

Why We Believe

The Story Behind the Jaycee Creed

The year was 1946; the place, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. About 12,000 shouting, politicking Jaycees from the US, Canada, Mexico, South America, Europe and the Philippine Islands had taken over the Schroeder Hotel and other nearby establishments for the national Junior Chamber convention there.



Up and down the main streets and clear out into the suburbs, at all hours of night and day, the fun went on. Cabbies, waitresses, elevator operators and the Milwaukee natives were all asking the same question, "How much longer can they keep up the energy?"

Past President of the Ohio Junior Chamber and National Vice President of the United States Junior Chamber C. William Brownfield realized at this convention that the organization did not have a Creed. He was inspired by the devotion of Junior Chamber members "to the purpose of serving mankind in a thousand different ways, right down at the grass roots where freedom lives or dies."

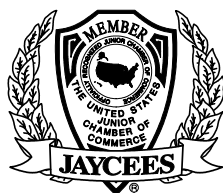
Morning and afternoon forum sessions were made lively by the same young men who had been on the loose all night, now eager and determined in the planning of governmental affairs, youth welfare, money-making activities, and all the other interests that make a local Junior Chamber of Commerce a success.

There were guests from many lands; magnificent speeches; and a musical pageant depicting the spread of the Jaycee movement, soul-stirring in its beauty and exciting in its promise. There were the tears of joy of the Oklahoma City Jaycees who won the Marks Award—more tears in the eyes of a presidential candidate and his wonderful wife who were magnificent in defeat.

All this was something Jaycee Brownfield had never seen before. And he loved it. The actual writing of the Creed took place in July 1946 during a drive from Brownfield's hometown of Columbus, Ohio, to his coal mine in New Lexington, a journey of about 75 minutes. He started that journey with a firm conviction in his mind to work on the Creed. It was during that trip that the following words came to mind and were put on paper: The brotherhood of man transcends the sovereignty of nations. Economic justice can best be won by free men through free enterprise. Government should be of laws, rather than of men. Earth's great treasure lies in human personality. Service to humanity is the best work of life.

In 1950 the first line, "we believe that faith in God gives meaning and purpose to human life." was added. Since it was written, Junior Chamber members all over the world recite the Creed at local, national and international meetings and functions. During that time there has been much discussion of the interpretation of the Creed. The author himself said, "Every Member is free to interpret the Creed in the light of his own conscience."

No matter what a member's interpretation of the Creed may be, he or she should always practice what he or she believes. Many unsuccessful attempts have been made to change the Creed, but it has prevailed through the years and continues to be as the covenant that holds the organization together. Many members have made the Creed their guide in life.



Written by Wes Kam 1994

MEANING

The following interpretation is based on Brownfield's own views and what is commonly believed and understood to be the meaning of the Creed to the organization.

"We believe..." Everyone must believe in some ideal, principle or philosophy. To believe is to practice what is believed to be true.

"...That faith in God gives meaning and purpose to human life..." "God" here does not refer to any specific religious God, but to a supreme omnipotence. It does not matter who or what your God is; the line is just saying that you must believe in something. Brownfield interpreted it in this way: "The Junior Chamber membership, drawn from many religious backgrounds, is united by a common bond of faith; that man lives by the will of (his/her) God, that God's will for man is good; and that the life worthwhile is lived in harmony with His eternal plan."

"...That the brotherhood of man transcends the sovereignty of nations..." This line breaks down all the boundaries that have been imagined by mankind. It simply means that all men and women are equal. It respects allegiance to one's country, but, at the same time, reinforces the idea that man is a citizen of the world. Brownfield put it this way: "Man-made boundaries have been drawn and redrawn, separating the human race into many nations. But across these unnatural divisions there has been an intercourse in art, science, commerce and religion; evidence of man's universal brotherhood; proof that man himself, not his territorial divisions, is of basic worth."

"...That economic justice can best be won by free men through free enterprise..." The operative words here are "...can best be won...." Junior Chamber members believe that man should be free to use his skills and abilities to the limit in improving his economy. Brownfield expressed it this way: "Where economic improvement has been greatest, man has been free to follow his dream of making a personal fortune by doing something never done before, or by doing it better." He also said, "... the system of self-development through private enterprise could be adapted with variations to suit local conditions in many parts of the world. "

"...That government should be of laws rather than of men..." This tenet of the Creed simply means that no one should be above the law, and that the law should be the same for all people, no matter what status they hold in society. The government must be based on constitutional law, accepted and ratified by a majority of the people. The power to change laws and elect governments should remain in the hands of a majority of the people. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, spoke of a government "of the people, for the people, and by the people." This line of the Creed crystallizes what President Lincoln was talking about so many decades ago. Brownfield expressed the meaning this way: "In a free society, the fundamental law is derived from the people. It is they who hold the final authority."

"...That earth's great treasure lies in human personality..." Every individual has a separate and unique personality. That is the main difference between humans and other creatures of the world. That uniqueness makes the human personality earth's greatest treasure. It cannot be duplicated nor can it be made. Brownfield's views on this line are: "True treasure lies in the hearts of men. There is about us a vast field of opportunity for cultivation of the human personality. It's not the quantity nor the length of life that gives it zest, but the quality of living, the achievement we make in terms of human progress."

"...And that service to humanity is the best work of life..." This final tenet of the Creed is the logical culmination of the preceding lines. A person who believes in the Creed will most definitely find service to humanity to be the best work of life. Note the word humanity. Brownfield's interpretation of this line of the Creed is: "The life lived unselfishly grows richer, deeper and fuller. Joy is more enduring and peace of mind, more certain. The world looks at the contribution such a life has made and marks the one who lived it as a benefactor of the race; yet he knows in truth the greater benefit has been his own."

Brownfield aptly summarized his interpretation of the Creed when he said: "Only in the deed can the world become flesh."