

Thoughts from a Young Mason

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The other day I heard, once again, from a brother approximately 30 years my senior who told me “what young Masons want.” It was one time too many for me, and so I have put my thoughts on paper as to what a young Mason wants. After all, I’m 34-years old and have been a Mason for 4 years—I should know!

I do not mean this to be a commentary on the division of young and old, but rather to be a proclamation of a young Mason concerning what I believe we want. This is so we might all improve our understanding of one another and progress our fraternity.

It occurred to me that some may not know what young Masons really want. Worse, I think it is often misunderstood or misstated. We “young Masons” or new Masons bear some of the responsibility for this. We are often uncomfortable declaring our desires, our disappointments, and our frustrations. And what do we do? We quietly stop appearing at meetings and simply slip off the rolls. We return to our communities outside the lodge disheartened with Masonry, and—unfortunately for the fraternity—we will often share our disappointments with our friends. Sadly, we then join a group of Masons as diverse as the lodge itself: unfulfilled Masons.

Well, Brethren, I don’t intend to become an unfulfilled Mason. So here I stand. It is vital for the members of the Craft to understand one another so that we can create an environment that is beneficial for all.

Initially, we must discuss Blue Lodge, the birth place of the Master Mason, for without it, Scottish Rite Masonry does not exist. The young man approaching the Craft today does so to supplement and add to what his church and family have already given him. A certain tugging at his soul speaks to him to seek a deeper meaning in life, in family, and in God. He researches and desires an initiation into the esoteric and ancient quest for Truth. He requests a petition with these hopes in mind. Why shouldn’t he? The eloquent writings of Masonic scholars, including the Scottish Rite’s Albert Pike, have hinted at the existence of such knowledge, and Masonic writings abound with hints of this very thing.

What does this man find once he joins? For too many, it’s membership drives, one-day classes, poor and hastily planned ritual, late nights, and a push to become an officer before he is even proficient as a Master Mason. If that man has made it through the three degrees hoping that at the end of his journey some of the promises might be fulfilled, he only learns phrases like “progressive science” and “self-improvement.”

Excitedly, he stands up in lodge one day or approaches a small group of brethren in the parking lot and explains some ideas that he has for lodge and changes he might like to see. He is immediately told, “It has never been done that way, they won’t allow it, and anyway it’s against the rules.”

He swiftly learns that they won't allow much of anything, and worse, no one will claim to be a member of them. They are the most illusive, but most powerful members of Masonry. They are responsible for every poor, hasty, or frustrating decision ever made, and more importantly, they rigidly enforce their number one rule: NO CHANGES.

I bring up them as it leads into discussing what they have decided the young Mason or unfulfilled Mason is looking for. I will attempt to list some of the most common things I've heard. Make no mistake, I am listing these because they are misconceptions, and we do not want them.

X 1. Young Masons want everything easier and faster, which leads to one-day raisings, watered down ritual, and little or no memory work.

This simply is not true. Once I arrive at the West Gate and am permitted entry, I want a fulfilling and life-changing experience on which I can build a better understanding of my relationship to my brethren and my God. I don't mind hard work. To the contrary, and this is a big one, I want to feel like I have achieved something. I don't want to be handed a pin, given a handshake, and told thank you for your small fee, and by the way, here is your membership card. I want my path to be challenging and enlightening.

X 2. Young Masons want or need low dues.

I am very willing to pay higher dues. I do, however, want a quality experience—educational, social, and community—for my money. I don't need low dues. If the fraternity does not value itself, why should I value it? Can something that comes so cheaply have real value? These are questions I asked myself when I saw Masonry's low dues schedules.

X 3. Young Masons want it to be easy to get in.

I don't want to believe that just any man could or should get in. I wish that every investigations committee treated their assignment with the importance it should have—if we did not worship at the altar of bigness. I already belong to the community at large, and that costs me nothing in time or money. I would like the Fraternity to be guarded and to care greatly about the men who enter it. If I am going to call a man my brother, I want to be able to trust him. I don't trust everybody who shows up with some money in one hand, and a petition in the other. I have seen brothers sign both lines of a petition, as if increasing our numbers is the only thing that counts. Let us care about our fraternity enough to guard it against those who do not deserve the title of Master Mason and brother.

These observations would prove of little value, if I did not offer some solutions and provide an explanation of how they might be applied to the Scottish Rite.

It begins with ensuring a quality Blue Lodge experience. We as Master Masons should

return Masonry from a primarily social institution to one that studies ancient symbolism and the truths so revealed. Encourage and allow the candidate to have a meaningful experience in the initiatic phase of his degree work. Follow up with quality education and instruction in regards to the symbolism and, more importantly, how to apply it to his life.

The concepts I provide above are succinct, but no less complete. Let us address how they might apply directly to Scottish Rite Masonry and tie it all together.

Scottish Rite Freemasonry is the graduate faculty, the pinnacle of Masonic thought and study, the “University of Masonry.” This implies a higher learning and higher level of understanding, research, and study for its members.

Outside of reunions, I cannot remember any Masonic instruction on the Scottish Rite degrees ever being presented—even once—in the years of my involvement. The cure is simple really: treat Scottish Rite Masonry as the university it purports to be. Do not thrust an application at men the night they are raised Master Masons as if the only thing of importance is a signature and \$250. It debases the man’s night, for one, and it says that the man—without further evaluation—is ready for the degrees of the Scottish Rite, which debases our membership.

Do not rush through a reunion like it must be done in three hurried days or it doesn’t count. Many of us “Young Masons” work 50 or 60 hours a week and earn about a week of vacation a year. Our wives don’t want us to burn two of those precious days on another Masonic event. No candidate can take in what the degrees have to offer in three days. To pretend they can says that all Scottish Rite has to offer can be learned in 72 hours. Let’s back off the tight three-day schedules. Offer the degrees throughout the year. Offer some degrees at the stated communications and have a few Saturdays thrown in.

And if it takes a man a couple of years to reach the 32nd Degree, so what? If the man understands what has been presented, if the degrees were done with brothers that knew and understood the work, and if each degree was treated as a special event, then the brother is not going to mind the time. Remember, it is not the speed of the education, but the quality of it that young and unfulfilled Masons are interested in.

Bring education and discussion to the forefront of the meetings.

Period.

You are not going to retain young Masons without real change. It is not about a gimmick or a slogan. It is about improving men within the fraternity who seek a higher understanding and deeper meaning of the Craft.

Let the Scottish Rite take its rightful place as the University of Masonry. Let’s improve our men and make them better. Let every aspect of Scottish Rite Masonry radiate perfection in ritual and education.

It is not going to be easy because we are asking you to imagine a Masonry many have never seen in their lifetime. I am asking you to see beyond your own personal experiences and allow progress in this beautiful philosophy and science of ours.

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