

## VOICES OF FREEMASONRY

Welcome to the seventh edition of Voices of Freemasonry.

Is the Freemasonry that you have experienced that which you expected when you first petitioned your Lodge? To what extent have you invested in Freemasonry? How can Lodges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century successfully guard the West Gate? Do the words of Dwight L. Smith and Joseph Fort Newton still ring true in contemporary Freemasonry?

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

In the main, the answers of the 49 men who participated in this segment of our on-going project reflected carefully considered and quite thoughtful answers. As with previous editions of Voices, the men who responded reflect a broad spectrum of experiences.

There are a few common themes that emerge from this group of respondents.

Unsurprisingly, virtually all of the men who completed the questionnaire indicated that they were heavily involved with Freemasonry. Perhaps the most common sentiment expressed was that any investment in Freemasonry tends to provide greater rewards than the level of investment might suggest. In other words, we tend to get more out of Freemasonry than we put into it. That perception alone, if true, makes Freemasonry unique in the history of mankind.

Freemasons, perhaps from time immemorial, have been instructed to carefully guard the West Gate. Just how do we go about doing that? Our participants gave their thoughts on that subject, and tended to agree that while background checks and strong investigating committees were highly important, the most effective way to guard the West Gate is simply to require that men in the Lodge become acquainted with a prospective candidate well before he is even provided with a petition.

Somewhat shockingly, several responses seemed to indicate a lack of understanding as to what it is that the phrase, “guarding the West Gate” actually refers. In certain instances, answers seemed to relate more to Lodge security than to ensuring the quality of applicants for admission into the Order. In this day of rising physical threats to Lodges and to individual Freemasons, perhaps such confusion is to be understood.

Questions 5 and 6 are closely related. The responses indicate a somewhat qualified agreement that Freemasonry needs revitalization. The extent of that need varies from response to response. Those variances notwithstanding, there was a broad agreement with the advice that Indiana Past Grand Master Dwight L. Smith gave when he urged men to, “try Freemasonry.”

The Old Charges of Masonry again demonstrated that they ring resonant with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Masons. The Old Charges contain language calling for decorum in Lodge, and the men who responded to this questionnaire overwhelmingly indicated their agreement with their provisions.

The words of Rev. Joseph Fort Newton elicited more thoughtful responses when participants were asked to consider his analysis of what he considered to be the six words that best summarize religion, if applied to Freemasonry.

Perhaps to no surprise, the most varied responses came with respect to the questions as to whether or not the Freemasonry that men have experienced was the Freemasonry that they expected. Each man, of course, comes to Freemasonry with his own set of expectations. Here, the responses cover the spectrum. Some men said that Freemasonry had not only met, but had actually exceeded, their expectations. Others frankly admitted that the Freemasonry they have experienced is not the Freemasonry for which they were searching.

Two respondents began their Masonic journeys in jurisdictions outside of North America. Their comments about what they found in North American Freemasonry, and the contrasting approach to practice of Freemasonry, make highly interesting reading.

Interestingly, some respondents indicated that Freemasonry is moving in a direction that more closely corresponds to their expectations. Perhaps the most interesting response was from the man who said that Freemasonry met his expectations because he makes sure to “make it happen.” That response, standing alone, indicates a high level of investment and internalization of the personal responsibility taught by Freemasonry.

William O. Ware Lodge of Research is grateful to the 49 men who responded to this set of questions. The Masons who participated in this exercise hold memberships in 21 U. S. Grand Lodges. In terms of Masonic experience, the range of their years of membership falls between two Master Masons who are in their first year in Masonry, and a man who has spent 70 years as a member of the Craft. On the average, this group of men has spent roughly 23.14 years in Freemasonry.

Here is a final thought: All Freemasons have a voice. We deeply appreciate the efforts of the 49 men whose voices are heard here. Is your voice heard?

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