

Grand Oration 2011 Communication  
Steven D. Johnson - Grand Orator

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master, Grand Lodge Officers, Distinguished Guests, members of the Grand Lodge. Brethren all.

About a year ago, I was interviewing a 25 year old candidate. I closed the interview with one last question; “Why do you want to be a Mason?” His answer...”My wife and I are about to have a baby... and I want to be the best father I can be”.

We make good men better.

We here today recognize that to be a real Mason is to be a better man in every relation of life - a more considerate, loyal, and loving husband, a more devoted father, a more involved citizen, and a truer friend. And it is incumbent on us to convey this covenant to those new to the craft.

Today, social and cultural changes and a positive presence in the media have resulted in young men looking to Masonry as a source of spiritual and ethical values.

The age of candidates seeking admission into Masonry is growing lower and lower. Only a few years ago, the typical candidate was in his mid-forties. Now he is in his early thirties.

He comes having researched Masonry on the internet. He comes with many questions. And he comes expecting answers.

It's important to understand what these new Masons want from the brotherhood. They want intellectual stimulation. They want someone at their back in the battles of life. They want to discover the mysteries. They want to enjoy the "mystery" of Masonry. They want to be with men dedicated to making a difference. They want to be with those who have subdued their egos, and are focusing on what is real... and not petty quarrels. They want to be in association with older men who have promised to mentor and to share wisdom and experience.

In other words, they have come looking for exactly what we have been telling the world we have to offer. Popular books talk about it. Movies romanticize it. Our Masonic forefathers have written about it. Our ritual says it, and we have all knelt at the altar and promised to make it real. So we can hardly blame them for expecting to find it.

Really they aren't asking for much. They are only asking for what we should be able to give them, "Don't ignore me, share with me, treat my questions and concerns as important, let me learn, let me help with the lodge." And most important, "understand that my dreams are as important as yours."

He is brought into the Craft enthused, and eager to be an educated, oriented, and invested member of your Lodge. We must never leave our new brother alone to fend for himself, especially during the most critical initial period in his Masonic career. Let us instead furnish him suitable assistance, guidance, and encouragement until he has formed the habits of interest and activity. When we touch each others' lives in this way, something very special happens. At that moment you realize that mentoring unites us with compound stronger than cement.

And it's not only the candidate that profits by mentoring . Your Lodge itself is strengthened by members who are more active and come better prepared for our labors.

Freemasonry has outlived most institutions and has continued to exist beyond the rise and fall of nations and empires. Among good men and true, of whatever nationality or political or religious opinion, this brotherhood will continue its march as a living, breathing testament to the human spirit. And that is the Masonry into which I was initiated, passed, and raised.

We are critical players in this brotherhood, and we are gathered here today as its stewards, its leaders, and its guardians. Let our legacy be one of brotherly love and friendly mentoring. Let it be said of each of us that just as the old operative Masons were driven by dreams, as the first

speculative Masons were driven by dreams...we are driven by dreams. And so are the young Masons. And they are our future.

Among the treasures of the British Museum are sixty-four ancient Masonic manuscripts, the oldest of which is the Regius or Hallowell Manuscript

This ancient document is written by hand on vellum or parchment in English, and experts tell us it was written sometime between 1315 and 1390.

Around 650 years ago.

But can you visualize the time that has passed since this document was written? Let's assume the year 1315,

Then...

- Martin Luther was not to see the light of day for 175 years, nor would Columbus petition Queen Isabella for 177 years.
- One-third of all the land in England belonged to the Pope at Rome.
- The Hundred Years' War had not yet started.
- Marco Polo had just returned from China and had been excommunicated because he presumed to teach geometry.

- Jacques de Molay, the Grand Master of Knights Templar, had been shortly before this time, burned at the stake.
- The Black Death which was to take a toll of more than one-half of all England, had not yet devastated that fair land.
- And the first page would not be taken from Gutenberg's printing press for another century.

Masonry will survive; something this right, and this ancient cannot die.

A great Mason once wrote: "To sow, that others may reap; to work and plant for those that are to occupy the earth when we are dead; to project our influence far into the future, and live beyond our time; to rule as Kings of Thought over men who are as yet unborn; to bless with the glorious gifts of Truth and Light and Liberty those who will neither know the name of the giver, nor care in what unregarded grave his ashes lie, is the true office of a Mason and the proudest destiny of a man."

I truly believe, my Brethren, that the men who will ultimately make Freemasonry survive and thrive in the future are not yet Masons, but the visionary men who will teach them are.

Thank you.