

In Pursuit of a Common Ideal



By Mike Church, ILLINOIS 2005

"Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but they whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves their conduct, will pursue their principles unto death," said Leonardo da Vinci

I've been fortunate to spend the last three years of my life representing our Fraternity in myriad capacities as a member of our Headquarters staff. I have traversed the Fraternity's landscape in search of nothing more than a simple continuance of my own enlightenment and understanding of the deepest meanings of Sigma Chi. When I was asked to briefly present what knowledge I had gained through all of the miles I've traveled, I was hesitant to pass my opinions onto others for fear of disrupting their own search for truth, but I can think of no better subject on which to prepare my thoughts.

During my three-year tenure at Headquarters, I've met an immeasurable amount of brothers—men from all walks of life whose commonalities can be so diverged that the link between their similarities is barely recognizable. As I engaged in conversations with each new brother in which the exchange was limited by the boundaries of pleasantries, it seemed only to contribute to the increasing confusion that plagued me: It had become a mystery to me how every one of us, despite the extent of our differences, could be drawn to the teachings of the same grandiose but certainly enigmatic organization—so much so that the necessity to dispose of further mostly meaningless discourse in favor of a more profound rhetorical exchange became apparent.

First, I began my quest to unlock the perplexing nature of Sigma Chi by immersing myself in my thoughts so that I could better understand my own passion for the Fraternity. It was my hope to reveal further clarity by subjecting whatever conclusion I reached to further trials with others in order to achieve a generally accepted agreement among Sigma Chi brethren everywhere about what has drawn us all to the Fraternity. When my internal intellectual and spiritual journeys intersected, I cleared my head, opened my heart, and sought the answer to the age-old question: What is the tie that binds?

Since its inception into Sigma Chi's literary repertoire, one of our most frequently celebrated citations is excerpted from our Spirit, which states

that we are a brotherhood of men of "different temperaments, talents and convictions." The acceptance of this philosophy by our membership has ensured that our brotherhood remains comprised of such men, providing endless contributions to our proud heritage and making this arguably one of the most important components of our Fraternity.

But while the short snippet from our Spirit has integrated itself into our everyday vernacular, our use of it as a stand-alone entity is summarily insufficient, rendering it an incomplete depiction of the celebration of the diversity of our membership. To explain, if a Sigma Chi were to consciously neglect from the Spirit the idiom that we are "sharing a common belief in an ideal," would he still be a Sigma Chi? If, then, it is our communal belief in an ideal that binds us together as Sigma Chis, is the absence of that idea from our language destroying the potency of the meaning of "different temperaments, talents and convictions?" As I reflected, it became clear to me that these two statements were so reliant on each other that we should be using them both in constant congruency to describe why we celebrate the diversity of our membership. But even as that realization became clear, one important question remained unanswered: Which common ideal do we all share?

I haven't figured this question out yet, and I may never. Maybe there is no one common ideal, but rather there is a sum of all of our ideals that comprise a singular ideal in which we all believe. Or maybe the common ideal we all believe in is actually just the pursuit of whatever ideal it is that we believe we all share. Or maybe our literature was left purposely vague so as to leave the deepest meaning of Sigma Chi to the man interpreting it. In the end, after three years, hundreds of miles and countless handshakes, what I've discovered is that the only ideal that matters is the one that's found in the journey itself. Until I unlock the real meaning of Sigma Chi, I'll just keep my heart firm, let my conscience approve of my conduct, and let posterity be my judge.

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