

VOICES OF FREEMASONRY

Welcome To The 4th Edition Of Voices Of Freemasonry.

Is Freemasonry an event or a process?

Does the usual path through the Degrees of Freemasonry adequately provide men with an accurate representation of what Freemasonry is? Does that same path prepare men for the lifetime of work that lies ahead?

Are men sufficiently instructed in the meaning and philosophy of Freemasonry, as it is presented in the three Degrees?

Does the individual Mason's level of education in the Craft, and the corresponding extent to which he is grounded in the principles of Freemasonry, have an impact on whether he chooses to remain an active member of the Fraternity?

These questions, and more, are the focus of this 4th edition of **Voices of Freemasonry**.

It seems safe to characterize each of the 37 respondents to this set of questions as, at least to some extent, a seeker. The answers they supplied, however, reflect a broad spectrum of experiences. Not all came to Freemasonry seeking exactly the same thing. For some, Freemasonry has fulfilled their expectations. For others, the promise of Freemasonry has been greater than the reality of the experience.

Some themes emerge in the responses. Many of the participants indicated their belief that the usual period of 28 days between Degrees offers an adequate time of preparation before being advanced to the next Degree. Most of those who responded indicated their support for a structured education program, and for a greater educational presence in the Lodge. Many directly linked increased Masonic education to increased retention rates.

One wonders if there is a bit of incongruity here. Would more time between the Degrees serve to enhance an education program, and thereby bolster the retention of men in the Lodge?

The question related to the propriety of one-day classes, or an accelerated path through the Degrees of Freemasonry, seemed to elicit enthusiastic responses both in favor of, and opposed to, the idea. One respondent, a Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ohio, stated in his response that the participation and retention rates of men who come into Freemasonry through an accelerated path, and those who receive the Degrees in the traditional fashion, are identical. It should be noted here that, in contrast to that point, M. W. Bro. Mikel Stoops, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kansas, recently released a study of membership statistics showing that among Kansas Masons, men who came into the Fraternity via an accelerated path are significantly more

likely to leave Freemasonry, either through demits or suspensions, than those following the traditional route. Notably, retention rates for both groups are poor.

Regrettably, outside of the Kansas study, there is very little data available to support assertions that one-day classes are beneficial or detrimental to Freemasonry. Anecdotal accounts, though quite common, simply are not acceptable as evidence for either position.

Regardless of the topic, the responses serve to illustrate the wide range of opinions and experiences found in Freemasonry. One response is from a man who is in his third year as a Mason, and now finds himself Master of his Lodge. One of the more illuminating responses is from a Brother who is an Entered Apprentice. His perspective is particularly informative.

Discussions about the topics presented here are nothing new. They have been occurring in our Lodges (and more frequently outside of our Lodges) for decades, and probably as long as men have assembled as Masons. Offered here is a collection of particularly thoughtful comments and responses that should capture the interest of any attentive reader.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research is grateful to the 37 men who responded to this set of questions. The Masons who participated in this exercise hold memberships in eight U. S. Grand Lodges (including Kentucky), and one Canadian Grand Lodge. In terms of Masonic experience, the range of their years of membership falls between an Entered Apprentice Mason in his first year and a 55-year member. On the average, this group of men has spent roughly 15½ years in Freemasonry.

Here is a final thought: All Freemasons have a voice. We deeply appreciate the efforts of the 37 men whose voices are heard here. Is your voice heard?

William O. Ware Lodge of Research – December 20, 2021.