

The Unlodged Mason

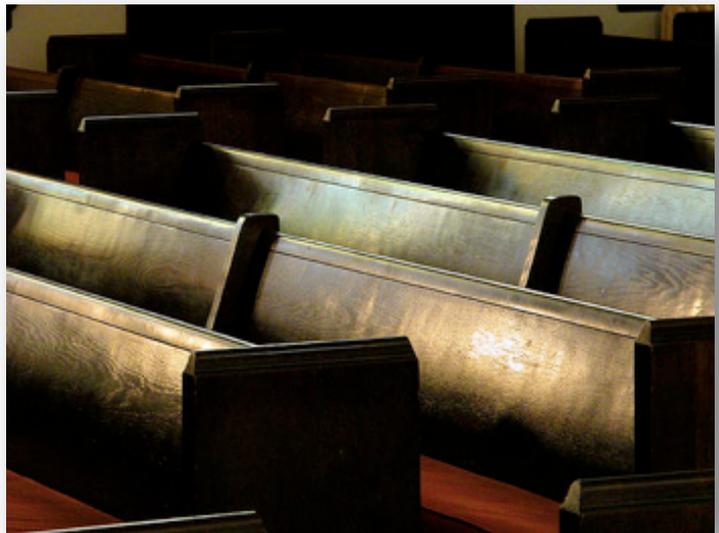
Greg Stewart, *Freemason Information
Web Magazine*

My good friend and Brother Frederic Milliken wrote an article entitled *Message to the Unlodged Mason*. In the article, Fred discussed the importance of attending lodge and the advantages of having personal interaction with other Freemasons. I generally agree with Fred's conclusion on this subject and believe that attending lodge functions is essential to the Masonic experience, but I also can identify with the plight of what Fred calls the **unlodged Mason**.

Fred correctly compares the unlodged Mason to the Christian that does not attend church. This is a fair comparison because it is my opinion that the purpose and structure of Masonry is much more similar to that of a religious organization than that of a community organization. So why do some Christians not attend church? Many Christians do not attend church because the goals of the church may not match the goals of the worshiper. Some churches have an all or nothing approach to dogma and require that you agree with the church's opinion on every matter. Other churches continually ask for more and more out of their volunteers which eventually sucks all of the enthusiasm out of the those in the congregation that offer their time and resources. Then, there

are also those worshipers that attend service or Bible study searching for answers to their complex questions about spirituality and that constantly receive replies that are either not straightforward or that sidestep the question all together. This constant cycle of a church not aligning with the individual worshiper's values, requiring him to over-commit to the organization, and not providing him with the spiritual knowledge he seeks results in the Christian walking away from the congregation.

Not surprisingly, this is exactly what occurs in our Masonic lodges as well. Numerous individual Masons have been turned away from the lodge because he brought new ideas to the assembly and was told that "this isn't how we've done it before." Lodges often volunteer their young, enthusiastic members for every task which inevitably interferes with that member's family and vocational responsibilities. Finally, many men come to the Masonic lodge looking for a method of self-improvement and



enlightenment and find an organization that neglects education almost entirely.

Freemasonry often plays a big role in the lives of unlodged Masons. I have personally met many Masons who don't attend lodge that have noticed my ring. They are always excited to interact with another Mason and often mention how important the fraternity is to them. Other unlodged Masons are avid Masonic researchers. Still others would gladly come back to the lodge if they felt that they would not be compelled to volunteer for every single lodge function and constantly put the lodge first in their lives.

It is also important to note that the lodge is not always at fault for each individual Mason that does not attend lodge. Some Masons have unrealistic expectations of the fraternity, others probably should have never joined, and there are those that just don't feel like going. For some reason, these men continue to pay their dues, but they are just not interested in interacting with their assemblies. However, our lodges can and should work to make functions more attractive to those that do not attend lodge for the reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph. Our lodges should not do this for the sake of the organization, but for the sake of those individual Brothers because they do need real, personal Masonic interaction.

If our lodges accept and tolerate individual opinions and values, if we expect a reasonable amount of involvement from our members, and if we offer the spiritual and moral enlightenment that our Brothers seek,

our unlodged Masons are much more likely to start attending lodge. With a wider variety of Brothers, the beautiful Masonic tapestry will be enhanced and become even more colorful. Like Brother Fred wrote in his article: there ain't nothing like the real thing, baby.

SOURCE: Greg Stewart, Freemason Information. Freemason Information is a Masonic web magazine for both Freemasons and those interested in the fraternity of Freemasonry
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**The full article cited in this paper follows*

Message To The Un- Lodged Mason – *Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing, Baby*

Fred Milliken

Online Internet Freemasonry tends to be educational, philosophical, reform minded and at times argumentative. Those of us involved in Internet Freemasonry tend to spend more time exploring the fine points of the philosophical side of the Craft, a side we never get from our Lodge, than actually attending our Communications.

This has led to the rise of the un-Lodged Mason. He is a cousin to the un-churched Christian, the un-templed Jew and the un-mosqued Muslim, who belong to that cadre of believers who wish to worship outside of sectarian organized religion, not as a member of a worshipping community but alone. Thus, I hear from some of my Christian friends, *“Well you don’t have to go to church to be a good Christian.”* Translated into Masonicese you have, *“Well you don’t have to go to Lodge to be a good Mason,”* which may all be well and true but if one operated in that manner one would be missing something.

Those of who are Masonic writers have to acutely aware of this dichotomy, for if we are not careful we will treat our beloved Fraternity as a concept, a study, a discipline only, and only is the key word here. Lest anyone think I am a snob here, I am absolutely convinced that Masonic research and study is a necessity for the complete Mason. I am greatly in favor of esoteric Masonic study groups. It is difficult to be a Christian without ever having read the Bible nor having any knowledge of what Jesus said and did. It is equally difficult to be a Mason without appropriate study of the Craft. But it can’t end there.

There has to also be the human touch. The whole benefit of community is to be able to interact with living, breathing human beings. When I attend church, I experience what community can do in the magnification of the power of the Holy Spirit in group action. I am also never able to inspire myself as much as a good preacher or a good Masonic

ritualist can. This concept of community is something Scott Peck put into words:

“If we are going to use the word meaningfully we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to “rejoice together, mourn together,” and to “delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own.” Like electricity, it is profoundly lawful. Yet there remains something about it that is inherently mysterious, miraculous, unfathomable. Thus, there is no adequate one-sentence definition of genuine community. Community is something more than the sum of its parts, its individual members. What is this “something more?” Even to begin to answer that, we enter a realm that is not so much abstract as almost mystical. It is a realm where words are never fully suitable and language itself falls short. The analogy of a gem comes to mind. The seeds of community reside in humanity – a social species – just as a gem originally resides in the earth. But it is not yet a gem, only a potential one. So, it is that geologists refer to a gem in the rough simply as a stone. A group becomes a community in somewhat the same way that a stone becomes a gem – through a process of cutting and polishing. Once cut and polished, it is something beautiful. But to describe its beauty, the best we can do is to describe its facets. Community, like a gem, is multifaceted, each facet a mere aspect of a whole that defies description.”

If Scott Peck were a Mason perhaps he would have used the lesson of the rough ashlar and the perfect ashlar.

So what we can say about Freemasonry is that it is not only a study, a philosophy but an interaction of community gathered together to practice, teach the virtues of the Craft in a mode of human interaction whereby those in the community seek to inspire and bolster each other. And the larger the community and the more interaction that takes place the greater the pride and enthusiasm that is generated. Note that we certainly are not speaking here about a business meeting. But the two main aspects of Freemasonry can feed on each other. Study and research encourages community Masonic participation and community Masonic participation encourages study and research.

I was reminded of the importance of the human touch when I traveled to meet fellow Masonic Information writer Terence Satchell (who may or may not agree with these views). Actually, we both drove about half way to each other and met in the middle. Although Terence and I have sent numerous e-mails back and forth to each other and chatted online, we never had met face to face. That meeting in person was so much more valuable and more heartwarming and personal than electronic communication that it led me to write this message. We explored each other as a person with the ability to feel the emotion and the nuance of each other's communication. A bond was forged that was impossible to create in any other manner.

And that is the message for today.

Virtual Freemasonry is very nice, but it is no match for the real thing. Virtual camaraderie is not the real thing either. It lacks the substance and the ability to reach to the very core of being, the human soul. There is no substitute for the real thing.