

St. John's Lodge No. 9, F. & A. M.

Trestleboard

NOVEMBER 2018

Jim Russell, editor



Serving Seattle since 1860

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FROM THE EAST



Seann Maria, *Master*

Brethren,

We had a very eventful month. Some of us took the option to board a bus to tour Portland's Shriners Hospital and visit the Grand Lodge of Oregon, where I had several conversations with the Grand Secretary of that jurisdiction and his staff. We were given a tour of the Grand Library and gifts had been set aside for us. I hope that you all will take some time to learn more about the history of that jurisdiction as it is one and the same with our own in the State of Washington.

Among stated meeting events we elected new officers and I am grateful for the honor of being elected for a

second term as Master and I intend to use the momentum of the previous year to keep introducing new and exciting ways to attract and retain the right people to our great Order. We have a budget vote coming up preceded by an explanation of the charities being included. I hope every brother takes the time to consider how important your vote is and that a review of how the money is being spent is a right and privilege of being a Freemason, so please don't take it for granted. Among the month's events was the delivery of our firesafe to the Scottish Rite Center where it awaits the migration of our archives. The Past Masters night saw good attendance and I was happy to see so many faces contribute. If I had to pick the most important event of the month it would be an easy choice. I would choose that we received two petitions for the degrees and one petition for plural membership.

All of us now have a responsibility to this Lodge to make good on our claims that we value new members to our Lodge. I'm speaking to every member of our Lodge when I say you have a responsibility to the Lodge to make sure that you pursue your own investigation of these men to the fullest. You have a responsibility to fulfill your obligation to vote with utmost confidence, one way or another, but not to vote with a lack of facts around your position. We've been a Lodge too many times troubled by a black ball that came unexpected. We are men who should express our concerns amongst each other so that we are not caught unawares when a decision is revealed. I plead to you brothers to follow cardinal values. Be Prudent, Diligent, Temperate, and Discreet with these votes that will form the future of this Lodge.

Lastly, my brethren, let us all be equally committed to the obligation to help these new men, should they join our order. We have made an obligation to give them a course in moral instruction. We cannot take credit for their thirst to journey forward, but we can take ownership for our responsibility to step forward and volunteer to learn ritual so that we may teach and to take on duties so that we may set an example, and to share our Masonic lessons so that they may strengthen their own character.

Be well Brethren

CALENDAR



- November 13 (7pm): Long Range Planning *Razzis Pizza*
- November 14 (6pm): Board of Trustees
- November 14 (6:30pm): District 5 Assoc. meeting (*Razzis Pizza*)
- November 15 (7pm): Officers meeting
- November 21 (6:15pm) 7:30pm: St. John's 9 (dinner) Stated
- November 22: *Thanksgiving Day*
- December 2 – 10: *Happy Chanukah*
- December 8 (8am): Shopping for Operation Kids Smile (*Southcenter*)
- December 12 (7pm): Master Masons Study Group (**cancelled**)
- December 13 (6:30pm): Installation of Officers (Thursday evening) *followed by dinner at 8:30pm*
- December 15 (9am) 1pm: Operation Kids Smile (set-up) Party time for families
- December 19 (6:15pm) 7:30pm: St. John's 9 (dinner) Stated
- December 27: Feast Day of St. John the Evangelist *take a Brother to lunch*
- December 31: Deadline for payment of 2019 Lodge dues

The Secretary is looking for your 2019 dues payment



"My favorite Charity"

November dinner hour

Let us know about your favorite charity supported by St. John's Lodge

Challenge: can you do it in 3-5 minutes?

NOVEMBER COMMUNICATION TO ADOPT 2019 BUDGET

Brothers invited to promote their "favorite" charities during the dinner hour

It may be the evening before Thanksgiving, but that doesn't mean there's not a lot of work to do this month at St. John's stated communication. Last month WBro. Seann Maria presented for initial consideration the proposed budget for next year, which will be adopted following an opportunity for amendments. We may be balloting on a number of petitions for membership to the Lodge. And, brothers will be given an opportunity to share their favorite charities during the dinner hour leading up to the 7:30 business meeting.

Last month we elected new officers for next year. WBro. Maria was re-elected to the East and Bro. Blair Neumann was elected to the West. VWBro. Ashley Brinkley will be our next Junior Warden. VWBro. Jim Maher, VWBro. Jim Russell, and WBro. Hans Wehl were re-elected to another term as Treasurer, Secretary and Trustee respectively.

Worshipful Master Seann Maria invites all Masons to join us for our stated communication on Wednesday, November 21st. Dinner will be served at 6:15. Please make your dinner reservations with the secretary at 206 623-0261 by Friday, November 16, prior to the meeting.



Do you know of a brother who has not attended Lodge in a while? Call him and ask if you can pick him up and bring him to Lodge.



2019 Annual Membership Dues

Notices to all required to pay 2019 dues were mailed to members of St. John's last month. Dues are payable no later than December 31st of each year; beginning January 1 they **increase by \$5** each month.

PETITIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP RECEIVED

Last month petitions for the degrees were received from Mr. Sylvain Niles and Mr. Louis Leandro Turner.

Mr. Niles lives in Seattle. He was born in 1978, in Paris, France. He is employed as head of technology for Crystal Commerce in Mountlake Terrace.

Mr. Turner lives in Seattle. He was born in 1983, in Tacoma, WA. He is employed as a doorman for Neon Boots, and as a martial arts instructor for Pacific Muay Tai.

A petition for plural membership was received from VWBro. John Richard Adamson of Puyallup, WA. He was born in 1941 in Iowa City, Iowa. He is a member of Corinthian Lodge No. 38 and Krucible Lodge No. 318.

The following committees were assigned to investigate the petitioners and to report back to the Lodge by the next Stated Communication:

For Mr. Sylvain Niles: Bro. Paul Doak, Bro. Blair Neumann, WBro. Jeffrey Pullen

For Mr. Louis Turner: Bro. Eric Koteles, WBro. Jeffrey Pullen, Bro. Jeff Hawley

For VWBro. John Adamson: VWBro. Jim Maher, WBro. Hans Wehl, WBro. John Louderback

Great concern has been expressed that brothers are not heeding the recommendation of well-qualified investigation committees. If any brother knows something about a petitioner that should be brought to the committee's attention, he

should do so well in advance of the evening of the balloting. It had not been our practice in recent years to announce the names of those on the committee, thus making it difficult to offer these warnings. Recently the Lodge brethren have voted that the committee members should be made known and published in the Trestleboard.



5-Year Planning Continues

WBro. Russ Johnson continues to spearhead a committee of St. John's brothers to prepare a new 5-year plan for our Lodge. [Find here a summarization](#) by WBro. Johnson of our first two meetings. We invite your participation at our next meeting, which will be Tuesday evening, November 13, at 7pm at Razzis Pizzeria in Greenwood.

Please let us know if you wish to attend so we can be sure we have a meeting space large enough to accommodate everyone.



Assignment for all: WBro. Johnson has asked that you prepare – in bullet format – your perception of what would make an ideal stated communication meeting and what you see as an ideal candidate degree experience.

Public invitation to
St. John's Lodge No. 9
Installation of Officers

For the year 2019

Thursday evening, 6:30pm, December 13, 2018

Invite your
Family & Friends

Dinner & Refreshments to Follow
RSVP please!

Greenwood Masonic Center

LODGE BROTHERS ELECT NEW OFFICERS

Last meeting, ballots were distributed for the election of officers for 2019 and one Trustee whose term will expire in 2021. Bro. Jeff Hawley had previously announced his desire to step out of the progressive line. Twenty-four members (Master Masons) were present and voting. Visiting brothers Steve Harrell and Scott Bohart served as the tally committee. The result of the ballot:

Bro. Seann Maria	W.M.
Bro. Blair Neumann	S.W.
VWBro. Ashley Brinkley	J.W.
VWBro. Jim Maher	Treasurer
VWBro. Jim Russell	Secretary
WBro. Hans Wehl	Trustee 2021

Installation of 2019 Officers

At the request of the Master, the brethren voted that the installation of 2019 officers be open to the general public. So brothers, ***invite your ladies, families, friends and prospective Masons to join us*** on Thursday evening, December 13.

Officers are to assemble at 5:30pm for a photo session. A buffet dinner will immediately follow the close of the installation ceremony.

DECEMBER MASTER MASON STUDY GROUP

Please note that due to a variety of events occurring in and around early and mid-December, we are cancelling December's Master Mason Study night and wish everyone a happy Saturnalia. Next scheduled meeting will be Wednesday, January 9.



NOVEMBER MEETING HIGHLIGHTS:

Here's a look at what's happening at our November stated communication:

Dinner - guests welcome

1. Menu: Pesto Caesar salad; Beef bourguignon; Vanilla bourbon cherry bread pudding
(allergies, vegetarian? Let us know a week before.)
2. Welcome & Introductions
3. "My favorite Charity"
4. Announcements

Stated Meeting - filed

1. Ballot on petitioners
2. Adoption of 2019 Budget
3. General business

Refreshments

Kick back, visit, and enjoy a beverage and dessert

SANTA RIDES AGAIN

VWBro. Neil Quinn and WBro. John Louderback will be leading a team of St. John's brothers and their ladies for this year's annual Operation Kid Smile. We expect 20 or so children will be on Santa's list. We will visit their families at the Tacoma Scottish Rite and Santa Claus, played by our WBro. Hans Wehl, will distribute toys and other gifts to the children.



St. John's members and their ladies will be shopping at Kohl's and Target (Southcenter) for clothing and toys on Saturday morning, the 8th. Then, Santa and his elves will be working much of the day Saturday, December 15, preparing the Scottish Rite "North Pole," breaking for pizza and lunch before the 1pm party for the kids.

PAST MASTERS RECOGNITION

St. John's Lodge is proud to honor its Past Masters who have worked so diligently to move our Lodge forward through the years. Serving as Master of a Lodge, especially one as active as this one, takes a lot of time, thought, planning, and true brotherly love.

St. John's is also honored to count among its members many who have served other Lodges, as well. These brothers have earned the title of Affiliated Past Master. Last month we recognized the following Affiliated PM's who were in attendance:

VWBro. Ashley Brinkley (South Gate 100, Delta-White Center 172), WBro. Vinny DiGiulio (Ashlar 121), WBro. Fred Eastman (Eureka 20), VWBro. Tom Eastman (Eureka 20), WBro. Jim Lumsden (Greenwood 253), VWBro. Jim Maher (Daylight 232), and VWBro. Neil Quinn (Rainier 189).



12 Past Masters of St. John's were honored at October communication

The Worshipful Master called upon the Senior Deacon to escort the Past Masters of St. John's to a formation west of the Altar, facing the East. In attendance were WBro. Hans Wehl (Elliot Bay 257 1968), WBro. Bill Collison (1971), WBro. Mike Wilderman (1978), WBro. Serco Tokatlian (Ionic 90 1982), WBro. Richard Hawley (Ionic 90 1989), VWBro. Jim Russell (1991), VWBro. Chuck Brockway (Ionic 90 1992, St. John's 1996), WBro. Terry Grove (2003), WBro. Joe Oates (2012), WBro. Eric Koteles (2014), WBro. John Louderback (2016), and WBro. Jeffrey Pullen (2017). They were accorded the public Grand Honors and presented with tie chains adorned with the Past Master's crest.



Assisted by VWB Neil Quinn, Master Seann Maria presented gifts to each of the Past Masters of St. John's. Here he greets WB Mike Wilderman. WB Bill Collison looks on from Mike's left, WB Rich Hawley stands to Mike's right. (Click on photo to see more pics.)

Proposed 2019 Budget Introduced

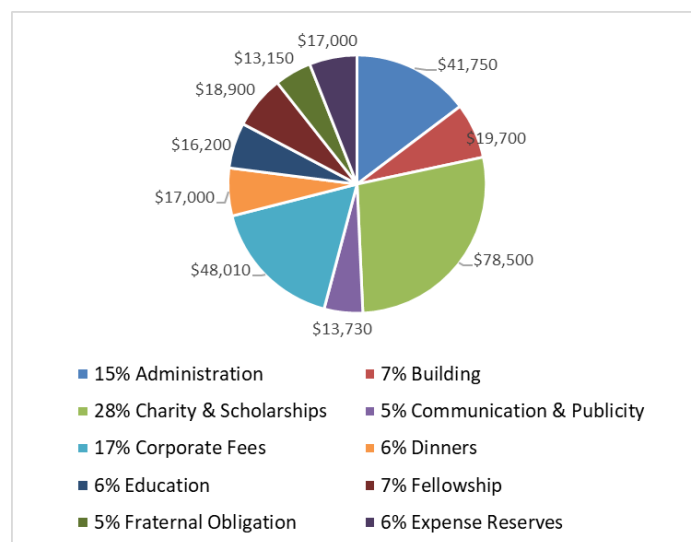
Last month Worshipful Master Seann Maria distributed the proposed 2019 budget as recommended by the Board of Trustees. He highlighted and explained those line items which have significant changes from this year's budget. Action will be taken at the November stated communication following the 1-month layover.

Below is a pie-chart showing the distribution of expenses:

Corporate fees include those fees charged by the professional team to manage our financial portfolio (the larger the portfolio, the greater the expense – so that's a good thing, sort of) and insurance against property loss.

The low cost of education reflects that most of our Masonic education is provided *gratis* by the research and leadership of our own members.

Administration costs include salaries of the Secretary, Treasurer, Musician and Tyler, as well as the supplies and regular expenses to run a Lodge.



Visit Our District Brethren

District 5 Lodges	Next Meeting	Time
St. John's 9	Wednesday, November 21, 2018	7:30pm
Eureka 20	Monday, January 7, 2019	7:30pm
University 141	Monday, December 3, 2018	7:30pm
Daylight 232	Saturday, November 17, 2018	10am
Lafayette 241	Thursday, December 6, 2018	7pm
Queen Anne 242	Thursday, December 13, 2018	7:30pm
Esoterika 316	Tuesday, January 22, 2019	7:30pm

Don't forget to visit some upcoming installations of officers:

- Eureka No. 20 - Monday 11/12/18 at 7:30 @ Green Lake Masonic Hall. Food about 6:15
- University No. 141 - Saturday 11/17/18 at 4:00 @ University Masonic Hall. Food after
- St. John's No. 9 – Thursday 12/13/18 at 6:30, dinner following
- Lafayette No. 241 -1/2/19 at 5:00

SHRINERS HOSPITAL FOR CHILDREN TOUR

Members and guests of St. John's boarded a bus Saturday morning last month to travel to Portland to tour Shriners Hospital for Children and visit the Grand Lodge of Oregon.

A great time was had by all, with entertainment on board to and from the City of Roses.

Following the tour of the hospital, and lunch at



Entrance to Grand Lodge of Oregon AF & AM

McMenamins, the staff of the Oregon Grand Lodge made everyone feel welcome when they made a special effort to open the building (normally closed on weekends) for a tour.



Grand Lodge library

Worshipful Master Maria reports that he had "several conversations with the Grand Secretary of that jurisdiction and his staff." They were given a tour of the Grand Library and gifts had been set aside for St. John's travelers.

St. John's and the Grand Lodge of Washington have a historical connection to the Grand Lodge of Oregon (our "mother" Grand Lodge).



On the tour from St. John's were (l-r) Charles Gain (University Lodge), Blair Neumann, Seann Maria, Ashley Brinkley, Carl Alexander, Jan Alexander, Kazi Scott, Elaine "Pat" Zittlau, Mike and Kim Riley, Jane Davis, Gale Kenny, Scott Bohart (University Lodge), and Helmuth Svoboda.

Happy Thanksgiving from all of us!

"Let us remember that, as much has been given us, much will be expected from us, and that true homage comes from the heart as well as from the lips, and shows itself in deeds."
- Theodore Roosevelt



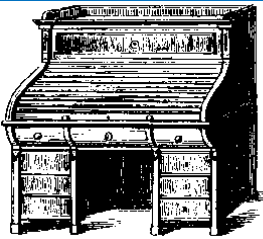
CLOSING CHARGE

At the close of every Lodge meeting, the Master charges the brethren to forget not the promises we have made to ourselves and to our brothers.

"Brethren, we are now about to quit this sacred retreat of friendship and virtue, to mingle again with the outer world. Amid its concerns and employments, forget not the duties you have heard so frequently inculcated and so forcefully recommended in this Lodge. Be diligent, prudent, temperate, discreet. Remember that, at this Altar, you have promised to befriend and relieve every Brother who shall need your assistance, to remind him, in the most tender manner, of his faults, to endeavor to aid in his reformation; and to defend his character. These generous principles extend further, for every human being has a claim upon your kind offices. Do good unto all. Finally, my Brethren, be ye all of one mind; live in peace, and may the God of love and peace delight to dwell with you and bless you!"



Pictured above are the elected Grand Lodge officers of Washington: Junior Grand Warden RWBro. Cameron Bailey, Deputy Grand Master RWBro. Charles Wood, Grand Master MWBro. James Kendall, Senior Grand Warden RWBro. Chris Coffman, and Grand Secretary RWBro. Clinton Brown. They are pictured here as seen on the cover of the [Fall issue of the Masonic Tribune](#).



From The Secretary's Desk *Jim Russell*

Brethren,

It is my pleasure and honor to serve as Secretary of St. John's Lodge No. 9. I appreciate once again your vote of confidence and will do my utmost to deserve the respect and trust shown in me.

I recently reviewed what is expected of a good Lodge Secretary, and found this posted on the Grand Lodge of Colorado's website that pretty much says it all.

THE OFFICE OF LODGE SECRETARY

The responsibilities accepted by the Lodge Secretary when he is installed are covered in the Installation of the Secretary (Page 80 of the Colorado Craftsman).

In a Masonic Lodge the Secretary is in charge of all the executive details, with the exception of those allotted to the Treasurer. In addition to the mechanical duties involved in the office, such as recording the minutes, collecting dues, maintaining membership records, etc., the Secretary is continually at the beck and call of the Master and the Brethren, arranging funeral services, sending floral tributes to bereaved families, acting as liaison officer between the members and Grand Lodge, serving as Lodge correspondent, etc.

The Secretary is responsible for preparing and mailing the Trestleboard, invitations to special meetings, scheduling activities for the Temple building, and generally keeping the Lodge members informed of Lodge activities.

Constant contacts with his fellow members, affords the Secretary opportunity to serve his Lodge by spreading harmony and inculcating within the hearts and minds of his Brethren the true spirit of Masonic helpfulness. All this requires many hours of dedicated labor within and outside the confines of the Lodge Room.

A Secretary should regard his work as a sacred trust and rejoice in the fact that his position offers him many opportunities to serve without encroaching upon the powers of the Master. The ideal Secretary realizes that his duties should be performed with dignity and humility and in such a manner that harmony, rather than discord, prevails in the Lodge.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A LODGE SECRETARY:

A Lodge Secretary must possess a complete understanding of how the Lodge functions. Because of their past leadership, Past Masters who achieved a measure of success in the East make the best Lodge Secretaries. They are familiar with the Lodge functions and their tenure in the East assures them of a wider acquaintance among the members, which is an asset to the Secretary who must act as liaison officer between the

Lodge and the Brethren. They also possess a greater spirit of loyalty and helpfulness.

In summation, here is a list of qualifications that a good Secretary must possess:

- 1) He must be a member in good standing and not be delinquent in his dues.
- 2) He must possess administrative ability, loyalty and integrity and be morally, mentally and physically able to perform the duties required of him.
- 3) He must be trustworthy, scrupulously honest and prompt in the remission to the Treasurer of all the monies he collects.
- 4) He must be efficient, possess a knowledge of the proper procedures of his office and always maintain his books and records in order and up-to-date. His minutes should be processed carefully and accurately.
- 5) He must refrain from committing to paper, or bringing before the Lodge, anything which is improper, which does not have the approval of the Master or which might run contrary to the principles and landmarks of the Fraternity.
- 6) He should possess initiative; do the right thing in the right way without having to be told.
- 7) He should be modest in his demeanor and not fall into the habit of continually usurping the floor. Fewer words and more action are hallmarks of a good Secretary plus the ability to think and to learn and profit by experience.
- 8) He should always be dignified, especially when speaking or reading the minutes. Undue levity on the part of the Secretary detracts from the decorum of a Masonic gathering. His voice should be well modulated, never too low to be heard in the rear of the Lodge or so loud his voice can be heard outside.
- 9) He should be neat, not only in his attire but also in the typing or writing of the minutes or other records. Future historians will appreciate this.
- 10) He should be conscientious in the performance of all his duties.
- 11) He should be prompt. This is one of the most desirable attributes of a good Secretary, first in his place and last to leave the Lodge room. Punctuality in attendance and promptness in attending to the business of the Lodge is an essential attribute; procrastination and tardiness go hand in hand in making a poor Secretary.
- 12) He must be thoroughly familiar with Masonic forms and documents and know when to use them.
- 13) A pleasing personality and a friendly disposition are indispensable assets, plus a character beyond reproach and the possession of a full and complete sense of personal responsibility to the Lodge and to the Brethren in general.
- 14) He must be familiar with the Laws of his own Lodge and his Grand Lodge, also with the Book of Constitutions.
- 15) He must be a good Mason and live up to its highest ideals. He must be slow to anger, quick to lend a helping hand and ever ready to visit the sick and or aid and comfort the bereaved.

Why Become a Freemason

WHY BECOME A FREEMASON?

“Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation. Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair; the rest is in the hands of God.” “The grand object of Masonry is to promote the happiness of the human race.”

— George Washington

“Freemasonry is an institution calculated to benefit mankind.”

— Andrew Jackson

“Freemasonry is an order whose leading star is philanthropy, and whose principles inculcate an unceasing devotion to the cause of virtue and morality.”

— La Fayette

“Freemasonry embraces the highest moral laws and will bear the test of any system of ethics or philosophy ever promulgated for the uplift of man.”

— Gen. Douglas MacArthur

There are many personal benefits to becoming a Mason, and the rewards can be different for each person. But all Masons share a common goal: making good men better. Only individuals believed to be of the finest character are favorably considered for membership.

TRADITION

For all of history, men have come together to build. Fathers taught the secrets of their trade to their sons. Families learned to work together and these builders began to erect evermore beautiful edifices. Freemasonry teaches, exactly, those time tested principles which bring men together amid who best can work and best agree. Those principles apply to building anything, from friendships to communities, private aid to Charities, or simple fun. Just as time has not changed male human nature, Freemasonry has not changed what works.

MORALITY

You'll share the values of the great men who founded the United States: Men who believed in the brotherhood of man and the ideals expressed in the U.S. Constitution. Freemasonry is built upon the tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Brotherly love is the practice of the golden rule. Relief embodies charity for all mankind. Truth is honesty, fair play and adherence to cardinal virtues. Above all, men of all faiths are welcome, as long as they believe in a Supreme Being.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Masons seek to improve themselves and to help others, not because they think they should, but because they want to. Because of this crucial distinction, Masons give freely of themselves and ask nothing in return. Nationally, Masons give away more than \$2 million every day to relieve suffering. When you're a Mason, the

satisfaction derived from selfless service is immeasurable, for it is in helping others that one most helps himself.

FRATERNITY

Masons come from all walks of life: accountants, teachers, office workers, laborers — you name it. They represent all creeds and cultures, and all are welcome. You are bound to develop lasting friendships, meet new business associates, and broaden your circle of friends. No matter where your travels take you, it's great to know there are Brothers you can depend on and trust.

FELLOWSHIP

By attending Masonic Lodge meetings and learning from your fellow Masons, you'll strengthen the bonds of fellowship as you join together with like-minded men who share ideals of both a moral and metaphysical nature. You'll enjoy the friendship of other Masons in the community, and you'll be welcomed as a “Brother” by Masons everywhere in the world. Freemasonry also promises that should you ever be overtaken by misfortune, sickness, or adversity through no fault of your own, the hands of our great Fraternity will be stretched forth to aid and assist you.

CHARITY

From its earliest days, charity has been the most visible Masonic activity. Freemasons have always been devoted to caring for disadvantaged children and the sick and the elderly. In fact, Masons in North America give away approximately \$2 million to national and local charities each day. Masons are also actively involved in a great deal of community volunteer work.

EDUCATION

The Grand Lodge has advocated the education of members since its foundation years. Its ceremonies provide instruction to all members, supplemented by various other activities such as seminars, lectures, workshops, reading and use of audiovisual materials and the Internet. Because Freemasonry is an esoteric society, certain aspects of its work are not generally disclosed to the public. Freemasonry uses an initiatory system of degrees to explore ethical and philosophical issues, and the system is less effective if the observer knows beforehand what will happen. It is described in Masonic craft ritual as “a beautiful system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.”

LEADERSHIP

Freemasonry offers its members leadership opportunities at the Lodge, District, and Grand Lodge level. As Freemasons progress through the craft, they discover different aspects of themselves and develop a range of skills that even they might not have known they possessed. By developing leadership techniques that fit their personality, Masons unlock the door to their full potential.

LET'S LOOK AT THAT A LITTLE CLOSER



Nobody joins this Fraternity to attend a monthly meeting. Nobody. They do join for reasons, and you have to figure out what those are, and find ways to fulfill those needs. Friendship. Fellowship. Community Service. Personal Growth. Knowledge. Skills. There are many reasons why men come to us.

It's Not Them, It's You: Building Masonic Infrastructure

by *Midnight Freemasons Founder*
[Todd E. Creason, 33°](#)

I was asked recently what got me so interested in the topic of Masonic education. There were a few things, but I keep going back to the same experience. And believe it or not, it's one of the few stories I don't think I've told outside my local Lodge.

Shortly after I published my first book in 2007, I was invited by a Lodge to come and speak about it at their regularly stated meeting. I agreed. The meeting started at 7, and they dined at the Lodge at 6:30. The downside was that the Lodge was two hours away.

I had to leave work early to get there by 6:30 and I got turned around and wound up getting there a little later than I planned – about 6:45. But that wasn't a problem, because there wasn't anybody there yet. So I sat in the parking lot and waited, and about the time I was thinking I'd written down the wrong night, the first car pulled in at a little after 7.

Now when I was told the Lodge members dined at the Lodge at 6:30, what they meant, is that they all go individually to their favorite fast food restaurant, order food, and then eat it together at the Lodge. I hadn't had anything to eat since about 11:30 that morning, but I sat there and watched them devour their cheeseburgers and tacos; the Master didn't think I'd have time to run and get something and eat it before they were done and opened the Lodge.

The Lodge opened about a half an hour late, and we got right into the meeting. They were having a good time, but I'd never been more bored. It was a ninety minute long gossip session. They talked about their inept local school board. They talked about the township not cleaning out the storm drains. They talked about the pastor's wife's sister's son-in-law with the drinking problem. There was in that ninety-minute discussion one issue relating to Freemasonry and Lodge business that caught my attention – I'll tell you about that in a minute.

At a little after nine o'clock, the Master glanced at his watch, and said, "oh, dear, we've run a bit late tonight. I'm afraid we won't have time for Bro. Creason's talk. Maybe he'll come back next month and give it to us. Would you like to at least tell the Lodge where they can buy your book before we proceed to close?"

I didn't say anything. I did as I was asked and told the members of that Lodge where they could buy my book. I didn't mention I hadn't eaten all day. I didn't mention I'd left work early. I didn't mention I'd spend two or three hours on my presentation. I didn't mention I'd driven two hours. I didn't even get mad when the Master asked if I'd be willing to donate a copy of my book to their library shelf. It's probably still there. By the time I stopped and got something to eat on my way home, it was nearly midnight when I rolled in my driveway. My drive home still holds a world record for the longest continuous bout of cursing in modern history.

As I said, there was one short discussion during that meeting that caught my attention. They were talking about their two new Master Masons. These two had gone through the degrees together, and after they were raised a few months earlier they'd only attended one or two meetings, and nobody had seen them since. They weren't even returning calls.

Now don't you find that odd?

That's really when things clicked with me. That's when I first became interested in "enhancing the member experience" and began writing about it, and began setting about actually doing it in my own Lodges – and we have a lot of people in my area interested in this same topic now. And there's a lot of really interesting work being done to this end.

The problem so many Lodges have, is they go about things completely backwards. You've got to start with building your infrastructure. If you want to build your Lodge, you have to really take a hard look at your Lodge. What do you want to accomplish? What are your goals as a Lodge? What would a new member enjoy about your Lodge? Why are prospective members interested in joining your Lodge? What do they hope to gain, and does that exist in your Lodge? If you want to build and grow your Lodge, you have to build it first. You have to be ready for those new members when they arrive. If you don't fix what's wrong with your Lodge first, those new members won't still be there by the time you figure that out.

But I can tell you without hesitation that nobody joins this Fraternity to attend a monthly meeting. Nobody. They do join for reasons, and you have to figure out what those are, and find ways to fulfill those needs. Friendship. Fellowship. Community Service. Personal Growth. Knowledge. Skills. There are many reasons why men come to us, and as we've been learning in my part of the world, building this infrastructure not only helps retain new members, but it also engages our long-time members as well. I've seen many go from grumpy Past Masters to mentors, teachers, and trainers. And some of our biggest critics in the beginning when we were trying to improve our Lodges – well, many of them are our biggest fans now.

We've spent a great deal of time finding ways to keep our business meetings short and on point. We have education presentations every single meeting, and we start with those! I make notes when I see members of my Lodge looking at their watches, or glancing at the clock to see what's going on in the Lodge that has them bored. We have great discussions. We have guests come and speak to our Lodge from outside groups. We learn things about our community, and we learn things about each other. And we invite other Lodges to join us – and very often they do! And these experiments that started in our Lodge have spread, and other Lodges are doing some interesting things as well. I hope to share a guest post at some point from a member of another Lodge near mine that tells the story of his Lodge's journey from ordinary to extraordinary.

If your Lodge is having problems with attracting new members or retaining your old members, it's most likely not them. The best place to start looking is at what you're doing in your Lodge.