

# WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

## VOICES OF FREEMASONRY

Welcome to the sixth edition of **Voices of Freemasonry**.

What does it mean to be “on the level?”

Are the Old Charges still relevant to the practice of Freemasonry? Is the concept of the progressive line a useful management tool, or does it serve to promote into leadership positions certain men who are unprepared or otherwise incapable of leading?

What is the concept of “servant leadership?” Does it have an application in contemporary Freemasonry?

What facets of Freemasonry do you find most interesting? Is this reflected in your Masonic reading?

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

It seems safe to characterize each of the 31 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.

In recent generations, the concept of the “progressive line” has been a mainstay in North American Freemasonry. In this edition of “Voices of Freemasonry,” respondents expressed their misgivings about the use of the progressive line, but acknowledged that, with the right mix of men, it can be a useful tool. The key is finding the right mix of men. The Old Charges of Freemasonry, incorporated into Anderson’s 1723 version of The Constitutions of the Freemasons, directed that offices in Masonic Lodges be filled strictly on the basis of merit, and not by seniority.

As membership shrinks, there is, quite often, an insufficient number of men, qualified or otherwise, to serve as officers of Lodges. In many such cases, the progressive line has served as a conveyor belt delivering to the East men who are unprepared for the challenges of leadership.

What of the notion of servant leadership? Our 31 respondents were, again, in general agreement that the Master best leads who best serves. But how does servant leadership manifest itself? Reflecting the general orientation of contemporary Freemasonry, a significant number of our respondents interpret the admonition to practice servant leadership as a call to engage in community service.

It is impossible to review this collection of responses without commenting on the answers returned with respect to the idea of “meeting on the level.” With only a few notable exceptions, the general opinion represented herein is that meeting on the level is a representation of equality. While that may be true, in a certain sense, what is almost uniformly ignored is the reality that man’s equality is achieved, ultimately, through his mortality. Freemasonry does not teach, and never has taught, that all men are equal in ability. Nor does it teach that all opinions are equal. It does, however, inculcate a spirit of friendship and brotherhood that allows men of different backgrounds, abilities and opinions to unite in brotherhood. When men, regardless of station, realize that life is a fleeting thing, they are able to unite in the great work of building a spiritual temple, eternal in the heavens. Our equality is the certainty of death. In recognition of that, we unite to build for the time when we will take on immortality.

Especially interesting are the questions about areas of interest and recent reading among our 31 respondents. Unsurprisingly, five topics were identified as being the aspects of Freemasonry in which they were most interested. Those topics were:

History	17 responses
Philosophy	12 responses
Symbolism	12 responses
Ritual	11 responses
Esoterica	9 responses

Our respondents identified 53 individual Masonic authors whose works they had recently read. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century writer W. L. Wilmshurst stood out as being the most frequently cited author. Other authors with multiple mentions were John W. Bizzack, Robert G. Davis, Andrew Hammer, Chris Hodapp, Art de Hoyos, Ralph Lester, Robert Lomas, Henry Pirtle, Samuel Prichard, Jasper Ridley, and Michael Schiavello.

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 31 men who responded to this set of questions. The Masons who participated in this exercise hold memberships in thirteen U. S. Grand Lodges and two Canadian Grand Lodges. In terms of Masonic experience, the range of their years of membership falls between a Master Mason in his first year and a 62-year member. On the average, this group of men has spent roughly 18.78 years in Freemasonry.

Here is a final thought: All Freemasons have a voice. We deeply appreciate the efforts of the 31 men whose voices are heard here. Is your voice heard?

William O. Ware Lodge of Research – April 1, 2023.