

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Thomas Anke**
Years in Masonry: **20**
Lodge Name and Number: **Lodge Ad Lucem No. 812
(PA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

My great-grandfather was a Freemason in Scotland before he emigrated to the US. My grandfather and father were also Freemasons.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

We are at a turning point. The post-WWII bubble was “peak masonry” from a numerical perspective. Men today are looking for meaning more than belonging. On the whole, the Craft needs to adjust how we market our product, and also focus on what is important in what we do as Lodges. We have muddied the water with too many baubles and pomp, and have lost sight of what is really important about Freemasonry.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

It is not. When I joined, I did not feel that the Craft met my expectations. It was pleasant, but not life-changing. In 2007, I became a Warrant Member of a Traditional Observance Lodge. T.O. is the Freemasonry that I expected when I joined. Focus on making good men and less on Fellowship. Focus on education more than pancake breakfasts. Involve all members in the work of the Lodge to maintain active membership. Lose the buildings and focus on the work.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am very involved. For the last several years, I have been the GL Masonic Educator for the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania, involved in officer training, mentor training, candidate education, and training material design. I also served as WM of my Lodge for 3 years. In addition, I am an officer in the Scottish Rite, PHP of my Royal Arch Chapter, and belong to 15 other appendant bodies.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

We have been working on this on the strategic level in Pennsylvania. We redeveloped officer training, mentor training, and candidate education to improve retention of members and improve the quality of the Craft. It all starts by getting men invested in the Craft, rather than handing them a dues card and never seeing them again. Active members are more important than the number of members.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I agree. People spend too much time arguing about the right way to wear a ring or the proper way to ride a goat. The post-WWII boom led to primary focus on fellowship at the expense of what makes the Craft special. I tell the officers that I train that 99% of what they need to know to be a good Mason is found in the Charges and Obligations. If people focus on the Work, and learn it, they will know everything that they need to know to be quality Masons.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn;

nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Decorum is extremely important to the Craft. A handful of Past Masters loudly talking in the “Amen Corner” of the Lodge room is an all-too-common feature of many Lodges. That has to stop. When I train Wardens, I remind them that the SW has a gavel for a reason... to maintain order.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself.” He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton’s statement? Why or Why Not?

I agree. Freemasonry is an individual journey of self-discovery in the company of worthy men. We need to remember that our actions in and of themselves are supposed to reflect the Divine. Our actions should be Worshipful.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Our Lodge requires candidates to meet with us socially six times before we even consider giving them a petition. People who are only casually interested may move on to another Lodge, but the people who stick it out persist in membership after getting their degrees. We need to make people wait longer before initiating them. We need to get to know them before we call them Brother.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

As MAC chair for my District, I speak with most candidates that are on the threshold. I remind them that the Craft provides a structure to learn about themselves and to develop themselves into the men that they want to become. We do not have the answers, but we can help the candidate to find them.

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Name: **Bruce Ball**
Years in Masonry: **13**
Lodge Name and Number: **Franklin Lodge No. 14 (OH)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Since I retired from the military, I felt a loss. I could not find what I wanted in the veteran organizations. I found it in the lodge.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Freemasonry on the whole is struggling, as are all fraternal and veteran organizations. We need to reinvent ourselves.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

I have enjoyed being a Mason. It is what I was looking for.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I have enjoyed Lodge. I have held every chair/position except Chaplain, Treasurer and Marshal. I progressed through the District line. I am a member of the York Rite and Scottish Rite.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes. Not sure of a plan. Things seem to move slow in the Grand Lodge. If we started to change, it would take years. We spend too much time on memorizing lectures and charges.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

We spend too much time on ritual and such and not enough time on the tenets of Freemasonry.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Order and form are important, however the wording needs to be updated.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes, but listen and learn from others.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Time and patience.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Be committed. Don't become a Mason for the title. Remember, Blue Lodge is where it begins. If it fails, you cannot be a Shriner, a Companion, a 32nd Degree.

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Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Jeremiah Beaver**
Years in Masonry: **1**
Lodge Name and Number: **Broad Ripple Lodge No. 643
(IN)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

I had been looking for ways to become more social after the COVID-19 lockdown and subsequent restrictions had loosened. At the same time, Freemasonry was being referenced in several books I had been reading and I was intrigued by the esoteric components. This led me to talk with a couple of men at work who I knew to be members, and I began searching for a Lodge to visit. My father had also reminded me that several generations of my family were Indiana Masons and sent me an article from the Indiana Freemason Magazine written by Christopher Hodapp, PM Broad Ripple #643. Broad Ripple #643 was the closest Lodge to my home which solidified my decision to visit and ultimately petition.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

I am not sure I am qualified to answer this broad question with anything other than anecdotal testimony from the short time I have been a Freemason. I am aware that because Lodges continue to close and membership continues to decline across the country, an argument can be made that the Fraternity is in dark times. However, I am a member of what I consider to be a vibrant Lodge and am inspired by the so-called Observant Freemasonry movement. I believe if these ideas continue to grow and existing Lodges with good leadership continue to employ best practices, then Freemasonry will endure for the better even if it means smaller numbers of Lodges and Brothers overall.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

The Freemasonry I have experienced is not exactly what I expected, but in a positive way. I believed, like many American men, that the Fraternity was more or less a social club that performed acts of charity and had a set of rules or rituals based on esoteric symbolism. It wasn't until I started coming to dinners and talking to Brothers that I found it to be primarily a system of moral and philosophical instruction. While fellowship and being charitable are certainly a part of our Lodge culture, I was pleased to find that there was actual study involved and lessons to be learned in the degree work.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I consider myself to be very invested in Freemasonry at this point. I regularly attend meetings, have participated in degrees, visited other lodges and have been reading on the subject extensively.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Reiterating some of my answer from Question #2: Anecdotally speaking, I am aware that Lodges continue to close, and the Fraternity is arguably in dark times. However, I firmly believe that the ideas employed in what is being called Observant Freemasonry are the best path to revitalizing Freemasonry moving forward. The belief that Masonic Education is paramount and should be considered true Masonry, the notion that membership requirements should not be watered-down but fortified, the enforcement of a formal dress code, the practice of performing ritual work with the utmost integrity—these ideas as well as others will strengthen Lodges and Freemasonry as a whole.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I believe Brother Smith meant that the many issues facing the Fraternity including retention could be solved if Lodges actually practiced the things that distinguish Freemasonry from other groups. To me, this means that pancake breakfasts and fund-raisers are great; however, if we are not earnestly teaching Brothers about what the Working Tools of an Entered Apprentice are and how they can actually be applied to one's life for example, then what separates Freemasonry from the Rotary? The Winding Stairs of a Fellow Craft, The Legend of Hiram Abiff et al.—these are teachings that a man can't get anywhere else and therefore should be at the forefront of Masonry.

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Proper decorum absolutely has a place in contemporary Freemasonry, and is one of the things that I appreciate most about my Lodge. In short, we conduct ourselves like gentlemen especially in a Stated Meeting or during ritual work. Levity is fine for dinner or social gatherings, but in a meeting or a degree you are expected to pay attention and be respectful to whomever is speaking. The same goes for the dress code: informal situations can be informal attire, but Stated Meetings and degrees are formal events and Brothers should dress accordingly. This is generally true in social gatherings where respect is demanded, like work, church, weddings, funerals—Lodge should be no different.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself.” He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I agree with this sentiment. In my mind, “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself” basically means you should strive to be self-aware, have discipline

and offer assistance to others. I also understand how Brother Newton saw this as applying to Freemasonry. I believe the goal of Masonry is to endeavor to look inward by using the tools presented to you. These tools can then teach you to control your passions and know your limits. You will then be enabled to give more of yourself to your family and community.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

A multi-pronged approach is required to effectively guard the West Gate, in my opinion. First, the Lodge should have a clear consensus of how to engage potential new Brethren i.e. number of events he should attend before petitioning, vouching/signing of petition, etc. Second, and probably most important, the appointed Investigative Committee has to be rigorous, including an in-person interview. It needs to be clear to the petitioner what is expected of him i.e. what Freemasonry is and is not, decorum, dues, required memory work, expected attendance, etc. Third, the findings of the Investigative Committee should be thoroughly discussed in a Stated Meeting and any potential issues with the petitioner should be debated before a vote.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I invite men interested in Freemasonry to come to a dinner and meet some Brothers, be it my Lodge or one closer to his home. I give a loose overview of what the Fraternity is about in my opinion and try to dispel any nefarious rumors they may have heard. I explain that they should practice due diligence and visit multiple Lodges before committing to one. If or when they find one that they feel welcomed, and after discussion with multiple Brothers about what Freemasonry means to them, then they should consider asking for a petition.

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Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Francis Bell**
Years in Masonry: **24**
Lodge Name and Number: **Melita Lodge No. 295 (PA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Initially, it was the fact that many men, who I respected, were members of the fraternity. I also had a grandfather (deceased) who was a member.

Later as I had a chance to read more literature on the topic, I became more interested in the Craft. In fact, I made the point of joining the GL of Pennsylvania at its original headquarters at Philadelphia to be more close to the guiding principles of the order.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

The generation that came before my entry (in the late 90's) was, in my opinion, the last of the "giants" for my jurisdiction.

There came a point where we were worried about numbers and with that worry, quality goes out the window, so we brought in a bunch of driftwood and just as quickly, it floated back out (not before doing some damage of course). Within the last 5-10 years we inherited the same problem that most of the country has, that being entitled children who view the craft as a cosplay or a big piggybank.

I know there are still quality members out there, but the rejects have failed upwards and their influence is starting to be felt and will probably take a decade to clean out.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

Outside of the problems mentioned in Question 2, I will say that I have made a good number of long term friends, I have had the chance to visit lodges in a number of different States and countries and have observed the ritual at work across national, cultural and racial lines.

The issue is, as always, if you promote and respect the ritual and teachings of Freemasonry, you will have an enriching Masonic career. If not, you could have joined any old fraternity.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Time wise? I put in a good 20 years as an officer and student.

I was master twice, participated in a number of degree teams, certified as a masonic scholar in our GL's masonic academy. Spearheaded a couple of historic initiatives in the Temple as well as outside in the community. Published a couple of articles (one local and one international) plus some work in the Appendant bodies.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Take the money out of it.

Invest in actual auditors. Go through the books. Make examples of those that misuse lodge funds.

Follow a solid path of investment

Go back to the basics on the degrees. Don't push people through the pipeline just to game the numbers. Quality gets quality. Intellectual debate is scarce these days. People need somewhere to discuss topics without getting cancelled.

Give membership a better handle on the Bible. It is a rule and guide for both the religious and not (although we shouldn't be bringing in the "not") so you should invest in quality speakers.

You can go on for hours.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I don't have the time to research Bro. Smith and see what the context of this quote was taken from so... PASS.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

It most certainly does. The problem lately is that people seem to suffer from poor impulse control. You have to have discipline in a Lodge or the membership will feel that they are being dictated to.

The old question was why does a group of free thinkers have so many laws and the answer was...for that reason.

Your activities during Lodge are to be dictated by the charges at opening. Everything should be handled with decorum. If there are business issues or other controversial issues, try and have it hashed out at a special or extra meeting.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

There are a number of references from Ritual that will compliment that statement. Can't talk about it in this forum.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

In this day and age it should be easier than ever. Sometimes merely mentioning that part of the application will be a State background check will be enough to set things right.

You can have an affiliate or probationary period where you give the membership a chance to meet the people and interact. This is also the reason that you should not skimp on your Investigation Committee and actually go through the steps.

However on ideas, you can't make a lodge into a cookie-cutter-everyone-thinks-the-same group. That goes against what the Lodge stands for. That said, it doesn't mean you allow for idealogues whose teaching goes against the grain of the teachings just because he has a clean record.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Do your research:

- **On the topic;**
- **On the potential lodge;**
- **On what kind of time you will have to spend learning the Craft.**

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Riger Biede III**
Years in Masonry: **9**
Lodge Name and Number: **Gila Valley Lodge No. 9 (AZ)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

My father was the reason for my joining the Fraternity. He was a Mason/Shriner for most of my adolescent years and truly was a Mason's Mason. He has always been my idol and following in his footsteps was a natural progression to growing up.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

I think that Freemasonry is an interesting place in today's society. The overall numbers may be going down but the men that are coming to the West Gate are coming for the right reasons. We are becoming a younger and stronger institution of quality individuals.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

I had a pretty open mind when joining the Fraternity with few preconceived notions, however, I do feel that we need to improve as a whole. For the Fraternity to continue to attract new members we need to live up to our own expectations. We should be a source of improvement and education for our members, we should foster our member's purposes and passions, and truly bring Light to our world.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Freemasonry has been a large part of my life for the last 10 years. I have had the pleasure of volunteering and being a part of many amazing committees and organizations during my membership. Starting in my home Blue Lodge and sitting in the East, to being on the Divan at the local Shrine, to the Masonic Charities Board, to the Library and Museum Board, to planning multiple annual Communications, to working on the yearly proceedings, and now being appointed the progressive Line, it could be said that I have a big investment in Freemasonry.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Men knock on the west gate for many reasons, some personal, some practical, but all came because of interest in Freemasonry. For the Fraternity to be successful, Lodges need to live up to expectations and give members what they are looking for. Our Lodges to be doing Masonry, to be studying ritual, to be functioning with a purpose and with a passion for what their members are there for.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

That statement is a good assessment of the state of Freemasonry today. Men today are not coming for the potlucks, they are truly coming to learn, to think, to become better men. Lodges that are thriving are those that are listening to their members and giving them what they want... Freemasonry. Ritual and Education should be front and center, Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth should be the norm, and we all need to remember that Charity is the most important of all.

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

In Arizona, in the second degree charge we are reminded that we are expected to observe the solemnities of all of our ceremonies. It is clear and concise. There is a time and place for levity, but our meetings and degrees should reflect the responsible character of who we all strive to be.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself.” He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton’s statement? Why or Why Not?

The mission of Freemasonry generally focuses on many things, including self-improvement, education, service, and fellowship. Could a person delve into “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself.” and come away with a good idea of Freemasonry? Sure, but I think that it takes a further deep dive to come to a complete understanding of what the Fraternity truly means.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

The most effective method of guarding the West Gate is to stop worrying about the membership numbers and focus on what needs to be focused on, good men. Get to know the candidates, get to know their families, make them a part of the Lodge family before admittance. Ask those important questions, why are you joining? What do you want out of Freemasonry? What do you want to bring to the Fraternity?

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Why are you interested in joining? What do you want out of Freemasonry? What do you want to bring to the Fraternity?

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Tim Brewster**
Years in Masonry: **13**
Lodge Name and Number: **Cub Run Lodge No. 910 (KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Friends that I had.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Troubled.

Not a lot of offerings for young men - most of which are still kids at heart.

Hard to compete with social interaction that they have become accustomed to.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Very much so.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I'm all in, excluding family functions that coincide with lodge activities.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize
Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

No response.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

His take is spot on - getting a younger generation interested in sitting around talking with older guys is nearly impossible.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

A measure of reverence has to be maintained not only as respect to the Worshipful Master and officers but to each individual brother - hear what has to be said before interrupting.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Agree wholeheartedly - being true with yourself and setting your own compass for that decision will later reflect on your actions with others.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

No response.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

That it's a learning and awakening process – you will find out where your heart really lies when following just the fundamental thoughts and teachings of Freemasonry.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **William Britton**
Years in Masonry: **10**
Lodge Name and Number: **Cumberland Valley Lodge
No. 315 (PA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

To make myself a better person though the light of the Masonic Journey. Also it was to join a band of like-minded Brothers. Having retired from the United States Armed Forces I naturally gravitated to Freemasonry to fill the missing part of my life's journey. Naturally the Masonic values incorporated into the United States Armed Forces by Brothers George Washington and John Paul Jones made Freemasonry the right fit.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

It is strong among the membership, and those who are currently joining the order. As for membership, our numbers may not be as strong as they were in previous decades, but those numbers were the result of Armed Forces service members joining the order after two World Wars. Originally, in the beginning, Freemasonry was not a large order. We are, in my option, right sizing in numbers. Those currently members are strong in Masonic principle. A short heavy chain is far stronger than and long weak chain.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes, and more. I find the principals and chief tenets of Freemasonry, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, things most need to enrich one's life stressing to its members the principles of personal decency and personal responsibility.

Further these principles and tenets solidify the virtues of faith, hope and charity which are supported on the three great pillars of wisdom, strength and beauty.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Simply put, I get out of Freemasonry far more than I put into it. Freemasonry 's value to mankind has the potential to restructure the entire social order to the benefit all of Mankind.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Freemasonry must naturally evolve if it is to remain relevant. Its principles and tenets are steadfast, constant and true, however we need to ensure it evolves as society evolves to remain relevant. It is my belief that we are right sizing in numbers. Our membership focus should have an emphasis on quality as opposed to quantity. To retain membership we should bring Masonic light to Freemasonry and our membership through word and action, with less focus on trivialities, and more focus on the education.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I agree and revitalization is the key. As stated previously Our membership focus should have an emphasis on quality as opposed to quantity. To retain membership we should bring Masonic light to Freemasonry and our membership through word and action, with less focus on trivialities, and more focus on the education. Our focus should be the principals and chief tenets of Freemasonry, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, things most need to enrich one's life stressing to its members the principles of personal decency and personal responsibility. We need to resolidify the virtues of faith, hope and charity which are supported on the three great pillars of wisdom, strength and beauty.

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

We should always show consideration to our brethren as well as ourselves, not only in lodge, but outside of it as well. When engaged in any undertaking it should be taken with serious consideration and concern, be extended to others, and all of mankind as well. Family always comes first, but this should expand into the community as well. Freemasons are taught “to aid, support, and protect each other.” The whole concept of brotherly love is what unites us. this same concept if applied correctly would change the entire social structure.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself.” He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton’s statement? Why or Why Not?

I agree, Being able to identify our own strengths and weaknesses, behaviors, and tendencies permits focus on knowing our individual path to self-improvement. To know ourselves allows us to better know others as well. With proper application of Masonic tenets, principles, and virtues we can learn to control and strengthen the deficiencies we find within ourselves. Once we learn to know ourselves and are able to correct ourselves, we can learn to understand others and give to them that which we have learned of ourselves.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

I do not believe that there is one true method to guarding the West Gate. Guarding the West Gate is not only applied to petitions and the admittance of new members, but personal and the acceptance of external influences on our own characters. The same application we use to guard our personal West Gate should be the same used in accepting new members into the lodge. To know what we expect of ourselves is to know what we expect of others who what to enter the lodge. It goes back to the previous question concerning "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." As we all know the lodge is not a building. It is that temple not made by hands eternal in the heavens. We must look at the hearts of men to guard the West Gate. If their heart be true they should be suitable to pass through the West Gate just as our own hearts are to be steadfast, honest, and true.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

What brings you to Freemasonry? What is it you seek; personal growth and self-improvement, community involvement, friendship and camaraderie, intellectual stimulation, and faith-based values? If this is in your heart, Freemasonry may help you find what you seek. Membership is open to men from all backgrounds. Our aim is to empower members to be the best they can be. Is this what you are looking for? If not, Freemasonry may not be the right fit for you.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **John Buckler**
Years in Masonry: **2**
Lodge Name and Number: **Kingston Lodge No. 315
(KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Always interested. Once I retired, I sought admission as I had time to dedicate to it. Men in my life that were/are Masons I admire.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Freemasonry is still doing necessary work. Work that is needed more and more.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes. It is a group of men that I trust. Patriotic and generous. Men are not my Brothers only, truly my friends.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I try every day to be a good representative. I enjoy my time in my home Lodge and York Rite. Traveling when I can and meeting Brothers in other lodges and meeting men that recognize me out in public. Members of OES as well. Having that connection is important.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I don't think it's revitalization that's needed. Education and a higher profile in the communities we are a part of. Social media is a good platform. We don't pat ourselves on the back. However, being in parades, supporting our local schools, hospitals etc. People want to know more about us when they see us doing what we do.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I agree. What do we do while staying within the confines of our obligations? I know what will happen if we keep doing things the way they have always been done. We will get the same results mostly.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Tradition and respect hold us to these things. You can have fun in lodge. Manners and decorum are important in the way we respect each other and ourselves.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

While I believe there is more to religion than that statement, those are important aspects of religion. Basic requirements. Freemasonry requires that and more as well. Controlling ourselves to make us better people and better Masons, making us better able to give of ourselves when needed.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Keeping in mind our obligations every day. Even when we fall short as all people do. Try to be better.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I wish I had done it sooner.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **John Cissell**
Years in Masonry: **17**
Lodge Name and Number: **Buechel Lodge No. 896 (KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Family history and connection to my roots.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

In peril. The core values of Freemasonry have been abandoned for many years, and the leadership is unqualified for the roles they occupy. Society is largely resistant to anything that appears to be elite, or intellectual, and our membership largely consists of men who are neither intellectual or elite.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Partially.

I expected to join Freemasonry that is the common man's social club, as that was my experience with the organization as a child. I found a subset of the fraternity that exposed me to the foundations of the organization and that caused a seismic shift in my approach to the fraternity.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Freemasonry is a foundational institution in my life. It is the stick that I use to measure men and other organizations. The vast majority of the men whom I respect are associations that I've acquired through Freemasonry.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, I believe it is.

The Grand Lodge system in America is broken and destined to financial collapse. Until lodges are consolidated, or charters seized to purge the craft of the excess capacity, and a mission focused leadership structure enacted, we will continue to flit from ill-conceived plan to ill-conceived plan without any long-term vision for the future until the probable becomes inevitable.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I concur with Dwight L Smith's analysis. Adhering to the foundations of the fraternity would solve most of the problems in the current organization. Instead we focus on being a charity aggregator, funneling energy into useless affiliate bodies and failing in the basic mission of self-improvement.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Proper decorum is essential to contemporary Freemasonry. We exist in a time where courtesy is increasingly rare and to learn to control oneself is a basic experience in Freemasonry. This is exhibited in part through adherence to proper decorum and respect.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

It is essential to first learn who you are before you can improve upon who you are. Until you are able to improve yourself, you are largely unfit to share yourself with the wider world. Only by improving who are can you perform the "charity" that is appropriate of any true Mason.

Contrary to contemporary thinking, we are created as imperfect creatures striving for better, not as perfect beings to whom the world should conform.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Diligence in getting to know someone before agreeing to allow him to petition is essential to properly guarding the west gate. Actively excluding unworthy men can only occur if we learn of their motives and character.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Why are you interested in this organization? If you are unwilling to open and candidly examine who you are, and what you believe, you should not start down this road. Go join a club if all you want is a place to get away from your responsibilities.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Bryan Colwell**
Years in Masonry: **19**
Lodge Name and Number: **Orphans Friend Lodge No. 275 (OH)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Family and friends.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Slowly dying.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes. Wonderful fellowships.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am very invested as I am the lodge secretary. Although with life circumstances not as invested as I'd like to be.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Start by being more active in the community. Provide relief to those who need it.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I agree. We have been taught the way Masons should act, if we let these principles guide us then others will see and also want to live by those principles.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes, but maybe not as stringent as others have tried to enforce it in the past.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

No, Masonry is not a religion.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

One man, one vote.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

You will get more out of it than you put into it.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **John Cooper, PGM**
Years in Masonry: **59**
Lodge Name and Number: **Harmony Lodge No. 164
(CA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

The Order of DeMolay. I wanted to know more about the organization that had created it and the kind of organization which would inspire the men who were on our Advisory Council.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

We have returned to the pursuit of the true teachings of Freemasonry after having wandered too long seeking more members for the sake of just getting new members. We are teaching men what it means to be a Mason.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes. I knew from my DeMolay experience, and my experience in my college fraternity - the Acacia Fraternity, which is a Masonic-based and inspired college fraternity - that I would find what I expected. And I did - and I continue to do so.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Significant. I am a Past Grand Master as well as a Past Grand Secretary of the Masonic Grand Lodge of California. I am a 33rd Degree Scottish Rite Mason and Knight of the Grand York Rite of Honour, as well as a member of many other Masonic rites and degrees. And I remain active in degree work as well as leadership positions in the Craft.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

The Masonic Restoration Movement exemplifies the revitalization that would help any lodge succeed in pursuing the real reason for its existence. Lodges that pursue its principles are flourishing.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I agree completely. We fail as an organization when we forget or ignore what it means to be a Mason. The teachings of Freemasonry are invaluable not only for us as Masons, but for the world at large.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Proper decorum is based on a respect for the Institution, its leaders, and its members. That is an important teaching in Freemasonry, and is a version of "civility," something that is sorely lacking in society at large today.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I agree. Freemasonry is all about self-improvement - which is the meaning of the Rough and Perfect Ashlars. You cannot improve yourself if you don't know where you are in the first place. Then Freemasonry is about control - the Point Within a Circle" is a symbol of that. From these two principles then flows our responsibilities to our brethren and our families, and thence outward to the rest of the world. The Shriners' hospitals are an example of that, as are the other major Masonic charities.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Before you can guard the West Gate, you have to understand what Freemasonry is. Once you understand that, then making sure that only those who are a "good fit" for its purposes should ever be initiated. As some rituals say, "it is the inward, and not the outward qualifications which recommend a man to be made a Mason."

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I never recommend Freemasonry to anyone unless I believe he is someone who will truly understand its principles and responsibilities – and be willing to carry out those responsibilities. I always ask someone who wants to become a Freemason what he thinks Freemasonry is, and then I ask him how he came to the conclusion that he could benefit by becoming a Mason. If his reasons are "mercenary" reasons, then I ask him to continue to think about the important things in his life and get his priorities right before seeking membership.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Daniel Cotton**
Years in Masonry: **5**
Lodge Name and Number: **Madison Lodge No. 183 (KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Family heritage. Networking. Social opportunities.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Strong core of brothers with a volatile exterior turnover rate. Sporadic with quality degree work. Emphasis on social traveling whether regional or statewide.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

No. I expected a much higher quality of degree work, lodge experience/facilities and local community connectedness.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Has been high, but I see myself backing off after finishing my year as master.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes. Fewer lodges with a higher set of standards across the board.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I agree. We have all heard the phrase making good men better. By doing good works, doing good works collectively; by learning, growing and participating in our intellectual heritage; by connecting our individual strengths/careers as a community we make each other better. If the standard is low with emphasis on generating larger numbers of participants, we muddy the waters and don't grow sustainably.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes. May vary from lodge to lodge. I want a higher standard but some levity in certain lodges while conducting menial business works is fine by me. Can feel more personal and interconnected

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

This survey is getting a bit old so I'm going to speed up. Yes, become a better person through persistence and share it with others.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Firearm.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

You get out what you put in, be selective in your lodge, not to conflict with the first phrase, but don't overwhelm yourself because there is enough knowledge and opportunity in Freemasonry to last a lifetime.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Calvin Crupper**
Years in Masonry: **8**
Lodge Name and Number: **Crittenden-Dry Ridge Lodge
No. 694 (KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Family members were Masons, and I was always curious. After my kids were grown, I felt I needed something else in my life.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

In most lodges it's a social club and some lodges are exploring Masonry through education.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

For the first several years I was let down in what I witnessed happening in lodges. I expected more. Finally I'm on the right path thanks to several brothers that have the same passion.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

100% now that I have found what I was looking for in Masonry.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Lodges must get away from 28-day Masons. The time shouldn't matter, only when the candidates are ready and have learned each degree and become proficient should they be moved to the next degree.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I feel that he is telling us to conduct research and education in Freemasonry to educate Masons that it's not about paying bills and chili suppers.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

The ceremony of opening lodge, rituals and closing ceremonies are solemn events and should be treated as such. Master and wardens shall be treated with respect during all ceremonies. The Master must also respect his wardens, deacons and officers with the same respect.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I do agree with his statement. Lodges should know what their purpose is. They should control in the manner of being able to conduct meetings properly in opening and closing ceremonies. Giving of themselves to brothers of the lodge when in need.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

We should get to know the candidates for several months and watch them in their daily lives. We should meet with the spouses and family of the candidates. Talk with employers and friends. A background check is not enough today.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

When a man has grown emotionally and mentally and is willing to devote himself to learning the Craft, he should become a Mason. Be willing to learn Masonry from study sessions and be willing to be self-motivated to learn each degree and become proficient in each.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **John Davis III**
Years in Masonry: **55**
Lodge Name and Number: **Lodge of Nine Sisters No. 773 (NC)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

The search for more knowledge.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Fair.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

It depends on membership in certain appendant bodies.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

100%.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Getting back to the basics of what Freemasonry is.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Refer to my former answer.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

YES! We need more respect for the Craft, and we need to be more formal in our manners and dress in the lodge.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Only put Masons in chairs who have been properly trained.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Why?

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Andre DeWald**
Years in Masonry: **23**
Lodge Name and Number: **Sultan-Monroe Lodge No.
160 (WA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

A desire to learn more about how to exercise virtuous behavior in my life and meet and discuss philosophical ideas with men of like mind.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

In decline. And the desire of education and knowledge of philosophy and how to apply it in our daily lives is growing less and less important in Masonic lodges.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

It is for me, because I make it happen. Fortunately, my lodge, although small, supports my efforts to open discussions after the meetings to delve into esoteric topics and philosophical ideas. If this were not possible, I probably would not be active in my lodge.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am fully committed to making this fraternity all that it can be. I drive over 100 miles to give a Masonic Education presentation to a lodge. I work with Washington Grand Lodge to promote education throughout the jurisdiction. I am a past District Deputy to the Grand Master and am currently serving as

Senor Grand Deacon in the Grand line and secretary of my home lodge. I attend approximately 8 meetings per month throughout the jurisdiction. I am also a member of Scottish Rite and Shrine.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, indeed. As I have stated above, the need in my opinion is to offer our members more light in Masonry. Offer them the opportunity to seek answers, ask questions and generate discussion on issues and history of the Fraternity. I believe this can be done, not by just presentations, but by discussing topics of interest that brothers can get involved in. I like to call it "igniting the spark of curiosity" so that brothers will want to learn more on their own and contribute to the discussions and knowledge of all.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I do agree with this statement. Brothers, in spite of what they may say was their reason for joining, have a thirst for knowledge and fulfillment to enhance the quality of their lives. Freemasonry, when active in a lodge, offers the tools to help a man develop those ideas in his life and as they become more profound through discussions and comraderies, the brother will see the effects of his increased awareness in his life and seek out more. Otherwise, the Fraternity become yet another boring meeting of business and cookies that cause a man to soon lose interest in participating.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Decorum teaches us to be temperate in our opinions and speech, as well as other areas of our lives. Being temperate allows us to savor ideas and concepts without trying to impose only our own ideas on others. This is essential to becoming an honorable man and one who is respected. It is how we grow to appreciate others around us and enhance our understanding of interpersonal relationships. It is how we become the Masons we profess to be.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Know thyself so that you may understand your own place in society and among humankind, and in Masonry among your brothers. This allows one to temper his character and enhance the best traits we possess while working on improving those we find less admirable to ourselves and others. Control thyself is the act of not just recognizing our shortcomings but actually working to improve them, which is the real journey we are on as Freemasons. Give thyself that others may benefit from the talents you have, and society as a whole will improve. In this way we live a full and productive life. Yes I agree with these attitudes towards religion and Freemasonry.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Perform an investigation of a candidate as if you were personally evaluating them to be executor of your estate. Because if they become a brother, they will be the executors of the legacy you leave as a Mason in your lodge. They will carry on or destroy all that you have worked for. I have seen successes and failures in Masons throughout my brief 20+ years. Successes in that two brothers I have mentored as new candidates have gone on to become Grand Masters of our Jurisdiction. Failures in that I have seen promising men become brothers only to disappoint because their character was not what was expected, and they have been expelled from Masonry. These experiences enhance in my mind the importance of proper vetting of a man who desires to be a Mason. What is his motivation? Why does he want to affiliate with our Fraternity. Assessing the answers he gives is a challenge that we must not

shirk or treat lightly because the outcome will define the nature of our Fraternity and be on display for the world to see who we really are.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Masonry will not make you a better man. Masonry will give you the tools to make yourself a better man if that is what you desire. But you must have the desire to want to improve.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Jeff Estes**
Years in Masonry: **26**
Lodge Name and Number: **Normal Lodge No. 673 (IL)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

I was impressed with the quality of the men I knew were Masons, including my father.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

I think we continue to attract men of high moral character, though our numbers have declined steadily over the past century.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes and no. I expected to be among men with whom I would choose to be friends, but I really had no idea what to expect with regard to the ritual.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am currently an active member in nearly 15 Masonic bodies, and hold 2 state-level offices (Illinois Lodge of Research, and Illinois Grand Council of Cryptic Masons).

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, and we are taking steps to do just that, mostly by being vocal about our passion for the fraternity and the personal benefits we gain from being active. We now have "Masonic Visibility Day" and are taking steps to increase our social media activity.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I do agree with M. W. Brother Smith. My Dad was a Mason, but he was from the generation that never talked about what that meant. Therefore, I joined because of a different group of men I knew. We need to increase visibility in our communities and continue to reach out to our Brethren. Too many men slip away over time, but a renewed effort to contact and invite them may help to bring them back.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes, proper decorum does have its place. The solemnity of our ritual should not be demeaned - our candidates deserve that. However, during regular business meetings you'll often hear laughter at my Lodge. The officers and members are a close group, and we thoroughly enjoy being together, so why not give ourselves permission to have fun (when appropriate)?

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes, I agree. Through study of our ritual a member learns to reflect on his own strengths and shortcomings. He can then use the information to make changes in his life. Giving of our time and resources to benefit our community and/or our Lodge is a worthy goal.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

We must continue to rely on each other to properly evaluate the qualities of each candidate, and encourage active participation from all members, especially new ones.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

It's a great fraternity of men who share a common bond of Faith, Hope, & Charity. I'm proud to be a member and I work very hard at it.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **David R. Finnell**
Years in Masonry: **44**
Lodge Name and Number: **Colonel Clay Lodge No. 159
(KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

My father, grandfather, several uncles and cousins were members. I had been around the lodge and its members all my life. I knew them and all the other members I met and knew to be outstanding people and wanted to be a part of the organization to which they belonged.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

It depends on what criteria you use. If you want to assess the numbers, we are in serious decline. Many of our "greatest generation" are dying and there are very few young men interested in membership, not just in Freemasonry but in many organizations. Churches and civic organizations also have the same demographic problems. However, among the members we have, there is a strong dedication to the principles of the Order, even among those who do not regularly attend. Our problem is not a lack of quality, but a lack of quantity of members.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Actually, everything I have experienced since I joined has been far greater than what I expected. I expected more of a social group of good men, but found there are philosophical and historical aspects I never knew existed. The social

circle of brothers I have met is far greater than I ever imagined. And the things I have learned about myself were totally unexpected.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Again, it depends on what criteria you use. In my blue lodge, 100%. In the appendant bodies (Scottish Rite, Eastern Star), not so much. I pay my dues and make donations because I know the money is put to good use and doesn't line someone else's pockets. But I don't attend.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I don't think any changes to the nature of Freemasonry are required. I am a conservative in that regard. We can make adjustments around the edges to streamline things and perhaps modernize the wording of the rituals in some places to make them more relevant to a modern audience (not everyone appreciates Shakespearean English). Loosening requirements for membership is a non-starter. However, proficiency examinations are a sore spot for many initiates. A different method for teaching Freemasonry to our new members might make them more receptive to coming back to learn more and do more.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I think he meant we need to be more like the men we claim to be as Freemasons. Then our actions will attract other like-minded men to the Fraternity, which would grow and improve our lodges. His analysis is partially correct. The problem lies with inertia in people. Everyone knows what Mother Theresa did, but that didn't bring a groundswell of new members into her church. The same is true of good people all over the world. However, there were those moved by her actions to perform their own good works. That in itself is a goal we can strive toward.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Absolutely! Proper decorum is a building block of civil society. However, this does not mean lodge halls must be like a funeral parlor. There is a time for dignity and decorum in our meetings, but there is also a time when we can be brothers and enjoy some social discourse in the lodge without the need for strict formality. The essence of the Old Charge language is to treat the leaders of the lodge with respect and if you disagree with them on some issue, bring it up in open lodge to discuss it respectfully. Like the old admonishment, "If you must disagree, do so agreeably."

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I agree. In our hearts, we must know we all have faults and recognize we are imperfect creations (know thyself). We also have the capacity to take actions to correct our faults and improve ourselves as much as humanly possible (control thyself). When we improve ourselves, we also realize there is suffering in this world that is far greater than our own and that we have the ability to relieve the suffering of others by our own actions (give thyself). These are the same principles contained in the phrase "to learn, to subdue my passions, and improve myself in Masonry."

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Personal knowledge of the petitioner is the first, most powerful tool. I have personally dissuaded several persons I knew from joining because I knew they did not have the moral qualifications. However, since we live in such large communities in these times, personal knowledge is not always possible. We can meet and socialize with a petitioner, but that may not always reveal their true character. The next tool is to use background checks to verify their history. The personal references on the petition can also be a source of information. Good people tend to have good associations.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I would ask them why they want to join and what they expect to get out of their membership. Assuming their motives and character are appropriate, I would explain what is expected of our members, both in time and effort, as well as lifestyle. If they are still interested, I would suggest they read some of the Grand Lodge publications and answer any questions they may have. If they are still interested, I would present them a petition and follow the process for petitioners.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Richard Giordano**
Years in Masonry: **24**
Lodge Name and Number: **Reliance Lodge No. 776 (NY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Familiarity due to personal connections - Dad was a Mason, I was a DeMolay - and my desire to continue the path I began in DeMolay.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Issues in many regards, but hope in the face of newer members bringing new ideas, new perspectives, and enthusiasm.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

What I expected Freemasonry to be back when I was raised is exactly what I expected it to be. It has since improved.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Fairly comprehensive - active in more than one lodge in different ways. My time has been invested in helping to make it better and more productive.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

If I had to pick a "step one," I would suggest each Lodge takes a detailed look at its "corporate culture," and figure out its own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Then, do something about it.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

He may have been referring to the problem of Masons getting too deep in the hole so to speak to figure out it's trapped. Perhaps Masons "mason" too much and forget the purpose of our work - to make good men better. We get wrapped up in meeting notices, degree assignments, fancy aprons and jewels, protocol for DDGM visits, and criticizing any ritual work that isn't 100% accurate.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Absolutely it does. Contemporary Freemasonry must evolve to meet the needs and interests of today's Mason, but some aspects of the lodge must remain unchanged. Levity may have a place when Masons gather outside of the walls of the temple, but that should end when the work begins and the door is Tiled. For all that we do as Masons, we must enjoy ourselves but at the right time and in the right place.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I can agree with this statement. It's the core of who we are. Make ourselves better, make our community better, which in turn makes us better still.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Know those who knock at our symbolic door. As one would not invite a stranger into their home, we should be equally cautious in our Lodges. No prospect should be handed a petition when they first visit the lodge, nor on their second, third, or sixth visit. Let them prove they are more than just "curious" about Masonry. Let the lodge get to know them, and vice versa.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Tell me about yourself...

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Rodrigo Guzman**
Years in Masonry: **43**
Lodge Name and Number: **Liberty Lodge No. 31 (MO)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Initially, it was the mystery of a society of men who worked together to improve themselves and help each other out. Subsequently, my brother and father became Masons.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Mainstream Freemasonry, in the USA, is in a state of confusion, without a particular course of action or goal. At times it seems like a ship adrift in the ocean, just changing course, based on the different currents, without a specific purpose or final destination.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

My Masonic career began in Ecuador in 1980. I moved to the US and had to start all over again, since my Grand Lodge was not recognized at the time by the Grand Lodge of Missouri. This allowed me to compare the way the ceremonies were performed in both jurisdictions, as well as the approach to Masonry from each organization. There was a big difference in the development of the new members between both lodges. In the USA, we concentrated on rote memorization of the proficiency, without further understanding of the ritual, it's symbolism and allegory.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I did not attend Lodge for many years, because there was nothing for me in those business meetings. No education, no development of the members. I returned to the lodge in 2019, with the purpose of contributing to make the lodge experience better and something of value. I have been able to help change the approach to Masonry in my lodge and contribute to the development of new members, by mentoring them.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Definitely! In my opinion, the key is to provide to the new members of the fraternity what they are searching for. We need to change the way the meetings are run. We need to concentrate on educating ourselves and our brethren in what Masonry is and practice it in and out of the lodge. We have to make our organization something that has some value. We have to make the time they invest in our meetings worth it. If there is something of value in those meetings, they will be eager to come back for more knowledge and, by default, fellowship.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I agree wholeheartedly! If we do what we are supposed to do as Masons, if we teach, in our lodges, what Masonry is about, then we won't have to worry about having to come up with other types of programs (Hawaiian shirt night), in order to entice our members to attend our meetings. If we have an educational discussion every time we get together, we will all be looking forward to our next meeting.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

I believe it is of the utmost importance. Bringing decorum and reverence within the lodge is imperative to help our members have the right frame of mind, in order to impart and receive the education necessary for us to improve within ourselves, within our lodge and within our community.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

In order to "make good men better," we have first and foremost to look inside ourselves and understand whom we are, what we are trying to accomplish and develop ourselves into a better being. We cannot make other people better if we are not doing it within ourselves. We have to become better individuals, before we can become a better fraternity and help develop a better society.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Honesty is paramount. Every new candidate needs to be made aware of what it is we are looking for in a new member. He must show motivation and be teachable. The candidate should not receive a petition for membership until after most, if not all, of the members have met him and become familiar with him. He must be made aware of the time commitment that is expected of him for his development as a Mason. The lodge must be sure that this new candidate is exactly what the lodge needs to help forge the fraternity into the future.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

We are an Initiatic, Philosophical Society that accepts into its ranks men who are searching for self-improvement. We are an ancient fraternity that teaches valuable lessons based on allegory and symbology. In order to improve ourselves, we must look into those allegorical lessons and decipher the symbols presented to us. It requires work, time and self-discipline. The reward for all of this is a path to becoming a better man, a better husband, a better father and a better member of society.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **James Hamilton**
Years in Masonry: **53**
Lodge Name and Number: **Fairfax Lodge No. 43 (VA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Brotherhood, my grandfather.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Good, but not as strong as it was. Chapters and Commandery are suffering somewhat. Shrine is strong.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes. Brothers helping Brothers. Lodges reaching out to the community.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am KYCH and Shriner. Current Secretary of my [Royal Arch] Chapter.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Probably. There is a lack of follow-up on training/learning after one becomes a Master Mason. Young/new brothers need an "older" Mason to bring them along the Masonic path.

One thing that should be reversed is the direct path to Shrine from the blue lodge.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Agree. One should let changes in society or current social structure be considered in Freemasonry if appropriate and not stick steadfast to the old ways.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes, without proper decorum and respect a lodge meeting would turn to chaos.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes. Seems to sound like what being a Mason is all about.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Current procedures seem to be most effective.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

**Why do you want to be a Mason? What do you believe Masonry is about?
Does your family agree with your desires?**

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Thomas W. Harper**
Years in Masonry: **6**
Lodge Name and Number: **Abraham Lodge No. 8 (KY);
Swigert Middletown Lodge
No. 218 (KY); William O.
Ware Lodge of Research**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

A desire for the mysteries and to be part of something larger than myself.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

The mysteries have been lost in a sad state of simple fraternalism. Although fellowship is an important part of Freemasonry, it has become the primary focus. This makes us no different than the Elks or Moose in its present state.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

No. I have since sought out and participated in converting Abraham 8 into a traditional observance lodge.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am a very active Mason, involved in 2 blue lodges, multiple appendant bodies, and some esoteric societies.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes. My plan would involve the consolidation of lodges and to focus on bringing dignity and proficiency to our ritual with a particular focus on restoring the search for the mysteries and improving our minds and spirits with education and ritual.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

As mentioned before, the fraternity has deviated from the original intent of Freemasonry into just another fraternal organization. The mysteries are what distinguishes Freemasonry.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

It does. Modern lodges have descended into casual social gatherings with casual dress and with much levity during what should be solemn gatherings. Although there is a time and place for such casual behavior (such as the Shrine or community gatherings), the lodge should be a place of reverence and decorum.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I agree, but this requires work. I feel that our fraternity has fallen into the status quo of apathy. There is, however, a small number of Masons who are working diligently to restore Freemasonry. I believe that this is the future, not casual fraternalism, which can be accessed elsewhere.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Actually investigating candidates, including a home visit, instead of blindly signing petitions.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I don't "say." I listen. I look for genuine seekers. Those are the ones who are the future of the Fraternity.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Bennett Hart**
Years in Masonry: **54**
Lodge Name and Number: **Urbana Lodge No. 157 (IL);
Manasseh Lodge No. 182
(VA); Civil War Lodge of
Research 1861-1865 (VA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Reputation of members doing good in the community, past and present.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Young people are not drawn to the same ideals and goals.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?

Please explain your answer.

Yes - The right hand of fellowship has always been extended to myself and others.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Above average.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Not sure revitalization is the right word. The public / young men are not as aware of what Masonry is about and what is going on in the communities. Local newspapers have all but died; the examples are not getting out.

However, I believe the standards should remain. One day conferrals and easy way through are not answers. There are the Rotary and Lions Clubs, etc. for those.

There should not be a free ride.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Disagree. As above.

(The public / young men are not as aware of what Masonry is about and what is going on in the communities. Local newspapers have all but died; the examples are not getting out.

However, I believe the standards should remain. One day conferrals and easy way through are not answers. There are the Rotary and Lions Clubs etc. for those.

There should not be a free ride.)

Advertising and proselytizing are not answers.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes..... as above..... Freemasonry is not for everyone....

There will always be some who can help make "good men better."

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Not exactly --- it is more: "Man's realization of himself; Man's relation to others and Man's relation to his God." Also, the Golden Rule.....

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

- 1. Signers who know the individual over a year (+), not just sign at dinner.**
- 2. A good investigating committee.**

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

- 1. Find out "why" they want to become Masons.**
- 2. Explain about "Making a Good Man – Better."**
- 3. Explain we are not a religion, but have lessons taught by allegory.**
- 4. Continuing the search for truth / light is important.**

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name:	George Haynes
Years in Masonry:	31
Lodge Name and Number:	Columbia Lodge No. 91 (PA)

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

In 1992, I was a graduate student newly transplanted to Philadelphia from Springfield, IL. I was looking for a path of self-improvement and more connection to the city than my research and the bar scene. My family had a strong connection to Freemasonry in Illinois.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

I think that I am the wrong person to ask this question. I have been a Freemason for over 30 years and have had opportunities in the Fraternity that most other Freemasons do not experience (details if requested). Also, I have had the pleasure of Entering my son. So, from my personal point of view the current state of Freemasonry is 10 out of 10. However, from the point of view of a "custodian" of the Fraternity I would say 6 out of 10. I am hopeful for the future of the Fraternity. There are some changes/trends of which I approve; but more changes/trends that I see as future problems that will need to be addressed. "Membership" is not our problem. Our problem is how we choose and treat our members.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

Freemasonry has far exceeded my initial expectations. Again, I have been very fortunate to have the opportunities that I have had in Freemasonry.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I would say that I am extremely highly invested and engaged in Freemasonry: 11+ out of 10.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Definitely! In my opinion, the key is to provide to the new members of the fraternity what they are searching for. We need to change the way the meetings are run. We need to concentrate on educating ourselves and our brethren in what Masonry is and practice it in and out of the lodge. We have to make our organization something that has some value. We have to make the time they invest in our meetings worth it. If there is something of value in those meetings, they will be eager to come back for more knowledge and, by default, fellowship.

I have been fortunate to be involved in bringing several of the "Smaller English Societies" of Freemasonry to the United States: The Commemorative Order of St Thomas of Acon; The Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, etc., aka "The Operatives;" The Masonic Order of Athelstan; The Masonic Order of Pilgrim Preceptors; and, The August Order of Light. I have also had the pleasure of being involved in the founding of two Masonic Lodges, a Mark Lodge, a Council of Knight Masons, and several Councils of the Allied Masonic Degrees.

In all of these cases the common thread is the building of something new, of creation, of organization from nothing. There was no lack of interest among Masons to become members of these new things. There was little resistance to spending the money, travel, and study time required to bring a new organization into being and learn the right way to operate. There was Brotherly cooperation and more recommendation of fellows than self-promotion.

So, there is your revitalization. Start a new Lodge (or, other body) every few years. The energy created will spill over and revitalize existing Lodges. Do not worry that a new Lodge will diminish an old Lodge, that is just the cycle of time.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I have studied Dwight Smith's papers on Freemasonry and have distributed them freely to anyone who would read them. I think that overall I agree with him, but that implementation and methods need to be chosen judiciously.

To answer this question in full would require a long paper that I am not going to write here. In summary, in my opinion ... Each member defines Freemasonry differently for himself and his definition may evolve as he involves himself in the Craft. Helping each member to find his place, his comfort zone, in Freemasonry will strengthen his interest and engagement with Freemasonry. Demanding that a member do this or that, pass some catechism, or join the right appendant body will ultimately discourage the member and drive him away. Better to help him find what he needs from the Fraternity, and then what the Fraternity needs from him.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Proper decorum and language vary from place to place and change from time to time. What is acceptable or proper speech in one country may be offensive in another, or from State to State. The decorum of the Lodge is different in PA, NJ, IL, NY, etc., and still more different in the UK.

I am reminded of the story of the young, newly made Mason who comes to Lodge dressed less well than expected, with longer hair than expected, and sits on the floor because no group on the benches was welcoming. An old Past Master approaches him and everyone expects a stern confrontation, but the old Past Master takes a seat on the floor next to him, shakes his hand and welcomes him. I am actually moved to tears as I write this because I have been that young man, I have been the disapproving and unwelcoming member on the sidelines, and I have been the old Past Master.

The urge for proper decorum is well intentioned but misplaced. If everyone attending the meeting feels included and engaged, then the kibitzing will stop and respectful participation will occur.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

No response.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

No response.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name:	Warren J. Heaton
Years in Masonry:	4
Lodge Name and Number:	Lexington Lodge No. 1 (KY)

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Recognizing my inner man and having a desire to associate with like-minded men.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

It has declined in many areas which don't include men of the first two degrees in any further education, or inclusion in at least part of normal proceedings. Everyone must feel like someone.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

In 2009, when I became a Fellow Craft, I expected to be more involved than just cleaning up after meals. In recent years that has been rectified in Lodge No. 1

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Investment of funds is not as critical as investment of commitment.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Continue mouth to ear learning obligations plus adding extended education to understand the real mystery of Masonry.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I disagree only from the point of understanding "to try" is weak. It weakens the resolve to actually accomplish. Try vs. do.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

When we walk through the doors we are all on the same level. Negativity prevails in society. One must recognize his brothers with respect and honor. A positive mind set is a choice.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes, I agree. Masonic growth and change is Religion. Not "A" religion.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Certainly to me it is a reminder of guarding our hearts and minds in every part of life's journey.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Count the cost of commitment. Don't become weary or selfish in one's participation. If our goals, as we grow, remain only inward, one is missing the journey of becoming a Free and Accepted Mason. It is a lifelong commitment and continuous journey of learning. Of coming to true light.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Brendan Hickey**
Years in Masonry: **13**
Lodge Name and Number: **Thomson Lodge No. 340
(PA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

There were a few things. I was looking for connections with similar men, and I was interested in the history and especially the possibility of learning new things.

Ah, but why have I stayed? Because I have found those connections and learned amazing new things, and more than that, found my place as a Masonic researcher and author and speaker. I have found challenges greater than I imagined and had to grow. Masonry is now part of who I am, and so I continue.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

We're making adjustments. The pandemic and other social factors have reduced our numbers, but I see a growing emphasis on quality over quantity. When I was Worshipful Master, I said several times that I could do almost anything with 10 men who wanted to be Masons and almost nothing with 100 who were lukewarm about it. I don't find big membership numbers to be compelling. Freemasonry's strength is in its good men, rather than many men.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

It's better. Please see above.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Substantial. I don't attend as many meetings as I would like, funny to say, but I am finding my place.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I think that we're already in the process. We need to keep pushing for quality men, knowing that it will mean a lower quantity. I can recall every member on whose committee I served and put the effort into initiation and never saw again, and what a waste of time that was. We need to expand our concept of the lodge to include our Masonic online spaces, the expectations of civility to extend beyond the physical building, and I don't see that in process yet.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Stanley Hauerwas is a Christian theologian, and his mantra is that the mission of the church is to be the church. To me, the same applies to Freemasonry. Our mission is to be Freemasonry, and when we let outside forces push us off our foundation, we lose our balance, become reactive, let others define us. That's no good. It sounds like what Brother Smith was saying. Take all of our promises and obligations and charges and say that this is our center, this is who we are, be this, period. That doesn't mean that we can't stretch at times, but we need to be wary of stepping out and we need to know when and why we might do that.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

We've lost proper decorum. In meetings, there's far too much side chatter. Online, there's almost no decorum. Are we really what we claim to be, good men who are getting better, or is that just a bumper sticker? Please see above. Again, if we're not who we claim to be then there's no point in this.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Here's a quote from Brother Theodore Roosevelt. You can decide. "Courage, hard work, self-mastery, and intelligent effort are all essential to a successful life." Yes, I agree with the reverend. The compass teaches us to control ourselves.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Time. Steady Progress, but time. Freemasonry is hard work and the men who are just here because of National Treasure or the money pit or whatever will fall away with time.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I would listen first. I want to hear their reasons and see if they make sense to me, and if so then encourage them to explore, but I would also caution them that it is hard work, and it takes time.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name:

James Hogg, Jr.

Years in Masonry:

Lodge Name and Number:

**Clifton Forge Lodge No. 166
(VA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Curiosity.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

**I'm a Past Master of #166 currently the High Priest in the Royal Arch and
Commander in Knights Templar.**

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes. The fellowship and friendship is more than I expected.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I'm all in.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize
Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

**Yes. More effort needs to be made to keep our Brethren interested in the
Fraternity.**

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Keep the Brethren interested.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes, it's a matter of respect to all Brothers, no matter their position in the Lodge.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes. That is either inside or outside the Lodge.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Knowing who is being allowed to enter it. I know that there is a big rush to achieve more members, but you do need to be careful about who enters.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Our goal is to make good men better.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name:	Hilton Kaufman
Years in Masonry:	45
Lodge Name and Number:	Chicago Lodge No. 437 (IL)

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Fellowship within a worldwide organization.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

A fast-dwindling organization with factions fighting one another and unable to financially maintain the abundance of physical facilities.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Not exactly. While I knew ritual was involved, I did not expect the emphasis on precision and the amount of memorization. I also did not expect the amount of internal politics and self-importance of some members.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I was a lodge officer for all but a few months since I became a member. I have been Master of a Lodge, president of two ritual instruction clubs, president of a High Twelve club, editor of the Illinois Lodge of Research publication, and a member of several related organizations.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I am more a skilled “get the work done” person than a planner or leader. Probably we must get more younger men involved and let them do things their way. I do not know if this means semi-formal attire with a sense of the esoteric or going motorcycle riders meeting in their leathers.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote “...the solution to Freemasonry’s problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?” What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Masonry has become a complex and formal institution rather than close associations of friends and brothers. I was secretary of a Lodge of over 300 members who do not know one another.

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

This depends on the lodge and the Master. My own lodge is usually quiet during degree ceremonies, but might be less so during business meetings.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

This definition of religion sounds strange to me. That could be because I am Jewish and not a Christian. It does sound reasonable to me regarding Freemasonry where we have things to help one better understand and improve oneself. We also encourage our members to be active in their communities and to be charitable.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

In my opinion, we should require that sponsors actually know their candidates, that investigating committees closely make sure of the qualifications, and that the use of the black ball should not be questioned. I am aware that this goes against the policy of some grand lodges to maintain membership numbers.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

There is a lot expected of you. It can be time-consuming and expensive. It is not just some social club.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Joe Kindoll**
Years in Masonry: **5**
Lodge Name and Number: **Doric Lodge No. 732 (TN)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

My father is a Mason, and I grew up around it. I was also a member of DeMolay, and learned a lot from the degrees and teachings in those degrees. I am searching to try and better myself and Masonry is a great way to take that journey.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

I think Freemasonry has been in a recent increase in quality of membership. There have been more members who are interested in exploring the esoteric side of the order and understand the teachings that we provide.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

Yes and no, much like any large group of people there are plenty of instances where tough situations are brought forth and sometimes cooler minds do not prevail. I will say I have met some of my closest friends within the Craft who are able to tackle issues with calm and fair judgement. There are situations where I am not as fond of temperament and decisions that those around me make, but even in those moments I realize that we can still have an effective conversation.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I still participate with my lodge when I can, and I still participate in the Scottish Rite. Due to my current work schedule I am unable to attend as frequently as I would like to attend.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I believe it is in need of revitalization, we have made the mistake of not properly guarding the West Gate and were more concerned of the quantity of members joining our ranks and less concerned with the quality of members. We also must continue to search for understanding in our degrees and teachings and not rely on a regurgitation of the ritual. I strongly believe that we have steered away from understanding the ritual that we use in every meeting, and that it is vital to our journey to better ourselves by understanding our ritual.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I believe he meant that by practicing and understanding Freemasonry's teachings we will be able to fix the issues present and inflicting the fraternity. I whole-heartedly agree that too many people are in some case only a Mason in name and will not attempt to continue their Masonic education which is vital to Freemasonry and its continuation and growth in the future.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Decorum is very important, the ability for having effective conversations that does not result in shouting matches, but allows individuals to communicate thoroughly and effectively. And we are in fact brothers and should teach each other as such. Even if two brothers have an argument or fight, they should still be able to treat each other respectfully.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes, the essence of Masonry is about learning how to better yourself through better understanding of our place in the world, controlling those aspects of yourself which would lead you down the wrong path, and by helping those around you.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Thorough examination of candidates petitioning the lodge, also to ensure that they will be a good fit in your lodge by having them come to meetings for a time prior to actually petitioning. Also by doing careful study with the new petitioners and brothers of the ritual and lectures so that they more thoroughly understand what it is they are reciting.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Masonry is about taking good men and making them better. We seek our members to put in the work on looking inwards to themselves and search for that aspect of goodness inside them in order to bring that forth and make themselves an upright man for themselves, their family and their community. Masonry teaches us that we are all on the same journey of life and that even though at times it might be difficult, there are always fellow brothers who can assist until we are able to assist others as well.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name:	Michael Kurcab
Years in Masonry:	15
Lodge Name and Number:	Sandy Valley Lodge No. 57 (NV)

Any opinions or views expressed in my survey answers are mine only and in no way represent the views or opinions of any Grand Lodge Jurisdiction or Appendant or Concordant body of Freemasonry.

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

When I stumbled upon Freemasonry in my late 20's I was completely ignorant about it. I had never heard of the Freemasons in my youth. We had no Freemasons in our family, and I was completely in the dark about the organization. My first experience with the Masons was in Sandy Valley, Nevada. I was volunteering audio engineering services for our local town board when a gentleman asked me if I could provide a sound system for his Lodge's annual Installation of Officers and Christmas Party. Since the Lodge seemed to be a community-focused organization, I said I would happily donate the services to them. He thanked me and then proceeded to tell me that I would not be allowed into the meeting until the public portion of the event. I understood and showed up early to set the system up. Upon entering the Lodge room (which was a private airplane hangar), I was immediately struck by the furniture, the layout, and the various symbolism around the room. I was greeted by members of the community whom I had known for some time and whom I had viewed as true leaders in our small town. I then asked about Freemasonry and was given the usual response of "We take good men and make them better." As a young man who had just gotten engaged to be married, I knew that I wanted to succeed as a husband and, eventually, as a

father. Becoming a “better” man resonated with me, and I asked for a petition that day.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Anecdotally speaking, I would say that the current state of Freemasonry is at a peculiar crossroads. A new generation of Freemasons who are enthusiastic about what they are learning and who are using technology to share that passion shows that the positive influence of Freemasonry is still as powerful and relevant today as it was over 300 years ago. Podcasts, websites, social media accounts, and even retailers are modern outlets being used by Freemasons to share ideas and show their support of the Craft. Freemasonry has survived wars, famine, persecution, and every destructive measure humanity could throw at it. Membership numbers ebb and flow but the Fraternity continues to inspire generation after generation of men to be better.

At the same time there are well-established jurisdictions and well-intentioned Masons that are looking to make innovations that may cause confusion and severe disharmony in the Craft. Some of these ideas may be powerful enough to destroy Freemasonry and its beneficent influence once and for all. These are the ideas of post-modernism and its offspring ideas that have multiplied over the past couple of generations. Post-modern ideas reject the very principles that make Freemasonry what it is. Freemasonry thrived during the era of the Enlightenment and into the Atomic Age. Membership quickly deteriorated with the onset of post-modern belief structures that questioned the ideas of stable identity and moral certainty and that suggested the idea that truth is fluid and subjective. These ideas that go against the time-honored truths of our Fraternity are not the solid foundation on which to build a man's character. No, they are the shifting sands of entitlement, envy, and moral degradation that cause a man's character to collapse when challenged by temptation, greed, power, and corruption. What does it mean to be an upright man when “upright” cannot be defined except by whatever one wishes it to mean.

In recent times these same ideas are being implemented in corporate boardrooms, product marketing campaigns, and even in the education system. For Freemasonry to continue to be a system whereby men truly become better, then it must resist the corrosive and destructive nature that the ideas of post-modernism and its offspring bring. It must not worry about offending those that would shout about Freemasonry not being inclusive. No, Freemasonry is not inclusive. It is, by the very definition of a Fraternity and by the

qualifications that are required to be made a Mason, exclusive. It must remain this way to survive and to provide hope for future generations.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

Yes and no. When I first petitioned my Lodge, I had no expectations of the "Masonic Experience." I started to research Freemasonry and came across the various media exposés and "informational" websites. It didn't take long for me to understand that a Masonic Initiation was meant to be something special and secret. For that reason, wanting to make sure I "did it right," I ceased all further research until I became a Freemason. The ritual experience was mixed. We are a rural lodge and, except for special events or conferring of a Master Mason degree, we dress very casually in Jeans and Lodge shirts. We use electric light instead of candles. These elements were different from the tuxedos and candles that I saw as "normal" in the initial research I had performed. So, in the beginning, there was an initial disappointment in the process of going through the degrees, specifically the lack of formality in terms of solemnity and décor. The performance of the ritual was still very good and the men who delivered the lectures were not only word perfect but, interesting and animated as they did so.

The relaxed and modern surroundings of my Lodge experience ultimately did not lessen the impact of the teachings. While I do believe that the impact may have been greater had the décor been more formal, the lessons of the Craft, and how they can improve a man's life and positively impact those in it, greatly exceeded my expectations. I was told early on that "you only get out of Freemasonry what you put into it." I would say that the return is magnitudes greater than what I have put into it.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am fully invested in Freemasonry. Outside of the financial commitment to be part of Blue Lodge and other appendant, concordant, and allied organizations, my spare time from my duties to my family and my career is spent in furthering my Masonic knowledge and helping the various organizations to which I belong succeed.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I do not believe Freemasonry needs revitalization. Freemasonry is as vital and relevant as ever. Membership declines, I believe, are a symptom of a larger influence in society that minimizes the importance of strong leadership, individual responsibility, and morality while glamorizing victimhood, irreverence, and the mentality of “You Only Live Once” (YOLO). This is the cyclical nature of humanity. If a plan is needed, I feel that It is important that Freemasonry stand its ground to provide a solid foundation and shelter during the temporary tempest of temptation and storm of selfish indulgences for any man who wishes to seek to improve himself to stand resolute against the storm and begin building his legacy for his children and for the future of humanity. No, there is no need to revitalize Freemasonry. There is a need to revitalize men. I believe Freemasonry exists to serve that purpose.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote “...the solution to Freemasonry’s problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?” What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I suppose Most Worshipful Smith was referring to the principles on which the Fraternity is founded. There is no ambiguity about the teachings of the Craft. We are given the tools to improve ourselves. We use the tools to train Masons to improve themselves. When the lessons of Freemasonry (or any subject in which we are interested) are first learned, we have a desire to share that knowledge with others. Often, we share it even when it is unwanted. We become young experts and let our passion and zeal overwhelm those who may have no interest. We begin to attempt to improve others instead of working on our own unchiseled stone. I was guilty of this when I began my career, when I became a parent, and when I became Mason. Perhaps what Most Worshipful Smith meant was instead of focusing outward on society and how Freemasonry can “improve” the world, let’s try getting back to simply improving ourselves and helping our Brethren who are seeking more Light to improve themselves. The rest will follow.

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Proper decorum is absolutely essential in contemporary Freemasonry. Contemporary social discourse has increasingly become less civil. As people are able to hide behind virtual avatars many have become quite rude and even vulgar in their social media activities. Freemasonry provides a place where conversation and discussion can take place without fear of embarrassment or bullying. There are also repercussions for those who are unable to control a passionate tongue in a physical setting. The Charge given to an Entered Apprentice today still admonishes the new Mason of improper behavior and decorum. If Freemasonry can help build strong decorum and discourse skills, then the Freemasons of the world will be able to be more effective in leading by example in society.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself.” He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton’s statement? Why or Why Not?

I would tend to agree with Rev. Newton. We learn as Entered Apprentices that above all we are to practice Charity and Benevolence. This is the idea of “Give Thyself.” We also learn the importance of controlling ourselves when it comes to our tempers and to our recreational pursuits. “Control Thyself” speaks to these actions. These lessons are introduced early on to explain what is expected of a Freemason. However, it is not until a man goes through all three Degrees and reflects deeply upon what he experienced and learned that he may truly begin to understand the idea of “Know Thyself.” To “Know Thyself” makes the other ideas easier to implement. To Know

Thyself is to understand one's capabilities and limitations. When these are known, it is easier to control oneself during times of reaching one's limits. It also allows for controlled discipline to expand capabilities and grow. Giving of oneself is easier when one knows his values, his principles, his achievements, and his failures. Knowing oneself leads to empathy and a desire to help others succeed which is necessary to "Give Thyself."

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Freemasonry is an exclusive Fraternity that teaches the value of tolerance. Toleration, however, must not be confused with adaptation of, or submission to, ideas that are not aligned with those of the Fraternity, and we must be cautious in being overzealous in the application of tolerance when membership is considered. After all, it is the future members that will determine the future of the Craft. Deciding to become a Freemason requires one to be of a sound mind and firm in one's determination to become a better man. When sponsoring a candidate, it is up to each Freemason signing a candidate's petition to truly consider that man's motives, mental health, and commitment.

Are a man's motives for joining the Fraternity reasons that would make a good foundation on which to build? The Mason recommending a man for Freemasonry should have a good idea of why he is recommending him. If the Mason making the recommendation cannot sincerely answer this question or, if he has any hesitation or doubts about the motive to join, perhaps more time should be spent understanding this. Actively questioning a man's motives is necessary in the petitioning process.

Good mental health is imperative for admission into the Fraternity. A man not of sound mind cannot, with any amount of honesty, grasp the tenets and principles needed to be a Freemason. The labors of a Freemason are performed with the mind, heart, and body. It is the mind that controls the heart and the body. This is not to say that the investigating committees need to be licensed psychologists or therapists. Simply spending time with a man in social and private settings can give indications of his mental well-being. Additionally, substance abuse greatly impacts mental capacity and is a necessary part of evaluating a potential member's admission into our Lodge.

Setting the expectations with the prospective member about the commitment of time and effort needed to go through the degrees and to apply those lessons to his life must be clearly communicated. When the expectation of commitment is communicated only then can an honest conversation with the applicant about his willingness to participate be had. This is not to scare the applicant off but simply to be clear about the process.

We must be sure that we are adhering to our principles and our Landmarks when considering a petitioner. Investigating potential Masons is not the same as conducting a job interview. Hiring policies in the corporate world do not necessarily translate well to the petitioner process in Freemasonry. Some practices, such as hiring slowly, add much value to the process and help ensure the candidates are right for the Fraternity and vice versa. Other policies that try to turn a blind eye to mental health, a libertine lifestyle, and an entitlement mentality must be rejected. Freemasonry teaches us to be honest in our actions and that it is what is on the inside that makes a man a good candidate for the Craft. This means we must not be afraid to turn those away that would cause harm or disharmony to the Craft. It may also mean turning away those who are not yet ready but providing guidance on what they can do to properly prepare themselves for future consideration. Many Masons today would have been rejected at some point due to not yet being ready to be received into the mysteries of Freemasonry (myself included). Being exclusive also means being aspirational – if we lead by example.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I used to say the standard responses of, “It takes good men and makes them better” or, “you will only get out of it what you put in.” As I have thought about my own experience more and have heard Brothers talk about their experiences, I now try to stay away from the clichés. I now share my story of wanting to improve for the sake of my wife and my children. I share the experience of eye-opening lessons that made me stronger in my faith. I share the value Freemasonry has provided for me and how I would not trade it for any other fraternal organization or social activity. I honestly share information about the labor that must be exerted to gain such rewards. I hope that my sharing will encourage men who are seeking similar things in life to join and that my story will deter those who would bend our Fraternity to the social pressures that ebb and flow with each generation.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Ted Langdon**
Years in Masonry: **10**
Lodge Name and Number: **Stonecutter Lodge No. 802
(OH)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

I was interested in the Craft for years due to connections it had to the Order of the Arrow in the BSA. I didn't act until I spoke with a person that I greatly respected at a training class for work. When I found he was a Mason in Pennsylvania, I decided to contact my local lodge.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

I believe Freemasonry is in a state of change. It remains [to be] seen if that is a good or bad thing, but I believe the era of large lodges is coming to an end. Men want community, and a lodge of hundreds makes that hard to do. With lodges shrinking, I also see a lot of buildings getting sold off, and a renewed focus on a central Masonic center where lodges meet every day of the week.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

No, but I had limited expectations. I didn't realize some of the fun that could be had with like-minded people. I did expect ritual to be a key point, and switched lodges to one that values ritual more than my mother lodge.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am a Past Master and current Secretary. I was the president of the district Past Masters' group, but have not held district office. My lodge meets 2-3 times per month, and I try to attend all meetings, my attendance is at 90% for the year.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Not revitalization. That implies that we need to go back to an era that doesn't exist anymore. We need a change, and I think it is happening. It doesn't have to be a huge change, or even a publicly visible one, but we need to focus on the members we have first, then on men we think would do well within the fraternity.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I totally agree. We have the tools at our disposal with ritual and traditions in our lodges. We can also look to other lodges to see what they do that works. We don't need to add things, but we need to work with what we have. Good ritual gets brothers to degrees to help or observe. Annual events get brothers back to lodge at least once a year, which may kindle friendships that lead to more attendance.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes, 100%. We can joke and play outside the lodge room all we want. We need to set that aside and act formally in lodge. There is a strong sense of honoring history and those who work to make the craft work when decorum is followed. Solemnity even in stated meetings makes brothers see the importance of each thing done.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I think this is a good idea, but I don't know if that is the full substance of religion. I think the statement is a great way to handle our lives, and ties to Freemasonry very well. There's a bit more external I see in religion. We have a view of a higher power that in most cases takes us outside ourselves, so that would add a 4th statement in my mind. Maybe something like "honor those above."

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

I think the most effective is also the simplest. "No is a complete sentence." If we have any concerns about a potential member, they need to be brought to light. There needs to be a good investigation, and possible discussion on every member, and the idea that we "need members" has to be thrown out. A brother can't be seen as money in a balance sheet, and a lodge that does that is bound to have a scandal at some point.

We have a black cube for a reason, but if we do our best to discuss issues before the ballot, it shouldn't need to be used. We can gently tell a man he is not a good fit. This also means that each lodge has their own west gate. So a man may petition lodge 1, and they say that they are the wrong fit for him. They can refer him to lodge 2 if it's just a matter of personality, cost, etc. If it is a felony or other undesirable trait, then lodge 1 should tell them no, but also warn the other lodges of a possible approach to their west gate

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I tell them to think about it once they hear “official” explanations from actual brothers, and to avoid the internet, etc. I ask them why they want to join, and from there either explain why it is a good fit, or why it isn’t a good fit.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name:	Jeffery Lanzet
Years in Masonry:	12
Lodge Name and Number:	Buechel Lodge No. 896 (KY)

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

I was interested in exploring a path for greater knowledge, as well as a way to better improve myself while helping others.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

It appears to be an inflection point in Freemasonry. I am not a historical scholar, but from my limited perspective it seems we are in the middle of a shift in the model of Masonry. I would generalize it (knowing generalization is never a good idea!) as a change from a primarily fraternal basis to a new paradigm. As cultural norms change and family and career trends shift, the primary motivating principle appears to be moving away from the need for fraternal connection to a deeper need for purpose in uncertain times. This does not obviate the need for Freemasonry to continue to be fraternal in nature and remain as one of the key elements of Masonic life. However, the emphasis seems to be moving towards finding meaning in our lives. Masonic education seems to be filling a need for Masons seeking understanding and purpose.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

I doubt anyone can say the experience of Freemasonry completely aligns with their individual expectations. As an organization that shields itself from external observation, expectations can be misinformed. In my experience the reality of Freemasonry aligned with certain expectations and did not align with

most expectations. I was encouraged to find my expectations of Masonry as a home for serious contemplation were realized. I value the ideals of equality and avoidance of discussion of politics and religion, however, I have found these to be mixed in practice. I was also not prepared for the depth of ritual and was somewhat disappointed to not find a greater connection for external charity (charity outside of charity for fellow Masons).

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I consider myself strongly invested in Freemasonry. As Past Master and current Senior Warden of my lodge I have made a significant commitment to Freemasonry.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, I believe Freemasonry is in need of a revitalization. A plan to do so requires serious consideration and collaboration by Masons across the spectrum of stakeholders. We need input from all degrees, all stations, and from those invested and those who feel disenfranchised. I do not believe any one brother can plot the course forward, and that certainly includes me. I would say that the path into the future will not be the same as the path to this point. Freemasonry needs to evolve to be more relevant to the needs of these times. My suggestions would involve significant change from past practices. Some thoughts include greater involvement of our brothers who are in lesser degrees, programs designed to provide assistance for those seeking knowledge, promotion of greater public perception of the work of Masons, a stronger embrace of those of different race and religions, and greater contributions to society as a whole.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

It is challenging for me to put this into historical context as I do not have sufficient knowledge of the state of Freemasonry in the 40's. Per my comments above, I do not believe "more of the same" is the right path forward. If PGM Smith meant that we should be looking at the core tenets of Freemasonry to

guide us forward - then I see value in that approach. However, I doubt that all Masons agree on those core tenets. Freemasonry has been late in putting into practice some of the ideals espoused in our ritual. For example the relatively recent recognition of Prince Hall Masonry is shocking.

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

I agree that proper decorum has a place in Freemasonry. I believe that harmony is a chief strength and support of all well-governed institutions. I am not sure what is meant by Private Committees. I think it is okay to hold discussions among brothers outside of lodge.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself.” He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton’s statement? Why or Why Not?

As with any summary of a complex subject, interpretation is critical. I can see how these words apply to Freemasonry; however, I could also imagine other interpretations. In general, the three parts make sense in the context of Freemasonry. Know Thyself implies learning about ourselves in the context of the influences of the external world. This includes the concepts of seeking knowledge and attainment of wisdom. Control Thyself aligns with restraining improper desires and passions. Give Thyself might refer to being selfless, charity, and commitment. We must be careful that these few words can be interpreted in many ways, not all of which are beneficial.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Beyond background checks and investigating committees, which are critical and should be a key element of guarding the west gate, I believe that getting to know prospective candidates prior to accepting a petition is also critically important. Spending time with prospective candidates during dinner before lodge, meeting outside of lodge, and perhaps having an introductory curriculum for prospective candidates, are all important ways we can get to know those who would be our Brothers.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I would share my personal experience, ascertain their expectations, and guide them appropriately. Freemasonry is not for everyone, and variations from lodge to lodge should be taken into account. If a candidate is looking for fellowship, I might guide them to a lodge that is focused on the fraternal aspects of Freemasonry. If they are seeking knowledge, I would guide them to a lodge that meets those goals. I would tell them that Freemasonry offers a valuable path for those of good intent, and, as with all journeys, it will be up to them to realize the full value of the experience through their work and commitment.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Antonio Mantica**
Years in Masonry: **2**
Lodge Name and Number: **Lexington Lodge No. 1 (KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

- a. **Curiosity about an organization that had attracted so many renowned members throughout history.**
- b. **The desire to find a community of which I could be a part.**
- c. **The ability to study self-improvement by surrounding myself with people who were also on similar journeys.**

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

In need of large-scale reform. At the small-scale, the state is so dependent on a lodge-to-lodge basis that it is hard to assess.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes, but only because I joined at a Lodge that made it explicitly clear what I would be signing up for. If I had walked into any other Lodge, I probably would have been turned away from Freemasonry completely.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Highly invested.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I would begin by reevaluating the roles that the Grand Lodge structure plays in the running of constituent Lodges. An overall emphasis on education is needed across many Lodges that have forgone that aspect of Freemasonry, too.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I agree with his analysis. Freemasonry's problems have largely come from brothers letting go of its original aims and purposes.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Certainly. Decorum -- including how you speak and how you dress -- is a means of expressing respect for a given company or space. Just as it would be disrespectful to the spouses and their families to go to a wedding in old pajamas and talk over the speakers, so too in the Lodge.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I agree with his sentiment. To know thyself is one of the greatest axioms that Freemasonry teaches. It is the necessary first step toward self-improvement.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Caring, deeply, for the sacredness of our fraternity.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Visit multiple Lodges. They can be very different from one another even within the same city.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Bernard Michels**
Years in Masonry: **17**
Lodge Name and Number: **John Phillip Sousa Lodge
No. 1106 (DC)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

My wife's uncle had been a Mason for over 50 years and saw all of the charity work I've been doing and suggested that I investigate becoming a Mason. This will allow me to improve myself while contributing even further with my charity initiatives as well as other charities.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

I think we took a big hit on communication during COVID where we over-communicated with zoom, and other virtual meetings. Therefore, those line officers who came up through COVID are struggling to get back to the tradition, history, and respect of Freemasonry before COVID.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

When I joined, yes. Today, I think there have been some challenges due to the lack of leadership and communication experience in our lodge ranks. I also feel there may be too much over-correcting of things done wrong in the past. I feel there has been a loss of equilibrium, at least in areas that I am aware of. I don't see it systemic, but I am seeing a pattern of like situations.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I am a WM of one lodge, Secretary/Trustee of another lodge, and a secretary of a lodge in a 2nd jurisdiction. I also am involved in degree work. I'm pretty busy.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I think some lodges need to have a reset of some sort or even a merger to re-ignite the excitement those individual lodges had when they were consecrated. I am not sure it's a one-size-fits-all solution, but I do feel that there could be a concerted approach to bring back the alienated members or older members who in turn bring in their descendants or friends to continue the growth and excitement.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Freemasonry is in the heart, however, many men do not know it's there. I think Freemasons who talk to good men about what Freemasonry means to them is the best way to see if those characteristics resonate with a potential candidate. My guess is that M.W.B Smith was saying that mouth to ear is the best form of resolving problems and gives a personal touch. Wise counsel and the reception of the same is always the best way to resolve problems.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

I am a firm believer in tradition and respect within the lodge and its officers, committees, and members must adhere to that outside of lodge as well. Evolving into a social club within Lodge is not what Freemasonry is about and proper decorum should always be maintained.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I think it applies to the length of your cable-tow. Know your limitations, Keep within the confines of the compass, and give all you can to yourself, your God, your family, and your world.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Ensure those who are recommenders have fully vetted this person themselves and are staking their reputation on this person's good character.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

A man should desire his heart to be like a cornerstone. If the cornerstone is as square and true as it can be, then every stone that touches it (like a wife, mother, friend, job, children, etc.) will be that much truer. For example, a crooked cornerstone will no doubt bring a crooked foundation, crooked walls, and all kinds of problems. The same goes for life. Freemasons strive to be that perfect cornerstone, but only God can be perfect, therefore we are men who work together to continually refine ourselves to be better men, allowing building better lives for ourselves and for those who touch us.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **S. Brent Morris**
Years in Masonry: **52**
Lodge Name and Number: **Patmos-Solomon's Lodge
No. 70 (MD)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

My grandfather wore a Masonic ring, and several of the men who were "mentors" or admired role models were Masons. I then became curious as to what were the "secrets" of Masonry. During my senior year of college, a fraternity brother announced in January 1971, "I've turned 21 and am going to join my uncle's Masonic lodge." I thought for a minute and said, "If you'll wait until March, I'll be 21 and join with you."

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Confused. The things that once attracted members -- insurance, retirement homes, orphanages, business networks -- no longer work effectively. The OES was once at the radical edge of feminism, but is today quaintly paternalistic. The leaders today try to find the "secret sauce" that worked so well decades ago. There is no social opprobrium for joining, losing interest, and dropping. Masonry really doesn't have a well-defined mission except to keep on doing what it always did.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes, I've experienced mostly what I expected and a lot more. It's important to look for what you want, because it's often not readily visible. Local social

activities aren't as extensive as I thought they would be, and the quality of lodge facilities are often threadbare and faded.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I've made a large investment in Freemasonry. Most of my spare time is involved with the fraternity. (Here I am on a Saturday morning answering a questionnaire rather than reading the newspaper.) The last 22 years of my employment was with the national headquarters of Masonic organization.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, Freemasonry needs "revitalization." It continues to use a "business model" that was perfectly designed for social conditions of 150-200 years ago. As one example, most grand lodges have a "progressive line" where officers serve one year in each of 6-8 offices before becoming grand master. They then are given almost unlimited authority for one brief year. It's not a good model to solve problems. Instead of 1 year in each of 8 offices, why not 2 years in each of 4 offices or 4 years in each of 2 offices? The primary focus in most lodges is on conferring degrees and making new members. If you're not interested in ritual, there's not much for you to do, unless you spend a lot of time finding the non-ritual activities.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

M.W. Bro. Smith was suggesting that instead of imitating a successful program of some other organization -- Rotary, Elks, churches, raffles, etc. -- that Masonry should stick with what made it successful in the past. That is, to focus on Masonic ceremony and protocol and social activities that have served us well. Included in this list of things to do must be programs of interest focusing on Freemasonry itself.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Masonry should be a little more conservative and formal than general organizations. It should provide a welcoming environment where men with different backgrounds can meet, chat, and work together for common goals in the community.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I don't disagree with Rev. Newton, but he ignores a large social component of the Craft. Freemasonry is a complex organization, the union (but not merger) of several distinct social forces. Some, like Rev. Newton, see Freemasonry as a deeply philosophical -- almost religious -- guide to life. Others emphasize the social aspects with a dash of almost simplistic morality.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

A mandatory requirement that a candidate know a member of the lodge for some minimum period (say 6+ months) and attend a minimum number (say 3) of lodge activities. The activities could be dinners at the lodge, family picnics, and such.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

It's a wonderful organization that builds friendships and encourages introspection as to our purpose in life. It provides a network of mutually supporting colleagues around the country. The more you put in it, the more you get out of it.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name:	John Murphy
Years in Masonry:	21
Lodge Name and Number:	Ada Lodge No. 119 (OK)

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

My father and some of his friends were members.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Like most fraternities / service organizations, membership and interest is down.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

No, we don't have nearly as many active members at my lodge, especially the ones that are able to confer degrees.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Moderate.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, awareness to the public and letting men know they can ask to join or for information. Most seem to think they have to be asked.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

No response.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes, for the purpose of organization as well as tradition.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Background check and interviews as deemed necessary (depending on how well the man is known or not known at all).

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Do it.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name:	Harry Allen Ohrt
Years in Masonry:	70
Lodge Name and Number:	Sunrise Lodge No. 79 (ND)

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Sitting in my office on a stormy, very quiet day, when my senior physician asked, "Have you ever thought of becoming a Mason?" "No." "Well here is a petition./ Fill it out and I will present it to the Lodge on Monday!"

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Many Lodges have closed in our state, but our Lodge is doing quite well.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes, it is all that I expected. I have always enjoyed the fellowship and teachings of the Craft.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I have always appreciated my involvement.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I see no reason to change anything about the Craft.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I am in full agreement.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Proper decorum definitely has a place. The world about us is slipping into a very lackadaisical and dangerous place. Freemasonry offers almost the only hope of recovering.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I completely agree with Rev. Newton.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Cease all this effort to dummy down the Craft.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

The Craft needs you to continue to keep it above the downgrading of society.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Brian Parsons**
Years in Masonry: **36**
Lodge Name and Number: **Roan Oak Lodge No. 36
(TX); Trenton Lodge No. 761
(TX); Sweet Home Lodge No.
576 (TX)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Family tradition and the work we do for charity.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Poor. Very little “young” blood joining. They seem too busy.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes. I love the work we do in our community, and we don't ask anything in return.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Medium. Wish I had more time but with a family of six, it's difficult.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, education to the public. Let them know via social media, commercials, etc. what all Masonry does and has to offer.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Not sure. I would like to see the entire quote prior to answering.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

No response.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes, be in control of your thought, word and deed. Do no harm, but spread the light.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

No response.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Awesome group of men doing great things. There's a lot of up-front work, but you will reap more than you sow.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Daniel Rivera**
Years in Masonry: **13**
Lodge Name and Number: **Reseda Lodge No. 666 (CA)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

I am the first man in my family to join Freemasonry, having read Manly Hall's "Secret Teachings of All Ages" at age 18, and finding the Craft's belief in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man to be in line with my own long-held beliefs. I was fascinated by the esoteric symbolism, history and philosophy of the Fraternity, and desired to grow in its knowledge and wisdom. I am very happy to have found wonderful men who became beloved friends and mentors.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Every American Grand Lodge is struggling with declining membership, as older Masons pass away and local lodges find themselves struggling to engage and retain newer members. Internally, there is tension between different generations and their respective modes of thinking and operating, with some embracing traditional observance and Masonic education, and others actively opposing these ideas. Externally, the Craft is viewed with suspicion and animosity by conspiracists and certain religious elements, or is met with indifference by the general public, who perceives the Fraternity as an irrelevant, obsolete relic of bygone days.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

Once I became a Master Mason in a nearby blue lodge, I found the kind of Masons I was looking for in surrounding lodges and appendant bodies: truly good, honorable men who loved every aspect of the Craft, who were founts of knowledge and wisdom. These men are truly my brothers, and have been great mentors and friends.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I first served as Master in Los Angeles in 2017, and am currently serving as Worshipful Master of Southern California Research Lodge. I am Past Celebrant of California College, SRICF. I am also a life member of Guthrie Scottish Rite, I've been active in York Rite and AMD Council, and am a member of the Royal Order of Scotland.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, Freemasonry does need revitalization: the Craft will benefit by having leaders with vision, compassion, understanding, and administrative capability. Knowledge and appreciation of Masonic symbolism, history and philosophy will allow for Grand Lodges to actively encourage the same in local lodges. Some jurisdictions are still 70 years behind the rest of the country, refusing to recognize Prince Hall, or turning a blind eye as local lodges exclude good men from membership for prejudicial reasons. One possible solution is to allow full transparency and accountability in each Grand Lodge's operations, and work from the top down to ensure good ritual, education, and administrative support for local lodges.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I wholly agree with M.W. Bro. Smith's assessment. Freemasonry at its core is a moral and spiritual science. Should each member act with compassion, moral uprightness, devotion to the numinous, and brotherly love, then all else will fall into place. Anything that does not conform to these moral and ethical values is not Masonry, and is directly responsible for the institutional decline of American jurisdictions.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Absolutely. Lodge meetings should be conducted with decorum and reverence, knowing that the work we do is incredibly important for the moral and spiritual edification of each member. Side talk during degrees or meetings should be discouraged and done away with. There are moments for merriment or casual conversation when we are not at labor.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes, that is a beautiful way to express what it means to be a good man. One does not become a good man but by self-knowledge: building our strengths and eliminating our shortcomings; balancing our obligations to God, country, family, and ourselves; and being of service to our fellow man, especially to our families and brothers.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

A lodge can begin by: 1.) conducting a criminal background check, thereby eliminating any felons from membership, and paying closer attention to anything questionable that may arise in such an inquiry. 2.) Slow down the admission process: have the candidate come to several meetings before an application is handed out. An applicant may have a clean criminal record, but his values, personality, or expectations may not be a good fit for the blue lodge. Such a candidate may be encouraged to visit other lodges, or turned away if truly unsuitable. 3.) Get to know the candidate: see who he is, and what are his expectations. You want to admit men whom you can trust to fulfill their obligations, whom you would be happy to call a friend and brother.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I would encourage them to visit several area lodges and determine which seems to be a good fit for them. Get to know the members, see what the lodge culture is like. Do you feel comfortable with these men? What kind of programs and activities, if any, do they have available for members?

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Bryan Slaughter**
Years in Masonry: **17**
Lodge Name and Number: **Crittenden-Dry Ridge Lodge
No. 694 (KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

I was looking for something to complete me. To say I was wondering in darkness is 100% correct. I knew that there was something more to life. I had a void in my heart.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

For the most part it misses the mark. Lodges are not doing anything that is what Freemasonry truly is or stands for.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Once I got through my Degrees I was let down. I searched for more and more light. The appendant bodies left me struggling too. But a lot in my Masonic life has changed the more I learned to be more observant.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I'm all in. This is where I'm going to leave my legacy. I can't do it at home, work or church. I can leave Masonry and leave it better than when I joined.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, just start practicing Freemasonry and brotherhood. This is not individual or self-centered. Masonry is meant to grow with each other. Call and check on your brother, don't be afraid to show love to each other. Be the best man you can be to inspire others.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I believe that he meant that we are losing focus on Freemasonry. It's easier to be club and not a loving brotherhood. It's hard work being a Mason and being consistent. It's easier to go at everything halfway. That way if it fails you are not losing much.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Tough question. Yes and no. I can stand behind and respect someone trying to better the fraternity. But I cannot respect or support someone who is in it for themselves.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Absolutely. Do we truly know ourselves, and, if so, are we willing to show the true us. Same for control. Are we in control total or do we fake it? But the hardest is giving of ourselves. Serving each other and those around us.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Masonry is a family. You just wouldn't let a stranger in your house or your family. These people will leave their legacy, too. Will it be a good one, or will it kill it?

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

This is not a club. It's a lifestyle. Are you willing to devote everything for this life changing commitment? You will become a better man, but you will lose the old you. You will search every day for more life, until you get the Great Light once you die.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **John Stains**
Years in Masonry: **22**
Lodge Name and Number: **Linden Lodge No. 637 (OH)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Friends and family were members, and I wanted to be part of something bigger than myself.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Our lodge and district are strong, overall I believe the fraternity will continue to decrease in membership. We need to continue to provide value to our membership.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes, I knew what I was getting into, and it has become a very important part of my life.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Active member, past master of my lodge, current grand lodge officer. Very invested.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Focus on providing opportunities for new and prospective members to grow and improve themselves. Charity, community service, social engagement and membership outreach. All this in addition to what we "have always done" meaning ritual work and education.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Freemasonry has, in some respects, become dues paying and stated meetings. Focusing on the tenets of freemasonry is what we should be doing.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes, now more so than ever. Young people need to learn etiquette and decorum, whether in person or online.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

To some degree yes. The three degrees, done correctly, will inspire a man to reflect on himself and seek ways to improve himself. It also charges him to improve the world around him.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Taking the time to know new and prospective members before they take the first degree.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Why do you want to join and what are you looking to get out of it?

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Martin Starr**
Years in Masonry: **30**
Lodge Name and Number: **Oriental Lodge No. 33 (IL)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Knowing scholars who were Freemasons.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Overall, in the USA, I think it is doing as well as any social organization could do.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

I did not have much in the way of expectations when I joined. It has proven better in some ways (social connections) and worse in others (organizational politics).

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Freemasonry is an essential part of my daily life.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I would like to see more local focus, with the emphasis on engaging the interests and abilities of existing and participating members, rather than top-down approaches designed to solicit new members.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

It's not an analysis, it's a thought-stopping cliché, implying that everyone knows what Freemasonry is and that it is a singular phenomenon which just needs to be "tried." In point of fact, Masonic bodies over time have taken different forms and functions, adapted to the needs and abilities of the participants. We should have Masonic bodies that fulfill the aspirations of men of the present.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Decorum is required of gentlemen.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

It is a reductionist phrase of no particular interpretative value to the study of religion or of Freemasonry.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Discrimination needs to be employed at all levels in the process. The proposers need to know the candidate well. The investigating committee should scrutinize candidates carefully to see if there is a good fit with the lodge and the fraternity. One would hope the voting members would either have met the candidate or would rely on the report of the investigating committee and vote solely for the good of Freemasonry and the lodge in question.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Freemasonry is an excellent addition to the life of every man of good will and character.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Zackery Tedder**
Years in Masonry: **20**
Lodge Name and Number: **Robert Burns Lodge No. 127
(TX)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

I was a DeMolay as a teen. Later I became an advisor and joined the lodge.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Not great. I was in leadership for about the past 15 years and once I got out, it's as if I was forgotten. I haven't heard from anyone since installation, and that has severely hurt me. My father passed away last year and the brethren of the lodge that I had been a past master of didn't even reach out. We talk a lot about how we take care of each other. I cannot say that I have felt that way when it was me who was needing support.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

I didn't know what to expect. DeMolay prepared me for numerous things in life, I can't say the same about the blue lodge.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Currently? Minimal. Previously? Highly.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, but I am not sure how to get there. It can be challenging to get guys to invest their time when there is little to gain from it.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

When applied, yes, it is a phenomenal resource for introspection, understanding, and a generally good framework for life. I am not sure that many brethren understand that, and I feel like we have been worse at helping people get it.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Absolutely. This is why the prevalence of Traditional Observance lodges has only increased. The typical country blue lodge does not understand these commandments; however, the higher order that is found in TO lodges do a lot to reinforce these charges.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I do. Thoughtful introspection is necessary to grow in the craft. Through that knowledge, you are better able to do the latter.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Effective investigating committees. Don't just go for 10 minutes, spend some time with the man.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

It will be everything that you put into it. If you put in little, you'll get little in return. If you put in much, you will receive more than you expect.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Adam Thayer**
Years in Masonry: **12**
Lodge Name and Number: **Lancaster Lodge No. 54 (NE)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Honestly at the time it was a whim, and I was curious.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Stronger than we give it credit for. For every man who takes a passing interest, comes in for a few years and then leaves, I see 2-3 men coming in who embrace our ideals, internalize them, and build the Craft into something stronger.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

My original expectations were that it was a dying relic, an old men's club, but I found so much more than that. Freemasonry has far exceeded my expectations.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

10+ hours/week, not counting time I spend with brothers doing non-Freemasonic things.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes, kind of. I think Freemasonry needs to quit focusing on membership numbers and get back to its roots, focusing on taking one man and making him the best he can be. It's time consuming, labor intensive, and our best hope for a solid future. I would begin by getting rid of membership number reports, making one day degrees an exception for extenuating circumstances, and putting higher expectations on both our candidates and our members - it's been my experience that the candidates can handle it, if our members quit being lazy.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

This speaks to my previous statement; we need to get back to the core of Freemasonry. It may be momentarily detrimental to the appendant bodies, and even to many struggling lodges, but it is our best hope for long-term survival.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

I have noticed, in my short time, an increasing laxness within our lodge rooms. This has led to a decrease in the solemnity and importance of our work, and also an increase in confusion (imagine there are seven different conversations happening while the WM is trying to discuss a motion). There is a time and a place for joviality, and in lodge assembled is not it.

Having said that, I think the issue stems from a positive: we are, mainly, friends inside and outside of lodge, and this naturally causes us to be less formal than we would be with people who we aren't as close to.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

I disagree with Newton on many things, including this. Both religion and Freemasonry necessarily contain an aspect of "the other" as well; the relationships to people outside of yourself, how you treat them, interact with them, what you do for them in secret (both positive and negative) is the core of morality. I much prefer John Donne's statement that "No man is an island entire of itself; each man is... a part of the main." Freemasonry (and religion) do not exist in a vacuum where you attend by yourself.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Slowing down. We are in such a rush to bring new men in, we aren't spending the time to find out if they are men we want to have in with us. At my lodge, in addition to the mandatory things we must do (background check, investigating committee, etc.), we also bring the candidate to dinner at least a couple of times, sit with him and talk, get to know him better, and give him a chance to know us, before his petition is balloted on.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

I have never regretted joining, however you should spend some time in self-reflection first. This will change your life, and together we do change the world, but change will take you outside of your comfort zone.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Jeremie Theilman**
Years in Masonry: **1**
Lodge Name and Number: **Nova Caesarea Harmony
Lodge No. 2 (OH)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Wanted something to do that had some meaning behind it. Community involvement was key to my decision.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Slowing down, but society is more self-focused.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes and No. I expected ceremony, but I also expected more written text on the traditions.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I'm about 75% invested but my family and career are my priority which holds me from participating in all that I'd like to.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

This question is tough because the ritual must remain intact, but it could be more digitalized.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I don't understand the quote without more context.

7. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Yes, because that is the tradition of the craft.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes. Look inside of yourself and be honest. Have self-control and don't let anything get you out of character. Give back, become a better person.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

No response.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Do some research and ask yourself are you ready for a commitment. I feel like in today's busy world getting commitment and follow through are hard traits to find.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Danny Tomlinson**
Years in Masonry: **56**
Lodge Name and Number: **Idaho Springs Lodge No. 26
(CO)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Dad and Grand-dad. Also, DeMolay.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Declining.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes, for the most part. We need to change from “the way it’s always been” to make the Lodge and membership more attractive to young men. I believe that the current mindset is “all about me” and the concept of doing the right thing without expectation of reward or recognition has become a thing of the past. We need to adapt. We must let people know about us. Fifty years ago, men wanted to join Masonry because of the reputation of Masonic Brothers. Today, young men don’t join any club or fraternity or other organization and they aren’t encouraged to join. Can we change our thinking, similar to the video that was done a couple of years ago by the Supreme Commander and Imperial Potentate?

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Heavy, intense, and very active.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Yes - see above. We need to let folks know of the good things we do and the work we constantly are involved in, especially at the local level. We need to re-energize ourselves to reach out to young men. We need to change the mindset and attitudes of our more senior members and welcome new members - work to eliminate the cliques that form in Lodges and the Consistory. We must be respectful of our rituals, but not critical of men that sometimes struggle with memorization - that is, alternative proficiencies, as an example.

Also, we need to train our men to become true leaders. This is not a criticism, but rather a suggestion. Often a man has a job that permits him to come to work in the morning, turn wrenches or teach class all day and go home at the end of the day. He never has the work experience of managing people, projects and budgets. As he works his way up the officer line in Lodge, however, he eventually gets to the East, with absolutely no experience in managing the Lodge and its business, and often little support from having a good Secretary, or Temple Board, or Finance Committee or whatever. His year in the East is a struggle and he is relieved to see it end. We can't allow this to happen, both for the man and the Lodge.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Not sure of the context of his comments. I would say again that we can't keep doing the same thing, expecting different results.

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Respect, manners and decorum should be learned by every young person at the knees of their fathers and mothers. There is no reason we should expect less in a Lodge meeting. In the historic mountain Lodge where I have recently completed three years as Master, my comments to Brothers always included the fact that dress code for Lodge was “mountain casual.” That is, jeans and boots. We are more hopeful of seeing your face than concerned about your necktie. I always wore a tie as Master out of respect for the office, but I want men to leave saying, “that was time well-spent.”

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, “Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself.” He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton’s statement? Why or Why Not?

First time that I’ve heard that, but I agree. “Give until it feels good!”

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Look for potential, quality and men that you would be proud to associate with and call friend and Brother. Sometimes we get hung up seeking “dingle-dangles” to reward ourselves for the most petitions submitted. Is another lapel pin really that important to your own sense of self-worth?

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Masonry is founded on faith, hope and charity. Is that where your moral compass is pointed?

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Piers Vaughan**
Years in Masonry: **43**
Lodge Name and Number: **St. John's Lodge No. 1,
A.Y.M. (NY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

I joined in the UK in 1979. My grandfather was a member. I was always fascinated by the idea, but there was literally nothing to read on the subject. It truly was a "secret society" in those days! The only book I was able to find was Pick & Knight's *The Pocket History of Freemasonry*. Of course, nobody wore pins or had bumper stickers or rings. My father had a friend who was a Mason, but when I spoke to him about it he changed the topic! I nearly gave up, but on my asking him a third time he took me into a back room and started to discuss it, saying I had to ask three times before being taken seriously. Things were very different back then!

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

I feel hopeful about it. There was a very interesting presentation at the recent Supreme Council. of the NMD on the subject, and the results of interviews were encouraging. More men appear to be joining; younger people are seeking a spiritual element to their lives which they aren't finding in the increasingly politicized and anti-Jesus stance of Evangelical and Baptist Churches, and we are getting better and putting a targeted message out there.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

It certainly was when I initially joined! It was secretive, exciting and educational. In the UK the focus is much less on charity and more on improvement of the man. Yes, there are charities, but they haven't obscured the underlying message. I was quite shocked when I first experienced American Masonry when I moved here in the 1990s! I gave lectures and was considered weird, since they weren't about saving taxes and planning for retirement. I was also surprised that people would be first-line signers on petitions from people they didn't know. Over the past 3 decades this has improved considerably.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

Pretty high. I am in most Orders, and have served in the East of all of them, and Grand East of Chapter. I hold senior positions in a number of national Masonic bodies, and also give lectures both in the US and overseas. I've written a number of books on the subject, too. I think I can say I have been very active in the Craft ever since I joined.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

I believe it is, but to date I see this happening already. Securing the West Gate against unworthy candidates (criminals and those who really won't "get it") is a good start, to make sure we start with an individual open to change. If we educate them properly, they will naturally give to Charity without the constant harassment to do so! We do need MORE education and LESS Leadership training, which seems to be the overriding flavor of the month. Focusing on quality over quantity will keep us moving in the right direction.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

I believe he was referring to the fact that Freemasonry was initially a social group who met to confer rituals of profound significance upon others. This has been lost over time as we slash and “modernize” the rituals to make them shorter and shorter (whereas most younger people tell me they joined precisely because of the profound rituals!). Then we had the horror of “One Day Classes.” Then we focused on bringing in large numbers and educated them little or not at all, using their money to build hospitals and monuments to ego, instead of passing on the money to those who knew how to apply the funds properly - which now leaves us with deserted Temples, mismanaged Old Peoples' Homes and Hospitals supported by the funds of a fraction of the numbers we had 100 years ago. Yes, we had done everything except practice Freemasonry for the past 100 years! Hopefully that is now changing...

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

When I went to public school (i.e. boarding school) in England, the purpose of the structure was to teach the skills we don't learn at home. For example, students were prefects, so they learned to administer justice and discipline fairly (after initial egos issues and heavy-handed application!). Similarly, implementing things like learning how to use the right utensils at dinner, making small talk, the art of debate, etc. all added to the educational process. To me, the rules of a Lodge Room emulate these, and teach new members order and protocol, patience and forbearance, which are valuable skills in the outside world (of course, they also learn the art of presentation, speech-giving, management, leadership, etc.).

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Yes! These six words indeed summarize the purpose of Freemasonry. We strive to make a daily undertaking to improve our learning and understanding; we learn to subdue our passions and find the ability to behave like gentlemen in our daily lives, choosing rhetoric over violence; and we learn to give of our time and resources when need requires - and deserves - it.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

There are three simple steps. The first and clearest one is a background check. Secondly, the prospect should attend a number of social events, firstly to ensure he is a good fit for the Lodge (if not one can always refer him to another Lodge), to ascertain that his motives are sincere, and that he wouldn't cause disharmony if allowed to join. Thirdly, a person should be assigned to be his "parrain," or sponsor, who should make an especial effort to get to know him and his family, and be prepared to be the first line signer on his petition, to show he has the utmost trust in his sincerity and suitability.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Seek out people you know in your family or immediate circle of friends to talk with them at length about what it means, what the commitment is, and whether it would interest you. Take a good amount of time to do this, since you will waste both your time and your friend's if you do not. If you have nobody to ask, contact a local Lodge or go to the Grand Lodge site to register interest, and pursue the same process. Put together a list of questions and concerns and make sure they are answered adequately before taking a decision.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Brandon Ward**
Years in Masonry: **6**
Lodge Name and Number: **Fort Thomas Lodge No. 808
(KY)**

1. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Men in my family were Masons but I had found out about it too late in their lives to join their lodge. In talking with a friend of mine about it he mentioned being a Mason and I asked what I needed to do to join.

2. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Depends on your locality it seems like, or someone in Kentucky is lying anyway. I have friends abroad who are also Masons and they focus a lot more on what the teachings offer and the esoteric things Masonry can bring into your life if you examine it.

Locally we seem to focus on the business meetings and fundraisers, but I keep asking the guys of my lodge: what does being a Mason offer someone? I was in a college fraternity so for me that word being included meant there'd be fun and social events to do. I'm the main reason this happens in Fort Thomas, if an event does.

We as a grand lodge directive seem to prioritize ritual work so much and the system so resistant to change that we think things have only ever been the way they currently are. Meanwhile there are rules in the constitution about opening and doing business in the non-master degrees, which seem to mean we could be more inclusive if that was something that mattered more than

people trying to protect whatever status they feel they've earned for their years in Masonry versus someone new coming into it.

3. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined? Please explain your answer.

So far? Not really unless it's been from visiting all the different lodges and joining the various bodies outside of the blue lodge, but that's just my lodge in general. I brought the average age down to 64/68 and I'm one of like 4 guys under 60.

4. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

I went from being entered to Worshipful Master since 2017 and am a great ritualistic I'm told. I go to business meetings even when I'm exhausted and wished I didn't have it because I recognize Masonry is run by the 10% of us who show up, and in my lodge if it's not me then who will is a question that spurs me on even when I just need rest.

5. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Can you just call me and we talk about this? I'll be here typing all day, but the simplest explanation is: what's in it to become a Mason is something we need to examine in today's world. It won't get you a loan, a better job, or even a master's wages if you only stay in a blue lodge. But where is the fun in Masonry? The shrine directly advertises they're it, but without the blue lodges they can't exist, so I have felt strongly we as KY GL need to examine what we're doing.

Largely it's a resistance to change, and anyone that says this is the way we've always done it or we've never done that before as their justifications for remaining static refuse to acknowledge one of the great truths of life; change is inevitable until you die, like taxes.

6. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote “...the solution to Freemasonry’s problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?” What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Again, something I’d probably rather discuss than try and type out a coherent response in a concise manner. He also probably didn’t belong to Kentucky ha ha.

7. The “Old Charges” contain the following language:

“You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship.”

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Of course it does, what do we teach that makes men better if not at least the most basic of rules of respect and manners in a meeting. We sure don’t seem to give them anything else they actively use as a wide audience! I hear more talk about politics in lodge meetings, and before/after them than I ever hear anyone focusing on the meat and potatoes of Freemasonry and the lessons its stories and adherence to the Craft can teach us.

Some days I debate reminding brothers that we practice the liberal arts, with heavy emphasis on that word they hate so much apparently.

8. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

You must know yourself to circumscribe your desires and keep passions within due bounds is control of thyself. The giving of thyself is in the service to the lodge, community, your family etc.

9. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Don't post any meeting time, do any public interaction or outreach, and overall be stodgy people resistant to change. It'll definitely keep them out of the West Gate.

10. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

Push yourself to become a Mason, and really examine the material of each proficiency to see what philosophical thoughts come about for you on your journey. We're all in this together, but walking our own paths, and with your help we can make this a fun and engaging experience for ourselves and those who will join us afterwards.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Walton, Kentucky

Voices of Freemasonry Vol. VII

Name: **Kurtis Wilhelm**
Years in Masonry: **9**
Lodge Name and Number: **Lakeland Lodge No. 190
(VA)**

11. What influenced you to seek membership in Freemasonry?

Father is a Mason. I grew up fishing with his brothers from the lodge & figured those are the kind of folks I want to be around. That, and of course curiosity of the unknown.

12. How would you assess the current state of Freemasonry?

Strong amongst us that remain, but membership is way down.

13. Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced what you expected when you joined?
Please explain your answer.

Yes and no. Yes, the fraternity of it, the education & commitment of those still active. No, because of a select group of "good ole boys" set an environment not conducive to the tenets of Freemasonry.

14. How would you describe the level of your investment in Freemasonry?

100% in the beginning; now 100% Royal Arch & 10% Blue Lodge.

15. Is Freemasonry in need of revitalization? If asked to formulate a plan to revitalize Freemasonry, where would you begin? Please explain your answer.

Freemasonry needs to return to our roots. Stop making things "easier" for candidates just because some feel membership numbers are more important than our long-standing traditions.

16. Dwight L. Smith, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana (1945-1946) wrote "...the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry. Why do we not try it?" What do you suppose that M. W. Brother Smith meant by that? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Please explain your answer.

Spot on! If we returned to the fundamental beginnings & our obligations, Freemasonry would once again be all that it should & can be. Follow the ritual, learn the catechisms, go through line for higher lodge responsibilities... that's the magic sauce.

17. The "Old Charges" contain the following language:

"You are not to hold private Committees, or separate Conversation without Leave from the Master, nor to talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Wardens, or any Brother speaking to the Master: Nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming Language upon any Pretense whatsoever; but to pay due Reverence to your Master, Wardens, and Fellows, and put them to worship."

Does proper decorum have a place in contemporary Freemasonry? Please explain your answer.

Therein lies the issue. Of course proper decorum is vital. We are not fraternities like the Moose, Eagles, Elks etc..., we are Freemasons! If brethren want those kinds of situations, they should be encouraged to pursue membership in those organizations & not try to meld the Blue lodge into something it isn't nor should ever be.

18. Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, a noted Masonic author, once wrote that the sum and substance of religion can be summarized in six words, "Know Thyself, Control Thyself, Give Thyself." He implied that the same six words summarize the mission of Freemasonry as well. Do you agree with Rev. Newton's statement? Why or Why Not?

Making good men better! I definitely agree. Self-actualization & discipline are at the core of all great stories.

19. What, in your opinion, is the most effective method of properly guarding our West Gate?

Work on finding a way to work with the good ole boys & younger folks to get us back on track and return to our roots.

20. What would you say to men who are interested in becoming a Freemason?

(Luke 11:5–13)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.