

# WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

## VOICES OF FREEMASONRY VIII

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Welcome to **Voices of Freemasonry**, the eighth edition.

Carl Claudy, a Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, and a prolific Masonic writer, once ended one of his articles by saying, “Thus, Masonic education is the foundation of our Fraternity.”

Participants in this edition of **Voices of Freemasonry** were given the opportunity to reflect on M. W. Brother Claudy’s words, and then decide whether or not they agreed with his position.

It should probably come as no surprise that most of the 35 men who were willing to take the time to complete this questionnaire would overwhelmingly be in support of the concept of Lodges offering quality Masonic education.

One Brother, however, posed this question: Who gets to decide what is considered quality Masonic education? Indeed, that is a key consideration. Is Masonic education mechanical? Should it focus on things like balloting, introductions of distinguished guests, or the confines of the ritual? Or is quality Masonic education a deep dive into the meanings of the symbols presented in the various degrees? Does it include a practical discussion as to how to integrate the lessons on Freemasonry into one’s daily life?

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Different approaches to Masonic education will reflect that which different men bring to the discussion. The men who responded here are, for the most part, among those who frequently read about Freemasonry, and are, therefore, likely to bring more informed opinions to the conversation about what it is that constitutes quality Masonic education.

Not only is their reading confined to books about Freemasonry, but our participants are also inclined to subscribe to one or more Masonic publications (although many of those are the organs of Grand Lodges or appendant bodies). Still, a significant number are regular readers of such publications as “Fraternal Review,” “The Journal of the Philaethes Society,” and the

transactions of research lodges. More than a few were subscribers to the late, lamented “Journal of The Masonic Society.”

Our 35 participants are not strangers to ideas, and when asked how to constructively improve Freemasonry, they were ready with a wide range of answers. Unsurprisingly, many of them suggested a commitment to increased and improved Masonic education, including a structured program for men moving through the degrees. Other recurring thoughts were raising standards for admission into the Fraternity and allowing Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts to participate in business meetings.

Correspondingly, they were asked to identify certain things that they would like to see eliminated from American Freemasonry. Some of the responses mirrored the suggested areas of constructive change. For example, eliminating the inclination to rush men through the Degrees of Masonry (including one-day classes) corresponds to the desire to slow down the progression of men through the ritual and provide for a structured education process between the Degrees.

Those who wish to rid our Lodges of bigotry and intolerance are in harmony with those who seek a Masonic environment that embraces Freemasonry’s universal nature. Men who wish to increase the standards for ritual performance and understanding should be in agreement with those who wish to require full proficiencies following each of the three Degrees of Freemasonry.

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Although these 35 participants are undoubtedly well-read and well-versed in Freemasonry, their responses also include some of the lingering institutional baggage that continues to plague contemporary Freemasonry. There remains an undercurrent of concern about the numbers of men coming into Freemasonry (although quality tends to win out over quantity), and there is also the remaining focus on good works and charitable endeavors.

Freemasons are loathe to give up these activities, perhaps because they have, for so long, been told that Freemasonry is the execution of good works and charity.

Freemasonry continues to need more men devoted to studying and thinking about its meaning and its purpose than engaging in acts of community service or public philanthropy. Reclaiming our identity as a philosophical and contemplative body of men is the key to our rejuvenation.

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 35 men who responded to this set of questions. The Masons who participated in this exercise hold memberships in twelve U. S. Grand Lodges. In terms of Masonic experience, the range of their years of membership falls between a couple of Master Masons in their second year and a 49-year member. On the average, this group of men has spent roughly 16.09 years in Freemasonry. The median length of membership is 14 years.

Here is a final thought: All Freemasons have a voice. We deeply appreciate the efforts of the 35 men whose voices are heard here. Is your voice heard?