

Masonic Basics

What is Basic Freemasonry?

Adapted by Tim Anderson from a talk given by Jim Billig at the 2006 Midwest Conference on Masonic Education at Milwaukee, WI.

How does Masonry attract members? How do we keep members after we have attracted them? Is there a connection?

These and many other questions are being asked every day in Lodges. The answer has always been available but the employment of the answer is unglamorous and takes considerable work. Thus the great quest for a silver bullet for Masonry - a solution that will immediately remedy all our membership concerns.

While these questions have occupied our Brethren for many years, we need to look at them in today's light, from a different perspective, and see what there is to see. We need to look at what the present day social structure offers and what Masonry offers its members.

With all of our advancements in material goods, we are still the same social creatures we have always been. Some of us are products of the somewhat calm fifties and others came out of the more turbulent sixties and fewer numbers from the succeeding periods. The fifties and sixties were eras of change when the social structure turned from personal responsibility to the replacement of personal responsibility by government legislation, legal substitutes, and the law suit. There has been an explosion of alternative ideas for problem solving, depression, interpersonal relationships, personality enhancements, physical enhancements, and the acquisition of stuff. Clearly something has been lost. People are searching for that silver bullet to fill the void in their life.

Today, our social structure is marked by isolation. Most customer service is gone as you have to serve yourself. Fast food, self check out, ATMs, working from home, services to buy and then deliver your groceries, computer chat rooms, and the greatest service achievement - that automated customer service - answering system at any company or service company. No real voice or person just a loop of frustration. This is labeled progress (change). We just relabeled and substituted the word progress for change.

The result of this progress is that as a society we have lost the common experience that helps hold us together. There is little social glue that keeps us together. Neighborhoods are only a collection of houses. Most of us cannot even tell who lives on our block or in our condo. We do not have the social fabric that used to hold us together. The appearance of the electronic connectedness is only smoke and mirrors.

We do not participate in local government, in religious practices, in family events or even daily family meals. We are increasingly coarse, rude, extremely impolite and more physically aggressive. At the same time telling ourselves that we are more connected than ever. Many realize that this connectiveness is only thinly veiled isolation. We believe our constant activity makes us useful and is the valued life style. Constant activity demonstrates our social worth. Well, I am here to tell you that this thought is utter nonsense!

Our young people want to socially interact.

Masonry as we know it is several hundred years old. What does it offer to us? Well, the bad element about Freemasonry is that its basic tenets don't change much. The really good part about Freemasonry is that its basic tenets don't change much. Freemasonry developed and flourished during a time period of the potentially greatest social, political and religious upheaval to be experienced. As a Fraternal Order, we have weathered several storms which give us insight into how to flourish in our present social situation.

Yes, we have an answer and we can flourish!

Each and every member of the Lodge has shared the experiences of Initiation, Passing and Raising. This is known as social capital. Masonry was the community's greatest social capital. Ethical behaviors, principled choices and activities that work to improve individuals and their community are social capital. These behaviors and tenets are social capital. The tenets of Freemasonry are timeless. This is how Masonry has endured through centuries and adversities. More important still is that the principles are simple. Reducing Masonry to its basic level in today's terms, Masonry is a male support group. It provides members with a place to go for a while that is a respite from the strife of life and the struggle of surviving in our present day society as most contentious topics are left outside the Lodge.

It's about time! - Move it or we will lose it!

There is no question that Freemasonry is needed and is important in the world! The world may have forgotten about it for a while, but Freemasonry has survived and is waiting patiently to be rediscovered. Values, Masonic and personal, as well as principles that consistently influence people's lives; encourage the right to question existing dogma and uphold our right to express one's own thoughts and ideas. These values promote toleration of all religious and philosophical views. The Fraternity is a constructive, stabilizing, and enlightening force throughout history.

We basically know this but now we need to move further. We need to move into the future by working today. There are some major thoughts that we need to understand. Masonry is no longer identified as an elite organization. Current Masons do not understand their own Fraternity. We rely on historic figures far too much for this understanding and this reliance prohibits us from achieving contemporary significance.

In every lodge two questions must be asked of its members. Who are the Masons? How does a community know them in their daily lives? This becomes the point where our Fraternity can rediscover, find, rejuvenate, resurrect, and make Freemasonry visible.

Some practical methods to begin to achieve this goal are:

One: As practicing Freemasons, there are a number of questions we need to ask and then answer for ourselves. What does Masonry do for you? How do you use Masonic teachings? When does Masonry work for you? Why are you a Mason? What is Masonry? If you answered the first set of questions you know what Masonry is. You can use the pat canned statements or you can use your personal experience.

Two: What is Freemasonry in your Lodge? Use the talents of the individuals in your Lodge and build a community of experts who can help aide and assist those Brothers who need help.

Three: Improve community access to your Lodge and Lodge activities that support the community of which you are a member. Contribute your insights and expertise to the community.

Four: Develop and implement Masonic recognition and incentive programs for educational initiatives, visitor programs and community involvement activities.

Five and most important: Honor the Mason in yourself.

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