

Chandler Lodge #138 F &AM  
Lodge Education Program

Subject: Members or Masons

Date: 09 Dec 08

Recently I attended a discussion on the subject of new candidates, why they are drawn to petition into freemasonry, more importantly why they stay involved or most important why we never see some of them again. It reminded me of a few articles I have read from brethren more educated than I, and with the recent discussion I thought I would combine these thoughts for a little insight on this subject, and pass it on to more of my brothers. Basically this is an opinion piece with some facts and ideas to stimulate each of you into re-evaluating or refreshing your Masonic viewpoint.

The first area to discuss is the thought process of the lodge. Are we really committed to making masons? Or do we get sidetracked in just the numbers of membership. The recent trend has been to work on the problem of declining membership numbers, but not addressing the internal problems. Masonry is the most unique organization in the world, and has succeeded for many years because of the strength of its core tenants, Brotherly Love Relief and Truth, with the support of the three great principles Faith Hope and Charity. Statistics show us, that death is a huge factor of our decline, but what most of you don't realize is the Suspension for Non-Payment of dues is running a close second. To over come this symptom we have raised dues, and become press hungry for recognition. We have shortened the entry process, made minimum examinations, and even waived some of our regulations with one-day classes and other membership increasing programs. But at what cost; have we cheapened ourselves? In Ohio grand lodge reports we raised over 7,000 new masons in a 2002 one day class, that and 8% are currently serving as officers in 67% of Ohio lodges. That sounds great, except when you look at the flip side, what happened to the other 92%?, that is over 6400 masons that we have not kept active. Right here at home we have had somewhere around 25 candidates in all the one-day classes, but only about 3-4 are involved. I am not saying one-day classes are bad, I agree that we may have many new men in our ranks that could not have otherwise joined, and we did get those extra 560 active brothers; but overall did it help *masonry*, or does it help *membership*? The only sure thing about one-day classes is it does prove the theory of the fraternity trending towards quantity (ie 7000) instead of the quality (i.e.8%). I agree now is the time to take action to make some changes and Lodge can be more enjoyable, interesting and meaningful, but at the same time we do not want to abandon our heritage, or principles. I do believe we can exercise our imagination and make the *perception* of Freemasonry more contemporary.

We all want to be the one to bring in the next petition, or have a close friend join, it is a fact that friendship is made stronger when these who we associate have the lodge secrets in common with us, but remember he must seek us out, we do not and should not be searching and recruiting. This is part of the draw of a new man coming to freemasonry. Men come to masonry because it is unique, they come because of our principals, yes some press coverage or a friends discussion may give them that needed nudge, but ultimately it is an internal appraisal that brings a new man to our door. There is no other organization like us. Think for a moment of how much time, effort, and money you have invested in your lodge. Now multiply that investment by all the masons in our history; times all the lodges worldwide; the resultant figures are enormous. Our theme of making good men better has proven a valuable asset, because it is human nature, mankind wants to do what is right, and moral, he strives to help himself, others

and the world. These people are drawn to masonry like moths to a flame, because they have these attributes and they want to share and socialize with like minded people, therein is the strength of freemasonry. We have prospered in this current form for at least 300 years and I think relating the issue of how we think of our fraternity and ourselves will have a direct impact on the next man that walks through the door. Most of us can acknowledge that only about 10% of our brothers are active. That of course means that 90% are inactive. Yet, they retain their membership. They pay their dues each year knowing that they will never participate in Lodge activities. There is only one logical reason why they do that. They perceive a value to being able to say, "I am a Freemason."

With all this in mind now think of passing this on to the new mason. Statistics tell us that approximately 85% of new masons seldom return to lodge. We should always be conscious of the old saying, 'you only get one chance to make a first impression', that man may never return and he will only have that one experience to evaluate masonry. All our brothers know that our entry progression is long and drawn out, at not like any other process in the world. Just getting through the investigation process and learning a little of the surface history of masonry can be overwhelming to the new mason. The current brother must better convey the nature, and history and process of acceptance to the candidate. A man prepared slowly and with sufficient knowledge will be less inclined to run when faced with adversity, he will be more willing to seek out answers to his questions, and continue on his voyage. Remember he has already professed an interest, our job is to encourage and increase this interest, and we would not willingly interfere with his quest. But how many times, having just conferred a degree with the proper dignity, do we adjourn to the dining hall or front porch and spoil it by behavior contrary to the lessons of the degree we have just worked, this could unknowingly have an impact on our new mason. True brothers will make certain that at all times we exemplify our Masonic teachings. This includes our own education; we have many members among us whose Masonic knowledge does not go beyond a literal understanding of the ritual. This is a sad state for the lodge, with just a trip to the library or one hour on the Internet our new member may be more educated, or have questions that the average brother may not be able answer. They should not be confused with random stories, but should be answered with facts and truths about our heritage, ritual and especially myths surrounding the fraternity. We owe a definite duty to our candidates to improve ourselves, and increase the ability to pass it on to the new mason. We should consistently remind ourselves that the person behind you in the officer line, or that newer member, or the latest candidate; is our legacy, they will know only what is passed on to them. This is the nature of freemasonry 'to pass on unimpaired the most excellent tenants'

Once a new mason is received we must make the welcoming of new members a very important part of what we do in Lodge, this includes wives and families, and I don't mean bring them in to discuss Eastern Star. I mean bring them in to socialize, eat a meal, take a tour, and have them join us in special activities. We often fail to appreciate the social side of Freemasonry and that is one cause for our members lack of interest. Take the combination of lodge work, and lodge sociability, and you have elements of interest and pleasure that should be attractive to everyone. We should strive to make our Masonic activities and social fellowship attractive to existing members, new candidates and also prospective members. Once again it relates to the knowledge. If the new mason and his family understands what he does, with who and why they can be less interfering and more supportive, and in turn he has the potential to be more willing, able and enthusiastic about joining the lodge activities.

The new man approaching the Craft today does so to supplement and add to what his church and family have already given him, many times he is already living the principles of masonry,

there just hasn't been that formal connection of our principles with his principles. A certain tugging at his soul speaks to him to seek a deeper meaning in life, in family, and in God. However he must be effectively educated about the history, symbolism and philosophy of the Craft, if he is to be worthy of the title Freemason. Combine all this into actually living with Masonic virtue and you have the difference between 'members' and 'masons'.

We should remember that our lodges are no different in terms of membership decline than almost all other organizations today, including most religions. The climate of society today simply is different and not geared to organizational interests. This is no fault of masonry; our leaders therefore should not be attempting to fix something beyond our control. Yes we may shrink in size, but it may very well make us stronger as a whole. Bringing new members is a noble idea, but I propose if we truly make ourselves great, they will come of their own free will. Our purpose and precepts have carried us through changing societies for centuries, it is significant that we are not a static organization. Freemasonry is an ever-evolving entity, and change cannot be opposed because it is change, nor should it be accepted for its own sake. We each have an obligation to be certain that any change we make will be of a benefit to the Craft or, more importantly, at least not be a detriment. A definite strength of freemasonry has always been the quality of its members, regardless of the rise and fall in member quantity.

We have always been distinctively different from any other organization. The world needs Freemasonry, but we should always be cautious that masonry is not for everyone, and was never intended to be; without quality men there can be no quality organization. I think we should be conscious of membership numbers, and the importance they have on the success or failure of any organization. However I firmly believe we are more reliant on the wisdom, strength and beauty this organization was built on which ultimately is the individual freemason, for he has the wisdom to learn and prosper, the strength to seek more of himself and the fraternity, and the beautiful principles of our heritage and ritual to pass on. It is true members can do many good things in a group, but we should be concerned with making better masons, and not just members. I do not wish to be known for enjoying Masonic privileges, without possessing those Masonic virtues, and more especially by being a mason I will not allow this generation of freemasonry to falter.