

A Perspective or Two... On The Role of Lodges of Research on this Day and Age of Freemasonry

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“It is not what dies that disappears. Only what is forgotten.”

- J.J. Benítez Hermón, Caballo de Troya 6

The previous quote should be one of the most important premises for an institution where its members are dedicated to the continuous transmission of knowledge. On the other hand, knowledge in Freemasonry can become a vague and malleable term because of some inherent characteristics to the fraternity.

1. **The private nature of some of its aspects.** The need to keep information hidden, while using catechism, can create differences in wording, considering the multiple transmissions of complex ideas over large periods of time.
2. **The commitment to use catechism as the main way to transfer information.** This can become tedious for a large portion of the brethren in the fraternity, limiting the number of people participating in such a process. Also, it can lead to possible distortions of the transmitted message. Utilization of catechism with unfaithful repetition can create confusion when communicated without a common-sensical contextual explanation. Mistaking the word right for rite, or vice-versa, is an honest onomatopoeical mistake, but it has deep repercussions in the conveyed idea, and it has happened. Moreover, It can be easily thought that a fraction of men could take issue with teaching through catechism because of the mental gymnastics they imply.
3. **The use of the human mind as the principal storage method for private data** immediately poses the risk of losing such data when the person who knows it has died, just like what happened in the legend of the Master Mason's word possessed by Hiram Abiff and lost upon his demise. There's also the example of some symbols which may have lost part of their meaning through forgetfulness and time.
4. **The concept that invitations to join Freemasonry are considered anti-Masonic conduct.** This might be the single most important factor against the natural growth of the fraternity since it obviously stops the brotherhood from the free expansion it could enjoy.
5. **A persistent yet understandable ban on landmark innovation in the core teachings of Freemasonry,** since given changes might pose intrinsic transformations of the imparted

knowledge over centuries into something different from the original form, depth and intention.

6. **Myriads of important proceedings, left to the discretion alone of individual lodges with short-term leaderships**, coexisting with the peril of becoming extinct in smaller and low populated areas, and with ever-changing communities.

The rationale behind the use of these precepts, understandably tries to preserve the structure of the procedures as they were designed, intended to be performed and taught to future Masons, but they also immediately present evident challenges and drawbacks for the future of Freemasonry. First to be noted as a drawback of utilizing such precepts, could be related to the declining numbers of members in state-wide Freemasonry all over the country. In this matter, the Grand Lodge of each state is the one entity that can observe the big picture and any emerging pattern over time, thus, it is the Grand Lodges' task to raise concerns, assess causes, establish preventive measures and, if necessary, corrective actions.



SOURCE: The Masonic Service Association of North America at <https://msana.com/services/u-s-membership-statistics/>

The trend of declining numbers in membership in regular Freemasonry has been known to exist for years, but efforts to change this, if any have been collectively made, have been unsuccessful, suggesting the approach adopted so far will not solve the problem. To be fair, it is not an easy feat. Moreover, it is a matter of hypothetical life or death for any institution. It is best to become serious about it, with a level of seriousness appropriate to life-threatening situations.

In general, research plays an important part in an organization like Freemasonry, particularly in understanding and preserving our rich history, symbolism, and traditions. However, rapid changes in societies demand more active and varied actions to impact and upgrade a brotherhood that, has been a trail blazer throughout history. The following are a few topics where research can expand knowledge of our fraternity, of its collective behavior and of its relationships with the world. Please be aware this list exists here only to spark creativity, curiosity and the desire to investigate a topic that the intended reader might find interesting, consequently adopting the necessary peculiarities to tweak his methods and therefore obtain accurate measurements of sought outcomes.

1. **Historical Research**: It helps members and scholars understand the origins and evolution of Freemasonry, including its influences, key figures, and important events over the centuries.
2. **Historical Artifact Conservation**. A Research Lodge can be focused on finding, restoring and safekeeping the creations of Masonic brethren. Retention of Masonic artifacts ensures that tangible pieces of history are maintained for future study and appreciation.
3. **Symbolism and Ritual Understanding**: Research aids in interpreting symbols and rituals, offering deeper insights into their meanings and significance within the fraternity.
4. **Preservation of Traditions**: By documenting and studying Masonic practices, research helps preserve the traditions and customs of the fraternity for future generations.
5. **Genealogy and Member Lineage**: Research into genealogical records can help members trace their familial connections to past Freemasons, enriching personal and collective historical narratives.
6. **Architectural Studies**: Many Masonic lodges are housed in historic buildings. Research can examine the architectural significance and heritage of these structures, supporting preservation efforts and enhancing appreciation of Masonic architecture.
7. **Art and Literature**: Exploring the influence of Freemasonry on art and literature provides a cultural dimension, showcasing how Masonic themes have permeated creative works throughout history.
8. **Membership Trends and Demographics**: Analyzing trends in membership, including recruitment and retention, can offer insights into changing demographics and help develop strategies to engage new generations.
9. **Digital Archives and Technology Use**: Research into digital archiving practices can help preserve Masonic documents and records electronically, ensuring their longevity and accessibility to future researchers and members.
10. **Educational Growth**: Research encourages continuous learning and intellectual growth among members. Lodges often have presentations and lectures that delve into various aspects of Freemasonry, facilitated by research efforts.
11. **Cultural and Philosophical Insights**: Research into the philosophical and cultural contexts of Masonic practices can provide members with a broader understanding of the fraternity's role in different societies throughout history.
12. **Comparative Studies**: By comparing Freemasonry with other fraternal organizations and societies, research can uncover common themes and unique practices, contributing to a broader understanding of fraternal movements globally.
13. **Cultural Integration**: Examining how Freemasonry interacts with and adapts to different cultural contexts around the world can highlight its global reach and adaptability.
14. **Sociological Research**: Investigating the social dynamics within lodges can offer understanding into member interactions, diversity, and community engagement, enhancing fellowship and inclusivity.
15. **Leadership and Organizational Studies**: Examining leadership dynamics and organizational structures within Masonic lodges can provide insights into effective governance and community building.
16. **Ethical and Moral Inquiry**: Research into Masonic teachings on ethics and morality can contribute to discussions on their application in contemporary society, highlighting their relevance and adaptation over time.
17. **Justice and Equality Initiatives**: Studying Freemasonry's role in promoting justice and equality can shed light on its contributions to social movements and reforms.

18. **Innovation in Practices**: Looking into how practices can be innovated while maintaining core values can help the fraternity remain relevant to contemporary audiences.
19. **Health and Wellness Initiatives**: Studying the impact of fraternal participation on members' mental and physical health can provide insights into the benefits of membership and inform wellness programs. From the author's perspective, improving awareness and use of modern techniques for better aging, implementation of healthier diets for dinners, prevention of injuries, increased mobility, promotion of mental agility exercises, high protein diets, strength training, among others, are basic parts of the concept of self-betterment that lead to an improved physical life.
20. **Meditation Practices**: Exploring multiple applications of meditation can broaden self-awareness and can promote spiritual well-being in personal, or even collective, goals.
21. **Communication Strategies**: Research into effective communication practices can improve how lodges interact internally and with the public, enhancing understanding and engagement.
22. **Interdisciplinary Connections**: Exploring connections between Freemasonry and various academic disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology, political science, among others, can provide new perspectives on its practices and influence.
23. **Economic Contributions**: Studying the economic impact of Masonic lodges in their communities, such as through employment and local spending, can highlight their role in local economies. There are multiple examples where these efforts have been overrated so research to know real numbers would be desirable.
24. **Impact Assessment**: Research can assess the societal impact of Freemasonry, exploring its influence on community development, philanthropy, and social change over time.
25. **Philanthropy and Community Service Impact**: Assessing the efficacy and influence of Masonic charitable activities can guide future philanthropic efforts and highlight the fraternity's contributions to society.
26. **Enhancing Public Understanding**: Well-conducted research can also help in demystifying Freemasonry to the public, providing a factual basis for discussions about the fraternity.
27. **Environmental Sustainability**: Researching how lodges can incorporate sustainable practices into their operations and buildings can contribute to environmental stewardship.
28. **Crisis Management**: Investigating best practices for dealing with crises, whether organizational or external, can help lodges prepare and respond effectively.
29. **Conflict Resolution Practices**: Exploring methods and effectiveness of conflict resolution within Masonic contexts can provide models for managing disagreements and fostering harmony.
30. **Personal Development Outcomes**: Evaluating the personal development benefits for members, such as skill acquisition and leadership development, underscores the fraternity's value in personal growth.

The list presented is neither definitive nor all encompassing. It should be taken as a starting point from where ideas for Masonic investigation could sprout. Even, where an intervention on the declining numbers in Freemasonry problem might begin.

One idea stands out from such an abundant array of topics. The well-being of the organization is a top priority, so understanding the diminishing membership takes predominance because any other Masonic topic will cease to exist if the trend continues and deteriorates further until the last unwanted consequences arrive.

To be effective, all approaches for the resolution of the dwindling membership issue must be methodical, consistent, measurable, unbiased and designed to be actionable and evaluated over small and large periods of time, for the pattern observed over decades most likely will not be stopped, let alone reverted, within a year which is the common term of a Grand Master.

Such proposed actions call for the use of the scientific method, and I have reasons to believe it is the best strategy to take on. Timewise, planning should entail at least a decade, with smaller evaluation periods to steer the project as needed, while keeping the effort progressing well and strong.

In current times and contexts, I would suggest this to be the main role of Masonic Lodges of Research. The brethren already acting in the development and diffusion of more knowledge, should undertake the collection of the data needed to subsequently design a local, state-wide and national effort with specific needs adapted to situations in each state and county where masons labor. This must be enforced entirely by the Grand Lodge in each jurisdiction but convening nationally to support each territory. It will prove to be a significant effort, but the unity in Freemasonry has proven time after time that the beehive behavior can do monumental wonders far better than individual accomplishments could.

All topics in the list are, of course, worthy of research and should be carried on by personal interests with the appropriate support of Research Lodges, but I would say this already is an everyday endeavor by current members of lodges dedicated to investigation and it should be the Grand Lodges' duty to recognize, sponsor and reward this behavior in all relevant aspects and opportunities.

A brother I admire has deemed "not a reason for real concern" the downward spiral in the participating numbers in our beloved band of friends and brothers, but it being such a transcendental matter, I would not sit and wait to find out if either his belief or mine were right. I won't let this concern run its natural course. I will act to permanently overcome this tendency and with this purpose in mind, this will be the first paper of many.

"It has to start somewhere; it has to start sometime. What better place than here, what better time than now."

-Zack de la Rocha. From the song Guerilla Radio by Rage Against The Machine.

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