



# Laudable Pursuit II

Examining the Progress and Future of  
Regular Freemasonry in North America

By

THE KNIGHTS OF THE NORTH

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Freemasonry in North America

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## PROLOGUE

In 2003, a group of Freemasons from Indiana published “Laudable Pursuit—A 21st Century Response to Dwight Smith”.

This publication is the next version and is titled “Laudable Pursuit II—Examining the Progress and Future of Regular Freemasonry in North America”.

The content is divided into two parts:

**Part I – Introduction and Topic Summaries**

**Part II – Comprehensive Topics**



## WHO ARE THE KNIGHTS OF THE NORTH?

The Knights of the North were originally a group of anonymous Freemasons from Indiana established at the turn of the Millennium who published “Laudable Pursuit”. It then quietly expanded to inviting members across North America and became a Masonic think-tank in researching the reasons behind the decline of regular Freemasonry on the continent and solutions to try and turn the tide. Members published Masonic resource websites, some which still stand today. Some of the Knights were instrumental in establishing The Masonic Society while some left the fraternity altogether.

After a multi-year hiatus, in 2012, a few of the remaining Knights resurrected the organization, reconnected with well-known “alumni” and carefully invited more worthy Masons locally, nationally, and internationally to establish a world-wide organization, with age groups represented ranging from the 20s to 70 years of age. Some of the members published books regarding their vision of the Craft. In general, the Knights of the North are dedicated to the “laudable pursuit” of inspiring and providing guidelines to all Masons on how to revitalize regular Freemasonry in their lodges, grand lodges, and other bodies by progressing it to a level of excellence that befits its established usages, customs, tenets and principals.

Now, there is still much work to be done.



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# INTRODUCTION

“Freemasonry is a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols.”

Far too many Masons deviate their opinion from this simple, yet elegant, definition.

“Freemasonry is a progressive science.”

Far too many Masons hold back their lodges and brethren with their regressive social opinions, so much so, bigotry and racism, sexism, religious and political extremism become passively tolerated and those brethren who don't agree or make a complaint are relegated to the sidelines and ignored, sometimes leaving in disgust, and the regression continues.



Far too many lodges pump through numbers without working together on progressing through understanding Masonic science together. Perhaps that would solve the former point.

“... to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge.”

Far too many Masons do not learn, read, listen, and teach.

Society changes daily and while Freemasonry has its honored traditions, ceremonies, and philosophies, that very philosophy “as a progressive science” demands that we understand Nature as a changing entity, and that people’s views and opinions do change over time.

So why do so many Masons resist change, even if it means a better way? There is a stagnation that plagues our lodges and grand lodges, and not just recently. The nostalgia of long-lost numbers and packed rooms, while fun to reminisce, diminishes the present and holds no real purpose for the new Mason seeking enlightenment and personal growth in the here and now.

Grand lodges forget their main purpose is to create new lodges, yet far too many hold this back from happening or worse, suspend lodges for simply trying new ideas. Lodges forget that their main purpose is to make Masons, not just on paper or running through a ceremony, but in teaching and learning about the Craft and the Great Work together. But it doesn’t mean making as many Masons as possible in a short period of time either.

Freemasonry is on a new precipice. The slow decline of grandiose lodges and buildings have come to a head and a new direction and way of thinking is already happening. Many of the large buildings have closed. The ones that remain are seeing higher per capita costs due to fewer members, reaching an unsustainable future where lodges are deciding to move, downsize, and regroup, amalgamate, or just close. More and more lodges are moving or occasionally hosting tyled meetings in unique locations like forests and caves, as it was before the magnificent buildings were constructed. There is a bright side to this.

The same is true for many grand lodges, particularly in English-speaking jurisdictions throughout the world. And while we believe there are many grand masters with good intentions who “play the game” to seek the





ability to make swift decisions to improve efficiency in administration and management of the day-to-day operations, unless the per capita costs decrease, and decrease significantly in the next decade or less, the purpose of grand lodges may relegate properly to what was described two paragraphs ago. We have also seen grand officers with good intentions make difficult but necessary decisions only to be cornered politically.

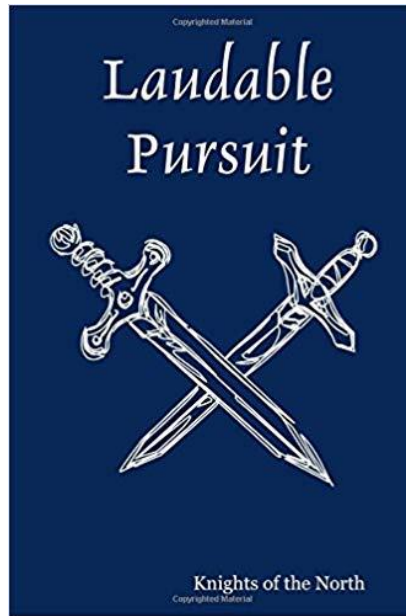
For the good of the Craft, if your grand lodge is in numerical decline, do not fret.

All this said, significant positive progress has occurred in many jurisdictions, otherwise, we may have predicted its absolute inevitable demise. But we are still here. We still believe there are greater days ahead for this beautiful system of ours—albeit in a format that may not suit the nostalgia.

If the thinking of nostalgic post-war Freemasonry of top-down structures, go-through-the-motions meetings, and cost-saving blandness of Living Dead Lodge #2 continues for future generations, then surely English-speaking regular Freemasonry will say “all good things must come to an end.”

Yet through all the wars, political turmoil, schisms, exposures, and oppression in various countries over the centuries, Freemasonry has proven itself, time and time again, that it endures. But it endures because Freemasons themselves ensure that it is relevant. And if a single lodge with seven or more good Masons are practicing Freemasonry externally and internally and that egregore of brethren are breathing some fresh air in-line with “level steps and upright intentions” in an otherwise dead jurisdiction or district, the light of Freemasonry is still alive.

And practicing that *is* our laudable pursuit.



## A. SUMMARY OF LAUDABLE PURSUIT I

For those who have read the original *Laudable Pursuit*, we salute you. For those who were motivated to take further action and improve the condition of Freemasonry in their lodges and grand lodges, and we know the many places where this happened, we applaud your efforts. If you haven't read LP1, please do. Or, if you are here and want to dive in anyway, read on, because we'll summarize the key components. So, let us recap what was communicated in the original version from 2003 and see where we've come since then. It's important we set the context from which we were originally inspired.



## Dwight Smith's Ten Questions

- ◆ 1. **“Can we expect Freemasonry to retain its past glory and prestige unless the level of leadership is raised above its present position?”**

Answer: It depends on what we mean by “glory and prestige”. If we are comparing it to peak membership in the late 1950s, then no. This has been an ongoing grand lodge-level issue. Without democratic reforms, a move away from top-down traditional thinking, and restructuring, there will always be politics for those seeking those offices and positions of leadership. A new member may already have leadership skills, however, a good leader knows what the organization is really about and that begins when he learns this at the lodge-level. We will maintain that developing this leadership begins by vetting and initiating a quality candidate with the right intentions, providing them proper instruction coupled with mentoring and education is a preferred path. Too many leaders do not really know what the Craft is about and so their notions of what we should be doing is either off-base or is mired in maintaining the lowest-common denominator minimalism at all costs. This has distracted others from the main purpose of creating new lodges and educating Masons.

- ◆ 2. **“How well are we guarding the West Gate?”**

Answer: This is becoming better in pockets, but the fear and desperation of numbers to support budgetary needs has diluted the solution and little improvement has occurred. The idea to initiate en-masse and “see where the chips may fall” is a dangerous notion and has not worked overall as opposed to a smarter, more deliberate approach. A simple suggestion for your lodge is do the opposite of one-day classes and implement a “One Candidate Per Degree” policy. We have proven this out in many lodges and found candidates will most certainly appreciate their degree ceremony from the concentrated energy bestowed upon them by the lodge. This also means that mentoring should be easier, but that mentoring is still vital, so that no one “slips through the cracks”, that he feels important, and that the degrees will be spread out over longer period, so he can properly learn what they are about. He isn't going to another lodge, because yours shouldn't appear as



easy to get into. With that, take your sweet time in getting to know a candidate before you hand him a petition—if you give him one.

Too many lodges get caught in the insanity-trap. This occurs when the fewer newer members that do stick around end up wondering where all the members are, so they tend or are led to believe that initiating more and more members will solve the problem. But that's the trap—it's the very thing that was done before they were even members to know any better, and the downward spiral continues. This is part of the reason why we see lodges with so many members, but no one comes to meetings, and the lodge dies because it can't even open!

◆ **3. “Has Freemasonry become too easy to obtain?”**

Answer: Far too easy. Please stop. In our respective areas, we continue to see too many men initiating at once, often five at a time, and then not seeing them again a year later. This has changed little in the past decade, again, except for a few pockets of lodges who emphasize quality and patience. The Millennial Generation does not want it easy, so do not think they see it as the latest quick fad. Lodges that seem desperate for members will not attract the members who will appreciate it. End the idea that Freemasonry is for every man. It is not, nor should it be. Don't think that flinging the doors open and responding to every tire kicker, especially from your website form, will result in more members, let alone quality ones. Make it more exclusive and you'll find more will want to join because it is exclusive. Try and see. Don't be afraid to turn away men who do not fit our criteria or what your lodge is looking for in a potential brother. If he doesn't fit your lodge culture, it is entirely okay to encourage him to join a different lodge.

◆ **4. “Are we not worshipping at the altar of bigness?”**

Answer: The big buildings are being sold off or per capita dues are beginning to rise dramatically to maintain them and members who can't afford the dues are demitting. The nostalgia of large lodge rooms and banquet rooms filled to the brim are a distant memory. Let it go. For those who still tell young Masons, “When I was initiated, there were 150 brethren and our lodge rooms were filled to the rafters” are doing a disservice to that young man. He should be made to feel equally special even if a tight-knit group of 15



brethren were in attendance. We have found smaller lodge settings are more intimate, fun, and exclusive, enhancing the experience, participation, and discussions. In fact, if you are truly nostalgic and know your early Masonic history, you know that most of the original lodges in Scotland, England, and Ireland were not bulking at the seams of membership rolls but were more intimate gatherings. Remember that “seven or more make it perfect”. Seven.

◆ **5. “What can we expect when we have permitted Freemasonry to become subdivided into a score of organizations?”**

Answer: With fewer members having to support the same number of lodges and chapters and councils and bodies and orders and conclaves and valleys and units and tabernacles, time and quality is stretched thin. Without good men joining your lodge, do not then expect to build your chapter or council in the future. Burnout also becomes a reality for many Masons and the enthusiast spark they once brought literally goes dark and the groups he was involved in now find themselves scrambling to fill the void.

◆ **6. “Has the American passion for bigness and efficiency dulled the spirit of Masonic charity?”**

Answer: This is not solely an American feeling, but yes, it has diluted. Members still boast about numbers and not necessarily about the who’s-who on the quality of people or content. “It was a grand event with 140 people” not “It was good to see Brother Steve attend as he’s been going through a tough time. I’m glad we were able to help him get back on his feet.”

◆ **7. “Do we pay enough attention to the Festive Board?”**

Answer: No, we do not. The festive board should be considered an equally as important aspect to the evening as the tyled meeting itself--that is, if the tyled meeting is interesting. We have discovered through our travels and visits that the lack of or poor festive board is more of an American lodge situation compared to the rest of the Masonic world. How that originated, we do not know exactly, but we speculate that it had to do with banning alcohol in Masonic buildings. Prohibition ended in the 1920s—nearly a century ago. Those grand jurisdictions that have not moved on from this utterly useless regulation need to understand



that people will find other organizations to join instead if one cannot enjoy a dram with a brother after a meeting in the same building.

◆ **8. “What has become of that ‘course of moral instruction, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols’ that Freemasonry is supposed to be?”**

Answer: Allowing your fellow brother to describe Freemasonry as something other than what’s described above, is a disservice and this is the core of where we are failing. We need to educate our members on the fundamentals, so they do not interpret Freemasonry to be something it is not, or worse, become and act against such morality. We are told to tolerate the intolerant and judgmental behavior of many who have been in the Craft for many years. And even when we try and correct their “errors and irregularities”, we are taken aside and told not to engage as it might embarrass the brother, yet heads turn aside when flippant awkward remarks are made by that member. They should do us all a favor and demit as they do not represent the tenets of Freemasonry. Hiding behind generational tendencies is not an excuse as the principles and moral instruction of Freemasonry have been clear from the start.

◆ **9. “Hasn’t the so-called ‘Century of the Common Man’ contributed to Making our Fraternity a little too common?”**

Answer: Freemasonry isn't for everyone, so we need to set higher expectations to those who come knocking. We have seen for many men, it has become a social rehabilitation institution where our tolerance for prejudice and poor behavior has soured the experience for many other well-intended men and we have lost far more members to this than we know. Stop thinking more numbers will solve your lodge problems. It hasn't. It won't. But having the right members will.

◆ **10. “Are there not too many well-meaning Brethren who are working overtime to make Freemasonry something other than Freemasonry?”**

Answer: Their well-meaning is based upon a misconception of what the Craft is about. There isn't something in it for everybody nor should everybody be in it. We must educate those interested



of what is really involved and not that it leads to joining other bodies. While we are instructed about charity being the highest ideal, lodges and grand lodges are not structured the same as charitable organizations—however, the separate charitable foundations stemming from it are. Some lodge members spend an awful lot of time promoting and raising funds for their charities within their lodges and that is their right in new business, but would it not be belaboring if the new Mason heard this at every single meeting—something he could find in any charity group? There needs to be a balance. Remember that the purpose of a lodge is to make Masons by ritual and education of Freemasonry, not just charity. Our very ritual instills the notion of charity with prudence and it is therefore up to the Mason to “do the good act for the cause of good”.

### Smith's Ten Pitfalls

1. “Abandon the ‘free will and accord’ rule which has placed our Craft far above the mine run of societies and permit outright solicitation.”
2. “Ape the service clubs. Get busy on ‘projects’ galore in the best Babbitt fashion.”
3. “Go into the organized do-good business in a big way. Find an area of the human body that has not been exploited. Exploit it. Set a quota, have a kickoff dinner, ring the doorbells.”
4. “Subsidize other organizations right and left, and, in the doing, ignore, neglect and starve the parent body.”
5. “Feminize the Fraternity. Carry ‘togetherness’ to even more ridiculous extremes than we have already.”
6. “Hire press agents to tell the world, like Little Jack Horner, what great boys we are. (‘Masonry is not getting its proper share of publicity,’ complains one Grand Master.) Never mind actions; concentrate on words.”
7. “Imitate Hollywood. Stage an extravaganza. Bring in all the groups that ever fancied themselves remotely related to Freemasonry. Form the parade, blow the bugle, beat the drums and cheapen the Fraternity.”



8. “Let Freemasonry ‘take a position’ on the public issues of the day. Stand up and be counted (assuming, of course, that the position our Craft takes is in line with our pet prejudices).”
9. “Go all out for materialism. Raise money; spend it. Build temples, institutions. Subsidize; endow. Whatever can be had by writing a check, get it.”
10. “Centralize, centralize, centralize. Pattern Freemasonry after Washington bureaucracy. Let nothing be done modestly by an individual or a Lodge; do everything on state or national level the super-duper way. Make a great to-do about local self-government but accept no local self-responsibility.”

Now think about your jurisdiction and which of the above pitfalls it has done. Has any of it helped? You can't say Brother Smith didn't warn us. These pitfall practices still go on today and none of them have contributed net positively in the long run.





## B. REASONING FOR THIS UPDATED VERSION

**A**fter reading the preceding points, you may understand why this updated version of *Laudable Pursuit* is also long-overdue. Since the original release and sharing of *Laudable Pursuit* in 2003, and later the narrated YouTube video version, many aspects of the culture of North American Freemasonry have for the most part evolved or unfortunately have devolved on their expected path.

Since then, the Masonic Restoration Foundation (MRF) has invigorated and motivated thousands of Masons in various pockets around the North American continent. These brethren have either taken their established lodges or formed newly constituted ones and adopted innovative programs, schedules, and lodge meeting formats. This has, in most cases, ignited a renewed energy worthwhile of a desired enhanced Masonic experience for those who were not finding their expectations met in their mother lodges. Lodges have become more focused on the individual candidate's experience and journey.

You may very well be one of those courageous brethren—having felt the symbiotic symptoms of an unfulfilling egregore in your mother lodge that the original “*Laudable Pursuit*”, Dwight Smith, and among hundreds of others have been complaining and warning about for decades.

As change is the only constant, there have been many changes in our Western cultures, demographics, communication methods, and yes, morals and ethics. If you have been a member for a few years, you may have seen many members come and go in your lodge, and this has spawned the usual internal frustration between those who continue to hang on to the belief we should fling open our doors to any man and those who want the doors locked for over a year or more to interested men.

And there lies the danger. Recognize that it can take one bad apple of the bunch to sour the membership, while on the other hand, that there are always those diamonds in the rough. Regardless of direction, it still takes an organization of men with the leadership capabilities to do something about improving and progressing the Masonic experience—improving it so we ensure that those who knock on our doors are doing so for the right reasons, progressing it to minimize the number that go, and fulfilling it to maximize the number that stay; but more particularly,



that the lodge is properly serving its members and vice versa. We recognize that there is a smart and deliberate approach to building a good, vibrant lodge—a balance between two pillars or approaches if you will.

We recognize this because with the advent of the Internet and social media since 2003, Masonic discussions online have grown exponentially, and interjurisdictional communication has never been higher. Masons are sharing ideas, debating contentious issues, promoting meetings and events, and organizing outside the grand lodge construct. The old top-down organizational structures that dominated corporations and governments are unable to respond as quickly to flash events and crises the way a Twitter feed can. On contentious issues, what is happening in one grand lodge, or one lodge for that matter has become known around the world in an instant.

From this growing network, we have interacted with brethren from around the world. Freemasons who have presented Laudable Pursuit to their lodge, found like-minded brethren and ignited a spark in another dialect. This has given us the reason to not only again reflect on North American Freemasonry but include perspectives from other countries. Freemasonry really is universal, but while we recognize there are societal and cultural differences, we strongly feel that the concepts in the original version require an update to better reflect that universality, as well as a broader framework from which to cultivate positive change within our lodges. That is not to say the issues in North American Freemasonry aren't also happening in other grand jurisdictions. We know they are because they also contributed to this revised manifesto.

We recognize that Freemasonry is thriving in many corners of the globe: Southeast Asia—particularly The Philippines, South America, and central Europe, particularly Italy, where it has grown by 40% in the past decade.

The Masonic Restoration Foundation (MRF) has evolved in a positive direction since its inception around the time the original Laudable Pursuit was released. It has been an active beacon for Masons to interact, share ideas, all in the name of improving the lodge experience. From this notion, we are outlining an alternative set of ideas for all brethren to consider as an approach to improving their lodges, chapters, and councils.



## Before we begin...

Note: The authors of this version of Laudable Pursuit have no formal connection with the contributors on the website “TheLaudablePursuit.com” although many of us are aware and have met some of these fine brethren.

Not that you were expecting it, but the honest reason why this second version of LP has taken so long to be released is simply because some of us have come and gone, life has changed, and new blood has arrived offering a fresh and welcomed perspective and these brethren equally should be heard. Sound familiar? For many of us, we have been busy in our lodges, chapters, valleys, preceptories/commanderies and councils trying to implement the very aspects of Masonic culture that we preach and there have been notable successes. There are numerous authors and editors involved in this updated version and you may note that the style and content are somewhat different, even section to section. This version has taken us years to complete as there is much more content, and there have been significant changes in Freemasonry.

When we began, it appeared many North America grand lodges were finally seeing some membership stability. This is now not the case and all Freemasons should seriously consider what the future will be for their lodge and grand lodge.

We will continue to regard the original “LP” as the guiding light manifesto that spurred an international movement of brethren to demand a better Masonic experience. We hereby take that torch and carry it forward.

As Dwight Smith had likely no intention of releasing an addendum or updated version of his commentary in the early 1960s, because frankly, everything he said still applies, in 2003, the Knights of the North had no intention of releasing another version of Laudable Pursuit.

Until now.

# PART I

## SUMMARIES

Below are the summaries of each subsequent chapter, which then follow in more detail as an addendum per se. This format was chosen so you can present these in your lodges either as an encompassing summary of all the topics or if you wish to explore each one further by presenting one of the detailed sections in particular.



## 1. INEVITABILITY - SUMMARY

### Trends

Despite the renewal in certain lodges and jurisdictions, the overall inevitable statistic that remains for Freemasonry in North America and the United Kingdom is that male birth rates have been on the steady decline since the peak in 1959 and Masonic membership totals have, for the most part, coincided with this rate.

With this information, we can surmise that the total Masonic membership, whether increasing or decreasing, in North America has been affected by:

1. Birth Rates, Baby Boomers, Family Lineages, and Immigration,
2. the Economy, and
3. War.

With higher birth rates come larger families and more men with a connection to the Craft through blood. As birth rates have dropped, there have been less of that occurring although immigrant affiliates and initiates have recently staved-off the sharper decline in membership during the 1980s. The largest impact was that the anti-establishment Baby Boomers didn't join lodges in droves like their fathers and



grandfathers did and the ones that did, did not remain members for as long.

On the economy, there is an interesting correlation with downturns and a slight improvement in church attendance and the number of initiations in Freemasonry as people look to the community for emotional and spiritual support or a means to “get a leg up” through networking (although we obviously should not encourage that is a reason to join).

Immediate post-war periods also see an increase in interest to regain the camaraderie and brotherhood found in military corps, as is what dramatically happened after World War II.

## Number of Lodges

What has not followed the downward membership trend, however, is the total number of lodges—which remains relatively high compared to the stressed membership of fewer brethren that is needed to support it.

By maintaining a minimum dues structure, little is now being saved in the lodge budget year-to-year, and little is accomplished in upgrades to aging buildings and regalia. Increasingly, there is a smaller pool of committed men being able to take on leadership and officer roles, degree parts, and trying attend at least 40 meetings a year. This causes stress and many just leave in frustration, accelerating the demise. Dying lodges need to die so the orphaned remaining and committed brethren can find or create better pastures.

## Pop Culture

Despite the recent supposed pop culture fascination with Freemasonry and the Knights Templar as depicted in books and movies like “The Da Vinci Code” and “National Treasure” along with the explosion of books on Freemasonry and related topics, the TV documentaries like “Inside The Freemasons”, conspiracy shows and programs, many Masonic leaders and members touted this as the beginning of a new wave of awareness and thus interested membership was seemingly on the rise.

But where is this wave? There wasn’t one, and if there was, it did not make the high impact turnaround that might have been expected. It was an anomaly more related to the higher birth rate of early Millennials joining, and any Mason who gets excited thinking that pop culture will



do the work for us and more men will knock on lodge doors as a result, is fooling themselves.

We know of the overall continued decline in membership totals from the peak in 1959 and while it has eased recently as Millennials have joined, the inevitable outcome that is already occurring is more lodge charter surrenders, triple-hyphen amalgamations, closed buildings, scrambling to find new and cheaper meeting locations, orphaned Masons who do not have a lodge nearby, and grand lodges that are having difficulty keeping up with these trends to trim the fat themselves. Eventually and naturally, there are fewer lodges, and more meetings in private rooms in taverns, hotels conference rooms, church basements, or community halls at a much lower rental rate.

## The Great Masonic Purge

We have been working on and updating this document for years because we have been monitoring the rate changes in membership numbers. **According to the latest statistics from MSANA, and if current ten-year trends and budgets continue, the large majority of U.S. grand lodges and several Canadian grand lodges will be hanging by a thread by 2040 if not sooner. By 2030, they will not be able to charge a reasonable per capita fee to sustain themselves. The United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) is not far behind.**

Yes, there were several grand lodges that saw slight increases in membership from 2009 to 2013 with a wave of Millennials joining, but the decline ramped downward again from 2014 to 2017. We will explore what happened and the possible outcomes.



## 2. EASE OF MEMBERSHIP - SUMMARY

As mentioned in the Inevitability section, the wartime camaraderie in the post-war boom saw thousands of men join lodges with peak membership in 1959. Since that time, lodge membership totals have, for the most part, been on the steady decline, yet many lodges and grand lodges, seeing the dropping dues revenue affecting budgets, decided the solution was to make becoming a Mason easier, opening the doors to a wave of men who would be enamored from a billboard advertisement slogan asking, “Is there greatness in you?” This wave would see dozens of men join at one time and complete the three degrees in one day. Has this quantity over quality approach been effective? Should we even concern ourselves with quantity at all?





### 3. COMMONNESS - SUMMARY

In your area, there are likely more similarities between lodge practices and culture than there are differences. One could argue then, what is the point in having so many similar lodges? We still find most lodges conducting the business agenda in a stale manner, to reduce reprieve from grand lodge gawkers, or past masters who knit-pick at every detail and thrive in the mêlée of minutia, constitutional debate, and political maneuvering. The resulting goal often falls naturally to a minimalist, lowest common denominator (LCD) approach without anyone noticing, where nothing is really accomplished beyond degree work, stale events, and dull business agendas.

The use of a single standard Masonic ritual working across all lodges of a jurisdiction is primarily an American practice. When you visit other countries, you will find different workings lodge to lodge—yet seemingly similar concepts, symbols, and allegories. If every lodge around the world had exactly the same ritual, why visit? Variety is the spice of life and Masons who see different ritual practices can glean more from the Craft as a whole and can approach their study of meanings in the ritual from various angles to comprehend and absorb them from a broader view.

Visitation is low because there is really nothing interesting or unique happening lodge to lodge. Education shouldn't be just about someone



reading a paper they found online. How many lodges still have a barbeque, fish fry, or a dinner of some sort? We won't belabor it because you see it everywhere. Why does your lodge truly stand out? Does it have a positive identify to give reasons for a member want to stick around and see what the fuss is all about?



## 4. LEADERSHIP - SUMMARY

Poor leadership at the grand lodge and lodge level has taken a toll on Masons, causing many to leave altogether. There are too numerous news stories to mention. We believe good leadership stems from having good people around in the first place and having past leaders mentor and supporting them is important. Leaders themselves need to exhibit unbridled enthusiasm, constant communication, and management skills to motivate the members to accomplish goals and tasks together. We also need to look at the way we elect and select people for officer positions and be smart about it, based on merit, not the entitlement of the “progressive” line, which does more to fail lodges and grand lodges than it does to help.



## 5. COST - SUMMARY

Are we being honest about costs to potential candidates? Are finance committees of lodges, grand lodges, and building associations properly planning ahead and adjusting dues accordingly so brethren in the future aren't hit with a big jump in dues? To do so, one needs to perform some historical and predictive analysis to see how long members of certain generations will remain on the rolls and to adjust dues accordingly.



## 6. FOOD AND DRINK - SUMMARY

There are still many Masonic buildings and grand lodges who do not permit serving alcohol. Now, we are not saying that alcohol should be served or consumed during a tyled meeting, but we are saying that Masons are responsible enough to consume before or after a lodge meeting.

We believe that having drink and a meal together before or after a meeting is just as important as the meeting or degree itself--taking what was learned there into the social interaction and conversation with our brethren. Not all brethren have busy social lives outside of their time with work and/or family and this is often their rare opportunity to have that benefit. Making that experience worthwhile goes a long way to building bonds and keeping members coming back for more. Therefore, having quality food and beverages and a casual or formal program to your festive board or “agape” meal is just as equally as important to having quality ritual and education during meetings, and it does not need to cost a lot either. This view has not changed since the previous Laudable Pursuit. Atmosphere and mood are important, so remember that bright fluorescent lights weren’t a thing a century ago.



## 7. EDUCATION AND MENTORING - SUMMARY

Of course, in the mix of it all lingers Masonic education. Thankfully, this has certainly been more frequent in lodges, and in some cases, perhaps too much quantity has saturated the lodge and not made these events unique enough—or perhaps lodges are having too many meetings. Let's look at what has worked and what hasn't. Fundamentally, we need to look at a core question to understand this organization and philosophy and how we can lift and enhance our Masonic experience and our fellow brethren to look beyond lodge as being a “night out with the boys”. Education and mentoring must literally go together. It is one thing to present on advanced topics to newly raised brethren without ensuring they understand the basics first. It is another to sit down one-on-one with a new brother and guide him to his own answers and recommend books to explore.

Learning the work is important but not as important as understanding it. We must share our understanding within a tyled construct to provide meaning to our meetings.

Since the release of LP in 2003, thousands of books on Masonry have popped up and many are now available online for free. But there have been some key books published by familiar brethren whom we have



close relationships with that we will quote and analyze so as not to reinvent the wheel but compliment those ideas and works.



## 8. TRAVEL AND VISITATION - SUMMARY

Travel and visitation are not the great benefits that oft-stated commentary makes it seem to be. Indeed, if lodges do other things poorly, welcoming visitors is also not done with the care and attention befitting a brother. Visitors are neglected, and they seldom come back to a lodge. They vote with their feet. Because we have too many lodges with not enough members supporting them, why should we expect visitors to give false-hope in supporting said lodges. We will look at some of the problems, and then offer some suggestions as to how the experience can be made better for almost any lodge.





## 9. INSTITUTIONAL CHARITY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - SUMMARY

Many grand lodges and lodges have focused their communications and efforts on fundraising for charitable causes and displayed this act publicly. While other bodies appendant to lodges have been involved here for over a century, is institutional charity one of the main purposes of Freemasonry, or is it something different?

Freemasonry does not raise a million dollars a day for charity, yet this myth continues. Big checks and photos in the local newspaper have not had the impact on public perception that many think it does—then again, what’s the purpose of it? Is it to improve public relations and/or attract new members? If so, is it making any real difference?

Remember that lodges and grand lodges are not setup or managed like a constant fundraising organization, yet some solely treat it as such and try to lure brethren in for their own pet projects. Charity is one of the highest ideals, yes, but like a school, this is what’s taught in the lodge as the purpose is to “make Masons” where practicing it occurs outside the lodge. Lodges should refrain from guilting members who do not have the time or money to be involved in a charity project, yet we’ve seen this



occur. Community involvement obviously is not necessarily about fiduciary charity, but volunteering time. If a group of brethren wish to do that on their dime and time, then by all means let them. While we recognize that many lodges simply donate funds to various local charities, making a motion publicly in lodge to drag all the lodge members into an endeavor they may not actually support privately is not the proper approach. We've seen this too and when the vote occurs, members do not show up to avoid conflict.

A Freemason who has charity instilled in himself and then uses that enthusiasm to volunteer and be involved in the community, gets noticed by others, and the discovery of his Masonic affiliation can bring more good reputation and trust than a big check photo in a community paper.

As a result, in examining Masonic jurisdictions in other parts of the world, those that are involved in the community and charity in a quiet manner, without fanfare, and without guilt, tend to retain more members. There's a reason why. It's called volunteering, not grandstanding.



## 10. SUBDIVISION - SUMMARY

As Dwight Smith said about government bureaucracy, the continued notion of districts has become perplexing and reinforces the old top-down structures that promote self-aggrandization, politics, reactionary fire-fighting rules over a necessary vision and smart-approaches to problem-solving using streamlined and focus-oriented planning can alleviate the inevitable. Those areas where district deputies aren't even elected further exacerbate the disconnect between reality and nostalgia.

Further subdivision has occurred with there being too many bad lodges in existence and area brethren being guilted into visiting and supporting them, yet nothing changes with these said lodges. While a grand lodge primary purpose is to consecrate new lodges, it's their authority to kill them off humanely or facilitate mergers as well.

Further, with lowered membership, low attendance, yet not fewer lodges to spread the wealth, plus the demands of other dependent organizations, a member's time is spread thin and he will choose the group that he deems worthy of his time, and often, that's not the lodge. We not only have to stop thinking a member has unlimited time and expense, but we are at a precipice where several appendant groups need to decide what's more important to them to survive—their own lodges that drive membership to their very group or their group. If it's the latter, then that group needs to decouple itself from the lodge requirement.



## 11. INFRASTRUCTURE - SUMMARY

We will also look at our local Masonic grand infrastructures in buildings, organization, leadership, and programs. For some jurisdictions, if the rate of decrease in membership count continues as it does, without an equal balance in raising building dues, we will continue to see lodges move into central buildings or private ones, and a further increase in lodge amalgamations and mergers. Or is there another way? We will discuss the merits of inevitability here.



## 12. MEETING FREQUENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS - SUMMARY

The adage that “less is more” can certainly ring true for Masonic meetings. While most lodges meet at least monthly, there are many who meet weekly. Are those few left attending for the sake of it, thinking that attendance alone will solve the lodge’s prosperity? But is it any wonder that the lodges, chapters, and councils that have reduced the number of tyled meetings are seeing a better and more consistent attendance? Does having fewer meetings focus the tyled agenda to one with actual interesting Masonic content and put the onus on non-tyled general purpose meetings to solve items of a business-nature? Are those lodges that who have too many meetings diluting the novelty of the experience?

Reading minutes, accounts, communications, and discussing administrative minutia does not make a Masonic lodge any different than any other fraternal group or organization. What makes a lodge “Masonic” is not just the ritual openings and closings and the energy it produces either--it is the content and subject of studying and presenting aspects of Freemasonry in relation to our lives that make it truly unique. If this isn’t done at every meeting, then what’s the point of thinking that your lodge is practicing Masonry?



## 13. CATCH ALL... - SUMMARY

### **Concordantly speaking...**

While we recognize that some may disagree, we also believe that there is a laudable pursuit which needs to be applied to other Masonic bodies, starting with what we will emphasize as the true and only concordant body of Craft lodges—that is, the Chapter of the Holy Royal Arch of Jerusalem, including the Mark Master Mason Lodge. Through our extensive research on Masonic history and origins, we have determined that the Operative system of seven degrees is, for the most part, found through a Craft Lodge, Mark Master Mason, Installed Master, (Most) Excellent Master, and Holy Royal Arch to complete an entire and complete system for Craft Masonry. In general, what applies to lodges, also applies to chapters. Solid chapters can inspire the lodges from which they depend upon their lifeblood, and they should set even higher standards in the pursuit of light in Masonry. Therefore, if you wish to enhance your concordant body, it is equally important for you to spend efforts in grooming candidates as they progress through the three degrees of Craft Masonry.

We must also take note, as many of us have become very actively involved in, the Allied Masonic Degrees—the only body of Masonry that has experienced growth and stability nationally in the U.S. and Canada.



Despite that, even though one must be a Royal Arch Mason and invited to join, AMD Councils are onto something—familiar reasons which we will comment on further.

All that said, we intend to focus mostly on our Craft/Blue lodges as they are the foundation of all that is in Freemasonry—especially at the petitioning stage, where it all begins. We will explore the debate surrounding the views on “Guarding the West Gate”.

## **Progressive Masonry**

The Masonic Restoration Foundation is a successful organization that provides encouragement, experience, and materials for brethren to enhance their Masonic experience above the mundane minimalistic practices commonly found in most lodges. The annual symposiums continue to bring together brethren from across the continent to share ideas and inspiration for their lodges. To expand upon this encouragement, we offer a format to shaping your existing lodge or if you are creating a new one. Because Masonry is a “progressive science”, Progressive Masonry allows your lodge to improve itself through a process where the members continually reevaluate the lodge and direction. The process of joining through affiliation or initiation ensures the prospective candidates and members are not intolerable, disruptive, or disharmonious, that mentoring and education are the primary purposes, that the degree progress is slowed and deliberate, that there is ample personal support for the brethren, and that the brethren agree to the other principles on goals and organization. Essentially, the primary purpose of a progressive lodge is to have a small but focused group of brethren that is not easy to join where they are committed to each other in practicing Masonry to a high standard, to keep each other accountable, ensuring lodge meetings, programs, and events are excellent, that it progresses forward with each brother supporting it. This model, in some form or another, may already exist within your lodge.

## **Thoughts on resistance to this document . . .**

It is worth noting that there will be resistance to our criticism of lodges, chapters, valleys, preceptories, councils, and grand bodies. We know this. For those who say, and we see it all the time on the various online



forums where Masons gather, “my lodge is doing well” or “there are no issues in my lodge,” we would like to recall a story from the rise of the New York Islanders in the 1970s. The coach of this promising talented team was a former NHL defenseman named Al Arbour. He had a stable of outstanding young talent that had not yet gelled into a good team, a team that would go on to win four straight league titles. One day, after losing badly to a much inferior team, the frustrated Arbour blistered the paint off the walls with a tirade that went on for ten minutes. He then stormed out of the dressing room, slamming the door behind him. A few seconds later, he quietly re-entered the locker room, and all eyes were immediately on him.

“In case there are some two or three or five of you who are convinced that I wasn’t talking about you, you need to know something,” he said in his normal quiet tone of voice. “If you think your play is not the problem, that there is nothing wrong with your effort, that it must be someone else, less talented or less hard working, it is you in particular I was talking to. *You in particular.*” He then quietly left the room again.







# PART II

## COMPREHENSIVE

This part of the document has a lengthier and more detailed format than the summaries. As an education presentation given in lodge, due to time constraints, you may only want only to cover one or two of the sections at a time.



## 1. INEVITABILITY

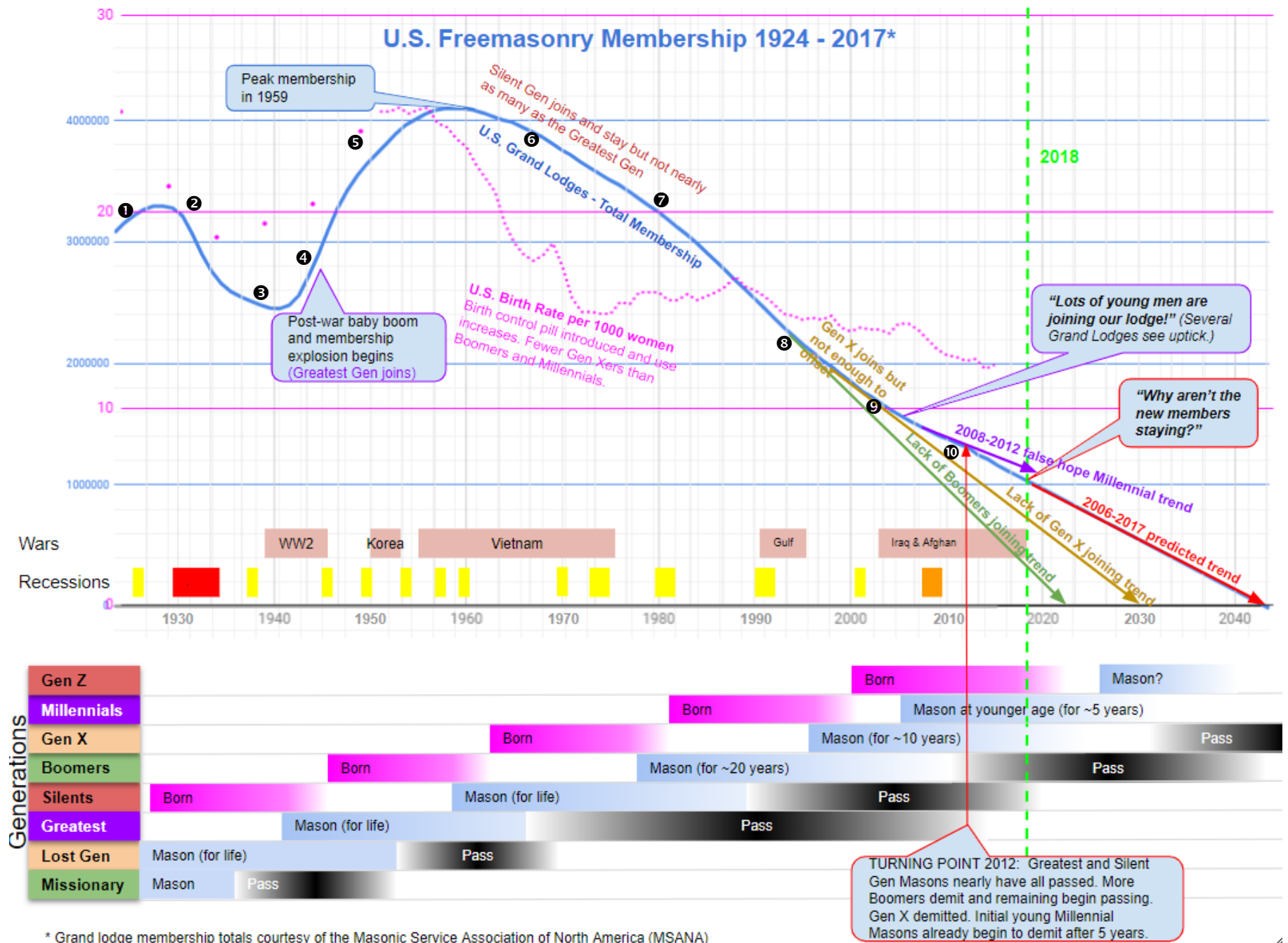
**T**his section discusses, in more detail, the demographical, generational, historical, and cultural nature of Masonic membership. This is the longest section.

### Membership and Birth Rates

#### ✕ **United States of America**

Despite the renewal in certain lodges, the overall inevitable statistic remains for Freemasonry in North America. Birth rates have been on a decline since the peak in the 1950s and Masonic membership totals have for the most part been dependent upon it.

Several of the following charts are based on numbers provided by the Masonic Service Association of North America (MSANA) and regular grand lodge membership numbers. Generational periods are based on Strauss-Howe Generational Theory and may not coincide with other generational studies.



At the current rate of membership loss average over a ten-year period (2006-2017), the number of card-carrying regular Freemasons in North America will reach a critical unsustainable level by 2043, if not sooner.

Key markers from the graph:

- ❶ The post-Great War spike in the early 1920s led to an uptick in Masonic memberships afterward
- ❷ Economic factors of the 1920s and Great Depression led to a downtrend in birth rates and Masonic memberships
- ❸ Economic recovery in mid to late 1930s stabilized birth rates and Masonic memberships
- ❹ WWII spiked birth rates and Masonic membership began trending upward from Greatest Generation joining in droves
- ❺ Peak births in 1947 and the number of returning veterans who stormed Masonic lodges led to the largest growth in Masonic membership which peaked in 1959 at over 4,100,000 Masons
- ❻ Vietnam war TV era saw a sharp drop in birth rates which saw fewer Gen-X men born. Masonic membership began to decline due to a lower population of the Silent Generation
- ❼ Late 1970s upward trend in birth rates saw a slight slowdown of declining memberships because of Baby Boomers joining and even though Boomers were populous, their ratio was far less than the Greatest Generation
- ❽ Early 1990s Gulf War saw an uptick in birth rates but declined afterward. Period of sharpest decline in Masonic membership ends.
- ❾ Post War On Terrorism has seen an uptick in birth rates and helped slow or stabilize Masonic memberships in some areas but it continues to decline approaching 1,100,000 members. Also, many grandsons of Baby Boomer Masons joined in this period
- ❿ Totals from 2014-2017 indicate that declination rates are back to where they were before Millennials joined, driving the average year-to-year trend over ten years from 2006 to 2017 shows that Masonic memberships are headed toward zero by 2043 at the earliest

With this information, we can surmise that the total Masonic membership in North America has primarily been affected by:

1. Birth Rates & Generations (primary) – Family Lineage + Immigration
2. The Economy (minor)
3. War (minor)

<sup>1</sup>On birth rates, there are several factors that have contributed to the decrease, but when “The Pill” was introduced in the 1950s and used more in the 1960s, along with other contraceptives, this certainly affected the rate. Further, parents’ need to have more children to stave off infant and/or mother mortality was more prominent prior to the improvements in medical research and availability, particularly with vaccinations becoming prevalent in the 1960s, parents also began having fewer children knowing with more confidence of their survival and overall health.

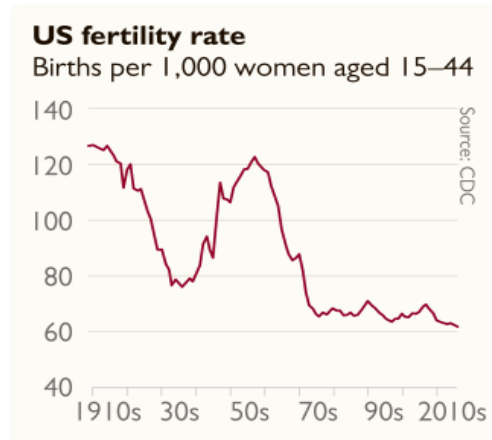
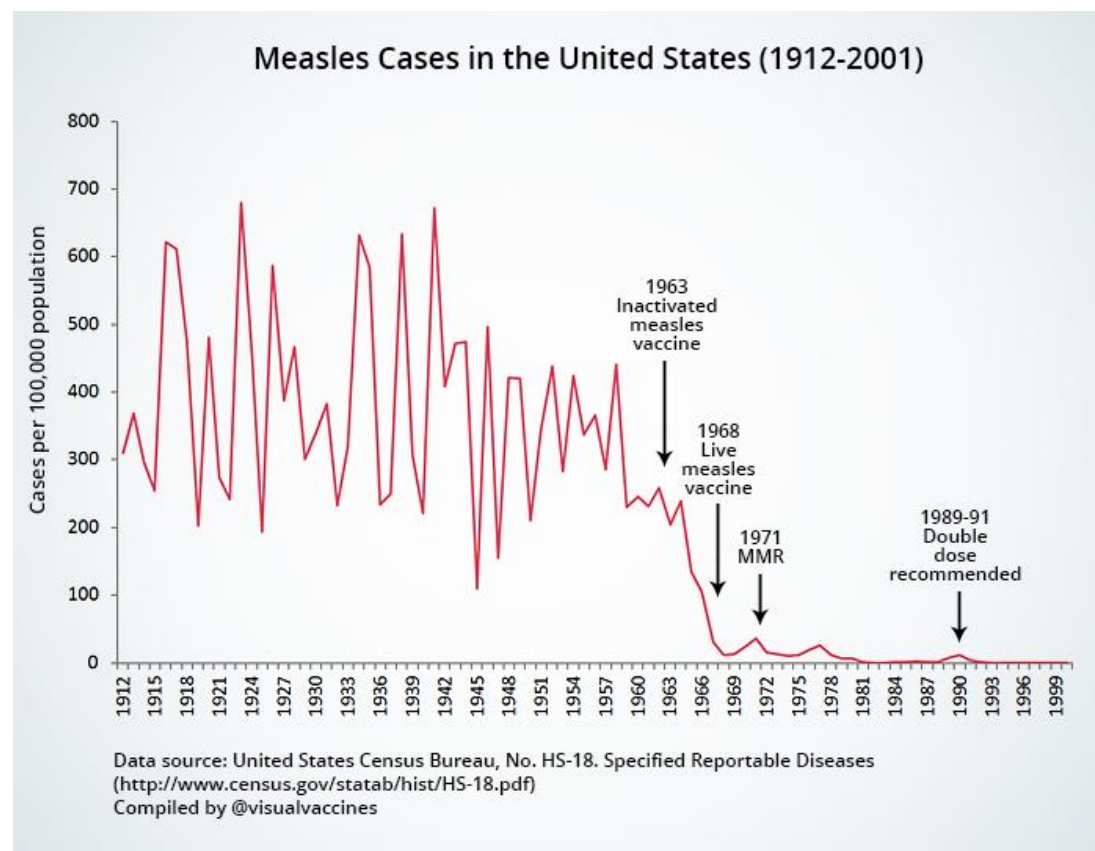


FIGURE 2. Maternal mortality rate,\* by year — United States, 1900–1997

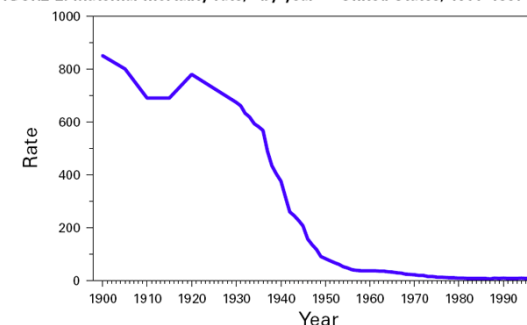
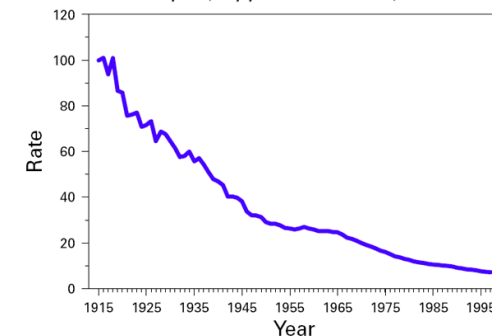


FIGURE 1. Infant mortality rate,\* by year — United States, 1915–1997

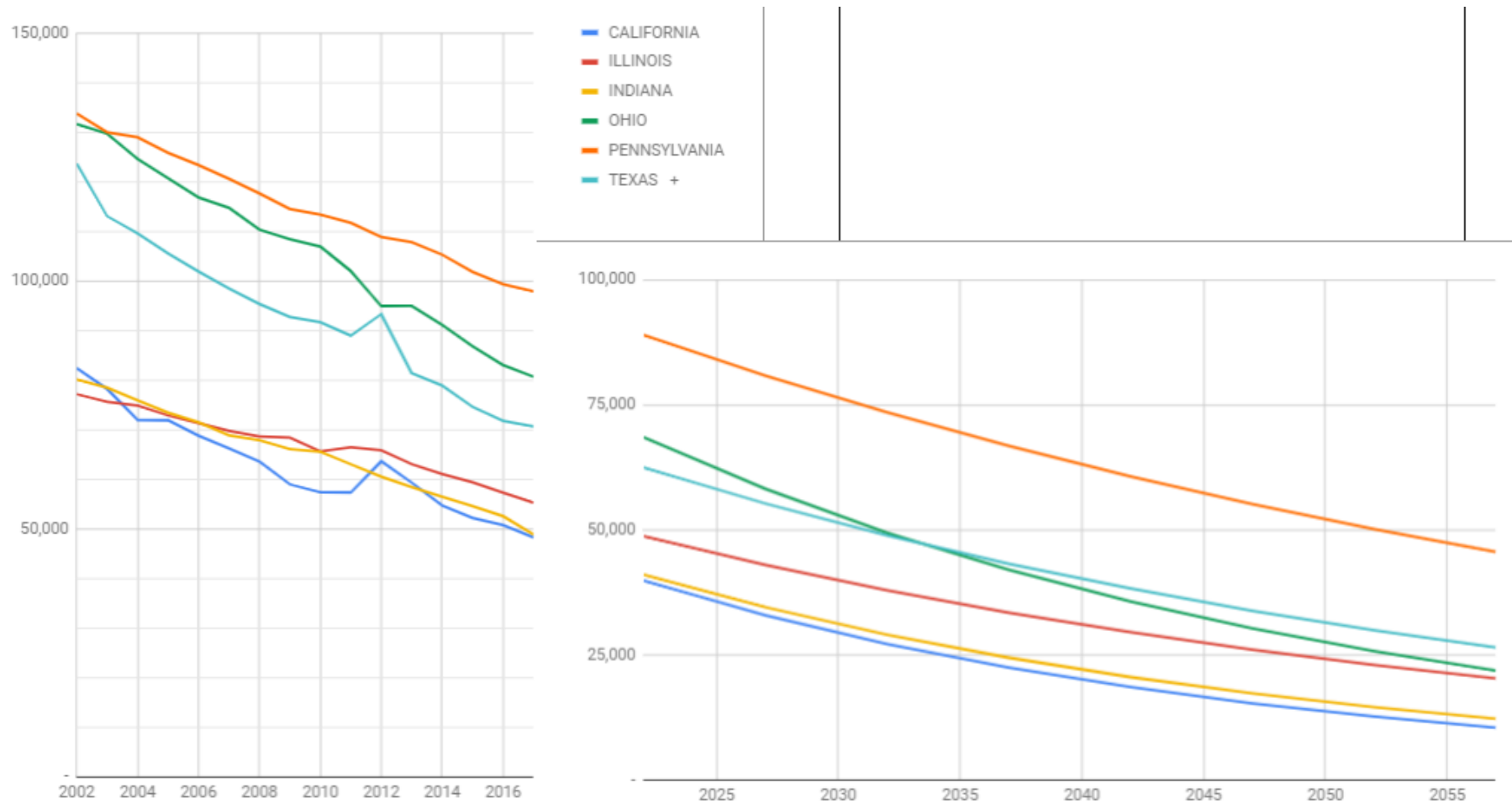


<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm4838a2.htm>

## ✕ United States Grand Lodges by Size and State + Last 5-Year Trend Estimates

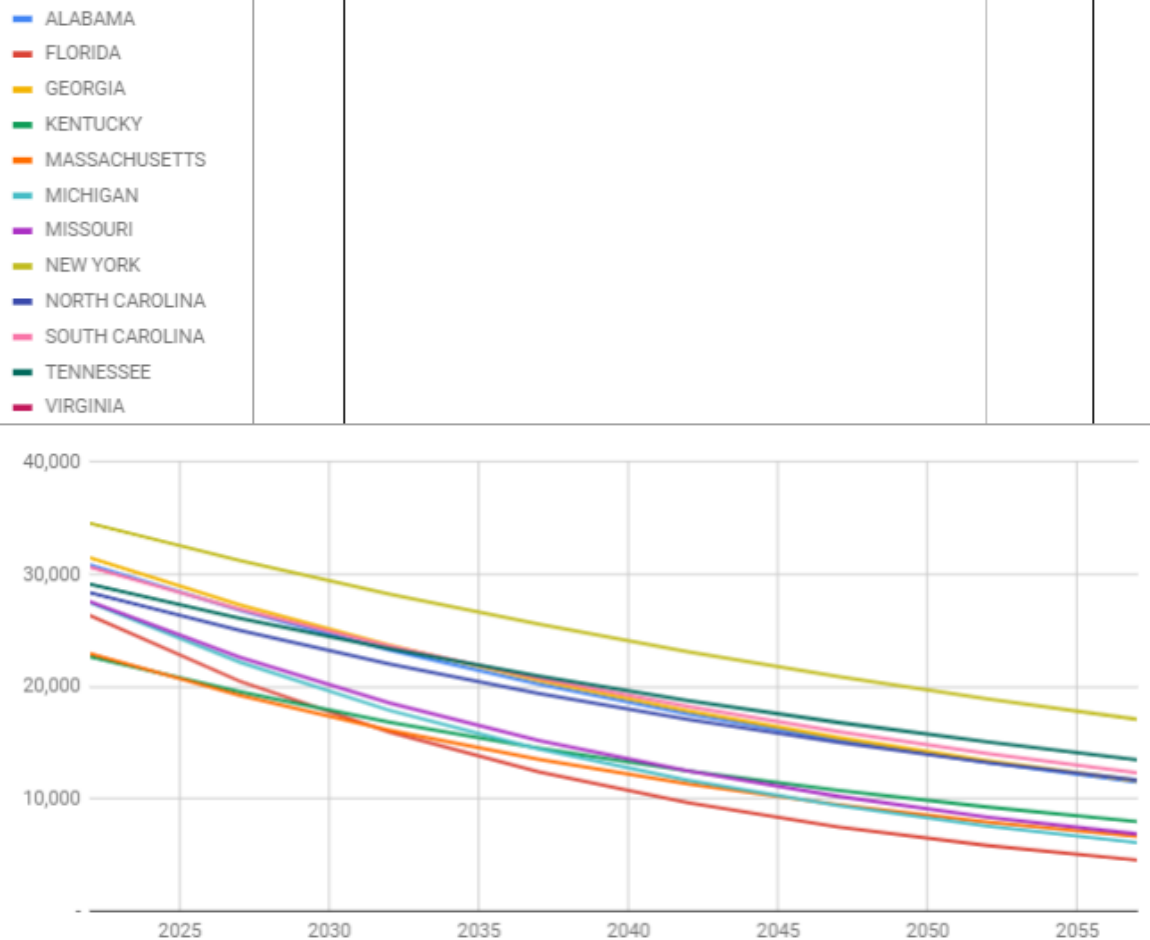
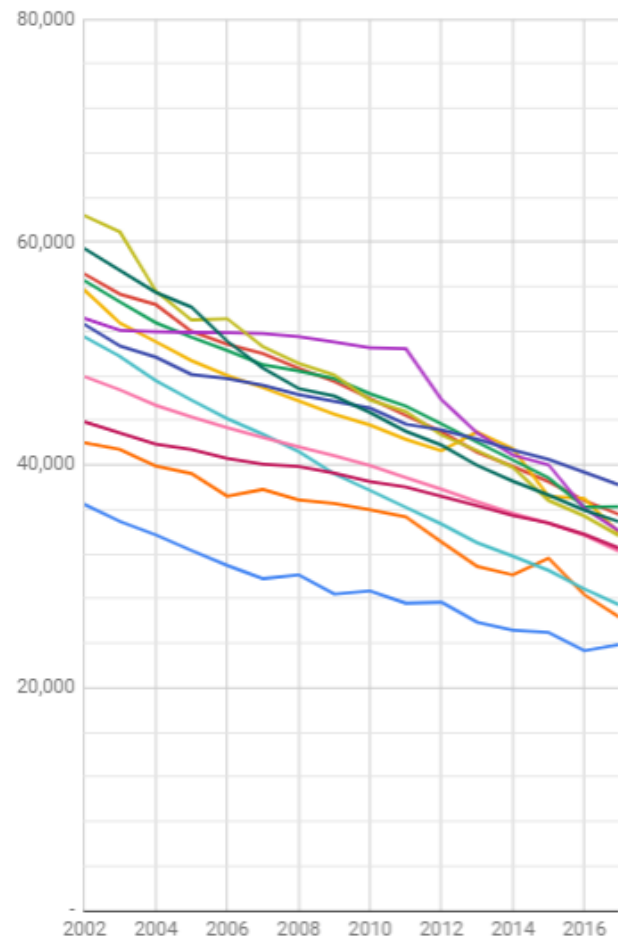
The next set of charts are organized by grand lodge membership size and show the actual data up to 2017 (MSANA) and a 5-year trend (2013-2017) estimate extrapolated forward in time.

### ◆ Large Grand Lodges

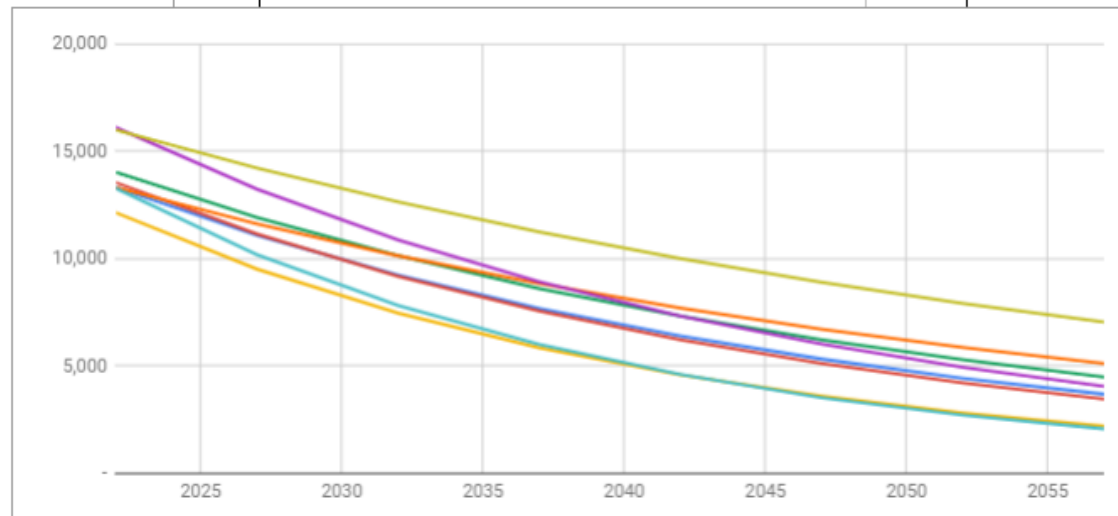
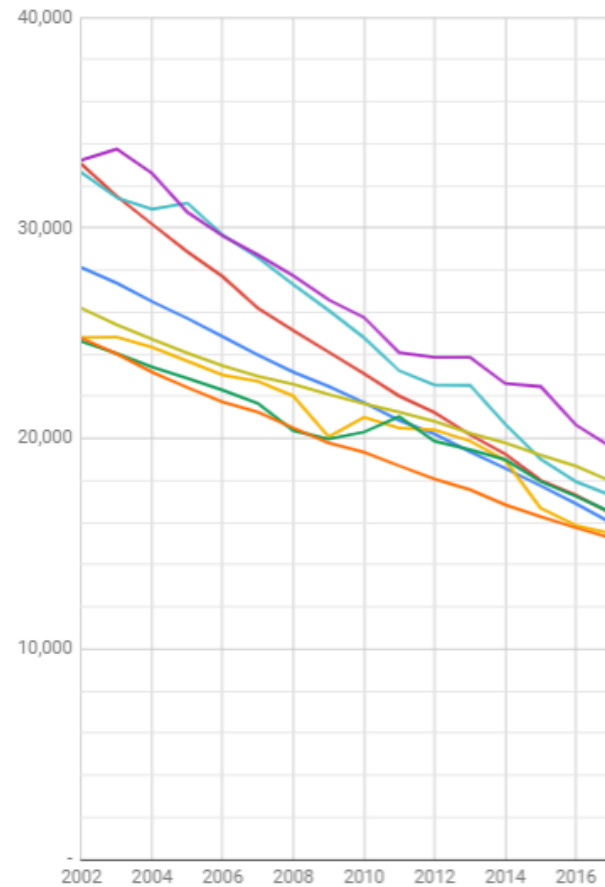




## ◆ Medium-Large Grand Lodges

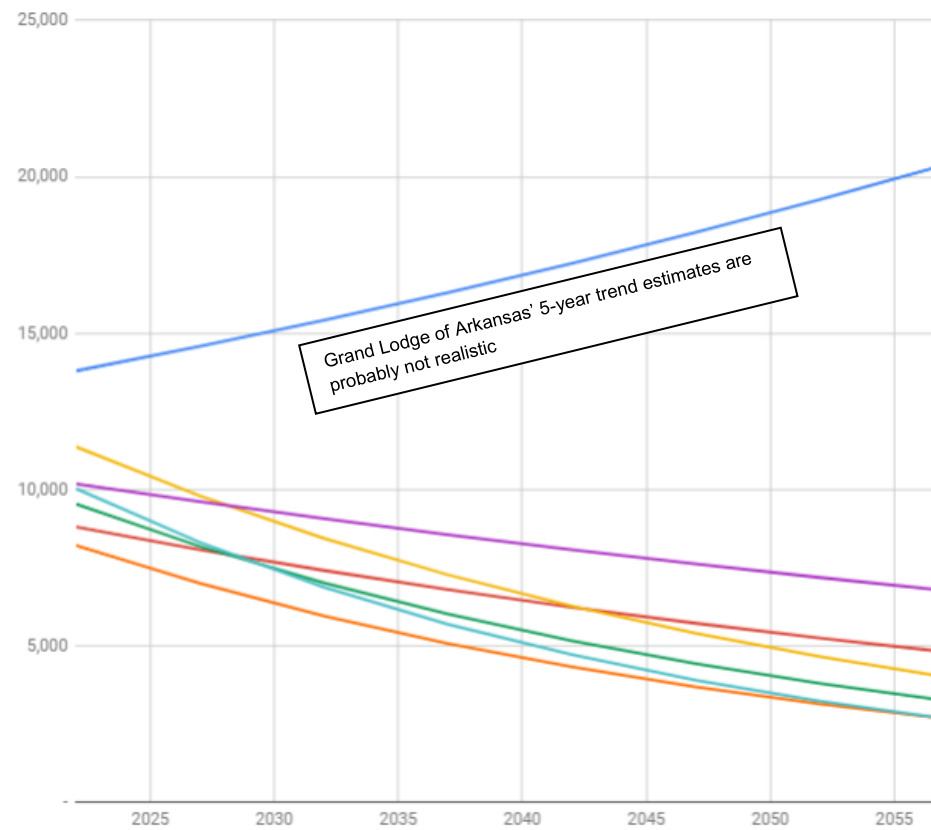
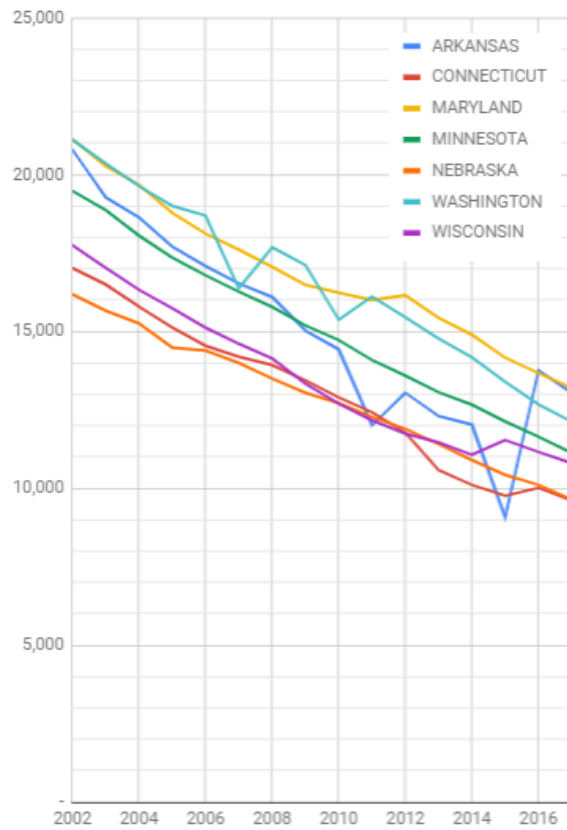


## ◆ Medium Grand Lodges

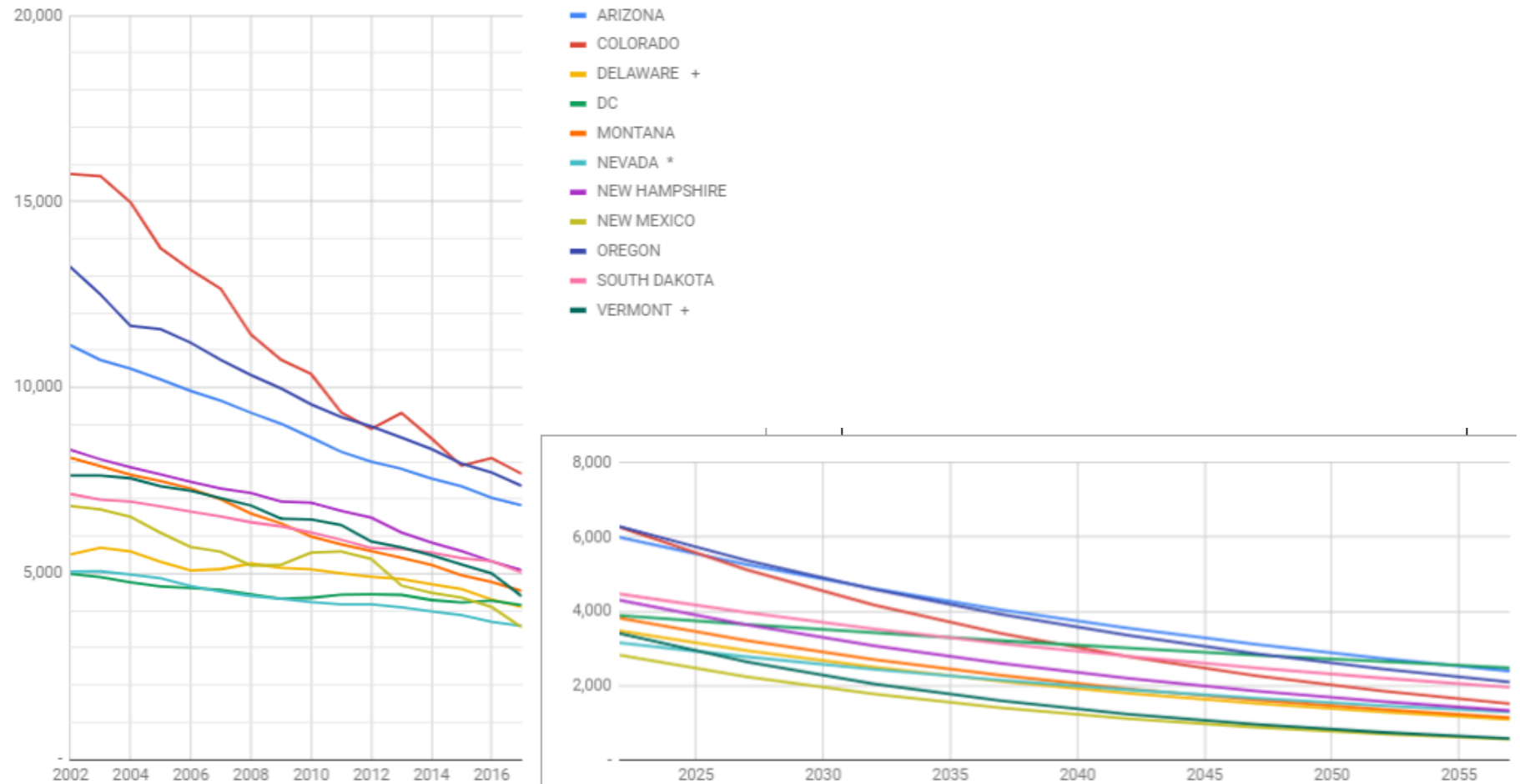




## ◆ Small-Medium Grand Lodges

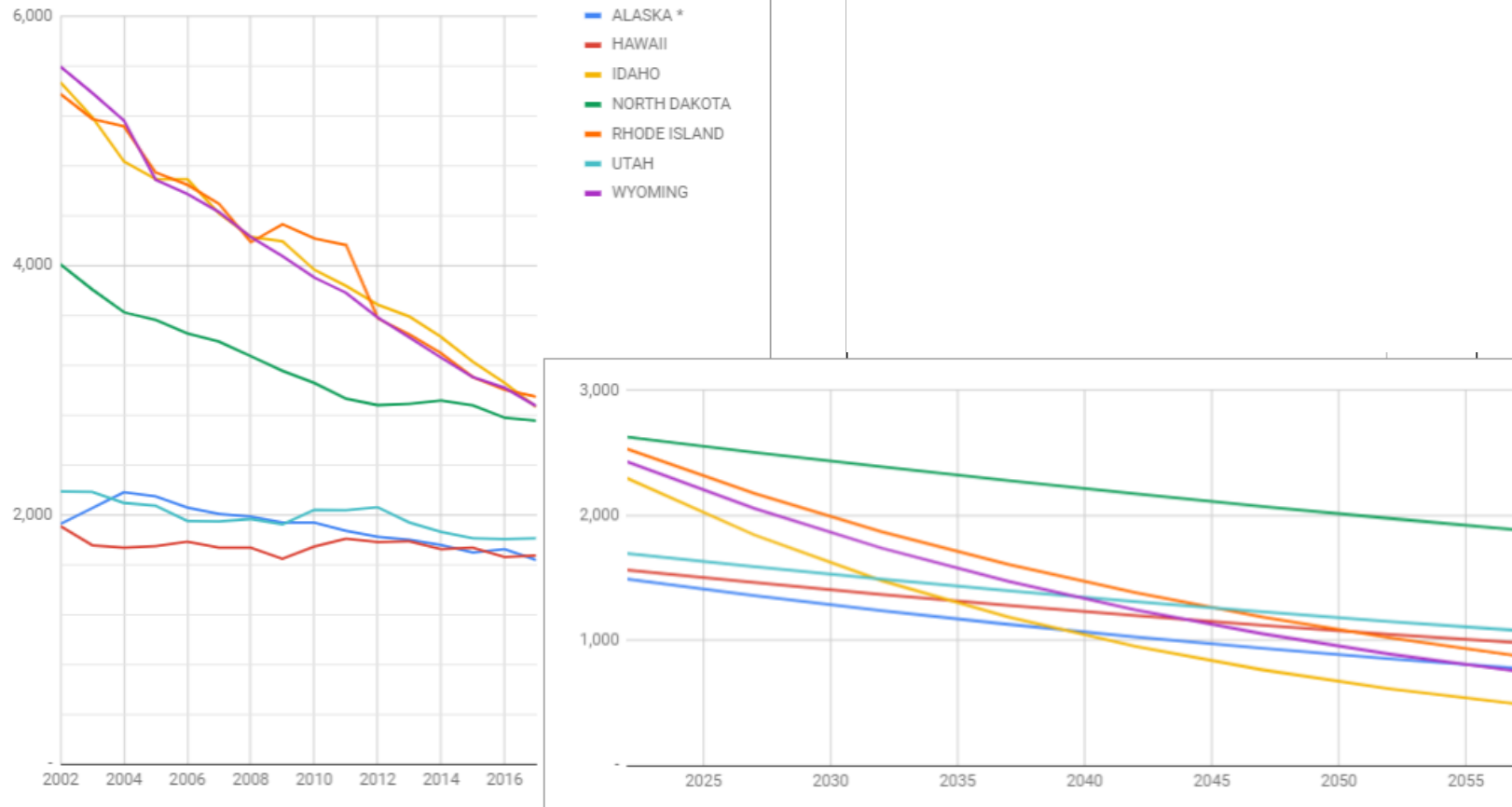


### Small Grand Lodges

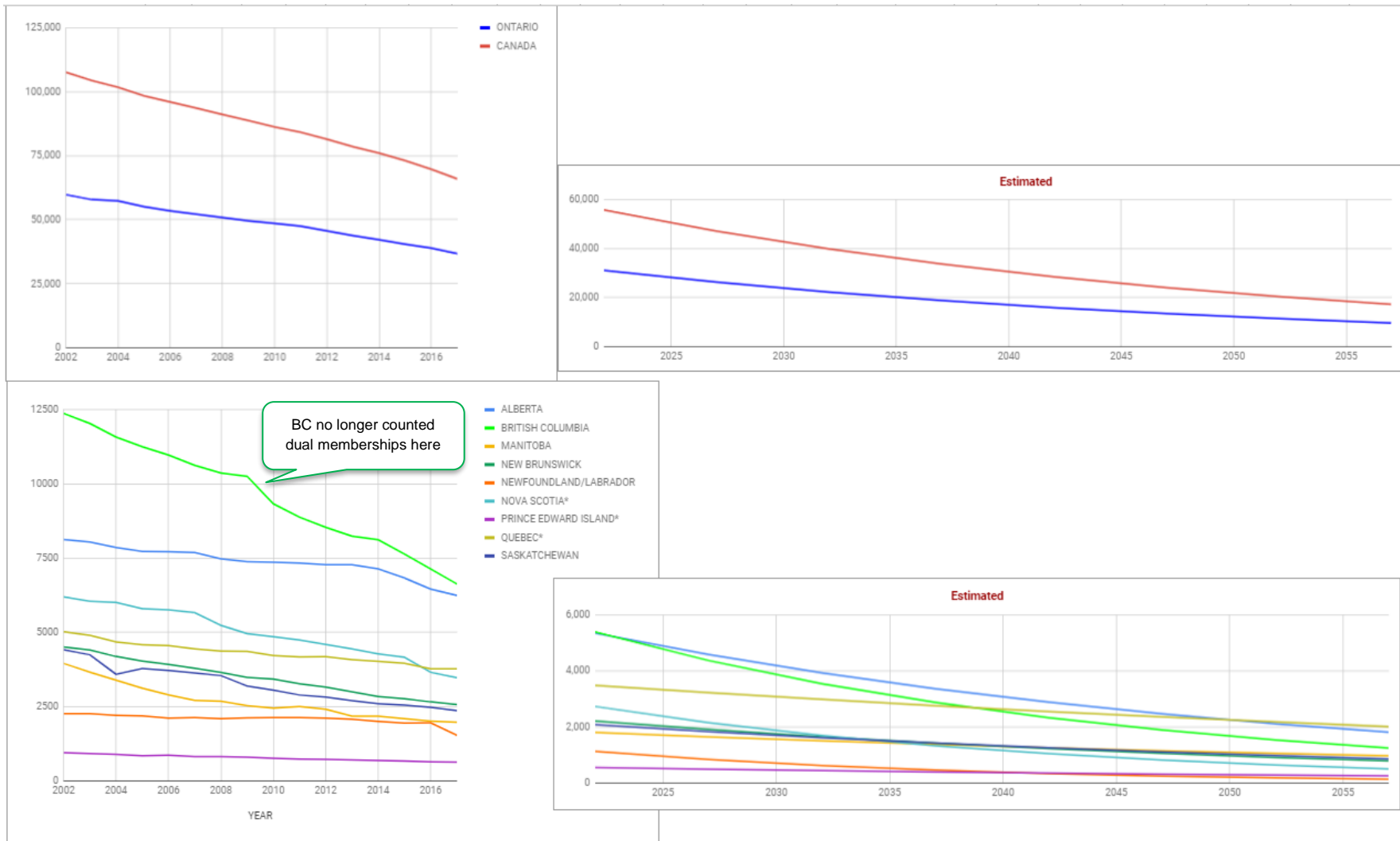




## ◆ Tiny Grand Lodges

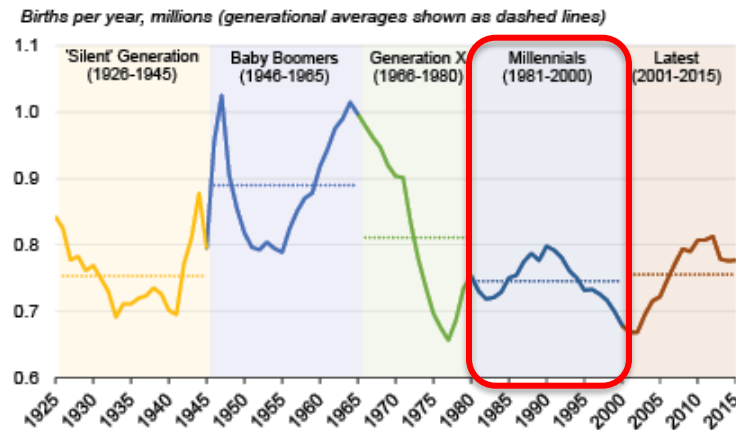


## ✕ Canada



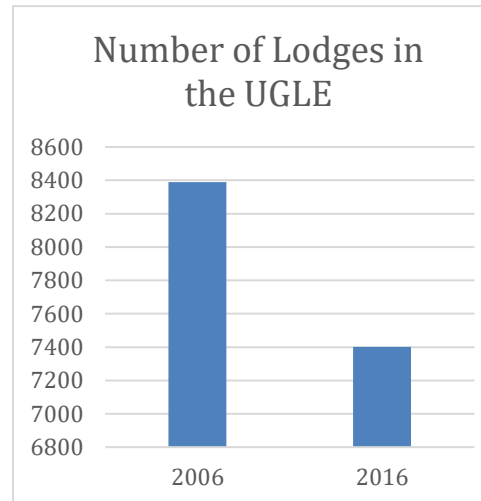
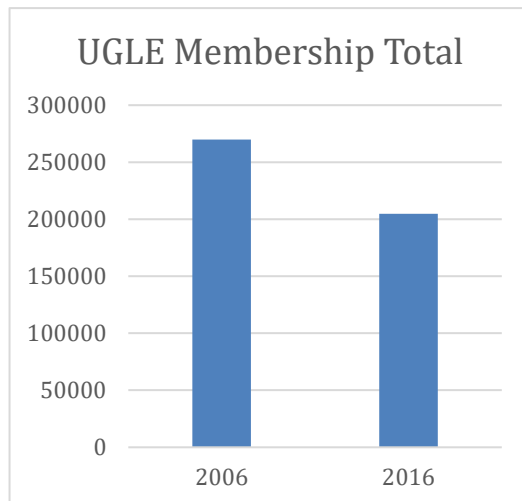
For several Canadian grand lodges, membership totals appeared to stabilize between 2009 and 2013 (like the U.S. trend), but 2014 to 2017 has seen a sharper drop (also similar to the U.S. trend). By 2050, there will be approximately 25,000 Masons in Canada, losing almost two-thirds of its members in 33 years since 2017.

## ✕ United Grand Lodge of England numbers



Note the number of Millennials born compared to other generations in the United Kingdom does not match the United States or Canada—relatively, it is far less.

In one decade, the number of lodges in the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) has decreased by about 99 lodges from 8,389 in 2006 to 7,401 in 2016. That is almost 1000 lodges in a decade.



Total membership has decreased from about 500,000 at the post-war peak by about 40% to 270,000 in 2006 (about -0.7% per year) to 204,775 in 2016—a 24% drop in ten years (-2.2% per year).

Extrapolating that trend, if it continues to accelerate as it has, **the UGLE will see a similar fate as North American grand lodges with less than 50,000 total members by mid-century—10% of what it once was 100 years before.**

The optimistic part of this is at least the UGLE is closing the lodges that need closing instead of the common practice in North America to let them hang on by a thread for no purpose.

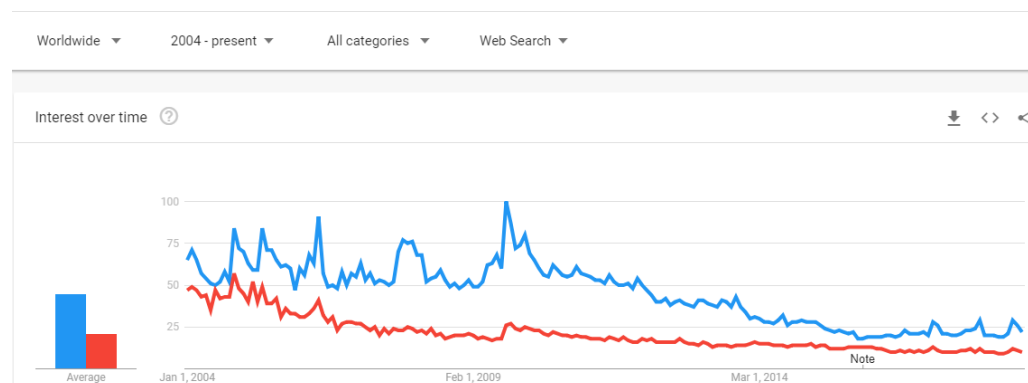


## Public Interest in Freemasonry

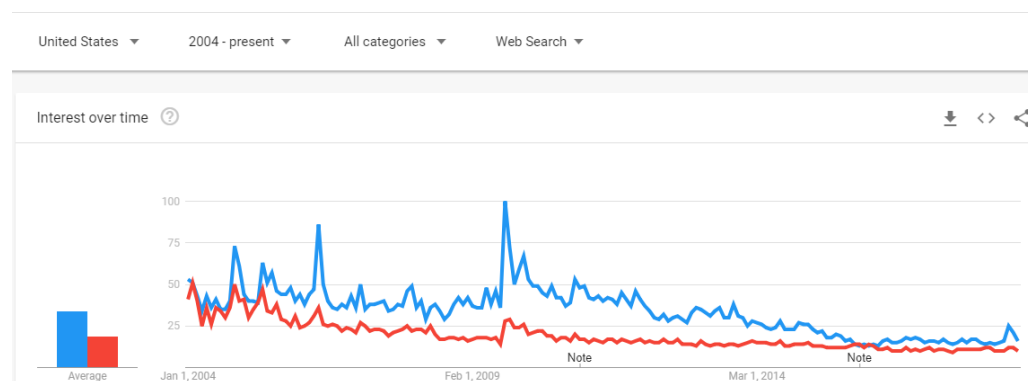
Despite the relatively recent pop culture fascination with Freemasonry and the Knights Templar as depicted in books and movies like “The Da Vinci Code” and “National Treasure” along with the explosion of books on Freemasonry and the like, TV documentaries, conspiracy shows and programs, many Masonic leaders and members touted this as the beginning of a new wave of membership as interest was seemingly on the rise. Is it?

The following charts are from Google Trends and show the search interest in “freemasons” and “freemasonry” worldwide, in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

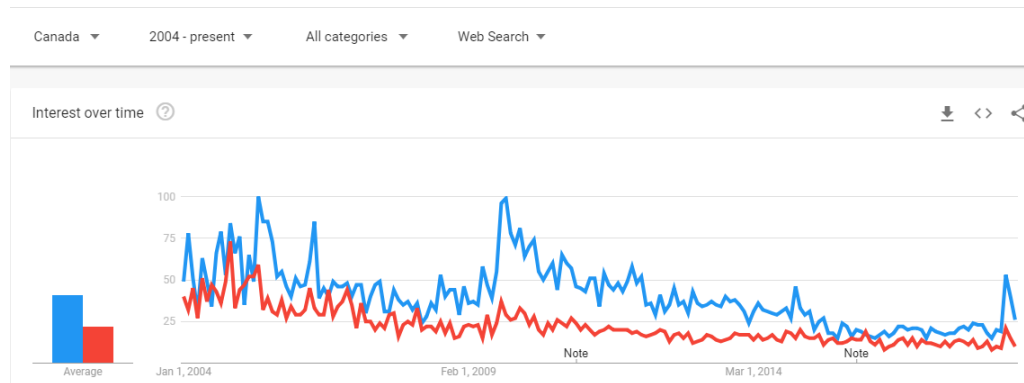
### ✂ Worldwide:



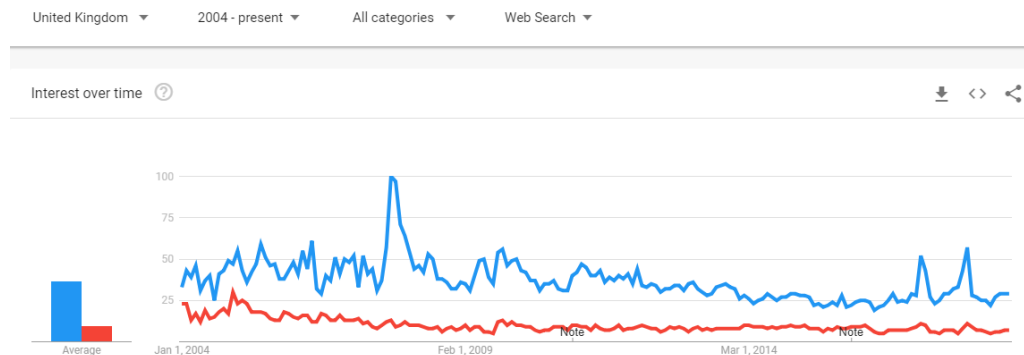
### ✂ United States:



## ✕ Canada:



## ✕ United Kingdom:



Other than the odd anomaly, none of these charts show any upward interest trend long-term. There was an anomaly in North America in September 2009 when “The Lost Symbol” novel by Dan Brown was released. That was a decade ago. The recent blips on the right are likely from the “Inside the Freemasons” documentary released in the UK in 2016 and in North America on Netflix in 2018.

So where is this wave? There really wasn’t one, and if there was, it did not make the higher-than-expected impact that the buzz on the Masonic web and in lodges we heard from optimistic brethren. **Sorry brethren, any Mason who gets excited thinking that pop culture will do the work for us and more men will knock on lodge doors as a result, is fooling themselves.**

We also must acknowledge that although the populations grow, and generations evolve, beliefs change generation to generation and the lodges that do not adapt to newer generation beliefs while maintaining the core tenets of Freemasonry are not lasting. Read on, brother...



## Atheism, Agnosticism, God and Science

### ✕ **Atheism**

The number of people professing a religion and or a belief in a god continues to decline. In 2008, about 90% of Americans said they believed in a god where 72% of Canadians said they do (69% in cities). As Freemasonry requires its members to have a belief in a Supreme Being, this trend does not bode well for the Craft for Canada in general for potential candidates. But with that said, even with a high percentage of believers in the U.S., there is a common notion among those religions that Masonic membership is highly frowned upon or forbidden altogether, so the number available even among believers is even lower.

### ✕ **Deism and Agnosticism**

There are also more people who do not lean toward one religion but are more comfortable as deists or who say they are “spiritual but not religious”. Some of us ourselves have declared this and we would surmise that there are many more Masons out there who do too. Although detractors of deism believe deists are full agnostics (although agnosticism covers a wide spectrum of beliefs) or even atheists, potential candidates for Freemasonry need to consider that the Supreme Being requirement can include a certain level of agnosticism within an appropriate context.

This new reality may be shocking or unacceptable to many Masons who strongly profess in a religion or God from an organized religion construct, but the fact of the matter is people’s beliefs and definitions are changing, and have always changed, just not as mainstream as it once was. Where does Freemasonry fit within this? Can it?

### ✕ **“God”**

Masonic membership requires potential candidates and its members to believe in a “Supreme Being” with variances including that they believe this Supreme Being rewards virtue and punishes vice and/or It has revealed him/her/itself to mankind. For those who limit the definition of “God” through the traditional means of what a religion’s dogma explicitly states, need to consider different perspectives.

In Freemasonry, the word “God” is not tied to any religion and we let whatever the believer decides, as Freemasonry does not define “God” or even what a “Supreme Being” is. All Masons should really understand



this important concept, so we could have more open discussions on this matter to educate our members who engage with friends and family about Freemasonry, that while not being a religion it requires a belief in a Supreme Being, and whatever a person deems that Being to be is not for us to judge.

There are hundreds of names for God, and a person's beliefs and views on God may change over time, so we mustn't shut down or berate another's beliefs. As we have seen armies rise to fight in the name of their god, dangerous it is for Freemasonry to raise a banner for such a cause to the world. The point is, it is up to the individual Mason to raise their own banner in their spirit to whatever Supreme Being they feel, and to understand that many of us will change our beliefs. That is the beauty of Freemasonry as a morality system.

## ✕ Science

With the accelerating advancement of scientific discoveries and papers, the world is becoming more familiar with the nature of the universe. Even for the casual reader of scientific discoveries and theories, keeping up with them has become increasingly difficult and complex. The great question arises from a spiritual or religious context then is whether these discoveries and theories have moved us closer to or further away from understanding God, or as a believer in pantheism, bringing God and universe ever closer to the truth.

What occurs in Masonic lodges needs to attempt to keep up with what our ritual charges us to do: "to expand your researches into the hidden mysteries of nature and science." As Masons, in education presentations and discussions in lodge, we need to share important theories and discoveries about how science has always beautifully coincided with Freemasonry and personal spirituality itself. We need to provide a culture of learning in a "knowledge lodge" where we discuss and openly speculate on "dark energy", the origin, size and age of the universe, black holes, energy flow, or quantum mechanics among many other interesting and enlightening topics. This will retain interest from younger generations whose participation and sharing of knowledge in these areas from updated curriculums in their schooling will enhance the lodge discussion.



## ✕ **Druids, Wiccans, Pagans, and other groups**

We acknowledge that a fast-growing number of Millennials, including women, are looking to other non-Masonic initiatic systems including the Druids, Wicca, Circes, Rosicrucians, Golden Dawn, Templars, Alchemists, Martinism, and many more.

These mystery schools are offering everything a Masonic lodge presents—degree rites with “really cool” rituals, enhanced education, fellowship, and more—many without being mired under the restrictions and regulations of a grand umbrella.

While these groups have their mythological history, many Masons, of all people, continue to exhibit their intolerant view of them as “witches”, “devil worshippers”, or “it’s a cult”—the very labels that the public has attached to Freemasonry. And it is this very closed-minded attitude among Masons themselves we have seen and heard first-hand that has likely pushed many people away toward a more accepting group with a focus on spirituality, self-improvement, support, and connection with ancient ritualist practices. You know, the things that Freemasons should be doing.

Whether there are people who continue to profess in a belief of a Supreme Being, these groups may have drawn their attention away from joining or retaining their membership Freemasonry. Whether that shift has contributed to declining lodge memberships, is difficult to state, but the fact that these groups are growing in membership and Freemasonry is not, is certainly telling.

## **The Information Age – Placing the Blame**

Some Masons have surmised that smartphones are the cause of why young men are not joining Freemasonry; they spend all their time on these handheld computers texting with friends and interacting on social media. Frankly, this



is an uninformed and perhaps ignorant statement to make. Studies have indicated that “we are addicted to our smartphones”. This is true from a biochemical perspective, and in turn, affects us psychologically, where the dopamine hormone is released on the number of likes you have on a photo of your dog, but the same argument could be said about any technological or media fad—from newspapers, radio, TVs, to desktop computers, to the Internet, to video games, etc. including other entertaining things like comic books, sports, music, movies, and theatre as well. Technology and other hobbies and distractions will always be around. The difference today is that social media is more distracting because it is more readily available.

Unfortunately, this argument will always evolve to shift the blame on everyone who uses these items (i.e. everyone including Freemasons!) instead of truly examining ourselves in Freemasonry is myopic and a deflecting argument. A better argument to make is how can our lodge be a comfortable and peaceful sanctuary from all these distractions outside in the profane world and focus on enlightening the soul and invigorating the spirit within ourselves.

### ✕ **Distractions are nothing new**

As Dwight Smith said in “Whither Are We Traveling”:

#### **“I – FAULTY DIAGNOSIS**

At the outset, I may as well precipitate an argument by disposing of the old favorites:

**One:** Whatever attendance troubles our Lodges may be having are not caused by television, nor the automobile, nor by bowling, nor togetherness, nor any of the other “busyness” in which our restless society is engaged. A multitude of activities may contribute to a decline in Lodge attendance, but they do not constitute the cause. When we complain of lack of attendance, what we really are saying is that interest is at a low ebb, for in any organization, if there is interest, there will be attendance. **No amount of television or bowling or endless “busyness” can usurp the position of eminence a Lodge of Freemasons occupies in a man’s loyalty if the Lodge is in a position to command his loyalty. The ailment isn’t quite that simple. We are looking at the symptoms – not the disease. The real source of the trouble is within ourselves.**



**Two:** Such problems as we may have will not be solved by forcing men to memorize a set of questions and answers, nor by cramming books and lectures down their throats, nor by any Big Brother Plan, nor by devoting our energies and resources to other organizations or movements, however worthy they may be. The cure isn't that simple, either. The patient's indisposition will not be relieved by nostrums. The treatment, too, must come from within."

"And certainly Dr. Thomas S. Roy, Past Grand Master of Massachusetts, cannot be accused of hostility to any Masonic body, yet in an eloquent address before the Conference of Grand Secretaries in North America in February 1962, he was forced to declare:

"If we permit the proliferation of Masonry into rites, and the 57 varieties of bodies whose membership is dependent upon ours, let us face the fact that the attendance that goes to them belongs to us. There is a sense in which it can be said that their success is our failure. I am not passing judgment on any of them. I am a good member in some of them and have done my share of work in them. But they all must face the fact that they must pour some of their strength back into the Symbolic Lodge. For any weakness we develop must sooner or later communicate itself to them."

Bro. Roy raised an important point that few listen to. Take the successes and learnings from your appendant and concordant body apply them to your lodge. This is exactly what we have tried to do.

### ✕ eMasonry

Thankfully, Freemasons are engaging online more and more each day—sharing ideas, advertising events, discussing topics to no end, and bonding across borders. Perhaps we shouldn't be blaming our phones, social media, or the Internet. A grand lodge is not going to prevent Masons from using them; we should be integrating them to our advantage as a lodge, grand lodge, and internationally without alienating the senior members who couldn't be bothered. Gen-X, Millennials and Gen-Z are fully engaged in mobile devices and social media. We already give presentations using PowerPoint or other tools to educate. We already discuss deep topics online. Perhaps we can step it up a level and continue that engagement, by retaining their membership through the gamification of Masonic education.

What is gamification? It is using an electronic video game-like setting for training scenarios and has proven to be more effective than traditional means. Brethren could compete against each other as take online quizzes and courses, as they travel through a labyrinth or an archeological excursion to find Masonic symbols. Or use augmented reality while on an actual trip to Washington, DC or London to uncover the Masonic buildings, architecture, and history for points. Could one of you develop an app for that? We have lodge webmasters and database administrators, plus there are other Masonic apps out there, so there are unlimited opportunities for our own members to develop tools for our lodges and grand lodges.

With all of this in perspective, and yes, it is a lot to consider, let's now get back to some hard statistics again.

## **“Numbership”**

What has not followed the downward membership trend, however, is the total number of lodges, which remains relatively high compared to the membership that is needed to support it.

By maintaining a minimum dues structure, little is now being saved for the lodge budget-to-budget, and little is accomplished in upgrades to aging buildings and regalia. With that, year-to-year, there is an ever-smaller pool of committed men being able to take on leadership and officer roles, degree parts, maintaining revenue, and trying attend at least forty meetings a year.

Another important note is that although there are lodges and chapters with a sizable membership base that should be able to support and run itself, the participation level is so low that it is still difficult to fill chairs to even have meetings, degrees, or events. In some cases, lodges with several dozen members on the rolls must close their doors, because they are unable to function without constant visitation and fill-ins. Without significant planning to resurrect the dead energy, usually the best option is to put the members out of their misery and start a new lodge.

With that, more grand lodges need to let go of the past and pull charters for dead lodges and allow new lodges to form with fewer founding brethren. Some jurisdictions require at least 50 men, a ridiculous number, where some are now lowering that to 25 and that is a good



thing. We advocate smaller, focused lodges that aren't worried about "numbership".

### ✕ Amalgamations

Because of this trend in Masonic groups, we are beginning to see more lodge amalgamations, but we still have fewer members supporting more lodges than ever before. This statistic alone has put a stress not only on a member's time, but on budgetary costs such as festive board/catering, hall, district, and grand lodge per capita fees which have all gone up in recent years. Further stress is on grand lodges whose administration and district officers need to spend time trying to "prop-up" inevitably dying lodges rather than improving already decent ones.

Lodges that are at the stage where they can barely hold a meeting should take up the courage to either implement a bold plan immediately, end the misery, consider either amalgamating with a stronger lodge, ensure the remaining dedicated members affiliate with a lodge, or have them start a new one. The difficulty is in rural lodges, who may be one or two hundred miles away from the next lodge.

With amalgamations, note that we've seen two poor lodges amalgamate to create a temporarily larger, but still a poor lodge. We've even seen triple hyphenated lodges! Without reinventing itself, perhaps with a new name, brethren who think amalgamating will instantly solve their existing issues that they're carrying forward, are again, fooling themselves. Let go of the past.

### ✕ Costs

The cost factor alone is causing a rift within many lodges where some brethren don't mind paying more for a better Masonic experience while others, many on fixed incomes, want to keep costs to a minimum. But when you look at the trends above, the total revenue declines along with membership totals as more resources are required to prop up lodges and grand lodges. A solution that appears to work is raising dues on working brethren and maintaining low dues for retirees, otherwise they may be lost to demit or SNPD. There is no reason why we can't support senior members in this regard.

### ✕ Time Demands

Further to all this is that Masonic concordant and appendant bodies such as the Scottish Rite, Royal Arch, Cryptic Rite, Preceptory, and others,

including Shriners International and a Mason's involvement in DeMolay or Job's Daughters all have their dues and time demands as well, and the Mason who was once a member of a multitude of bodies at low dues, is seeing dues increases in all of them, fewer members, and thus more time expected to support them to keep them alive. This has become more and more difficult to remain and support these groups, let alone their own lodges.

Men and women are working more hours than before to provide for themselves and their families. How often do we hear, "Brother so and so sends his regrets as he's working late this evening" or "he is working out of town for the next several weeks"? Then with what time he does have remaining, it is spent with his family—or should be.

**Is Freemasonry turning off men who want to join or have joined and want to contribute but are unable to commit the time because of the high-frequency demand of their time?**

It is.

Consider the typical busy lodge that meets regularly, has degrees, and social events. What is expected of a member in a year?

Read ahead to "Chapter 12 – Meeting Effectiveness and Efficiency" to see the list. From that, we estimated a total of **50 – 70 evenings a year** (15-20% of total days in a year, or 3 months total of weekday evenings a year) is often expected of a lodge officer.

Let us be honest and admit that this is a significant time commitment, let alone financial commitment on top of annual dues, especially for young families. Here are some hard questions.

◆ **Are we being honest and direct with potential members about what that level of commitment entails?**

No, or at least very few do this. I know you do not want to scare away potential members, but why not try honesty instead of "snake oil" disingenuous tactics?

◆ **Should we also strongly consider toning down the number of meetings while turning up the amount of value and Masonic educational content?**

Yes. In thinking about the time available for a member, it can depend on where he is at in what stage in his life. So, another





factor plays into our consideration of what expectations current or potential members have. With that, we need to be aware of the generational psychology at play.

We often hear about retired members who wonder where all the younger men are and why they aren't attending everything. It's because they literally do not have the time. Many Masons will "pick and choose" what meetings and events in a month are worth their time. Some of us have gone so far as not attending or visiting a lodge that does not have education planned or are initiating or raising more than one candidate at a time.

◆ **Should we encourage members to join other lodges if they are not satisfied?**

Yes. Members not satisfied with their current lodge should somehow be encouraged to affiliate with another lodge, not bullied into believing that they should always be dedicated to their mother lodge, no matter what. Too many times, disenfranchised Masons just demit, not knowing that there are greener pastures around the corner or even in the same room on a different night. **This is why it is important for you to identify brethren who genuinely like what Freemasonry is about, but seem unhappy with their lodge, and to then steer them in the right direction to maintain their Masonic membership. We bet you already know some brethren already.**

Starting from before a man joins, admit it, not every lodge is for every man and too often, lodges seek any man, not the right man for the lodge. There is nothing wrong with telling a potential petitioner that your lodge is not the right fit, but that there are other lodges that they should seek out. Help them become a Mason in the right lodge. Again, be truly honest with them. A retiree or empty-nester may have more time to attend meetings several times a month over a new father who may only have time to attend four meetings in a year.



## Generational Views

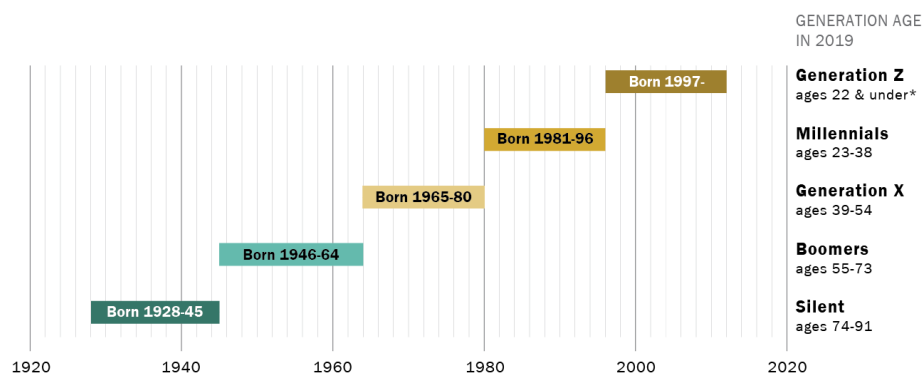
What is interesting about Freemasonry as an organization is that grand lodges and lodges comprise a wide range of male generations working together at the same time in harmony for common goals. Or are they? While it is possible that the issues outlined here may also be partially or wholly due to each generation having different views on them and their solutions, whether one brother puts more weight on it than another, the issue at hand remains to be dealt with.

Grand lodges themselves are usually run by a group of retirees, where change is an extremely rare occurrence. When the original *Laudable Pursuit* was written, the Silent Generation constituted the bulk of grand lodge officers, and now it is the Baby Boomers who currently constitute the bulk of that population. With them in these roles, we should consider their general attitudes and societal outlook alongside other generations and their typically expected archetypes (nomad, hero, prophet, and artist), and where upcoming generations see themselves within a society, and, of course, how Freemasonry fits within this construct.

### ✕ Strauss-Howe Generational Theory

This theory examines the last 600 years of our Western civilization society and categorizes a group of four generations or “turnings” of about 20 years into a repeating “saeculum” of about 80-90 years. These turnings tend to coincide with significant world events and the distinction is how each generation responds to those events.

At any one time in society, and as lifespans continue to slowly rise, there are six to seven generations. As of 2019, these generations are as follows, although the starting and end years are subject to debate\*.



\*No chronological endpoint has been set for this group. Generation Z age ranges vary by analysis.

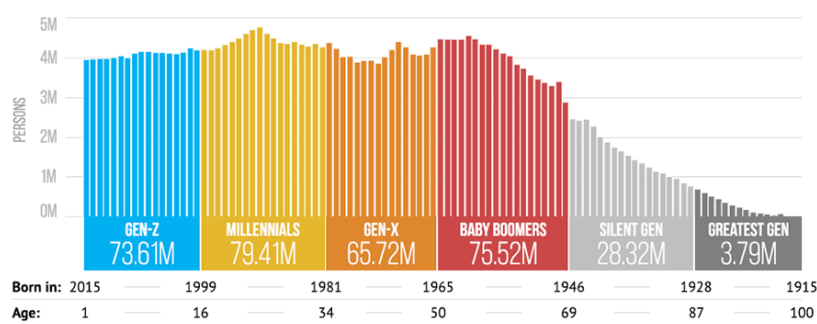
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With this, here is a chart to consider regarding generations in the U.S.A., primarily using 2015 as a point in time.

### Total US Population by Age and Generation

as of December 2015



knoema

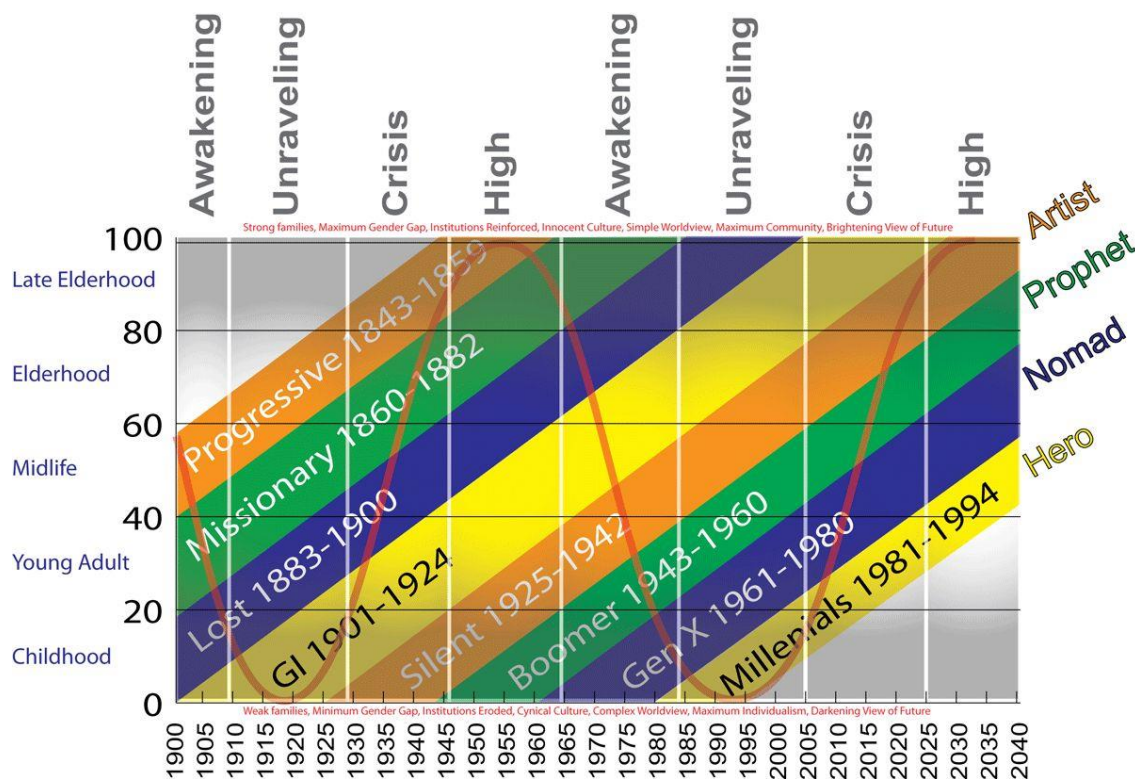
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The years are near to Strauss-Howe. Note that Baby Boomers and Millennials each have larger total populations than Gen-X and Gen-Z. In the UK, there are relatively fewer Millennials than in North America.

### Turnings & Archetypes<sup>2</sup>

Turnings: High → Awakening → Unraveling → Crisis

Archetypes: Artist, Prophet, Nomad, Hero



<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strauss%E2%80%93Howe\\_generational\\_theory#Timing\\_of\\_generations\\_and\\_turnings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strauss%E2%80%93Howe_generational_theory#Timing_of_generations_and_turnings)

- **1<sup>st</sup> Turning: High**

According to Strauss and Howe, the First Turning is a High, which occurs after a Crisis. During the High, institutions are strong and individualism is weak. Society is confident about where it wants to go collectively, though those outside the majoritarian center often feel stifled by the conformity.

According to the authors, the most recent First Turning in the U.S. was the post–World War II American High, beginning in 1946 and ending with the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

- **2<sup>nd</sup> Turning: Awakening**

According to the theory, the Second Turning is an Awakening. This is an era when institutions are attacked in the name of personal and spiritual autonomy. Just when society is reaching its high tide of public progress, people suddenly tire of social discipline and want to recapture a sense of "self-awareness", "spirituality" and "personal authenticity". Young activists look back at the previous High as an era of cultural and spiritual poverty.

Strauss & Howe say the U.S.'s most recent Awakening was the "Consciousness Revolution," which spanned from the campus and inner-city revolts of the mid-1960s to the tax revolts of the early 1980s.

- **3<sup>rd</sup> Turning: Unraveling**

According to Strauss and Howe, the Third Turning is an Unraveling. The mood of this era they say is in many ways the opposite of a High: Institutions are weak and distrusted, while individualism is strong and flourishing. The authors say Highs come after Crises, when society wants to coalesce and build and avoid the death and destruction of the previous crisis. Unravelings come after Awakenings, when society wants to atomize and enjoy. They say the most recent Unraveling in the U.S. began in the 1980s and includes the Long Boom and Culture War.

- **4<sup>th</sup> Turning: Crisis**

According to the authors, the Fourth Turning is a Crisis. This is an era of destruction, often involving war or revolution, in which institutional life is destroyed and rebuilt in response to a perceived threat to the nation's survival. After the crisis, civic authority revives, cultural expression redirects towards community purpose, and people begin to locate themselves as members of a larger group.



The authors say the previous Fourth Turning in the U.S. began with the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and climaxed with the end of World War II. The G.I. Generation (which they call a Hero archetype, born 1901 to 1924) came of age during this era. They say their confidence, optimism, and collective outlook epitomized the mood of that era. The authors assert the Millennial Generation (which they also describe as a Hero archetype, born 1982 to 2004) show many similar traits to those of the G.I. youth, which they describe as including: rising civic engagement, improving behavior, and collective confidence.

- ➔ For a very in-depth analysis and commentary on this topic in relation to Freemasonry and our lodges, we would encourage you to listen to the podcasts by Brother Eric Diamond on X-Oriente.com.

## ✕ Generations in relation to North American Freemasonry<sup>3</sup>

Generation	Archetype	Generation Birth Year Span	Entered childhood in Turning Name: Events	Turning Year Span	North American Masonic Events
<b>Great Power Saeculum (81 years)</b>					
<b>Missionary</b>	Prophet (Idealist)	1860–1882 (23)	1st Turning: High: Reconstruction, Gilded Age, Civil War	1865–1886 (21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decline in membership from “Morgan Affair”</li> </ul>
<b>Lost</b>	Nomad (Reactive)	1883–1900 (18)	2nd Turning: Awakening: Missionary Awakening, First wave feminism	1886–1908 (22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Golden Age of Fraternalism</li> <li>Growth of the Scottish Rite</li> <li>Shrine founded</li> </ul>
<b>G.I. “Greatest”</b>	Hero (Civic)	1901–1924 (24)	3rd Turning: Unraveling: World War I, Prohibition, Roaring Twenties	1908–1929 (21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Masonic temple building boom</li> </ul>
<b>Silent</b>	Artist (Adaptive)	1925–1942 (18)	4th Turning: Crisis: Great Depression, World War II	1929–1946 (17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The Builder” and other publications</li> <li>Allied Masonic Degrees founded</li> </ul>
<b>Millennial Saeculum (76 + years)</b>					
<b>Baby Boom</b>	Prophet (Idealist)	1943–1960 (18)	1st Turning: High: Superpower America, Golden Age of Capitalism	1946–1964 (18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greatest Gen returning from war join lodges in droves.</li> <li>Peak membership total</li> </ul>
<b>Gen X</b>	Nomad (Reactive)	1961–1981 (21)	2nd Turning: Awakening: Consciousness Revolution, Fourth Great Awakening	1964–1984 (20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Great Masonic Denial Period*</li> </ul>
<b>Millennial (Gen Y)</b>	Hero (Civic)	1982–2004 (23)	3rd Turning: Unraveling: Culture Wars, Postmodernism, Neoliberalism, Great Regression	1984–2008 (24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post-Millennium revival of education and esoterica.</li> <li>Laudable Pursuit released</li> <li>Masonic Restoration movement</li> </ul>
<b>Homeland (Gen Z)</b>	Artist (Adaptive)	2005–present (?)	4th Turning: Crisis: Great Recession, War on Terror, Climate Change, Cold War II, Opioid epidemic	2008–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eMasonry boom</li> <li>Masonic book boom</li> <li>Millennials joining</li> <li>Grand Lodge internal schisms</li> <li>Prince Hall recognition</li> <li>Lodge hall closures</li> <li>Immigrant/ Clandestine lodges</li> </ul>

\*-Coined by us because nothing significant occurred in Freemasonry during this period other than continued decline due to birth rates in English-speaking countries

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strauss-Howe\\_generational\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strauss-Howe_generational_theory)



It can be argued that the G.I. and Silent Generations, with their long-standing memberships in Freemasonry were able to carry it this far. With the looming demise of grand lodges, will their equal turnings as heroes and artists in the Millennial and Homeland generations be able to hang around long enough to reinvigorate and reinvent the Craft?

Let's look at each generation with respect to current Masons.

### ◆ **G.I./Greatest Generation**

They were styled the Greatest Generation by journalist Tom Brokaw as they came of age during the Great Depression and are the veterans who fought in World War II.

This is the generation that after returning from the war, looking for a continued fraternal camaraderie massively joined lodges spiking the total population to its peak in 1959. Since then, as we all know, the total is in steady decline.

Currently in our lodges, there are fewer and fewer of these men, if any, where many lodges no longer have them on the rolls at all, and if they do, they likely were awarded a life membership, many are physically no longer able to make it out to meetings. There's no doubt that when they do, their demeanor is dignified, humbled, and their encouragement and support can give a spark of motivation to the lodge officers.

We have also seen many of these members, along with Silent Generation members who, despite having been a member for many decades, are still required to pay lodge dues although they are in a seniors' home or other seniors' facility. Some forget to pay and stodgy secretaries will proceed with trying to collect dues, then suspend them for non-payment. This isn't right. Stop it.

### ◆ **Silent Generation**

The Silent Generation were the people that missed, for the most part, fighting in WWII, but their childhood largely consisted of living through the Great Depression and had parents who already fought in WWI, and some saw their parents serve in WWII. They did not wish to "rock the boat" of society but preferred to work within the societal norms so they weren't "outed as a communist" by the McCarthy era, and as such, Time magazine in a 1951 essay labelled them as "Silent".

They were so normal that when they came of age and found a new post-war booming economy, they married early and had babies at the

youngest average age of all modern generations, hence the “baby boom” despite Silents having a lower population due to the Great Depression.

In Freemasonry, they found stability and community although due to their lowered birth rate, did not have as many members join compared to their preceding generation who joined in droves after returning from the war.

### ◆ **Baby Boomers**

Baby Boomers in general have a high work ethic and as a result, expect perks, promotions, and praise. In the U.S., this is the “flower power” generation that led the civil rights movement, fought in Vietnam, and bused out to Woodstock to see the greatest rock and folk musicians play in one of the largest festivals of its time highlighting that generation’s cultural milestone.

Personal relationships meant everything as writing letters and phone calls were common and thus this generation developed very strong personal and social skills. Although at a young age, this generation was the first to be introduced and influenced by television marketing.

After the Greatest Generation joined and a less populated Silent Generation, although there were more Boomers, they weren’t the “joiners” like their dads and granddads. As a result, the growth of and total membership did not sustain itself. When Boomers were in their mid-30s and as the sons of previous generations, they joined in the 1970s, which stabilized the numbers for a few years. However, because that total number was lower than the post war spike, there were fewer dads to then have their sons join two decades later in the early 90s.

Twenty years or so later, there are numerous examples of Gen-X men joining not because their father did (as more did not), but because their grandfather did. But they also joined a little later in life, not earlier, so it was no longer a 20-year cycle, but a 30-year one or more. With Generation-X, this has been the primary levelling of the membership in the mid-2000s.

In our lodge communications, Baby Boomers they appreciate phone calls, personal letters, handshakes, and arm-twisting and are less responsive to social media. They view technology to help their productivity not to connect with other people.



This generation is nearly all retired and as such, many may now find time to attend meetings after being busy in upper management and wish to convert those skills into serving in grand lodge. The issue is that their top-down management knowledge they learned from their military parents may fit with grand lodge structures, but Generation X and Millennials do not respond well to such commanding and demanding motivators.

### ◆ **Gen-X**

Generation-X is a “Nomad” generation who were born between about 1962 and 1981 and had much in common with the Lost Generation and tend to travel and/or move to other places as they find their current place not stable or exciting enough to build a life in. They got married and had children later in life than before.

Once they did settle though, they looked at the institutions in their society and wanted to make changes to it to adapt to their outlook and needs. The political battle against the generations before it has been difficult, but those who have prevailed now hold higher leadership positions at a younger age than those generations were able to before. Gen-X now finds itself as the bridge generation between the Baby Boomers and Millennials and the stresses are found in the workplace, in politics, and in our communities. While Gen-X was often seen as the anti-establishment generation, they really weren’t of coming of age yet.

They did have fewer offspring than the generations before and this will affect Masonic membership numbers in subsequent generations. They admire their mentors and honor traditions, but they realize more needs to be done with less resources unless things change to adapt to meet the expectations of the next generations—the Millennials and Gen-Z.

### ◆ **Millennials**

Millennials have all now come of age whose birth range typically starts in the early-1980s and end around just before the turn of the Millennium. By 2019, also fueled by immigration, they will comprise the largest population in the U.S. overtaking Baby Boomers. They see a world where government and corporate corruption coupled with economic instability are the norm and as such, they have a high distrust of authority. With that knowledge, they have a general expectation of being entitled, but they appreciate and will strive if properly challenged. They have seen first-hand that an individual can make a significant difference for good or evil. They identify with a single villain or hero, and likely why so many

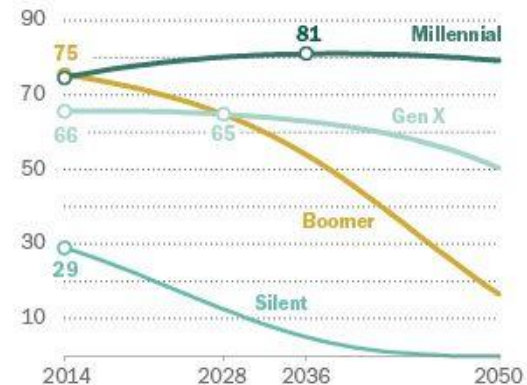


movies they are attracted to today are about superheroes fighting an evil villain.

They are easily distracted by technology with all the noise and overwhelming amount of information coming at them. With that information though, they are highly informed and intelligent. Ultimately, they do not like their time wasted and will get turned-off quickly if their expectations are not met, or if any negativity is a part of their endeavors to be a “hero”. If they can get their information on the Internet, they will, so they are looking for a “cool” and meaningful experience that no Internet or technology could provide that meets their imagination.

### Projected Population by Generation

*In millions*



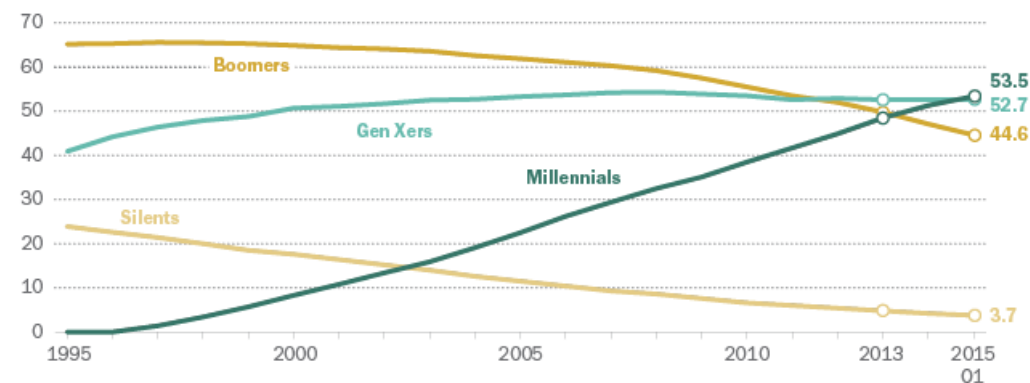
Note: Millennials refers to the population ages 18 to 34 as of 2015.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau population projections released December 2014

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### U.S. Labor Force by Generation, 1995-2015

*In millions*



Note: Annual averages plotted 1995-2014. For 2015 the first quarter average of 2015 is shown. Due to data limitations, Silent generation is overestimated from 2008-2015.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of monthly 1995-2015 Current Population Surveys, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)

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They are whom Freemasons should have been attracting and retaining for many years to come and are obviously considered as the future of the Craft. In this sense, the degree work could be amped up in delivery,



including lighting, smell, sound, and other sensory effects to make the experience more memorable and impactful on them as candidates, but remember that this only lasts so long. More importantly, providing them the right Masonic educational tools, books, and resources for them to discover their own greatness within. Many have gone so far as to rebel against new technology in favor of older methods that still work; perhaps why LP records have made a comeback and their desire to preserve buildings in former warehouse districts where they prefer creating businesses inside older-historical buildings which tends to their “hero” side in preserving the past.

Freemasonry is an ideal landing place organizationally and philosophically for these men who are looking for meaning in their lives and wondering what their place is in society. More especially, psychologically, it can be that uplifting motivator and beacon for men wanting to exemplify “the hero” archetype. That simply means that Freemasonry must be a difficult challenge they can achieve, but continually wanting more.

However, as mentioned earlier, other groups are competing for them with most Masons not knowing this competition is happening right before their eyes.

Unfortunately, we may be too late as those Millennials who have already joined on average at a young age of 25 are already leaving their lodges. They have not stayed long enough to sponsor their friends and may have told them not to bother joining. There are numerous stories that we’ve read posted by former card-carrying members online.

Note that Millennials now comprise the plurality of the population and labor force, and if your lodge and grand lodge are not reflecting this for the most part, then they are behind the trend.

Generations are becoming less religious, although they may be more spiritual (see below).

### Generational Replacement Drives Growth of Religiously Unaffiliated

	Evangelical Protestants	Mainline Prot.	Historically black Prot.	Catholic	Other Christian groups	Other groups	Unaffil.
Silent generation (1928-1945)	30%	22	5	24	3	4	11
Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	28	17	7	23	3	5	17
Generation X (1965-1980)	25	13	7	21	4	6	23
Millennials (1981-1996)	21	11	6	16	3	8	35

2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Don't know/refused answers not shown. "Other Christian groups" includes Mormons, Orthodox Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of smaller Christian groups.

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What this means is that Millennials, now a plurality of the population is the least religious. That doesn't sound promising for Freemasonry where membership requires a belief in a Supreme Being.

Or does it?

### Generation Z (iGen)

"A 2014 study *Generation Z Goes to College* found that Generation Z students self-identify as being loyal, compassionate, thoughtful, open-minded, responsible, and determined. How they see their Generation Z peers is quite different from their own self-identity. They view their peers as competitive, spontaneous, adventuresome, and curious; all characteristics that they do not see readily in themselves. In addition, some authors consider that some of their competencies, such as reading competence, are being transformed due to their familiarity with digital devices, platforms and texts.

**A 2016 U.S. study found that church attendance during young adulthood was 41% among Generation Z, compared to 18 percent for Millennials at the same ages, 21 percent of Generation X, and 26 percent of Baby Boomers."**<sup>4</sup>

While some of you may lump all kids today and call them "Millennials", this is wrong—all Millennials are adults. Gen-Zers are or are about to be nearly all born and differ in traits and behaviors than Millennials. They

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation\\_Z](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_Z)



are an artistic cohort, which means they should repeat the Silent generation's tendencies.

As such, Gen-Z is more motivated by having a more secure life in finances, work, and religion. As the Silents grew up in the Great Depression, early Gen-Zers saw their parents struggle during the Great Recession. With that, they are showing signs of being more competitive rather than the collaborative Millennials—where independence gives them more control over their destiny. They multitask even more efficiently between various communication methods. Because of their independence, Gen-Z is more entrepreneurial and prefers communicating face-to-face, which aligns with trust issues on their desire for more security. They have an instinct on learning digital tools quickly and have an expectation of having their needs and demands met efficiently. They are naïve and distrust “brands” and “behemoths” like big banking and corporations—and tend to espouse anti-establishment feelings toward such institutions. Watch out grand lodge!

What this means for attracting these men, is the flashy advertisements and billboards by grand lodges simply won't sell to Gen-Z, although they could be intrigued by social media advertising that offers a more genuine emotional response, but they prefer and trust individual interaction. Because of their financial safeguarding, they want to ensure they are getting value for their money. If your lodge is not offering much, don't be surprised if a Gen-Z demits after a short period of time.

On initiating multiple candidates at a time, a Millennial may not mind it as much as a Gen-Z, but lodges and members should be prepared to provide answers to Gen-Z regarding a potential candidate's inquiry on joining and ensuring him that his degree progress is not hindered by a struggling lodge. He is expecting the lodge to perform to a high standard.

Despite their competitiveness, Gen-Z is an accepting and inclusive generation. If they join a lodge and discover members spouting intolerance toward races, religions, orientations, and views, you'll lose them, and any hope of their friends joining. This right here is what will kill grand lodges if certain members with these beliefs don't keep their opinions to themselves, not have them at all, or even let them join in the first place. Gen-Z prefers authenticity and substance over style—which is what Freemasonry supports “the internal and not external qualifications of a man”.

Get the idea? So, there's hope for a turnaround? Well... Gen-Z as the following generation is not as populous as the Millennials, so as of the early to mid-2020s when they come of age to join Freemasonry:

- Will Gen-Z also join at a young age like the Millennials did, meaning some lodges should see an uptick by 2025-30?
  - **Fewer of them will have a personal connection to a Mason like a father or grandfather compared to Millennials and Gen-X simply because there are way fewer Masons now than before and fewer families intact. This may very well be the primary general reason of declining memberships—declining family Masonic lineage.**
- Will enough of their Millennial friends in lodges bridge them toward petitioning?
- Will they retain their membership for five years, or more?

Either way, the declining Western birth rate will continue to retract overall membership in old fraternal organizations like Freemasonry where they may be viewed by Millennials as stodgy, old, religious, and boring and by Gen-Z as “the establishment” and no longer of value.

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As we mentioned in the first section, there is an increasing number of people who stylize themselves as not belonging to any religion but having some spiritual beliefs. Let's delve into this a bit more, to have a better understanding of the generation of young men that your lodge should be attracting at this very moment, shall we?



## ✕ Millennials and the Rise of the Nones

Based on research by Martin and Tulgan in 2006, Robert Davis describes Millennials thus;

"They seek a common identity with other men. They want to be on the journey of self-development and improvement. They seek truth. They desire authenticity. They want a tribe. They seek meaning in their lives"

Those sound perfect for Freemasonry!

But we've already noted that churches are also losing membership. Remember, like the GenXers, their parents rebelled against the churches, so their children never developed a connection to them. Plus, like their older siblings, most Millennials are highly independent in thought and action. So, they aren't seeking truth, meaning, and self-improvement in conventional ways or places. So where ARE they seeking it and what kind of meaning is it?

In tracking religious identification – what faith you consider yourself - and religious activity, the Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life and several other scholarly groups have identified an interesting trend.

In the last couple decades there has emerged a rapidly growing demographic who identify their religious identity as "none". In these surveys, the term "nones" is often used to describe people who answer a survey question about their religion by saying they have no religion, no particular religion, no religious preference or the like. It also includes atheists and agnostics. But we want to be clear, the term "nones" should not be equated with "secular" or "non-religious." Surveys in the U.S. and Canada find that most "nones" have some religious beliefs and practices. Two-thirds of U.S. "nones," for example, say they believe in God whereas according to the 2011 Canadian General Social Survey, one-third (33%) of unaffiliated Canadians say that religious or spiritual beliefs are important to the way they live their lives. And about one-in-five (18%) religiously unaffiliated Canadians say they pray, meditate or engage in other forms of worship on their own at least once a month. **So "none" means no affiliation, NOT no religion.**

24% of Canadians identify religiously as none. This is an increase of 7% in the last 10 years.

29% of Canadian adults between the age of 25 – 44 and 20% of adults between 45 and 64. (As a side note, 44% of British Columbians report as compared to 12% of Quebecois. Alberta falls exactly at the mean of 29%.)

In the U.S. 25% identify as none, which is a 15% increase in the last 10 years - the fastest growing identity group. As you can see, Millennials are increasingly identifying as "none".

**These are the people who would describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious".** They are seeking various groups that provide spiritual experience, wisdom, insight, knowledge, and a community of likeminded seekers without having to adhere to a narrowly prescribed dogma and praxis.

One such group that these young men join will sound familiar to you. Members of this group go through a series of three degrees during which they are bound and blindfolded, led through various challenges and learn various symbols and phrases pertinent to the group. Their ritual space places an emphasis on the compass points with light and knowledge coming from the East. They require their members to have an active relationship with some aspect of the Divine but many do not teach any kind of dogmatic theology. Members are encouraged to find their own unique relationship to whichever face of the Divine speaks to them. They end their prayers with "So Mote It Be".

But if you think we are talking about Freemasonry you'd be mistaken. Although founded by a Masonic Brother, Gerald Brosseau Gardner, which is why it looks so much like Masonry – we are talking about Nature-based religion of Wicca or modern witchcraft. Or they are joining its cousin, the modern Druidic movement. The largest denominations of this group trace their lineage back through the Druidic Revival of the 1700s which was started by several prominent British Freemasons of the day.

Both Wicca and Druidry, along with several other modern Paganisms, as they are called by religion scholars, fall under the category of New Religious Movements and GenXers and Millennials are joining them in large numbers. According to the American Religious Identification Survey, **Wicca, the largest of the New Religious Movements, showed an**



**average annual growth of 143% for the period 1990 to 2001**, with similar growth in Canada and Australia, making it **"the fastest growing spiritual identification in America."**

Take a look again at changes in Canadian religious identification and notice that jump from 4 to 11% of Canadians identifying as "other". According to the Pew Research Center's 2014 survey, 3/4 of individuals identifying as "other" also identified as Pagan or Wiccan and placing Wiccans and Pagans at 0.3% of the total U.S. population or just under 1 million people. These "other religions" are projected to triple in size in North America, from 2.2 million in 2010 to **6.6 million in 2050**, due largely to switching into other religions (such as Wicca and pagan religions) in the United States.

This rise of the modern Paganisms among the GenXers and Millennials has already started to affect Freemasonry. **Freemasonry and the modern Paganisms appeal to the same types of men – free thinking spiritual seekers.** In the US there are now lodges that have predominantly Pagan membership. While many lodges and Grand Lodges welcome these new brothers, there has been a backlash among more conservative brethren and even prompted a former Grand Master of Florida to issue a now reversed ban on Pagans in Florida lodges.

But we want to emphasize, Millennials aren't joining just any other religion. They are specifically seeking out experiential and often initiatic religions that leave room for *personal* revelation and practice. **The modern Paganisms by their definition are devoted to the study of the hidden mysteries of nature and science and these are what appeal to these young men.**

At the same time, Millennials are also joining other spiritual and initiatic fraternities. While civic organizations like the Lions, Rotary, and the Elks are losing membership, esoteric and spiritual fraternities like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn are booming. Most GD temples are having to turn away new candidates in order to not be overwhelmed. Many of those new members, by the way, are current or recently demitted Freemason, so the structure, ritual, and practices of such Masonic offshoot groups feel familiar.

From all this, we propose that Millennial Nones and Others are precisely the demographic that Freemasonry needs today. Intelligent, curious, well-read, spiritually motivated, and searching for a community that will support their explorations rather than limit them. These are men who



believe in actively engaging with their spirituality and the groups that support them.

So how do we attract these men? Let's look at a little history.

In the Vermont Masonic ritual it states "the design of the Masonic Institution is to make its votaries wiser, better, and consequently happier". In the US prior to WWII, Freemasonry was truly a system of moral and intellectual instruction intended to make good men wiser, better, and happier. Through the technology of initiation, spiritual Light was birthed and then cultivated by ongoing, lifelong study, reflection, and discussion. Free-thinking and exploration were encouraged. Remember that the Premiere Grand Lodge era was also the intellectual salon era where gentlemen got together to discuss science, theology, philosophy, and the arts. It is for this reason that equality of all Masons was emphasized, and discussions of politics or religious dogma prohibited.

As Davis notes,

"The WWII era brought thousands of men into Freemasonry, giving lodges little time to incorporate anything into the Masonic experience other than performing the ritual ceremonies of initiation, passing, and raising. This created a new generation of men in lodge who were taught nothing about Masonry beyond its rituals".

The subsequent generations of Schwarzkopfers and Boomers simply passed on what they were taught. It was "don't ask me why we do this, just do it. It's traditional". Unquestioned dogma.

But as we have seen, Millennial Nones reject unquestioned dogma and are looking for exactly what Freemasonry USED to offer pre-WWII. When done properly, we provide the young seeker with the experience that initiates his own unique spiritual journey. We then give him complex emblems and symbols, intellectual discourse, and other tools to craft his own personal relationship to the Grand Architect of the Universe and develop his own understanding of the principles and tenets of our Institution.



To attract spiritual Millennial Nones and Others, we simply have to let them know what we do, and then actually do it. They are hungry for the things that Freemasonry has to offer. As Davis points out, most Millennials have done extensive research on the history, goals, and practices of Freemasonry before they apply. Often, they know more than most of the members of the lodge. They are interested in delving deep into the symbols, rituals, and practices written about by our 18<sup>th</sup> century Brothers, and are deeply disappointed to find themselves in a "fork and knife" lodge where the actual Work of Freemasonry - spiritual development – is never discussed, and the ritual done perfunctorily. In short, when Masonry acts like a civic organization like the Lions Club, we suffer the same shrinking membership woes. To attract and then keep these new Brothers in Freemasonry, we have to actually give them Freemasonry.

For the Pagan Millennials, many of them already know about Freemasonry because it is part of their spiritual heritage. You probably have at least one in your lodge already. To keep these Brothers, and attract more like them, we simply have to remember that Freemasonry has always allowed a Brother to worship the God of his choice according to the dictates of his own conscience. The idea of a God – or Goddess - with antlers, or with one eye missing, or that has an elephant head, or even has multiple aspects – might be foreign and odd to us, but Freemasonry has always been open and welcoming seekers of Light.

If the Fraternity can learn to put aside its religious prejudices and restore its commitment to free thought, intellectual and spiritual exploration, and the full initiatic experience, it is our belief that the Fraternity can – as it has at other times in history - ride or even lead this wave of change. Either that or be swept away and drowned by it. The choice is ours.

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This research shows that Millennials do have an appetite for joining a group with spiritual intentions—if Freemasonry in your area is not aligned with that, then it's likely Millennials aren't joining your lodge and if they do, they're likely not staying around.

### ✕ **Finding Balance**

While we have lodges consisting of multigenerational memberships, and each generation with different needs, if there's one main lesson that Masonry teaches is balance—to be on neither extreme but work

together to find that balance among the brethren in your lodge. And while Masonry has traditions and lodges have traditions, they also have habits, and some are bad habits that the members do not realize. One of those bad habits is many of the members do not speak out enough, but also, for a few, is that they speak out too often.

Masonry is also a progressive science and if that progression is blocked by bad habits, literally, what or who gives-in? Whatever the issue is in your lodge—from petitioners, degree timings, food, religion, esoteric or scientific discussion, there are usually varying views on how to approach each of them, so how should a lodge deal with them?

While the balance of an issue may be in the middle, nor left or right to tip the scale one way or the other, what sometimes happens is members of the lodge with strong views on either side put so much heavy weight on each side that the scale itself, while it may be balanced, is bogged so far down to a lowest common denominator on the floor that the lodge itself is unable to move forward and the chains of the scale can snap, and sometimes, brethren become disappointed and some leave never to be seen again.

On the other end, brethren who try and change their lodge to make it overtly in their image overnight often do so at the peril of losing a multitude of long-standing dedicated members who, although may be open to change, resist because the right balance of change management was not utilized.

So, finding that happy medium is a key endeavor to the process of renewal, and it takes courage on all sides, good leadership, and instead of putting more weights on either side, why not let go and remove them to balance out the differences?

Something has to give—either full weight is put on the scales or we remove the weights themselves. Renewing your lodge comes down to a fundamental question:

**Are the members expected to give more money and time to continue to have the same or better Masonic experience than before and into the future, or do lodges equally need to demand less time while providing a higher quality experience to make that time more worthwhile, relevant, and meaningful to its very members?**



## ✕ Certain Members – Tolerating a Lowered Bar

As lodges become desperate for members and demand more quantity, the demand for quality decreases. The bar is lowered. The requirement standards are dropped, and a negatively-increasing spiral ensues. The tragedy is when good men do join and meet other members who do not meet expectations, they become utterly turned-off, then leave.

While we do not have any statistics on this, we can say from our own lodges and actively visiting others over many years, that while most brethren are certainly tolerable, there are those who have a long way to go for self-improvement in social intercourse, tactful discussion, and proper behavior, so much so that they often become completely intolerable hearing them whisper racist, sexist, and homophobic remarks, or who exude boorish, ignorant behavior. When one of them somehow becomes master of a lodge, as we have seen a few great lodges fall faster than a gavel rap, recovery can take years. Sponsors need to be much more careful. Further, lodge officers often deal with these men and their foibles on a weekly basis, which, we know, has affected other relationships—friendships, family, and personal.

The remaining public that *is* aware of Freemasonry in a good light, and especially for those looking to join, have an immense high-expectation of what Freemasonry is—almost to utopic standards for some. Upon engaging with members who instantly fail their criteria, the disappointment is staggering and unfortunate. A worse yet situation is for the new Mason who becomes quickly turned-off. It is crucial that lodges thoroughly vet potential candidates—ensuring they attend events and casual get-togethers to get to know the brethren well in advance of handing them a petition to fill out and submit. Seriously ask yourself the question: would you would become friends with them, can carry a decent, intelligent conversation with them, or do you just need them to add to the numbers? And, what is your rush? If it's numbers to keep dues low, then just stop and rethink your intention. You may have been subconsciously ruining your lodge by filling it with crumbled stones.

Yes, our ritual charges us to “correct the errors and irregularities of your younger brethren”, but we are not experts in psychological therapy. While Freemasonry's highest ideals are charity and love, that does not mean the Craft is a rehabilitation institution for wayward men. Please stop treating it and your lodge as such in thinking “Masonry will be good for them.” You can offer help in your own way, but we don't take good



men and make them better. It is the Mason himself who does it using the tools within Freemasonry.



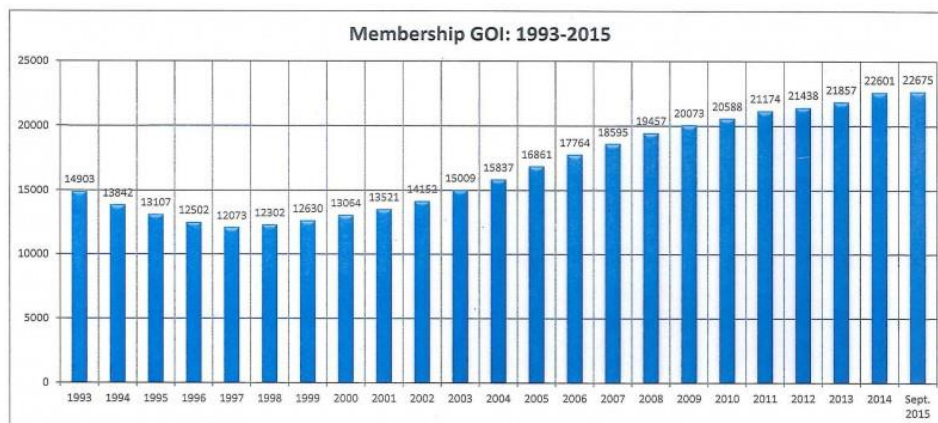
## The Great Masonic Purge - The Death of English-speaking Grand Lodges

We've shown you the trends. Many English-speaking regular grand lodges will not be able to sustain themselves as they are currently structured. As we explained, in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, total Masonic membership generally follows birth rates, and coupled with not as many Baby Boomers joining as their family predecessors did, has reduced the number of family and personal connections. Further, just because a grand lodge of a more populous state is bigger than another, it does not mean it will last as long, and in many cases, the bigger ones have a higher rate of decline as the bulk of the membership are in their later stages of life.

### ✕ Freemasonry isn't dying

Freemasonry won't die though—not at all. Maybe it will in your area, but in other parts of the Masonic world, regular Freemasonry is thriving. In South America, The Philippines, Southeast Asia, and Middle Europe, particularly Italy, Freemasonry is growing and doing so with younger men. For example, while North American grand lodge member totals have declined by 20% in 10 years, **the membership Grand Orient of Italy (the recognized one) has grown by 40% over the same period.**<sup>5</sup>

#### Grand Orient of Italy (GOI) Total Membership



*Grand Orient of Italy (GOI) total membership 1993 to 2015*

“Number of Lodges: 842

Number of Brethren: 22,675 (September 2015) (~27 members per lodge)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.grandeoriente.it/en/about-us/>

Trend: a positive trend in membership (plus 600 members annually on average); most of the petitioners are middle-aged men (40 years old) and the average age of our Master Masons is 50 years. GOI has already 700 applicants in the first quarter of 2015.”<sup>6</sup>

Why? We have learned that Italian lodges do a lot of the very things that we have been a proponent of: not easy to join, smaller and focused lodges, education and mentoring, and quiet charity. The quality of the members is not just educated men, but those with a keen desire for research and knowledge (as ritual dictates). With this, Italian lodges attracted a lot of younger Millennial men. The key for these lodges going forward will be to keep them engaged as members past ten years of membership—the trends are showing that they are.

You’ll note if the declining trend from 1993 to 1997 stayed, there wouldn’t be a Grand Orient of Italy by 2015. Instead, things changed in the late 90s.

## ✕ Immigration

Recent immigration to some Masonic jurisdictions in North America has benefited their respective lodges with renewed energy. This includes affiliated Masons. In several cases from our visitations and in our own lodges, men from a particular culture will coalesce toward a single lodge and then sponsor their fellow ex-pats to be initiated or affiliated.

After some time, these brethren’s culture may dominate the lodge culture. All brethren need to be mindful of not alienating a brother or brethren no matter what culture or background they are from.

There are also cases of brethren from one culture trying to create their own specialty lodge. Whether this structure befits Masonic tenets is subject to much debate and discussion. Should a lodge offer something for every Mason or should a lodge be more specialized in the aspects that make it unique from other lodges? Does this specialty extend to culture and/or religion?

That said, immigration may single-handedly stave-off a lodge or grand lodge from closing as it is for many countries to stave-off a population decline due to low birth rates.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.grandeorient.it/en/about-us/>



## ✕ Remaining Grand Lodges in the United States

The inevitability according to the 10-year average trend from 2008 to 2017 as reported by the Masonic Service Association of North America, is that unless a wave of Generation-Z men join to hold off the tide, many U.S. grand lodges will not be able to operate this century as they stand. The general trend indicates that by 2043, there will be significant stresses on the finances of many grand lodges and lodge buildings which will likely accelerate the trend.

## ✕ Shriners

We surmise that Shriners International, upon the decline of their respective grand lodges as they hang by a thread, will lift the Master Mason membership requirement and “go it alone”. We assume this because we are surprised they continue to hold onto that requirement from a decreasing pool of prospects today. We predict that when the time comes, hundreds of Shriners will demit or be suspended from their lodge, further accelerating the demise of lodges and grand lodges.

The contentious issues between some grand lodges and their respective Shrine Divans in certain areas have certainly been noticed in recent years—where grand masters threaten to revoke the memberships of Shriners due to conflicts. The seeds of separation have been planted.

What could occur in many instances is that men will join the Shrine and then notice that most of the members are Masons anyway and they may be attracted to Freemasonry to then join a lodge. Instead of Shriners “chickenhawking”<sup>7</sup> brand new Master Masons for new Nobles, it’s possible that Masons will be poaching the Shriners for members.

## ✕ The Future of English Freemasonry

Because a grand lodge dies, it doesn’t mean all their lodges die and that there won’t be lodges surviving afterward. What happens to those “orphaned” lodges, we do not exactly know yet, but we do have some ideas.

So, picture, if you will, your grand lodge is streamlined or ceases operation in ten years, but your lodge is still relatively healthy. How do you maintain regular recognition as a lodge?

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<sup>7</sup> A term coined by Knights of the North in 2006



### ◆ **Streamlined Grand Lodge**

In some jurisdictions, grand lodges are already looking for ways to streamline administration and operational costs. There are already numerous state/provincial-level and national Masonic-based organizations that function and maintain standards without having to spend on a physical apparatus to do so and are instead looking to information technology systems to have lodges self-administer their rosters, submit reports, and collect dues.

As lodges close and grand lodges take ownership of their lodge furniture and regalia, the inventory grows and storage space becomes an issue. Where a museum can no longer do the same, selling or auctioning off items becomes the unfortunate default recourse. We have already seen brethren purchase or claim Masonic lodge furniture to create their own lodge room outside at their ranch, in their house basement or barn loft and then host actual tyled meetings and degrees. Grand bodies are moving their offices from large grand lodge buildings to simple office spaces or no corporate office at all, including the grand secretary's home office. The need for paying a salary for administrative assistants diminishes as there are fewer and fewer lodges and members to administer where a simple online database system does the trick.

### ◆ **Regional Grand Lodges**

The likely longer-term secondary outcome will be your grand lodge amalgamates with an adjoining one, or less likely, its mother grand lodge. Picture, for example, the Grand Lodge Kansas and Nebraska, or the Grand Lodge of the Mid-West (consisting of Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma), the Grand Lodge of the Dakotas, the Grand Lodge of the Northwest U.S.A. Then eventually, you may see the Grand Lodge of the Western United States or The Grand Lodge of Western Canada.

What will be interesting are the common lodge names within the same jurisdiction, but that's beside the point. The convergence of grand lodge assets and regulations alone will be a daunting, but inevitable task.

### ◆ **United Grand Lodge of America? United Grand Lodge of Canada? United Grand Lodge of Australia?**

Many decades from now when the regional grand lodges can no longer operate, there may be a call to have one grand lodge for the entire country. The UGLA has been proposed by many Masons even over a decade ago as a suggested means to regulate rogue grand lodges. A



UGLC in the Great White North has not been proposed from our knowledge. However, it's not like nationwide grand lodges or bodies do not already exist in England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Philippines, Japan, etc.

#### ◆ **United Grand Lodge of England**

An unlikely scenario, but one to ponder far in the future is whether the UGLE, seeing its own reduced size, would want to envelope the surviving lodges and Masons of dead jurisdictions from other countries into its purview as districts. It is how lodges formed in the colonies and provinces in the first place. It is possible in Commonwealth nations like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, but we doubt it will ever happen with U.S. lodges, notwithstanding the Grand Master of the UGLE is in the Royal Family.

#### ◆ **Prince Hall Grand Lodges**

Keep in mind that we have not examined Prince Hall grand lodges in North America, but it's entirely possible that surviving lodges consider becoming part of their recognized Prince Hall grand lodge counterpart instead, especially if it is run well and financially viable. Properly constituted Prince Hall grand lodges are recognized by UGLE, so to maintain that, a lodge could then have the freedom to decide which grand lodge would serve them best.

#### ◆ **Clandestine**

There are hundreds of clandestine grand lodges around the world with thousands of members, many who joined thinking it was mainstream Freemasonry only to realize upon trying to visit a regular lodge, they didn't join the big traditional international organization and their membership not recognized. How many of them could have joined our ranks instead? Some have left and done so, but not all by any means. Many of these grand lodges in various countries have also unified for their own international recognition. We do not have any statistics on the size of the memberships, but with the ease upon which it has become to buy Masonic-type regalia online, create a website, and obtain and use Masonic rituals, we can only surmise that clandestine groups are increasing.

For more information on addressing clandestine Freemasonry, visit the article on Bro. Chris Hodapp's "Freemasons for Dummies" blog:



<http://freemasonsfordummies.blogspot.com/2016/10/addressing-clandestine-freemasonry-why.html>

### ◆ **National or International Lodge Alliances**

While regional grand lodges are the likely scenario, there is possibly another future where geography and borders do not limit how lodges wish to align and recognize themselves. Would lodges across borders be a catalyst to form a coalition of lodges across jurisdictions, including countries, to form a mutual “grand lodge” alliance of recognition?



Yes, this was a long section of a myriad of related topics to digest. The primary purpose of this exercise was to get you to think beyond your jurisdictional borders “with eternity in view”, so as you read the following shorter topics, you would have this one to keep in the back of your mind as context.





## 2. EASE OF MEMBERSHIP

**A**s Freemasonry appears to be moving into a new era, if it has not already, the debate on quality and quantity of membership has raged on and will likely continue. The nostalgia of filled rooms and massive lodges, for whatever reason, is still told in stories of yesteryear, comparing the “good ol’ days” to now, rather than making the present seem befitting enough of our time.

Instead of a Sacred institution, we are witnessing the result of the profanation of the Craft by men who may have shared a trench or faced the horrors of war together. And in doing so, experienced the deepest bonds of their lives, so it is only natural that these men would have provided access to the Craft to men of shared wartime experiences. The memory of these men should remain fond. But what we have today, is an institution which requires membership numbers to maintain the structure of its bureaucracy, as well as well as to prop up decaying infrastructure. We are told of different times when the Craft was doing things “right”. We are sure that the social experience of post war Freemasonry would have been amazing to witness—all those heroes and wounded who were looking to find a way to connect for civilian work, and rebuilding. The night of being able to feel safe among friends, and to know that their bonds were so strong, that they would fly to protect a Brother.

But those sentiments fade among newer, younger generations who are looking for a different purpose than being focused on remembering. We see many faces among our ranks that thought that they might get some instruction. The problem is that the social-experience shared among those heroes, was only one aspect of the Craft, and an imbalance occurred. There were very few who could teach anything tending toward the Mysteries. The savants of the past were simply that, in the past. Where are the spiritual and philosophical explorers? Where are the scientists among our ranks? We see a few. Some are offering a perspective. Some are trying to convince you.

The open doors to provide ease of access to membership funds, as well as an illusion of vitality. But we cannot neglect the cold hard facts of retention versus initiation. How do we hold onto members when Lodges are filled with negativity, criticism, inappropriate commentary? Our new “members” have no idea of the storm of confusion that they are about to face. The unaware are following the blueprints without any understanding of the purpose of their work, and then believing themselves as having some sort of special revelation as to the “true” purpose of the Craft, they begin to crystallize their position and create opponents. There are predictable patterns, and we can even read about English Grand Lodges, offering grand titles to rich benefactors for access to their wealth. There is almost a battle between those that want to practice a sacred tradition that claims to offer a “sufficiency of truth”, and the men who want to project a limited definition of Freemasonry upon the minds of people who have obliged themselves to obedience. We look abroad and see Lodges in many areas, thriving and full of Brotherly Love, but they are often Lodges that have no interest in the Mysteries, beyond getting through the Ritual so that the Brotherly Love can be enjoyed. It is difficult to point a finger at these Lodges as having done anything wrong. Because that warmth and openness in those Lodges is one of our highest principles.

There is no better time than the present to begin to diminish the panic of dwindling numbers. Allow the craft to return to its natural form of a close-knit lodge of men that enjoy the discussions they share, rather than to focus on the difficulties that grand lodge is facing with its shrinking budget.

The proposal is this;



- 1. Don't panic. Keep practicing Freemasonry and continue to work while it is day.** When the Craft returns to a healthy state, it will be attractive to intelligent seekers. Slow down. No need to rush candidates through. The process can be reflected upon.

Start talking to people who you don't usually speak intimately with in your lodge. See if there is an opening to deepen your bonds to your Brothers. Yes, you will meet people who just need to unload their burdens onto a listening ear, and that is a great practice of relief.

Also start having discussion *in* lodge, about research, plans, goals, accomplishments, science, philosophy, and so on. Elevate those lodge brothers who are paying attention.

- 2. Find a way to decrease the sense of urgency to bring in new people.** Be ready to welcome a new brother into a healthy lodge that is stable but practice the Craft and try to find a way to avoid the tendency to judge the health of a Lodge by the initiations that it is performing. Recruitment is not our aim. We have asked for light. We have committed ourselves to make daily progress. That progress is aided by people who know to balance the aspects of our Craft.

Just knowing a "guy", should not be enough to obtain access to the Craft. We have an obligation to protect our lodges from the profane. Far too many people have joined our ranks, who know nothing and are inclined to know nothing about the subtler aspects of our institution. The panic about diminishing membership, has cast the gates open to everyone who expresses an interest, or agrees to some not so subtle prompting to petition. It must be said, that the "gates open wide" approach has not served us. It has destabilized the Craft. The experience of brotherly love can be had in many other institutions, organizations and religions. It is not unique to us, so it cannot be the only focus. The same can be said about relief. We are left with a remaining quality of Freemasonry, that sets us apart from most other organizations. We oblige ourselves to truth. And that can only happen when we can rely on the fidelity and integrity of our Lodge Brothers. To approach the concept of truth, we grapple with the rough aspects of our own lives, such as deception, cognitive dissonance, superstition, selfish ambition, insecurity, and so on. Our Lodge experience can be a bold exploration of controversial ideas, instead of a delicate

negotiation of people's feelings. We should be confident that any rough words are not intended in malice, and that offenses will be addressed promptly to resolve any differences.

In short, we need brothers in our ranks, who are actually that. Brothers who want us to succeed with our pursuits. Brothers who will stand at our shoulders when we stare into the abyss. I would hazard a guess, that many of you have a brother or two, that you must guard your words around. Lest they be offended or pass your thoughts along to people that were not intended to hear. Having these sensitive, untrustworthy men within our ranks, has diminished us, but the start of this change of culture will be a long one. Long because the people who are directing the culture of the Craft, have the people that they will assist to lofty positions. This culture change must have the Long View in mind. These changes will take time, but the changes to decrease the Profane and those keeping us focused on mundane affairs, within our ranks, will require that time.

The result is that we will pass along a healthier school for those who understand the balance of our qualities and create stability.





### 3. COMMONNESS

“Everybody got to deviate from the norm.”

– “Vital Signs” by Rush, lyrics by Neil Peart

In your area, there are likely more similarities between lodge practices and culture than there are differences. One could argue then, what is the point in having so many similar lodges. We still find most lodges conducting the business agenda in a stale manner, to not receive reprieve from grand lodge gawkers, or past masters who knit-pick at every detail and thrive in the mêlée of minutia, constitutional debate, and political maneuvering. The resulting goal often falls naturally to a minimalist, lowest common denominator (LCD) approach without anyone noticing, where nothing is really accomplished beyond degree work, stale events, and dull business agendas.

Despite the ritual lecture charging us otherwise, lodge meetings and events become a lifeless atmosphere of no meaningful relationships being built, lack of friendships, and no real reason to attract new members, as the remaining members themselves who want change to move forward are met with a steel wall of pessimists, nostalgic nay-sayers, and dullards devoid of fun, who are seemingly experts on tradition, and detract any idea to the contrary. The entrepreneurial spirit of the new member Millennial is crushed, and with it, along with his participation and dues card.



## On Visiting and Ritual Workings

Visitation is low because there is really nothing interesting or unique happening lodge to lodge. Education shouldn't be just about someone reading a paper they found online. How many lodges still have a barbeque, fish fry, or a dinner of some sort? We won't belabor it because you see it everywhere. Why does your lodge truly stand out? Does it have a positive identity to give reasons for a member to want to stick around and see what the fuss is all about?

The use of a single standard Masonic ritual working across all lodges of a jurisdiction causes the need to visit other lodges unnecessary, yet it requires the continued monitoring and enforcement of proper ritual delivery. Many jurisdictions around the world allow more than one ritual working, and some do not have any restrictions and rely on lodges to keep their own traditions. As there are many English dialects and meanings of words and phrases from region to region, Masonic ritual workings also have their variances. People travel to different places to gain new experiences and see different things. Imagine traveling around the world only to see the same buildings, nature over and over. Those jurisdictions who do not permit lodges to explore and practice other workings are limiting their members from expanding their Masonic education. Removing these dystopian shackles would further make lodges unique and worthy to visit in order to experience the beauty of seeing how common Masonic concepts can be communicated in different ways so it can enhance our understanding of them.

## Commonness is unattractive

As with any group of people, whether at work, at a school, church, or club, each lodge should, in turn, have a different egregore of energy and synergy. The energy each member brings should be recognized and their best talents utilized to the benefit of the lodge and brethren.

However, the commonness occurs among lodges when many have lowered the bar to the level of merely following the constitution and bylaws, and nothing more. District deputy inspections applaud meeting minimum requirements rather than encouraging good and interesting ideas from energetic members. Instead, they are not considered, no creativity or uniqueness is cultivated, and although the lodge has built up a massive nest egg in its savings, funds that could be used to invest in



interesting events or ritual furniture sits in an investment fund earning the rate of inflation, they're never used, except in the case of a rainy day. Then the next thing you know, few members attend because there's nothing to do except allow the same five to seven members perform the ritual as they've done for the past twenty years, and as the rain comes down, many don't know they're soaked, the lodge must amalgamate or close its doors anyway, and the nest egg washes away into another account, along with hundreds of orphaned Masons who paid their \$50 in dues year after year, but saw nothing happening—no return on investment. We bet every person reading this knows of at least one lodge that fits this description.

Sadly, this situation will occur much more frequently in the next decade. Do not let your lodge fall into the easy, comfortable trap of commonness. Do not be afraid to challenge positively “those members of long standing who have learned nothing but the simplest routine of the degree” and lodge meetings, who merely see it as a club, over the greater beautiful system that it is and should be. Make your lodge unique—a real place to be where good men want to learn, be inspired, interact, get creative, and enjoy themselves—especially for those who get that rare one night out.

## **Be unique and elevate**

A smart way to make your lodge unique, is to make becoming a member of it a special experience. Do not just rely on the rubrics of Masonic ritual to do that—because every lodge has the ritual, although lodges should be allowed to practice whatever ritual they choose.

How many lodges have a couple members go out and pick up the candidate from his home to take him to his initiation?

How many use colored LED or black lights to give the degree an ambience?

How many use appropriate music?

How many have a lodge night or even a degree at the planetarium, in a cave, or outside among the mountains?

How many have a book club?

We know those lodges are out there, and they're well known because of just those very things. What makes yours noteworthy?

You yourself should equally not fall into becoming someone you are not destined to be. You became a Mason to ensure that you would become a better man in some way and to know yourself more. Look upon the members in your lodge who prevent that growth, not with disdain, but positively, to recognize it is an obstacle to overcome, and an opportunity to rise above, lead, and progress forward. We wouldn't have written and published this new version if we didn't believe that very aspect ourselves.

The public that is aware of Freemasonry expects commonness among the members—in their demeanor, behavior, character, and goals. But we know that there is nothing further from the truth. Like any society organization, the locality befits the culture, demographics, and traditions. Pigeon-holing your lodge into the public expectation for the sake of correctness also does a disservice to your lodge and to Freemasonry. Being different is what progresses us from the shackles of the past.

“Everybody got to *elevate* from the norm.”





## 4. LEADERSHIP

“Leadership is not about a title or a designation. It's about impact, influence and inspiration. Impact involves getting results, influence is about spreading the passion you have for your work, and you have to inspire team-mates and customers.”

- Robin Sharma – Canadian Lawyer

**P**oor leadership in any organization can greatly damage it, not just for that year, but for subsequent terms as others who are competent in the following year or years spend their efforts building from a lowered bar rather than a solid foundation. Two or more terms with weak leaders and members will either rally to support, scheme to retake back power for the good of the group, or more often, just won't bother coming and leave.

Such are the fates of many lodges and grand lodges. But this all starts with who we sponsor and how we mentor new members in setting expectations.

## “Progressive” Lines

Just as we need to be mindful of those men we sponsor into our lodge, we need to be duty-bound to ensure we only elect or appoint the right person for the officer chair, and not based on them having warmed a seat in the “progressive” line or worse, their name was merely in the notice as being assigned that position.

The previously often used “progressive” line for officers is anything but progressive. In most cases, it is regressive and fails lodges year after year. There are brethren who fill an officer role, while not performing their duty to expectations, still feel entitled to move up a chair just for showing up, rather than based on their skill and ability. Not every Mason needs to become Worshipful Master and we must also remember, not every year does a lodge need a new one. This does not serve in the best interests of the lodge. Again remember, the purpose of a lodge is to make good Masons, not make new Installed Masters. It is imperative that the former is priority over the latter as only a good Master can be created from being a good Mason first.

We have even seen brethren appointed to the “next” chair who have not shown up at all, but only because their name was there! We need to stop killing our organizations like this and find the honesty and courage to tell your brethren in general that no one is entitled to move up a chair—that it must be earned.

This does not detract from the success and good experience in having a brother progress through the chairs to learn every role possible, so that when he does become Master, he will understand how to run the lodge better than anyone. For those that are hesitant about becoming Master, do not force them, but guide and reassure them of the support they will gain from the brethren.

Yes, in many cases, this will mean that Past Masters will need to sit in the chair again. This is not a bad thing. For lodges looking to reset, or where an officer has moved and left the lodge, it is necessary that a past master or other dedicated brethren offer to step in and fulfill a role until such a time someone else can. This policy should be incentive for all Past Masters to “own” the lodge and take an active role in mentoring brethren and to own the position.



A detailed lodge officers' manual should be given to all brethren, not just officers, so the duties are clear to everyone, and for those who are interested in becoming an officer. To ensure that they've read it, perhaps have a fun online quiz, or one in lodge or a general purpose meeting.

## **To elect or not to elect?**

“Democracy is the worst system of government next to all the others.”

- Bro. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain

Many grand lodges have not moved toward more democracy and those that have, the organization still is not working to address the needs of the members and lodges.

Many non-U.S. Masons find it peculiar that a country founded as a beacon for democracy and a people's republic against the tyranny of entitled monarchs has grand lodges that do not practice democracy to the extent of other jurisdictions under constitutional monarchies. Shocking, it is, to hear of the grand line and district deputies being an entirely appointed affair with no electoral system in place. Yet because “we've always done it this way” means it must be the only right way, right?

Wrong. There are far too many embarrassing examples in recent years of grand masters issuing edicts and expelling members without due course or any resemblance of justice. Their blatant abuse of power, privilege, and stubbornness has disaffected hundreds of Masons, as far as many no longer wanting to be associated with such folly and frankly, un-masonic practices.

## **Creating a new lodge at will of members not grand line**

Far from us to solely point at U.S. grand jurisdictions, as this rigidity obviously is not exclusive to us or them. There are cases when good brethren were trying to create a new lodge, the grand line promised one thing to a group wanting to form a new lodge, went behind the back of an existing lodge, then went back on their word to the brethren. There are also cases where a lodge has rejected a potential candidate, rightly or wrongly, only to receive reprimand or worse yet, suspension from the grand master, stripping them of their constitutional right as a lodge to

determine who can be a member of it. This is a blatant abuse. Injustice is perhaps more prevalent due to the lack of accountability. It should be right of any group of Masons to form a new lodge that meet the minimum requirements or admit who they choose, not at the will of the grand line.

### **All members should vote**

Some jurisdictions allow all Master Masons a vote at district and grand lodge on motions and/or elections to the grand line. Some only allow Past Masters or senior lodge officers and up. Some do not even have elections. While there are arguments both ways in determining if every member can vote or if every lodge, no matter their size should hold equal weight, the key aspect is that if every member pays the same dues to grand lodge, then should not each member, no matter what their rank, have an equal say in determining who their leaders are? There is an argument that each lodge should hold the same equal weighting in voting on grand lodge matters, no matter how large or small the membership total is. Well, if lodges were smaller overall and big ones didn't have hundreds of members, this might not be an argument.

### **Nominee Biographies and Question Period**

In the jurisdictions that do hold elections, some request that nominees write a biography and/or an essay on their vision for Freemasonry. This is a good thing. Should we not take it a step further and have them present and get asked questions from the members on the grand lodge floor or at election meetings across the jurisdiction? Or is that too democratic and transparent?

#### ✕ **Electronic Ballots**

Grand lodges need further to understand that not every Mason can make the trip or has the time to attend the annual communication or district meeting to vote in person—particularly those with young families. Grand lodges could also distribute electronic ballots in advance.

#### ✕ **As above so below**

And if we are asking this of our grand lodges, we should do the same for our own lodges too. Potential lodge officers should provide a plan and an essay for their potential term in office and to stand in front of the lodge and be asked questions. Some utilize a strong group of Past



Masters or a nomination committee to accomplish this as well and that's fine too, but the other members should be involved.

If incoming lodge masters are required to appoint assistant and junior officers, they should do so with the consent of the other elected officers to ensure future continuity. Perhaps lodges should employ an appointee form signed by the WM-Elect, SW-Elect, and JW-Elect.

Overall, there are jurisdictions and lodges that should employ more democracy, accountability of leaders, and discontinue using the "progressive line".

## **Management**

The most difficult aspect of being Master of a lodge is managing the officers and members to complete certain tasks. We can tell you, and it's no secret, that encouragement, praise, and understanding goes a long way. For those involved in project management, setting reasonable timelines and tasks to fit the person's capabilities and getting their buy-in also go a long way. Someone who is terrible with numbers shouldn't be your treasurer. Someone good with ritual could be your director of ceremonies or marshal. More importantly, you must do what is best for the lodge to keep things moving forward. It is entirely okay to ask a member who hasn't fulfilled his duties or completed his tasks if he would be okay with stepping aside for the time being. It might be a relief for him.

Many grand jurisdictions have introduced officer training programs and management training. Some have worked, and some have not. A committee within the lodge, say, of Past Masters, should determine if they would recommend it to their Master-elect. There is a lot of material out there, but more onus befits the Past Masters to continue to guide and mentor, instead of complaining, causing disharmony, and generally being grumpy because "That's not how we did it in my year." (Shout out to all the brethren on the Grumpy Past Masters Facebook group. Harumph!) Basically, don't complain if you're not helping and complaining doesn't help, so all you can do is offer to help!

## **Enthusiasm and Inspiration**

When many of us sit in "the chair" of our various lodges and bodies, after the opening, the energy of the room has been lifted and brethren have settled into their seats waiting in anticipation. But then what do we do?



Minutes. Accounts. Communications. Motions. “Really boring stuff” that vacuums the life out of what was a beautiful opening. Save that minutia to the end of the meeting if you have time. Start with education, a discussion or debate, music interludes, deliver ritual parts using a different working from another country, or other interesting presentations to keep the energy level up.

Too often we also see candidates complete a degree only to be asked to then sit and listen to the boring administrative business. Is this what they joined? The brethren should immediately discuss some highlights of the degree and then have the candidate provide his immediate insight. You might learn something from his fresh perspective. This is what we call “content”.





## 5. COST

“Fast food is popular because it's convenient, it's cheap, and it tastes good. But the real cost of eating fast food never appears on the menu.”

- Eric Schlosser, Journalist

**T**hose who read the original LP understand that with the large influx of new members in the 1950s, revenues for lodges and grand lodges peaked, but without regard for saving for future generations. Becoming and being a Mason then was inexpensive, and relatively, it is poignantly inexpensive today compared to other valued memberships.

Valued.

If you're an avid movie-goer, you are likely spending more on going to movies each month than your lodge dues. Gym memberships?

Golf? No comparison. New candidates have said “those lodge dues are just two rounds of golf”.

Ask yourself, are men not joining because the cost is too high or because the cost is not high enough?

Do you know any potential candidates who said they didn't join because it was too expensive?

We don't. Quite the opposite. Some are shocked at how lodge dues are so low. Given that, however, as we discussed earlier, we tend to primarily mention initiation fees and annual dues with our candidates not at the actual and real total cost when more fully involved.

There are many aspects to "cost" when it comes to being in Freemasonry. Let's look at them.

## Dues

Standard annual dues usually consist of:

- Lodge dues (in range from \$30 to \$500, but the "thumb in the air" mean from all of our combined travels and discussion indicates they are between \$100 and \$200—not including grand lodge, district, and building fees)
  - Note that we also know of a newer lodge whose dues were \$500/year and had lavish dinners at a downtown club. This lodge eventually went defunct. Take that as you will.
- Grand lodge per capita assessment (in the \$50 range)
- District per capita assessment (nominal, usually around \$5)
- Building per capita fee (varies, and now finally rising)

Most lodge annual dues include the other three in them, but some keep them separate so they don't have to budget and introduce dues motions just to keep up with the fees your lodge does not necessarily directly control. We suggest all Masonic groups should do this.

## Other Costs

Then there are supplementary costs of being a member. When you attend a meeting, these can include:

- Parking and fuel (\$5 to \$10)
- Donations to the lodge benevolent fund (\$2 to \$5)
- Beverages (\$5 to \$15)
- Meal / Festive board (included or \$5 to \$20)
- 50/50 draws (\$2 to \$5)



If one spent on these, it could cost up to \$50 per meeting. If your lodge meets 20 times a year, well, that's \$1000.

Then there's attending the grand lodge annual meeting and paying for fuel, hotel, dinner tickets, beverages, and perhaps purchasing Masonic books and items from the travelling gift shop will add to your cap.

Then there are all the events—the bar-be-ques, dinners, fundraisers, and more. And if you're in other Masonic bodies, rinse and repeat.

If you climb the grand lodge ladder, you may be required to purchase your own past officer apron and regalia and travel and attend lodges weekly.

When you bring it all together, for some, it can easily cost thousands per year.

So again, when we discuss with our potential candidates on the real amount of time spent, are we also being honest with them on actual cost? Park the dues for a second, and just talk about the miscellaneous costs. Let's admit that it's significant. Saying "One hundred and seventy-five per year" is wrong, unless you don't expect the guy to show up.

## Budgeting

Should lodges plan their budget to derive a dues number based on a balanced budget, or should there be savings and a fund built up, so it can grow? We certainly know of lodges that do this—in so far as dues are quite low, but some smart brethren decades ago invested into a guaranteed fund that the lodge simply uses the annual interest gained. Wouldn't it have been nice if more groups did just that back in the 1950s and 60s?

Should building management do the same and end the "break even" or rely on donations?

Should grand lodges save for the future while trimming the fat?

Do they have long-range plans, knowing the total number of members and lodges are decreasing? Are they too afraid to close lodges? Should we be hoping things will improve year-to-year?

That's poor planning—especially when we know that on average, the total number of Masons in North America is decreasing at 4.5% and

there's no stopping it. There will be fewer members, fewer lodges, and thus less revenue, but not necessarily less expenses.

If your lodge is planning its budget, please, do not just plan so that it is close to balance. Plan further ahead. Look at your history of total members and find that rate and get ahead of it. Even if your lodge has been growing lately, do not assume that it will continue.

## **Not just an event, but a Masonic one**

When you consider the extraneous costs to be a member, you should ask yourself if you are honestly getting out of it what you are paying for. Could funds be better appropriated to more worthwhile endeavors and events? Do you need to have so many meetings and events to keep you engaged and satisfied?

Does your lodge do the minimum? Could it do more with more?

If the lodge is primarily treated as a social club, ask that question. Are there are other social-based clubs out there that have, you know, social events? What makes your lodge so different and unique from any other group besides using an ancient ritual to open and close your meetings and performing? Guess what, there are many groups that do that too. Aprons and regalia? Please. Really, besides a charter, what makes your lodge a truly Masonic one? What's the Masonic value in it?

Shouldn't lodges be hosting "Masonic" events instead of mere social ones? What do we mean by "Masonic"? We certainly know of many lodges that will invite interesting Masonic guest speakers to come give a talk on a topic of Masonic interest. And there are many "Masonic" topics to discuss and share by learned brethren who've spent nearly their whole Masonic life researching and studying how the Craft is joined at the hip with philosophy, psychology, history, alchemy, biochemistry, archeology, arithmetic, astronomy, music, geometry, religion, spirituality, Kabbalah, Hermeticism, Buddhism, politics, and many more. Yes, we said "religion" and "politics" because there is a dignified way to explore these topics together.

If your lodge budget can plan for flying in and putting up a brother in a hotel or if one offers their home, then if necessary charge for tickets to cover other costs such as the dinner itself, you will find that everyone's Masonic experience will be heightened. This is what it means by



“hosting”—where your lodge covers some of the costs. We know of Masonic groups that budget \$1000 per year to do this. Why can’t yours?

### ✕ **Back to dues and fees**

If you know your lodge and grand lodge are decreasing in membership by about 4.5% per year and your dues are say \$200, why not simply increase it to \$250 right now and get ahead of the curve before it’s too late?

We also don’t have to reiterate the idea that 100 years ago, dues then were the equivalent of about \$700 in today’s dollars, if not more. Also note that total membership was not as high as it was in the peak in 1959, and yet during the Great Depression, the Craft experienced a positively significant impact.

Most, if not all, of the grandiose and beautiful Masonic buildings that were built between 1910 and 1935 made it through that period. And war. And poor economies. We also know that to construct many of those buildings, large endowments and donations were contributed by Masons who believed in a bright Masonic future.

Some propose the idea of taking the minimum wage in your area, say \$12.50 / hour for argument’s sake and using that as the baseline to say, a week’s worth of wages, or \$500 should be the annual dues all in—lodge, grand lodge, building.

Unfortunately, for some buildings, it’s too late. All the groups have moved out because of poor planning and the taxes, utilities, and maintenance costs have driven up the per capita fee and it’s become too high to swallow. And few are leaving an endowment behind on passing to the grand lodge above because there are fewer and fewer members who remain until their death.

With the current declination rate, we do not see a bright future for our Masonic buildings, because those lights are going out nearly every month in some city or town somewhere. Now imagine if more grand lodges and building boards listened to Dwight Smith and increased fees earlier than later and had a nest egg of which to draw interest at say, 4.5%?

## ✕ Now what of aging members?

When you look around lodges and orders, there is no doubt that the bulk of the membership are over 50 years old, if not more. There are many dues models that lodges use for senior members, including:

- A. Lower dues than regular for members 65 or 70 years of age and older
- B. Pays his membership for 10, 15, or 20 years in advance and becomes a “life member”

Note that there are jurisdictions that view “life membership” as an honor bestowed by a lodge for long-time service of a member where his dues are henceforth covered, and he maintains voting rights

- C. Year-to-year use of the lodge benevolent fund to pay the dues for the senior members whose health are failing
- D. Senior members are not treated any differently for dues

What sometimes occurs, unfortunately, is there can be senior members who are on the roster, but their health has diminished, they move to a seniors’ home, and the lodge can no longer contact them because their family hasn’t contacted the lodge and the lodge doesn’t have the family’s information. The member becomes “lost”. His dues aren’t paid then after a year or more, and after trying to contact him, he is suspended for non-payment of dues. He then no longer is eligible for a Masonic funeral (although rarely requested), is dropped from the roster, and because many of his friends in lodge passed on, no one of recent times really knew him.

This is a sad situation and lodges need to be ready to start covering the member’s grand lodge and building fees year to year without necessarily bestowing the honor of a life membership. To provide that compassion and charity, the lodge needs to increase its dues for younger members to save for the inevitable situation of covering a brother’s grand lodge and building dues for a few years.

It’s not just the Masonic thing to do—it’s the right thing to do.





## 6. FOOD AND DRINK

“If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.”

- J.R.R. Tolkien

**S**imply put: feed their minds, their hearts, and their stomachs and a brother should go home happy after a lodge night.

As we’ve said, the social aspect of a lodge should be treated just as importantly as the meeting itself. And with the social aspect is also the meal and the quality of food served.

On the quality of the food, why is this still an issue? How difficult is it for junior wardens and brethren to organize a meal? We have seen lodges that in one year, stopped having festive boards because the turnout was low that the cost wasn’t worth it. After a few more years, few attended or cared, and the lodge closed. Well, make it worth it. These times are also excellent opportunities to invite prospective men to meet and get to know the brethren.

We’ve noticed that the lodges where one or more of the brethren are responsible for preparing food often are more vibrant than those that do not. But the quality of the food must be there. Somehow with that sweat equity and time investment comes something from the heart that



sets an example for the rest of the brethren. Knowing that a brother took the time and effort to prepare a meal also seems to pull the cable tow of a brother deciding on whether to attend that night or not.

We should also look beyond just having the junior warden “be the guy” who always prepares the meals. If there are brethren who are good at this and who enjoy it, have a committee. Too often we’ve seen brethren who do not take on the junior warden’s chair because they can’t cook well. If your lodge lacks good cooks, and your lodge hall doesn’t have an in-house caterer, hire a catering company to bring in food. Maybe not for every meeting, but perhaps every other one.

Also, if you think it’s a good idea to get the ladies of the local OES chapter or your wives involved in preparing meals for your lodge, please stop. That is, unless the brethren of your lodge return the favor on a regular basis. We’re thinking that’s likely not happening. So why do we say this? Go back a few paragraphs and read again.

On drinks, if your lodge hall doesn’t have a committed bar staff and supply, then have a committee of a couple brethren to take on purchasing, storing, transporting, and running the bar and cash, obtaining liquor licenses, insurance, and ensuring the brethren are responsible. An honorarium may be warranted for your bartender. He should keep accurate records and provide to the auditor annually.

At your meals, provide good wine poured by your stewards and top it off with port or scotch afterward.

For the jurisdictions that still are reeling from the repercussions of the Morgan Affair and do not allow alcohol before or after lodge meetings, should we remind you that the Temperance Movement and Prohibition ended a century ago? Oh, and freedom is still a thing, is it not? While we understand that insurance liability might hand-tie your lodge, remember that thousands of lodges get by every day without incident.

Perhaps brethren could take turns driving together to lodge so that in case one was over or near the BAC limit in your area, safety is ensured.

Ultimately, enough with the excuses. The quality of your food and drink should reflect the quality of the ritual, enlightenment, and fellowship.

And please be different than other groups. Turn off or dim the lights, buy some candle holders, use blue, red, or black table cloth and enjoy.



## The Meal

We've been to "festive boards" or "agape" meals where the brethren just sit and eat without any program. Dull. Your meal should consist of a program consisting of something similar to the following:

1. Toastmaster (usually the Junior Warden) welcomes everyone and asks everyone to rise for prayer
2. Chaplain gives prayer
3. Toast to the Head of State (President, Queen)
4. Toastmaster directs the order of brethren to eat (if buffet style)
5. Meal & Dessert (if any)
6. Remarks from visitors
7. Remarks from brethren of the lodge
8. Remarks from recent candidate
9. Remarks from grand lodge officer
10. Remarks from the Worshipful Master
11. Tyler's Toast

Now remember, this is not a full-fledged table lodge. There are varying and separate rituals for that, depending where you are. When remarks are given, it can be a congratulatory message, a lodge advertisement, a short education bit, a poem, a joke, or words of inspiration. We've even seen magic tricks, singing, and mock rituals.

It's surprising how many lodges do not bother with a meal when it can be such an enjoyable part of the entire evening. Worse yet is not allowing a visitor the opportunity to speak and give greetings from the Master and brethren of his lodge.



## 7. EDUCATION AND MENTORING

“Education is the movement from darkness to light.”

- Allan Bloom, Philosopher

**W**hen we say that we need more education and mentoring in Lodge, what do we really mean? Are new members looking for information about our history, are they looking for some tangible but obscure information they believe they will receive by “joining”. The phrase “seek and ye shall find” comes to mind when thinking about education.

### On Education

What is it about education presented in the lodge that sets it apart from education anywhere else and why should it? What role do Masons have in the broader context of humanity? These two questions are at the nub of what it means to be a Mason.

If we accept that Freemasonry is “Ancient” and that modern Speculative Freemasonry is derived from ancient roots then it necessarily follows that over time, many layers of interpretation have been overlaid earlier ones. Being acquainted with the speculative mode allows the Master Mason to not only dig deeper into his own depth as a brother and



member of civilized society, but to also question the symbolism that gave rise to the modern era.

The last ten years have seen an explosion of electronic communications among members of civilized and not so civilized society, this has led to a great deal of information pertaining to Freemasonry on the Internet both positive and negative. How does this square with our work in Masonic education, and the sharing of ideas to “improve the morals of men in society”?

One of the dangers of any “group” is to fall prey to hidden agendas, and how we penetrate through those veils to get to the truth of what we ascribe as the “three great lights”. Truth is a subjective term. Perhaps the goal of enlightenment in Masonry is to begin to understand that subjectivity is about what is truth. What sort of education is the “Just and Upright Man” looking for? What aspects of the symbolism and the various interpretations, by past scholars such as Hall, Mackey, Pike, Preston, et. al. do we lean toward? In the front of the Collins edition of the Masonic Bible a section by H.L. Heywood and the specific section regarding the “Origins Of The Ritual” he states:

“We know now that the ritual was in use generations before Dr. Desaguliers and that it came into existence in a manner wholly unlike the authorship of a play, that it was never a play or drama and is not now, was not a set of ceremonies, was not “composed” or “invented” and had no author. It was the perpetuation of activities, practices, and usages of the daily work and customs of operative freemasons. It was not even called “ritual” which continues to be a misnomer but was called “work”; it is still a form of work and should be called by that term.”

This is of course Haywood’s opinion in the front of the King James version of the Holy Bible. We are also taught that Freemasonry is spread over the whole of the habitable surface of the Earth.

How do we square our education regarding the linkages to the Volume of the Sacred Law with those of differing moral views, as already noted regarding symbols?

From a philosophical point of view morals are mere judgments agreed to by society. Planet Earth has many societies and each one follows a set of moral codes determined by the people who are members of that society. It is clear that we as Freemasons need to be vigilant in our understanding of the terms we use in our “Masonic” education, so that we do not misinterpret the nature of symbolisms that are depicted in both words and pictures.

## On Mentoring

Regarding mentoring, the new candidate and even some old ones for that matter can feel lost when it comes to interpreting the “work” that is performed in the lodge. This work is the foundation for the building of a deeper understanding of the three great lights of being human. It is therefore important for those who undertake to mentor others that they are cautious in guiding in a manner that does not bias the brother to their own interpretation but provides an open and free path to inquiry and understanding.





## 8. TRAVEL AND VISITATION

“The traveler sees what he sees, the tourist sees what he has come to see.”

- G.K. Chesterton, English Writer

**V**isitation is one of the great benefits of Freemasonry, not a right but a great privilege, or so we are always told. Indeed, if flowery words are spoken in a meeting or at a meal, then the floweriest will be spoken about the visitors and visiting. It seems, when one is exposed to the talk, that visitors are celebrated and the right to visit is valued above all others. Visits are experiences where Masons learn significant lessons and experience almost transcendent friendship and brotherly love. Visitors are valued, prized, indeed loved, by the lodges they visit. Except, it's just not the case.

Most lodges are tepid in almost every aspect of their approach to the Craft, if not actually bad at what they are doing, and that certainly includes acting as a host to visiting brethren. Visiting brethren are most likely to be essentially ignored, but they may also be subjected to racist or sexist humor, forgotten but for the point in the meeting where they are introduced, made to feel awkward for over- or under-dressing, made to feel awkward because they do not follow the precise traditions of the hosting lodge, subjected to bad food which they are expected to praise unreasonably, embarrassed in small ways or criticized by (likely

uninformed) Masons in the hosting lodge, any number of problems. Most lodges will not commit these errors, and many will not be actively bad but merely (as with everything) passively negligent, but it is unlikely that the visitors will be welcomed into the lodge as a long-lost friend and brother, as the flowery words often suggest.

If these were businesses, our visitors would in most cases never come back. Oh! That lodge with the dozens of visitors at every meeting? It's a rarity; indeed, it is so rare that we can name precisely two lodges that have significant visitation at each meeting in a jurisdiction, and we suspect that most Masons reading this can count the lodges that have more than a dozen visitors at all meetings on the fingers of one hand. Our visitors do indeed treat our lodges as we would treat poor businesses - they don't come back.

## Be welcoming

Lodges are often cliquy little places, and Masons very quickly forget that the gathering over in the corner of the five men who always gather there, to gossip and comment on the foibles of other Masons (if they are past masters, to gossip and comment on the foibles of *younger* Masons and how they are not doing it correctly) or Grand Lodge, is not a welcoming addition to even their lodge's brothers, much less a visitor from another lodge. Before, during and after a lodge meeting, steps can be taken to create a culture of welcome for visitors, and lodges that take simple steps to improve their culture will see visitors return.

Before a meeting, the master or other ranking officer should make it a point of welcoming and talking with each of the visiting brethren. This is a time when many last-minute issues are being addressed, such as finding replacements for brethren who are absent, so this is often set aside. Making visitors a priority at this point in the evening, buying a visitor a drink if this is permitted, certainly making sure that at the least the visitor is comfortable, must come before rushing about to see who can stand in as junior deacon. Thus, better planning will allow the lodge to welcome visitors. All members of the lodge could be taxed to speak to each visitor, learn his name, ask about his lodge, ask if he has visited before, etc. Make them welcome.

During the meeting, several things can be done. First, ensure that someone from the host lodge sits with the visitors, especially visitors who do not know anyone or who are relatively new to the Craft (which



will be discovered when they are greeted prior to the meeting). Secondly, when they are introduced to the lodge, make a point of doing more than having them stand and say their names. For one thing, appoint someone to read their names from a list. It is, quite literally, the least you should do. The master could then make pertinent remarks about the visitors, having met them prior to opening, and perhaps the lodge can set up a ceremony where each first-time visitor is presented with a memento of the occasion. Finally, those brethren who should be recognized with honors should be so honored; in most jurisdictions visiting sitting masters can be invited to the east. This might include honoring any brother who has made an effort to travel a significant distance. He could receive formal honors or be invited to sit in a seat of honour.

After the meeting, cement the bonds that were begun before tying and continued in the meeting. Have the visitors sit amongst the brethren of the lodge. In a more formal meal setting, assign seating and ensure that the visitor is engaged throughout. At an informal seated meal, a similar effort should be made to include the visitors, and most importantly not to have the visitors cluster together while lodge members cluster elsewhere. If there is a less formal session of mingling, the lodge should ensure that all members know that this too is part of the meeting, and they cannot just run off. To do so is impolite. It may be just a “regular stated” to you; your guest has made a special effort to attend. If you just close the meeting then vanish into the night, the visitor will understand that the meeting was a formality and that there was nothing much keeping the members there, certainly not his presence.

## **Correct the errors**

Take care to ensure that no brother conducts himself in front of a visitor in such a way as the visitor might be reasonably offended. We are a group from all walks of life, rich and poor, old and young, educated and less so, from many nationalities and holding many political points of view. Not to mention from many faith traditions. Loose lips can sink ships, and we have seen quite literally hundreds of cringeworthy situations play out, everyone from past grand masters to the newest EAs saying things that are insensitive or outright insulting. The authors of this book have witnessed racial slurs, sexually explicit language and sexist slurs, expression of political sentiments in the most boorish ways imaginable, and many faiths dismissed, minimized or insulted. We are to be a culture of gentlemen. We know how hard it is to impress better behavior on our



brethren, but a welcoming lodge not only should do it, but must. It is especially important to make lodge members understand that what might pass at the worksite or on the bench at a baseball game is not fit nor proper conduct or language at a meal or among brethren. It's not acceptable to say "Oh, that's just old Elmer. He's always been like that." The visitor might not understand that "old Elmer" has always called them "Ni\_\_ers" or "b\_\_ches" and nobody can get him to stop. Our rituals talk about how we should admonish our brethren to act better, and we should step up to the plate.

## **Watch your diet**

While we are speaking of meals, a quick word about the dietary restrictions that faith, age, nationality can impose. We know that brethren from several faiths cannot eat pork, and some cannot eat meat. It seems to us that dietary restrictions have risen in the last 40 years at an amazing rate. A lodge must have good alternatives for guests who cannot or will not eat pork, shellfish, meat, gluten, peanuts, etc. Handing a Muslim visitor a spoonful of side salad while the rest of the lodge eats pulled pork, giving a vegetarian some dry mashed potatoes and overcooked carrots while everyone else eats steak, these are not the actions of caring brethren. We are not saying "don't eat pork" or anything like that, although you might want to consider more inclusive diet choices if you eat pork every meeting. We are saying "have a plan should someone show up who can't eat meat." Perhaps have a quick serve vegetarian lasagna or two in the freezer. Think about your guest.

## **On dress**

The traditions and dress standards of a lodge are not the same the world over. Many lodges require that the master be addressed by standing in a specific position; others do not seem to require the speaker to rise. Movement around a lodge; how brethren wear their aprons; where brethren are permitted to sit; proper forms of address; what various signals mean during the opening, a degree, the meeting or the closing; any number of other things that can be called regulations or traditions or customs, these things vary from lodge to lodge and jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Many lodges have very relaxed dress standards, while others enforce dress codes more or less aggressively. Some few require all to be dressed in black tie and formal wear. Also not forgetting the language barrier: it may be that a visitor could sit in your lodge but not



Speak a word of the language in which you meet. Visitors to a lodge often do not know of these regulations. If they matter, then it is incumbent on you as a host to advise the visitor in a timely manner (i.e., early) and to offer to assist in any way should he need your help. If a visitor needs to know about something before they arrive (formal wear required, for example, or dinner reservations required), you should have it clearly stated on your lodge website. Or arrange to have supplies in case they come unprepared. If the traditions do not matter - and most of what we are talking about are merely customs and really do not matter - then you should likely ignore the slight difference, and ensure that there is no hissing *sotto voce* comment from a disgruntled past master. Visitors are your guests. You should really try to treat them as such.

## Distance over time

Travel has much the same effect as local visitation, with the caveat that the visitation over distance, especially if the visitor is, due to work or some other regularity of visitation, able to visit more than once, an effective way of making friends away from home. The distant visitor will be hosted with more enthusiasm than the local man, it is worth noting, and differences in practice will make the visit no matter how factually drear more interesting on the basis of the old maxim that “a change is as good as a rest.” But the fact is that few lodges make an effort to host visitors well, even from far away, and the lodge experience is tepid at best for most visitors, whether they come from another lodge in the same hall or from another continent.

In addition to the concerns expressed above about visitation, for travelling brethren, there is the matter of cost. It is our opinion that any brother who travels to a lodge should, at the very least, never be required to pay for the meal. Depending on normal expectations, local visitors can be required to pony up, or not, as is appropriate to the lodge, but anyone who has come from a long way away should be able to visit your lodge without spending any money. Who invites a guest over and then makes him pay for dinner? Certainly, no gentleman does.

As with all things, being a welcoming and enthusiastic lodge for a visitor comes from the top. The master of the lodge must be prepared for the evening in advance so that he can attend to the brethren who are there, not merely as props to move into the positions of missing officers, but as men who are welcome and whose coming is a very positive aspect to the day. The officers should help with this and, indeed, any officer who is



responsible for the guests should arrange that they are welcomed by all. Duties that get in the way of welcoming visitors properly can and should be delegated so that all officers can get them out of the way quickly, and the visitors can be entertained as is right and fitting.





## 9. INSTITUTIONAL CHARITY & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

“A Mason’s charity knows no bounds, save those of prudence.”

- Emulation Ritual

In the operative lodges, the idea of charity was primarily reserved for the lodge workers and their families. A benevolence fund, which many of our current speculative lodges still practice, was used and as is often the case now. Members would request funds to help them through tough times, say from an injury or illness. We must remember that back then there wasn’t a government social assistance system, so the lodges took it upon themselves to act as a benefit insurance organization and often had an almoner.

Not until the advent of the Scottish Rite in the U.S. did Freemasonry enter the public institutional charity arena with fundraising for children with learning disabilities—a practice still maintained by most A&ASR valleys today. This happened before the Shrine began the Children’s Hospitals. Grand lodges then began starting their own foundations and bursary programs with Masonic leaders often seen in local newspapers holding up big checks with charity beneficiaries.

There are lodges who use a portion of the benevolent fund for local charities, and others whose focus is public charity and fundraisers. But is this the purpose of a lodge? We will continue to state that the purpose of a Masonic lodge is to make good Masons. Like religion and politics, when it comes to donating time and money, there are thousands of worthy charity groups, so for a lodge to solely dedicate to charity is not differentiating itself from any other group.

When the purpose of a lodge is to initiate as many men as possible so the lodge charities have more men to shake the money out of their pockets, unless that person knows and is expecting this, we would tend to lean on the assumption that this is not why a man solely joins Freemasonry, when there are, as we said, thousands of charities to spend one's own time and money on.

Further, what is the purpose of promoting charitable acts? Does that not contravene what it means? Why are lodges and grand lodges plastering their monthly newsletters and websites with donation news? Are we not supposed to be quiet about our charity, "To do the good act, not for ourselves, but for the cause of good"?

Perhaps it's best we leave charity in the heart of where it belongs--the Mason himself. Charity is a personal affair and not everyone is at the same level. Each person has their own charities they wish to dedicate to and for a lodge to focus and require its members to donate, members who do not wish to do so, for whatever reason, should not feel shame or guilt. For those brethren who wish to make institutional charity a part of their journey should be encouraged to join or volunteer at an actual charitable organization.

### **Charity within the lodge – “Brotherly love, relief, and truth”**

The lodge benevolence fund is one thing but dedicating personal time and money to help a fellow brother and his family is an aspect at the root of “brotherly love, relief, and truth”.

Are the members of your lodge helping each other out? Could you do more?

Consider a brother down on his luck after losing a job. Beyond the lodge fund to pay his dues, wouldn't pooling funds privately from brethren to help another out ease the pain and stave off harm to his family?



There are numerous examples. The point is asking yourself if this is what you expected your lodge to be doing and if it's not, why not? With the ability of quick and seamless electronic money transfer, it's not a matter of how, it's a matter of encouragement.

We suspect with lodges having lowered membership totals, the benevolence fund isn't as large as it used to be, but with fewer members, there are fewer members that may need help, so there shouldn't be anything holding you back.

This also requires that you connect with and speak to brethren of your lodge regularly to find out how they are doing.

Remember the "five points".



## 10. SUBDIVISION

“Associate yourself with men of good quality  
if you esteem your own reputation; for ‘tis  
better to be alone than in bad company.”

- President George Washington

**G**rand lodges in North America have, for the most part, been years behind in the exercise of “redistricting”. The distribution of lodges into districts has been a long-standing aspect of grand lodge governance, but it has failed us.

In our respective jurisdictions, a common duty for district deputies is essentially a “firefighter” where managing personalities and behaviors amongst members and visitors is a normal occurrence, coupled with trying to get semi-annual reports from secretaries of poorly-run lodges—this old top-down approach does little to build upon anything. Further, the continual begging of district deputies to come visit the meetings of dying lodges to keep them afloat with filling officer chairs, does nothing except give false-hope and is entirely a waste of valuable time that could be better used in planning meetings.

This issue stems from there likely being too many lodges being supported by too few members. District deputies need to have the courage to



recommend lodge closure and facilitate orphaned members to affiliate or start a new lodge.

There are too many jurisdictions where the grand master appoints his district deputies, where in others the district deputy is elected annually. He then visits each lodge on official visits and is greeted with the required pomp. When asked to speak, some are long winded, and some are not. Every year, not much changes—pleas for visitation to weak lodges, event promotions, communications from grand lodge, and unoriginal themes on uninspired minds.

Travel distances and time in large districts have made it difficult for those considering the job, where elections do occur, few if any candidates are on the ballot.

## **A Proactive Approach**

Many of us offer a completely different approach to managing lodges by district deputies. Instead of a reactive role, deputies need to be engaged in a proactive role--particularly for poorly run lodges. But to do this, having a deputy in place for a year simply does not work; a longer-term solution is needed. What we propose is removing districts altogether and allow lodges to form common alliances if they wish as they do not necessarily need to be along geographical lines. For grand lodge though, to ensure lodges are not only maintaining standards and landmarks, but are building and improving, consider the use of lodge consultants or representatives, or even perhaps simply use the existing grand stewards.

A suggestion would be that brethren wanting to help other lodges can sign-up and are vetted by a committee of past masters. Each steward would be assigned a few lodges to tend to over the course of three years. The steward would work proactively with his lodges and offer his unbiased opinions and suggestions on how a lodge could improve. He would meet with lodge officers to help with drafting plans, communications, and overall lodge management. Often, too many lodges get stuck in “that’s how we’ve always done it” and are closed or stubborn to seek outside opinions or help. These can also be the same lodges that do little to change, even when ideas are offered by new members.

We have seen grand lodge plans in action. Some are good and some do not work. The important part of executing a plan, as always, is getting buy-in and ownership of tasks from the members. If a poor lodge is too





stubborn to want help, then let it die. The grand lodge can then at least say they tried, instead of offering false hope, which is what's been done over and over and expecting a different result. And we all know what that defines.





## 11. INFRASTRUCTURE

“Someone asked me, if I were stranded on a desert island what book would I bring... ‘How to Build a Boat’.”

- Steven Wright, Comedian

In examining the traditional local Masonic grand infrastructures there are numerous areas of budgetary concern that need to be considered and compared with the past. Grand lodges should revisit what their actual purpose is to deliver and provide assistance, support, and mentoring to their districts, lodges, and members in order to maintain a semblance of regularity without hamstringing lodges to have the freedom and sovereignty to practice and learn about Masonry in a manner that fits with their Masonic pursuits into related topics where there are a multitude of concepts too long for this paper.

### Grand Administration

When membership was in the tens of thousands, record keeping, administration, and accounting required ample staff--particularly before the advent of personal computer systems, well-structured databases, and web-enabled accessibility.

Now, with the number of lodges and membership in some areas having dropped considerably, the need for office space, buildings, supplies, time, processes, and staff is likely too much for what is needed. That said, grand lodge buildings that house paper and regalia archives still require physical space. Perhaps more grand lodges can turn their buildings into a museum and provide tours to the public (see Freemasons' Hall in London on a large scale or the quaint but rich content at the Kent Masonic Library and Museum in Canterbury for instance).

Standard practice in many jurisdictions for lodge secretaries is to submit a semi-annual report outlining new and affiliated members, degrees, deaths, suspensions, and demits for grand lodge properly to track the master membership list to send out grand lodge per capita dues. Often however, this data is out of sync, usually depending on how well lodges keep track of this information, which many do not. Our own grand lodges are now moving to an online database maintained by lodge secretaries. This is a good start!

How efficient are these form processes themselves? Are paper and email reports still being used and data re-entered, perhaps incorrectly? Could an online system with web-enabled forms be more secure, efficient, and effective for all parties involved? Probably. Would there then be a need for full time staff to pay salaries and provide office space? Probably not, save for auditing information and as a back-stop to ineffective lodges.

## **Buildings**

We will continue to see lodges move into central Masonic buildings or into private ones, and a further increase in lodge amalgamations and mergers. We have also seen too many lodge hall boards become ineffective, unresponsive, lacking in vision, and even corrupt.

The dues to up-keep these buildings, especially single lodge buildings, will need to be increased dramatically, if they are not already raised significantly. Rather than increasing per capita dues on a consistent smaller basis to raise revenue over a long period, for decades, hall boards continued the same practice of keeping dues low without planning for ongoing maintenance and upgrades, and perhaps ignoring the reality of understanding that total membership was declining. This has caused stress on the per capita fee—so much so, the dues become too much for a lodge or chapter to blend it into their revenues and in passing the cost



onto its membership, hundreds of members have demitted—further exasperating the per capita fee.

More lodges and chapters either move into central Masonic buildings or they are moving into non-Masonic buildings that offer a much lower rental fee. Many are even holding meetings at not just one location, but various ones throughout the year--community halls, seniors' activity centers multi-purpose rooms, church basements, library rooms, banquet facilities, barns (yes, barns), quarries, forests (yes, forests), the list is endless.

The irony is most grand lodges have their annual communication at a large hotel conference room, yet many frown upon lodges that leave the big Masonic buildings for hotels or other non-Masonic facilities.

### **“Seven or more make it perfect.”**

For many brethren, departing with the lodge room and building where they were raised in is a difficult emotional attachment to overcome. The nostalgia and residual energy is certainly a feeling all regularly attending brethren have enjoyed, where routine, familiarity, and comfort become a staple of happy memories that should be looked upon with fondness.

This feeling is no different than when you move to a new house. We have all done it. We've let-go and moved on. Many of us have moved from a big house to a small one, but it never defeated the bond and love within the family. In the likely cases, it brought the family closer together, into smaller rooms, with more intimacy as well. There is something to be said about that.

For those of you who attend lodge meetings with one to two dozen brethren scattered within a massive two-story lodge room, often the audible incapability of a Worshipful Master can limit the effectiveness of running the meeting, and senior brethren don't bother attending because they can't even hear the proceedings. While a large space with beautiful furniture and moldings can be impressive for candidates while you work the degrees, we must remember that it is the people who execute the content of the degrees that make it truly impressive and impactful.

So, consider, wouldn't a smaller setting be more fitting? Why do we hold on to the days “when it was standing room only” or “the brethren used to fill the rafters”?



As the membership count continues to decline, save endowment funding or other sources of consistent revenue, so too will be the desire and means to continue to hold onto the infrastructure that supports it, and this includes large Masonic and grand lodge buildings.

We would encourage all of you reading this to delve more into the finances and infrastructure of your lodge buildings and determine whether it is truly serving your needs, whether the hall board is capable and effective or not, or if you should make the jump to another building or buildings. It may be the very thing that saves your lodge from the dependency of being tied to an unsustainable infrastructure.





## 12. MEETING FREQUENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

“The least productive people are usually the ones who are most in favor of holding meetings.”

- Thomas Sewell, American Economist

### Meetings Meetings Meetings

**T**he average lodge meets once or twice a month, and some meet weekly. The most common we have found in North America is twice a month—a regular business meeting and an emergent degree meeting two weeks later, with two months off sometime in the year. Few meet on a quarterly basis although this frequency is become more, well, frequent.

Now, we have only discussed tyled meetings and not non-tyled meetings and events. If you are an officer and/or taking part in a degree, there are of course degree practices, lodges of instruction / mentoring, officer planning meetings, general purpose meetings, event planning meetings, dinners, BBQs, hall board meetings, district meetings, grand lodge annual meetings, workshops, candidate meetings, and quick casual meetings over coffee or beer, to say the least.

With 365 days in a year, as an example, take an officer who participates in all lodge activities.

- ✓ 10 regular meetings
- ✓ 10 emergent meetings
- ✓ 10 degree practices / lodges of instruction / mentoring meetings
- ✓ 4 quarterly general purpose meetings
- ✓ 4 quarterly lodge officer meetings
- ✓ 2 event planning meetings
- ✓ 4 lodge social events (2-3 dinners, BBQ, pub night, golf)
- ✓ 1 district meeting
- ✓ 3 days of grand lodge annual meeting
- ✓ 1 hall board meeting
- ✓ 2 candidate meetings
- ✓ 1 day volunteer at an institutional location
- ✓ 3 days of regional workshop or jurisdictional college
- ✓ 10 lodge visits a year (1 per month average)

This constitutes sixty-five (65) evenings or afternoons per year total. That's well over two months or 18% in your personal year and just for being in a blue (Craft) lodge. What about your appendant and concordant bodies?

Don't ever tell a potential candidate that you meet 10 times a year, otherwise, you are outright misleading him.

Now think about how the meeting frequency is affecting time with those who are much more important than lodge--your family. We see Masons who spend four months of their total evenings in a year out at a Masonic meeting or function, because they are there when one of us visits in an area and shares among the group the quality of the event.

And yes, admittedly, those who can attend more, are retired, single, or do not have children to take care of anymore. It's no wonder when so many men initially join, they see the actual commitment level required, witness meetings that do not accomplish much, and then are turned off and eventually turn away.

Why do lodges need to meet so frequently? If your reason is to initiate as many men as possible, that's the wrong answer. You are already doing that, but not retaining them because you are initiating anyone who



wants in. Your return on investment is low, if not becoming a personal expense.

If your reason is that the lodge has so much on its monthly agenda to cover every meeting, that's also the wrong answer.

### ✕ Use a Consent Agenda

Take a good look at your lodge meeting agenda and see where you can utilize a "consent agenda". More organizations are using this to speed up meetings and make them more effective. It also reduces the opportunity for members to stand up and give nonsensical speeches or rants (it happens!).

### ✕ Content is the Priority

Also look at moving education presentations and discussions to the beginning of your agenda after opening and introductions. Put the business at the end—of course balloting is important but try and limit your regular meetings to an hour and a half at most, if not shorter. If you didn't cover business at this meeting, then table it. And please, have your secretary send out a week in advance, via email or shared drive, the previous minutes and upcoming agenda, including motions on the table. We know of lodges who have reduced their regular meeting business agenda length by 30-60 minutes. This of course opens the time up to practice and learn about Masonry through presentations, discussions, quiz bowls, different ritual workings, interactive learning, book reviews, musical interludes, meditations, and other much more exciting methods of learning our Craft, as well as more social and meal time.

No man joined Masonry because they wanted to attend meetings where the administration and minutia was attractive to spend more time with, especially for those whose day job involves just that.

When planning the lodge year, look at what will be on the agenda throughout the year and work backwards to see if you really need ten regular meetings a year to cover it, or if half of that would suffice.

With fewer meetings, comes more Masonic content in the meeting, and more appreciation by members to attend once every two to three months rather than it waste their precious time.

It takes leadership and a well-organized secretary to accomplish this, but it is certainly achievable.





If your lodge is struggling, know that there are lodges and chapters that have transformed and been rejuvenated by having fewer but better, worthwhile meetings.

What also comes with this is that it becomes harder to join your lodge or chapter because of the waiting time between meetings to accept petitions and ballot. But that's perfectly okay. You'll find your lodge will start to develop a waiting list. Why?

Because all good things come to those who wait—for the applicant and for the lodge.





## 13. CATCH ALL

“If it weren’t for the last minute, nothing would get done.”

- Rita Mae Brown, American writer

### “Afterward” revisited

“An outline for discussion and legislation.”

Let’s look at the original “Afterward” proposed in the original LP document and see what has changed, if anything, and proposals to improve you lodge. Many of these points have been covered in more detail in the previous sections, so again, this is a condensed format you can use for shorter presentations.

**“1. EAs and FCs should be allowed into our business meetings.** They have been since the fraternity began, in every corner of the globe except in the U.S. after the 1840's. It is U.S. Masonry that created an innovation in the body of Freemasonry. It's time we stopped it.”

Status: Slow, positive change

About half the grand lodges in the U.S. now conduct regular business in the EA degree, and EAs and FCs can enter a tyled lodge room and even vote. We know of no incidences that would refute such a common-sense practice, that the Morgan Affair is not even

known by most Masons, therefore can only conclude that the “raison d’être” is “because we have always done it that way”. Please change this in your grand lodge, if it hasn’t already and open all your meetings starting with the EA degree.

**“2. Provide better leadership at the Grand Lodge level by allowing nominations from the floor.** The current system of appointment to the line by the sitting Grand Master is flawed, irresponsible and subject to abuse, however well-liked and well-meaning the Grand Master may be.”

Status: Slow, positive change

Many grand lodges outside the U.S. allow each lodge officer or each Master Mason a vote to elect the Junior Grand Warden/Grand Junior Warden at annual communication. Why this isn’t common practice in a country that appreciates democracy is beyond us.

**“3. Provide better leadership at the Lodge level by ending the reliance on the progressive officer's line.** If a man is not qualified, he should not make the jump from SD to JW, nor should he ascend to the East just because he has put in his time. Both tyrants and amiable dunces can wreck a Lodge in a year.”

Status: Little positive change

The brethren who feel that continuing officer succession for the sake of it are, for the most part, failing their lodges as is it unsuccessful. We have seen too many brethren get elected or appointed to the next chair when they have successfully not fulfilled their commitment in the current year! We have also seen well-meaning but utterly incompetent brethren become Warden and/or Master who have, in under one year, turned their good lodge into a deserted island void of any social frivolity or direction. Do not think you are doing him or the lodge any favors. So how is that in the best interest of the lodge? We also find these are the same lodges that initiate too many men at once, thus diluting the quality, thus not properly preparing the member for becoming an officer, let alone Warden and Master. Further, as it has been said earlier, circumstances such as a job change, moving out of the area, and family commitments often change for an officer who was expected to move up the line and multiple holes in the line are therefore inevitable. Having a brother skip chairs to fulfill positions is unfair to the brother and to the lodge. By all means, if a brother



wishes to become Master one day, tell him what the expectations are and allow him to **succeed** through each chair to learn the duties, so that when he becomes Master, he understands how the lodge functions as whole.

**“4. Educate our members and our officers in our history, in our customs and in our duties.** That means Masonic education, leadership training, and the simple skills of being gentlemen. Develop a course of instruction for Wardens based on the ritual and leadership skills they will need, and make its completion a requirement for election as Master. “

Status: Large improvement

Education is becoming a staple in every jurisdiction, but not every lodge is having it, and those lodges, in effect, are dying off.

On education and mentoring, ensure your lodge has committee(s) for these tasks with a senior officer, Master or Senior Warden, on or leading it. Develop a mentoring package and give to the candidate after each degree with articles, perhaps even from your own members, and explanations of the symbolism, history, rubrics, floor work, protocols, and customs.

On leadership training, many grand lodges have been taking this on by introducing seminars or programs, but the attendance hasn't been as good as expected as it takes additional time and sometimes money to commit to. We tend to think, however, that if quality men joined in the first place, and were educated by their own lodge and their own lodge brethren, that if the lodge elected the right leaders to begin with, without having to depend upon officer succession, grand lodge wouldn't have the need to fill the void. We have most certainly seen successful lodges with quality leaders who have not had to be trained or educated on how to lead. That said, there are some intricacies, details, and expectations that even good leaders need to be aware of and creating an officers' manual outlining the duties of each position is fully warranted.

**“5. Raise the standards of our conduct and our work, not lower them.** That means proficiency and attendance requirements, dress codes, and real investigations of new members. That does NOT mean that we should exclude men because of social standing, profession or religion. It DOES mean that once a man is a Mason, he is to strive to be the best. “

Status: Improvement, albeit perhaps natural

We have witnessed standards increased not by edict of grand lodge or a past masters' committee, but by the demand of the influx of younger brethren.

But more work needs to be done prior to giving out a petition to explain the expectations that the lodge and Freemasonry have toward a candidate and member. During the discovery or interview process, be honest in his cost, time, and personal commitment to the lodge and its members. Resorting to saying "our dues are only \$100/year and we meet once or twice a month is all it takes" reeks of desperation and minimalism. If that's the standard expectation, then do not be surprised at his attendance or if he is suspended for non-payment of dues, and in the end, this whole process ends up being a waste of time.

On proper dress for lodge, this supposed debate needs to end. The argument that if we believe in equality and it's the "internal qualifications", then it should not matter how a brother dresses for lodge. This is a slippery slope fallacy. The reason for proper dress whether dark business suit or tuxedo *is* because it puts each brother on the level in the easiest standard uniform, whether a \$50 suit, or \$1000 tux, at least there is a level of respect for the institution of Masonry, the lodge, and your fellow brethren which does reflect one's internal qualifications rather than resorting to what can be deemed as laziness and slovenly dress--hardly a reflection of that. For those who do not work in a career field where a business suit is standard and must rush to a lodge meeting, not having time to go home and change first, there are numerous examples of brethren we can give who take the time, effort, and respect to bring proper clothes and change at the lodge building.

Younger men joining are themselves setting the example in proper dress over older brethren and this alone is naturally having an effect. We applaud them for it.

**"6. Eliminate the power of the Grand Master to suspend without an immediate trial.** When the GM suspends a member, a Trial Commission should be convened within a reasonable period of time, and must be made up of Past Masters, NOT Past Grand Masters or Grand Line officers."

Status: Worsening



As what has happened with recent grand lodge officer lines being overhauled with the stroke of a pen by the grand master, the grand master must be held accountable for his words and actions, and this check must come from the lodges, as represented by the past masters, otherwise the “divine right of kings” mentality will continue to plague these jurisdictions.

In fact, in many of these jurisdictions where Masons reside, they often join jurisdictionally neighboring lodges to disassociate themselves from the political carnage.

**“7. Repeal the prohibition of alcohol for renters of Lodge buildings and at Masonic banquets.** We teach Temperance, not Abstinence. It is long past time that we treat each other as adults, as our brethren everywhere outside of the United States do. “

Status: Improvement

Yet there are still areas where the ghosts of prohibition still haunt us through hiding behind the excuses of insurance and liability-- assuming that fellow brethren Masons are irresponsible. Can we move on?

**“8. Raise our dues and petition fees to a level reasonable enough to ensure financial stability,** and high enough to encourage participation and value. Any Lodge charging less than \$100 a year is cheating itself and cheapening the fraternity.”

Status: Slow improvement, but often too late

We know of many lodges who have increased their dues significantly, but the building fees have not gone up to effectively support maintenance cost and taxes.

We are now seeing small and large centralized lodge buildings facing financial difficulty by not having the vision and foresight to raise per capita dues years ago. To avoid your lodge from having to change and vote on its dues structure each year, separate grand lodge, district, and building per capita dues from the lodge member dues. Remove set lodge annual dues amounts from your bylaws and simply vote on them in the annual budget proposal. This will go a long way in not having to change your bylaws every time there is a lodge building budget crunch.

When people today spend \$100 year on TV entertainment subscriptions, football tickets, a round of golf, or a dinner out, it behooves us that a Masonic lodge membership isn't given at least the same value. Then again, maybe your lodge isn't providing good value or worth to begin with, so it would stand to reason a member shouldn't expect to pay more.

**“9. Adopt long-range plans for financial stability in the face of dwindling numbers, at both the Grand Lodge and local Lodge level.** Successive leaders need to sign on to such plans and be involved in their design at an early stage, not just in "their year." Reinventing the wheel every year is destructive, irresponsible and foolish. “

Status: No significant improvement

Many grand lodges have implemented long-range plans, but the brethren at the lodge level do not know or understand what they mean. With fewer members supporting the same level of expense infrastructure in administration as was found decades ago, something has to give, and that give is happening now. Very few lodges have long-term plans and essentially run on the Master's ideas, if any, year-to-year. Lodges should have multi-year planning committees, not just made of past masters, to get buy-in and support from the members continually to identify and solve areas of improvement.

**“10. End our preoccupation with saving the appendant bodies.** New Masons should wait one year after being raised before joining an appendant body. The lodge is not responsible for the troubles of other groups that compete for our members' reduced free time and discretionary cash. The other members of the Masonic family have a lifetime to seek a man's participation. Let's make him a Freemason first.”

Status: No change

As we discussed earlier, do you find it interesting how the AMD Councils are thriving by being invite only with a focus on education and discussion, by conducting meetings in the administrative degree for all members, having fewer meetings, limiting the council membership total, and performing degree work with meaning rather than word for word perfection? If anything, formats like this should be an example for how lodges can operate and succeed.



Indeed, many of us learned this in AMD and applied it to our chapters and lodges, and then have found similar success.

But time and time again, we are continuing to see “chickenhawking”—that practice coined by us defining the practice of members handing pre-signed petition forms to newly minted Master Masons to join their appendant body as soon as possible. What, their recent experience of being raised wasn’t good enough to learn more about? Patience, please!

**“11. Encourage local Lodges to have their own personality, style and customs.** Cookie-cutter demands that each Lodge must look, feel and act alike are stifling and ignore human behavior. In England and elsewhere it is common for many rituals to be worked within a given jurisdiction under the same Grand Lodge. It should not be unlawful to for a Lodge to work Emulation, Scottish Rite or other alternative but regular rituals for the three degrees. Greater variety means greater knowledge and deeper understanding of our heritage. We must not simply stick our heads in the Masonic sands and pretend other rituals do not exist.”

Status: Very little improvement, if not decline in some areas

For those trying to create a new lodge with like-minded brethren and are clashing against grand lodge, we feel for your struggle as many of us have endured it first-hand. As we discussed earlier, as the primary purpose of a lodge is to make Masons, the primary purpose of a grand lodge is to make lodges and have a protocol in place when one closes. This now decades-long pursuit of continually propping up dead or dying lodges with false-hope visitations and no actual real leadership and planning has wasted countless hours and money of driving time. Not allowing a group of men to organize themselves outside the lingering bad energy of their dying lodges and become the type new lodge they can build upon is single-handedly the most destructive thing a grand lodge can do to Masonry in its jurisdiction. And it is unfortunately happening in even what many consider rather progressive grand lodges.

Further, open or backroom reprimand and ignorant statements about how an existing lodge conducts its own customs within the construct of Freemasonry only weakens the Craft and undermines the very Masons supporting Masonry. Pushing lodges to follow strict ritual and meeting agendas and grand lodge officers openly



lecturing on proper custom is pompous and removes the flavor and spice in the variety of Masonic Workings and imagination in improving their own lodge experience. We often see too many homogenous lodges in an area, begging the question, why visit if they're all the same?

**“12. Slow down, not speed up our degree process.** One-day classes will quickly die by running out of candidates who want to participate in such mass raisings. They are already shrinking in popularity and becoming less successful in every year and in every jurisdiction that tries them. New Masons want to learn and understand before moving on. It did not solve retention.”

Status: This prediction was correct, but too many lodges are still initiating too many men at a time

After the advent of one-day-classes in the 2000s in many jurisdictions, we have now seen that it was a failed band-aid experiment that did not solve the root of the problem and has indeed quickly died.

We would even further advocate that putting through the maximum of five candidates for a degree allowed in most jurisdictions has been detrimental to a lodge's overall success and we would strongly encourage your lodge to only allow one candidate for the EA and MM degrees and at most two or three for the FC degree.

By implementing that one rule--one candidate per degree, your lodge will accomplish and solve many aspects:

- 1) the degree schedule will slow down to at least one year for a candidate to complete the three degrees (for lodges that meet monthly, and three years for lodges that meet quarterly), because
- 2) a backlog of candidates wanting to join your lodge will automatically occur, because
- 3) they hear it will take time to do so, and so they will appreciate the lodge and wait, because
- 4) if they do not want to wait they can easily find another lodge to join, but because
- 5) in the lodge where this policy exists, few candidates leave, because



- 6) the lodge has retention, attendance, and participation—an exclusive place where people want to be, because
- 7) the lodge officers and degree teams are not inundated with the extra time and complicated floor work of classes of candidates, often extending meeting nights until midnight, because
- 8) during the degree, the energy of the brethren is entirely focused on one individual, which greatly enhances his experience, shows that he is appreciated and is important to the lodge, because
- 9) only the best of men with the right intentions and expectations are deserving of that experience, because
- 10) the brethren of the lodge understand what Freemasonry is really about and how should it be practiced, because
- 11) candidates and brethren are educated and mentored on it regularly.

**“13. The Internet is making the Masonic world smaller daily.** Masons from around the world can converse instantly. Questions of recognition and regularity must be more thoughtfully weighed and decided upon, and multiple grand lodges within the same jurisdictions will be common in the future. That situation already exists in the U.S. with Prince Hall recognition. The same should be true in foreign jurisdictions where multiple, regular grand lodges stubbornly shun each other. Ignoring these issues will only be detrimental to the future of Freemasonry.”

Status: Improved in areas, but poor in others

Brethren are continuing to connect through Facebook groups and various private online discussion forums. The elongated protocols of sending a visitation request through your Secretary to the Grand Secretary to the host Grand Secretary and lodge Secretary is rarely used, instead of a direct email to the Worshipful Master or Secretary by finding it on their website is much more common.

We are sharing photos of our lodge rooms and taking snazzy group photos. We are boasting about meetings and events. We are sharing ideas. All of this has drawn curiosity of brethren to visit and connect. Work “road warriors”, like many of us have been and are, have effectively used the Internet as a means to connect with lodges in the area which we are working, making the travel

experience much more bearable—proving one of the true benefits of the Craft.

On recognition, we have not seen the breaches that was thought to have occurred online. Perhaps it depends on whether you believe speaking or conversing online to a woman, co-ed, or Prince Hall Freemason about the working tools is such a breach. Does this violate your obligation that you would not be present at the making of a woman as a Mason? We do not think so. But alas, while we recognize this will be an ongoing topic among regular Masons, albeit tiring, frankly, we wish it would end at some point if not now.

Some grand lodges, however, have taken it upon themselves to regulate the online activity of its members in Masonic forums or any in general by requiring them to have their Masonic lodge credentials to sign their posts, emails, or have in profiles. This is laughable to us in that one can easily create an anonymous profile. That said, many of the online Masonic forums require you to provide said credentials upon registering to an administrator. This is certainly an area we already know that grand lodges are in way over their head and we guess that most brethren will ignore it at their peril from grand lodge anyway, if they have been doing so for years already.

## Concordantly-Speaking – AMD?



One of the only growing bodies in the Masonic order structure that has seen growth over the past twenty years is the Allied Masonic Degrees (AMD) and this is true in the U.S. and Canada.

How is this growth possible when AMD is dependent upon the declining memberships within Craft lodge and Royal Arch chapters? Even in the years that saw decline in grand lodges and chapters, AMD remained steady.

### ✕ What is it about AMD that many Masons have been drawn to?

1. AMD is a relatively newer order. Created in 1932, it brought together many degrees that were once part of other systems, and when there was restructuring, they were “lost”
2. Grand councils have made the process of forming a new council straight-forward and so new councils have been popping up everywhere and brethren are excited to be part of a new founding group to add their own flavor
3. The degrees are shorter, relatively simple to perform, and the lectures convey a primary and profound moral relatable to other degrees
4. Most AMD councils meet quarterly
5. Membership is usually by invitation only to Royal Arch Masons
6. Council membership size is often limited to 27 total and if the council is growing beyond that size, a new council should be formed to accommodate—this more intimate setting ensures the council selects members who will contribute and attend
7. Masonic education is the primary agenda item and all brethren are encouraged to present papers at meetings—often several papers delivered at a meeting followed by open discussion
8. A brother must give an original education paper prior to being elected Sovereign Master of a council
9. Regalia is simple
10. Dues are not expensive

11. The degree structure only requires the St. Lawrence the Martyr degrees as the initiation administrative degree with no particular order to confer the others (with the odd exception: Architect grades and Red Branch)
12. The Order of the Red Branch of Eri is a unique and special order, required for being elected to Sovereign Master of a Council
13. The fun degrees (Ye Ancient Order of Corks, Order of the Bath) are quite humorous—something missing amidst the seriousness of Masonic degrees

Many of us are members of an AMD council and ironically it is the very order that has kept our memberships in our lodges and RAM chapters intact for the past several years. Without it, this very document might not even exist. There is something to be said about what AMD has meant to us and keeping our dues cards. We have found a sense of freedom and trust from our grand councils.

The other notable aspect is the grand councils are relatively lean regarding administration and operations. Grand lodges should look to AMD to model their ability to administer with a small membership. The U.S. AMD Grand Council utilizes the February Masonic Week in Virginia for the annual assembly, where in Canada it takes place at various cities annually on a weekend in August (nearest to the day of the Feast of St. Lawrence as possible).

In the future, with grand lodges and chapters on the brink of survival, we may very well see that the bulk of the remaining members in Masonry are AMD Brethren of St. Lawrence—because it has become special to many of us and worthwhile to keep around.



## Transformation to a True-Craft Masonic System

### ✕ Introduction

In our researches into the degree system of the operative masons, and many of us being members of multiple speculative Masonic organizations, there is a growing desire to transform and unite what the “true-craft” Masonic system should be. Further, with the incorrect promotion of “300 years of Freemasonry since 1717” (that’s a whole other paper), we also researched the history of the speculative and operative degree systems and realized that the detraction of “we’ve always done it this way” arguments, our notion of offering a revised construct of the Craft degree system is valid. The primary reasons we can see stopping this from being undone and reorganized is simply how the history unraveled and the resulting stubborn jurisdictional lines.

Let’s first admit that our speculative degree system is disjointed, clunky, confusing, and the result is a majority of Master Masons do not benefit from learning about the entire system of Craft Masonry unless they take the degrees in Capitular Masonry and more. Further, in North America, a Royal Arch Chapter has to revert itself back into being a Craft lodge to confer the degrees of Mark Master Mason and Most Excellent Master.

### ✕ Craft Degree System

#### ◆ Currently, we have:

Order	Degrees
Blue (Craft) Lodge	1° Entered Apprentice (EA)
	2° Fellowcraft (FC)
	3° Master Mason (MM)
	Chair: Installed Master (IM)* through a Board of Installed Masters, which exists everywhere except in most of the U.S.
Royal Arch Chapter (Capitular Masonry)	4° Mark Master Mason (MMM)
	5° (Virtual) Past Master (VPM) – U.S. only
	6° Most Excellent Master (MEM)
	7° Holy Royal Arch Mason (HRAM)
	Chair: Scribe / 3 <sup>rd</sup> Principal (J) Chair: King / 2 <sup>nd</sup> Principal (H) Chair: High-Priest / 1 <sup>st</sup> Principal (Z)
Grand Chapter	Order of High Priesthood (only for High-Priest / 1 <sup>st</sup> Principal (Z))

### ◆ We would propose:

Order	Degrees
Blue (Craft) Lodge	Entered Apprentice (EA)
	Fellowcraft (FC)
	Mark Master Mason (MMM)
	Master Mason (MM)
	Chair: Installed Master (IM). Required for remaining degrees.
	Most Excellent Master (MEM)
Royal Arch Chapter (Capitular Masonry)	Excellent Master (EM) – currently in AMD
	Holy Royal Arch Mason (HRAM)
	Chair: Scribe / 3 <sup>rd</sup> Principal (J)
	Chair: King / 2 <sup>nd</sup> Principal (H)
	Chair: High-Priest / 1 <sup>st</sup> Principal (Z)
Grand Chapter	Order of High Priesthood (1 <sup>st</sup> Principal (Z) only)

### ✕ Reasoning

Even amongst us, we have not totally agreed on this system, and a few believe there should not be concordant and appendant bodies at all!

This structure gives lodges more degrees to work with and chapters get fewer degrees. With smaller lodges and more degrees to confer over time, there isn't the time to rush in members. The degree process would take years and members are incentivized to be elected and installed as Worshipful Master to proceed to the following degrees of MEM, EM, and HRAM.

Because the Royal Arch degree in North America contains a version of the UK/AMD Excellent Master contained within it, we propose that a revised version of the EM from AMD be used. Although hotly debated, the Most Excellent Master, another U.S. invention, would remain due to portions of it being similar to the worthy and necessary ceremony of a Board of Installed Masters found nearly everywhere else in the world except in the U.S.

We might also propose that the Mark Master Mason degree, like the RAM, it being a construct of two degrees itself: Mark Man and Mark Master, could be separated as well, but we further agree that these are extensions of the Fellowcraft degree.

We would eliminate the Past (Virtual) Master degree as it is entirely an American creation to allow non-installed Master Masons the ability to



“virtually” become Most Excellent Masters and Royal Arch Masons, and encourage U.S. lodges to bring back the Board of Installed Masters (or rightfully called the Installed Master Degree) so eloquently performed upon a Worshipful Master-Elect. The original intent of the Royal Arch, and we would argue, the proper one in the dissemination of secrets and understanding of a complete story, should be limited to Installed Masters. This would mean, a Royal Arch Chapter would be solely comprised of Past Masters of various lodges in an area.

Yes, we realize that to accomplish this would take agreement from most of the grand bodies involved, but we believe it’s an idea worth sharing and promoting. At one time in Masonic history, the Royal Arch was simply a body attached to a lodge or two for past masters. The Mark fell out of favor onto its own due to someone’s opinion on its relevance, yet there is evidence it is one of the oldest recorded degrees.

(For more information, we would recommend investigating the operative system.)

We offer this revised system because there may be point in the future where due to the decline in membership counts, to keep Freemasonry alive, Royal Arch grand chapters may have no choice but to amalgamate operations and jurisdiction within their grand lodge. A restructuring of the degrees would be warranted within that particular jurisdiction.



## Why over What

How many times have you given an “elevator pitch” about Freemasonry?

“It’s a [world-wide/international] [fraternity/society/brotherhood] [with secrets/special knowledge] that has [meetings/events/charity].”

Ad-nauseum.

Let us caution you from answering the trap question of explaining “What is Freemasonry?” and instead explain “**Why Freemasonry?**”

Because other than properly explaining that “Freemasonry is a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols”, explain why you are in it and why it gives meaning to *your* life. Each of us will have a different answer for the most part.

Studies on sales and marketing, including politics, have shown that people tend to react and connect to someone or something from an often unexplainable emotional “gut” reason over thinking about “features and benefits”.

The gimmicky taglines of “2B1ASK1”, “We make good men better”, “Is there a Freemason/Shriner in you?”, “[celebrity Mason] is one and you can too”, “Brotherhood of Men Under the Fatherhood of God” simply do not work on any emotional level and why every one of you must stop using them and “correct the errors” of other brethren who use them. These tags take away any of the mystery of the Craft and reduce it to a meaningless Tweet.

No mass marketing campaign on Freemasonry will work if the majority of members who meet prospective candidates at the door cannot explain “The Why”.

Next time someone asks you “What is Freemasonry?” change the question and say, “It is a lot of things, but what I will tell you is why I joined.”





## 14. CONCLUSION ... FOR NOW

**A**fter about ten years since *Laudable Pursuit* was written and published, we recognized that it had an impact on Freemasonry in North America as a siren-call for Masons to reassess and revamp their lodges and grand lodges, and began writing this new version.

Without that original light of hope, while we are not exactly sure of how Freemasonry would be today, we can, with certainty, in having received so many accolades on that manifest, where brethren were inspired to make changes for the better, at least staved off the bludgeoning a little longer.

We wonder if the steadying of grand lodge memberships in the mid-2000s had something to do with the hundreds of newly inspired brethren, coupled with a stronger Internet presence for laymen to connect to their aspiring future lodges.

The irony, however, is that many of the good brethren who were the original authors, along with hundreds of those who rose a laudable banner of their own no longer have dues cards, while others still do. In our view, they will forever remain true Masons—they left their mark for positive change and rode off into the sunset and that is entirely acceptable to leave it for the next generation to pick up the flag and continue the fight—as much as it is disheartening to not be able to sit in lodge with them.

In this version, we have expanded upon and detailed more of the issues that remain today to offer suggestions and solutions to rejuvenate the discussion into a standard template for lodge success. We have outlined the tendencies of the younger generations for you, your lodge and grand lodge to understand, adapt, and align with their values to congruent Masonic values.

The Masonic Restoration Foundation movement began to provide a framework for lodges to use to enhance the Masonic experience. It has been very successful. There is no denying that each lodge can at least gain something from one or more of its suggestions, and the lodges that employ it see retention levels maintained while other surrounding lodges waiver.

The Masonic Society and “The Journal” began as a world-wide network of like-minded Masons to connect and spread more light in Masonic education and research. The quality of the Journal contributions is excellent and serves to fill the void and should be a template for grand lodges to offer similar services and enlightenment over front page big-check photos and discussions on how to wear a ring.

These are but two examples of groups of brethren who have taken leadership to improve the Craft. Yes, there have been many improvements in lodges we have not outlined, and we believe these and in many other lodges that have transformed themselves will survive the “Great Masonic Purge” in the coming three decades. At no other time in Masonic history will the courage and might of its remaining few members be tested to ensure this “the greatest institution of mankind” continues in North America. It survived the Anti-Masonic Movement, the American Civil War, the Temperance Movement, the Great Depression, many wars, persecution, lies and myths, and public ridicule by churches, conspiracists, and media.

Some of us believe there really are only about several dozen high quality lodges in each of our countries, give or take, so what the future holds for English-speaking grand lodges, we are not certain, but for those who have read this entire document, we admire your dedication and thank you for your attention, and with that, know that saving Freemasonry in your neck of the woods will be up to you and your more familiar brethren who share an affinity for progress and excellence.



Here is another challenge for you. Think about how your lodge will continue without your current building or how your grand lodge currently operates. Think big in your vision without thinking that bigness in buildings and numbers will be around to deliver. Think about recognition and regularity versus autonomy or a new framework. Think about selectivity on quality and character and turn away racism, religious bigotry, and homophobia to build a new progressive-thinking lodge with one foot toward in the future and one honoring the good of the past. Think about an updated degree system. Think about using different rituals. Think about a lodge that doesn't need to meet all the time for meeting-sake, one that is perhaps mobile and flexible, one that is compact and focused, one that is worthwhile to go to, and one that is worth the wait. Find your like-minded brethren in your area and build it now, if you haven't started already. Forget mergers and the dead nostalgic energy of the past. Build new because new buildings aren't made from two decrepit ones. How? Read on, brother.

## Progressive Masonry

“Freemasonry is a progressive science.”

Building upon the encouragement of the Masonic Restoration Foundation we are proposing a type of Masonry that we believe is inherent within the ritual and core concepts of the Craft called “**Progressive Masonry**”. It is not based on how lodges may or may not have been constructed in the past or how lodges on another continent run their lodge programs. We believe a lodge egregore of people does not have to be homogeneous in views. On the contrary, differing views and opinions are encouraged—it is how that discussion occurs in a respectful manner among the brethren that is more important.

The core idea is that there is no status quo to operating your lodge and that the officers continually reevaluate and look at ways to improve the lodge for the benefit of all.

Progressive Masonry has several requirements for a lodge that *may* include and already be a part of other lodge formats:

1. **Affiliated and initiated candidates are interviewed and vetted for their character over a period from first introduction to balloting, taking up to a year or more.** Candidates are required to attend meals, casual gatherings, and social and education events to get to know the members. Remarks by candidates deemed to be divisive that are racist, sexist, homophobic, or religiously intolerant will result in the candidate’s petition not being signed or withdrawn—intolerance will not be tolerated. The bulk of the membership should have met and become familiar with every potential candidate. The character committee will discuss the required commitments, financial and time, with his family, and alleviate any concerns.
2. **Sponsors will go over a detailed checklist of requirements and expectations of the potential candidate.** If the candidate agrees, they will sign the form, prior to being given a petition for membership.
3. **Prior to balloting, the candidate will write a 500-word essay about why he wants to become a Mason** (affiliates will write about why they want to join this lodge in particular) and what



his expectations are of the lodge and for him. After each degree, he will write and present an original paper prior to progressing to the next degree and proving up in the Master Mason degree (affiliates will present papers on each degree over a period). Candidates will memorize and recite the full form catechisms and obligations.

4. **One candidate per degree at a time** is initiated as an Entered Apprentice and raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason. The Fellowcraft Degree can have up to three candidates passed at a time.
5. **Each candidate's primary sponsor will act as his mentor**, unless otherwise designated. Sponsors also need to be more involved to set an example for his candidate.
6. **Meetings can occur anywhere, outside if possible**, within a reasonable travel distance for the bulk of the membership. About six tyled meetings per year, give or take—but it is up to the particular lodge.
7. **Dues are based on a week's worth of wages according to the minimum wage in the area.** Senior members older than 65 years pay half that amount and members older than 80 years that have been a member for at least 15 years are not required to pay dues as the lodge fund will cover their grand lodge fee and other external costs.
8. **Lodges will budget for the future and not just for the current year.** A fund will be created to pay for per capita fees for senior brethren and emergency benevolence for any brother.
9. **Elected officers include the Master, Wardens, Secretary/Treasurer, and Tyler.** All other officers are appointed by the Master-elect with agreement from the Wardens. For those wishing to become Master, it is encouraged that he hold four previous officer positions, particularly a Deacon, and Junior and Senior Warden.
10. **Two-year term for the Worshipful Master.** After one year, an election is held for the offices of Senior Warden, Junior Warden, and other appointed offices are reassessed by the Master whether the brother can continue in the role or have

a different brother appointed. This builds up more brethren qualified to become Master, not just who is available.

11. **The officers will reassess the progress of the lodge on** a semi-annual basis and brainstorm ideas on areas of improvement.
12. **A modified Chamber of Reflection will be used** prior to each degree and the symbols and questions will build upon the lessons of the previous degree. The initial chamber is refined and simple, progressing in complexity with the degrees. It does not have to exactly model the Chamber touted by many in the past decade.
13. **Each tyled meeting will be under ambient lighting, preferably candlelit,** with incense burned prior to the meeting to cleanse the space. Degrees will use appropriate background music whether played live or a recording to enhance the experience for the candidate and for the brethren to remain focused on the degree.
14. **Business suit is encouraged for every tyled meeting,** except where the meeting occurs outside and depending on weather. The lodge may decide to go formal for all meetings or occasionally.
15. **A meal occurs before or after each tyled meeting,** where quality spirits and food will be catered or provided by brethren willing to do so—it does not necessarily fall on the Junior Warden and Stewards.
16. **Education presentations are not limited to taking place in a tyled meeting** or at the meal but can occur at other locations.
17. **Members deemed disruptive, or non-attending (unless in understandable circumstances) under advisement by the Worshipful Master, will be contacted by the Senior Warden to solve the situation.** A group of seven or more members may make a formal request to the Master to have a particular member suspended or requested to demit the lodge.



## Call to Action – The Knights of the North

In 2012, our organization rejuvenated itself by a meeting of two minds at a cocktail lounge of a prestigious hotel nestled in the Rocky Mountains. Since then, it has expanded to a worldwide network of “Tables” or pockets of Knights in various countries including the U.S., Canada, Scotland, and New Zealand. Tables meet over dinner at various locations and discuss the contentious Masonic issues in their area, work on projects together, and often discuss joining and building common lodges, chapters, and councils.

Of course, there is an examination of potential members to invite through a rigorous selection process. Part of that process is that one or more of us must always meet in person with the individual—so that we build a true network and that not simply solicit online personas. If it’s not a local meet, these quiet meetings often occur at international Masonic educational conferences.

This is about synergy. The right people must be involved. Those who are simply looking to join something else to feel part of the group—abandon ye all hope.

Do we support each other in our various Masonic and personal pursuits? Absolutely. These friendships forged across lodge lines for a common “laudable pursuit” are what bind us in the Craft.

If you have read this document with a true enthusiasm and an inclination to be a part of a continued movement operating in the background within the Craft, let us know who you are and we will consider or arrange a meeting if one or more of us are in your area or you are in one of ours.

Then when *Laudable Pursuit III* is published in the future, we hope you will contribute like so many of us have.

The true purpose and philosophy of Freemasonry will never die as long as there are Freemasons who “get it”. We are building that network.

We leave you at the end of this document with the following excerpt by Most Worshipful Brother Otto Klotz:

“Before I conclude, my brethren, let me endeavour to portray to you the ideal of a Freemason.



If you see a man who quietly and modestly moves in the sphere of his life; who, without blemish, fulfils his duty as a man a subject, a husband and a father; who is pious without hypocrisy, benevolent without ostentation, and aids his fellowman without self-interest; whose heart beats warm for friendship. whose serene mind is open for licensed pleasures, who in vicissitudes does not despair, nor in fortune will be presumptuous, and who will be resolute in the hour of danger;

The man who is free from superstition and free from infidelity; who in nature sees the finger of the Eternal Master; who feels and adores the higher destination of man; to whom faith, hope and charity are not mere words without any meaning; to whom property, nay, even life, is not too dear for the protection of innocence and virtue, and for the defence of truth;

The man who towards himself is a severe judge, but who is tolerant with the debilities of his neighbour; who endeavors to oppose errors without arrogance, and to promote intelligence without impatience; who properly understands how to estimate and employ his means; who honours virtue, though it be in the most humble garment, and who does not favour vice though it be clad in purple; and



who administers justice to merit whether dwelling in palaces or cottages;

The man who, without courting applause, is loved by all noble-minded men, respected by his superiors and revered by his subordinates; the man who never proclaims what he has done, can do, or will do, but where need is will lay hold with dispassionate courage, circumspect resolution, indefatigable exertion and a rare power of mind, and who will not cease until he has accomplished his work, and who then, without pretension, will retire into the multitude because he did the good act, not for himself, but for the cause of good!

If you, my brethren meet such a man, you will see the personification of brotherly love, relief and truth; and you will have found the ideal of a Freemason.”

Are you?



