

Young Masons Discussion at Especial Grand Lodge in Ottawa Saturday, October 16, 2010

Young Masons – an opportunity to be seized or missed?

There is no question that the face of freemasonry within many of the lodges across our grand jurisdiction is changing. One measure of this is that the average age of Freemasonry is declining. This is caused in part by the fact that our distinguished brethren in their 80s and 90s and even younger are passing on to the Grand Lodge above. Another reason is great number of younger masons who are joining our ranks.

In fact, some lodges have the full suite of officers under 40 years of age. However, that is not a situation that we could call common, I don't think. Unfortunately, there are still a great number of lodges – too many – who need to rely on Past Masters to fill in the chairs. In fact, some of the lodges in this situation are ones who seem to be attracting – some would say - “more than their fair share” of young masons. So if they and other lodges are having a great number of young masons entering their ranks and signing their name on the register of Grand Lodge, why are they still having to rely on Past Masters to fill the chairs? Are we properly seizing this opportunity of having young Masons seek out and join our Fraternity, or are we squandering it.

In fact, some of the data shows us that a number of these new masons join but then don't even proceed to become Fellowcraft or Master Masons. Did they come in with the wrong impression? Did their experience turn them off? Did our interactions with them discourage them? Were we too inflexible?

One of the first, and great, things we learn upon joining is the unchanging landmarks. These are one of the things that is great and that a Brother would recognize whether they are visiting a lodge in Yukon, California, Ontario, PEI or India. However, just because the landmarks don't change, doesn't mean that Freemasonry isn't responsive to changing context and need.

Witness the remarkable changes over the last decade or so – lit signs out in front of the building here, open houses, not just responding to media requests but actively seeking out those opportunities for interviews. Likewise, lodges and Masons need to be responsive to the evolving needs of its membership. How many of you think that how a person passes their free time today is the same as 50 years ago. And how should freemasonry adapt to meet the needs of its members?

One clear example in Ottawa is Luxor Daylight lodge. It was created to meet the needs of the elderly brethren who either went down South during the winter months and hence missed a great part of the Masonic year, or didn't feel comfortable driving at night. The innovative solution was a daylight lodge that closed over part of the winter, and Luxor has become one of the most well attended lodges in the city with an active speaker program. This is an example of Freemasonry adapting while maintaining the traditional landmarks inviolable.

Well, our younger masons have different lives than we lead and different needs. While, they have joined our craft for varying reasons and we all recognize that they have much to gain from learning our hidden mysteries, the Craft itself has much to gain by ensuring that we don't drive them away with our intransigence to adaptation. We need to take the effort and time to understand what they need and to appreciate what they can bring to the Craft. Otherwise, we truly will be missing the boat.

I can speak to this with some experience because a while ago, I too was a young mason – okay, quite awhile ago. As we were organizing an open house, we wanted to get permission to put out a sign in front. Anyway, to make a long story short and to avoid all the details of the letter writing, etc., we were turned down by an esteemed mason. They weren't willing to consider adapting to the idea of a young upstart.

My point is:

- Rather than pre-judging the idea based on who it comes from or their age, listen to the idea;
- Rather than assuming all new Masons, especially young masons, must adapt to how absolutely everything has gone on in your lodge for the 100 or so years, listen to them; Like the message you heard earlier today – “Learn to Listen; and Listen to Learn”.
- Rather than assuming that the young masons won’t accept the responsibility to run with things, give it to them. Let them prove themselves;
- Rather than assuming that all young masons should have the same level of commitment as you **now** have to the Craft, encourage and allow them to build it up over 20 – 30 years just like you did;
- Rather than getting upset with the many conflicting priorities the young Masons have that are competing with Freemasonry, recognize the different environment they live in today and encourage them to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge. This will build commitment.

On closing, consider these questions:

- Those lodges that have all the officers under 40 – what are they doing that you aren’t?
- What do you do if your incoming SW has played hockey on the same night as your CGP for 10 years? Make them choose?
- **What about Festive Board timing?** Is there a right time? Is it better to come home at a later time with the FB after lodge, or is it better to have it before lodge with the time crunch between work and lodge?
- **What about families?** Do you have events to include their spouses? What about their children? Have you considered hiring a babysitter for the event so the spouses get a break as well?
- **Practices** – do you schedule your practices so that it is convenient for those retired or the young Masons who are still working or even establishing themselves in their career?
- **Electronic communication** – was your lodge one of the stragglers in moving to electronic summons or the first? Do you use email or an electronic invitation service such as Evite? What about Twitter?
- **Masonic education** - are the young masons receiving it? And are they getting it in a way that supports the message from the Grand Master - Get KNOWLEDGE; Get WISDOM; but with all thy getting, Get UNDERSTANDING.
- **Questions** – do members find questions about why we do a certain thing or do it a certain way impertinent? Is it viewed as challenging authority & tradition; or is the discussion and opportunity to engage welcomed?
- **What sort of mentoring and guidance is required?** Does it depend on their age? Their profession? Whether they have been in an initiatory order such as DeMolay before?
- What works and what needs to be done to engage and build the commitment in these young Masons? And who needs to do it:
 - GL,
 - the district
 - your lodge; and
 - last but definitely not least, by you as an individual mason

The future is in your hands, the challenge is there.

Seize it or forever regret it!

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