service."

If necessary, the other Lodges associated in the organisation will also be shown.

The object of the collection should appear either on the front page or at the appropriate point in the rubric.

2. a. It is necessary to ascertain whether the incumbent's approval has been obtained to the service submitted; a final copy must in all cases be sent to the Grand Secretary and will be filed for reference.

b. No exception will be taken to the use of references to particular creeds, provided that they are relevant to the sacred building where the service is to take place; this applies to hymns, prayers and lessons.

c. There must be some element of Masonic prayers in the service.

d. The preacher must be a Freemason.

e. The clothing arrangements must be adequate; no relaxation of this is to be tolerated.

3. From the above it will be seen that the emphasis now rests on the fact that the incumbent has the main choice in the make up of the service, except (1) that Masonic prayers must be included and (2) that the preacher must be a Mason.

On the other hand, the ceremonial side of the service is left in the hands of those who organise it.

From the point of view of this office, the requirements 2.c, d and e. above must be satisfied, and particular care must be taken to ensure that the elements of wording shown in 1. above appear in due prominence on the first page of the service paper.

4. No dispensation will be issued until satisfactory evidence of this compliance has been given.