

Good morning, and Hello from the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Wyoming. My name is Ken Thorpe, and I am currently the Junior Grand Steward of the Grand Lodge of Wyoming.

I have a little video to start us off...kind of set the mood...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFrdqQZ8FFc&list=WL&index=22>

We will get back to that in a moment...

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In February 1963 PGM Dwight L. Smith, then the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana, published a paper entitled "Whither are we Traveling." In 2007 at the Midwest Conference on Masonic Education Brother Christopher Hodapp made this comment:

"The last Midwest Conference held in Indianapolis was in 1967. Dwight Smith, PGM, addressed the group. In his talk, he asked a flurry of question we still have not answered 40 years later."

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I started writing a paper a few months ago about what we are doing right in Masonry...while my partner, Senior Grand Steward Howard Hill, SLIDE could not make it to our meeting today, he was able to turn me onto PGM Dwight Smith's paper.

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Wow.

Why wow? Well, I can tell that in Wyoming in 2021, SLIDE 54 years after PGM Smith's presentation in Indianapolis; 58 years after he wrote "Whither are we Traveling;" 14 years after Brother Hodapp referred to it, we still do not have the answers for his questions.

Now I am certain that I am not the quality of writer or presenter that PGM Smith or Brother Hodapp are, but I am going to give you a few thoughts...some are my own, some are Brother Hill's, but I think they are all in the same vein.

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So, back to the front...Why did we call our paper "What is SLIDE SLIDE Right with Masonry?"

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Well, what is Masonry?

Many definitions from what we are told in the anti-chamber by the Senior Deacon **SLIDE** prior to be admitted to the lodge to definitions by masonic scholars like Brother Albert Mackey **SLIDE** ...but what is Masonry practically speaking...from a user's viewpoint?

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Maybe a better way to put the question is what does it mean to you to be a Mason?

Let me start...this is what it means to me:

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- I am part of an ancient fraternity of men that have my back just as I have theirs.

When we become a Mason, we take an oath to look out for each other. This oath is taken on a holy book...in my case a Bible as I am a Christian. I take this oath to heart. I take it seriously. I am proud to be a Mason.

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- There are lessons that can be learned from this little book if I pay attention.

I have been an active Mason since 2003, yet every time I hear a lecture, I learn something new...my mind is usually blown away when I hear a Brother give an explanation of a lecture...and I have heard different explanations of the same lecture. I think this is the beauty of what is written in this book...many lessons can be learned from the same lecture.

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- If I apply the lessons I have learned from this little book, I will be a better man.

Right...I mean, you have all read the book, listened to the lessons being recited?
Right?

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- If I teach these lessons, I can make better men.

Learn the lessons, teach the lessons, make myself better, make other men better...and help support our famous bumper sticker **SLIDE** – MAKING GOOD MEN BETTER

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- If I make enough men better men, I can help make a better world for myself, my family, my friends. A better future.

WOW. Would that not be cool. Especially in today's troubling times?

So why is Masonry struggling? **SLIDE** PGM Smith had a few ideas back in 1963.

- Poor Lodge Leadership.
- Failure to guard the West Gate.
- Masonry has become too easy to obtain.
 - o Low fees
 - o Getting through the degrees as quickly as possible
- Worshipping at the altar of bigness.
 - o Quantity, not quality
- Subdivision
 - o Too many appendant bodies
- A dulled spirit of Masonic Charity
 - o Cut a check to pay your per capita fees instead of depositing in the "Box of Fraternal Assistance."
- Not paying enough attention to the Festive Board.
- Where is the "course of moral instruction, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols."
 - o Lack of Education
- Lower standards for membership
- Have we become another service club?

I have copies of PGM Smith's paper with me and can e-mail you one if I run out...I am not going to regurgitate his entire paper here...I list these out as they mimic some of the issues I see in my Lodge, and in other Lodges I have visited during my short stint in Masonry. He also brings up quite a few I had not thought about. 58 years ago! We all need to read or reread his paper...it is timeless, if a bit depressing that we are still having his conversation today.

Why do I see Masonry struggling in Wyoming...my list.

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- Business meetings

I run a multimillion-dollar company in Wyoming. That is my day job. I would say on average I spend sixteen to twenty hours a week in business meetings...more than that if you count the little meetings throughout the day with individual co-workers.

I did not join my Lodge to spend my evenings in a business meeting. I want to learn something new, have some fellowship with good men, and go home feeling better about myself than when I walked in the door.

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- The sky is falling

MEMBERSHIP IS DYING!

WE ARE GOING BROKE!

THE ROOF IS LEAKING AND WE CAN'T AFFORD TO GET IT REPAIRED!

Have any of you heard these or something of the like in a Lodge meeting? How about at your Grand Lodge meeting? I don't mean to be rude, but this is at the heart of every speech I have heard in the past fourteen years I have been going to Grand Lodge...not only from our Grand Lodge officers, but from your representatives as well.

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- This isn't the way we used to do it

“Do you seriously declare on your honor, that you will cheerfully conform to all the ancient usages and established customs of the Fraternity?”

We have customs in our Lodges, but we need to be mindful of what customs they are referring to when the Senior Deacon asked us this question as a candidate, and what customs can be changed.

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- The good ole boy club

If you have a new Brother, or a potential candidate, that you don't welcome into the Lodge and make him feel a part of it from day one, you will lose him.

And in my opinion, the big one that seems to be keeping young men away...

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- The Electronic Fraternity

Social Media **SLIDE**, video games **SLIDE**, 290+ channels **SLIDE** of TV with mindless talking heads on every channel. They take up space in a person's schedule if they allow.

There may be some other reasons your Lodge may be struggling...these are here to represent some of the common ones I have seen. The cure to each one is the same.

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What would happen if we talked about Masonry in Lodge?

Let's take another look at some of the items I listed above that may be preventing Brothers from coming to Lodge or causing them to demit, or worse be suspended for non-payment of dues.

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Business Meetings – These really need to be kept short, and the WM needs to use committees to do the heavy lifting for Lodge business. PGM Young encouraged the Grand Lodge of Wyoming to hand out minutes from the last meeting, so they didn't have to be read in Lodge.

I recently was elected as the Secretary of my home Lodge. Our last meeting in June was my first meeting in this chair. I took PGM Young's advice distributed our minutes prior to Lodge. One meeting is not a good data set, but, by speeding up the business meeting we opened our evening for more discussion...education. Our education chair had two presentations lined up, both great education. It caused us all to think...to have a conversation in our Lodge about Masonry.

Weird.

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This is where PGM Smith in his paper discussed the lack of leadership in many Lodges in his Jurisdiction. He warned that If we don't elect capable leaders our Lodges, we will be stuck in the perpetual business meeting...that will be poorly run. Remember the Monty Python Sketch? Let's not end up at the table with our tux and bow tie having lost the reason Masonry started. And decide to disband because it seems a bit silly...because getting dressed up to have a meeting with no content is silly.

Talk about Masonry in Lodge instead of business and you will see more Brothers on the sidelines, and keep the new ones engaged, coming back for more.

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The Sky is falling. I know I don't want to spend another minute talking about failing membership. Chances are I am not alone. Doom and gloom does not give me what I am looking for in Masonry. Again, I don't think I am alone.

Talk about Masonry in Lodge...get the membership interested in Masonry. Focus on the positive parts of Masonry, instead of the doom and gloom, and you will see positive results.

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PGM Smith also encouraged us to get back to the Festive Boards...men meeting around a meal. This is a tradition still being observed in England. Small Lodges, that serve a meal before their meeting. Sometimes to move forward, we need to look back and see what we have left behind...what we have lost.

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This isn't the way we used to do it. There are traditions in Lodge that cannot be changed. These are defined in The Ancient Landmarks and as defined by the 25th Landmark, the Landmarks cannot be changed...which is odd as I don't know if it is the 25th Landmark in your jurisdictions that defines this...it would seem from my limited research that while the Landmarks are similar between jurisdictions, they have in fact changed through the years...

In Wyoming we have a Code Book that can be amended. It typically is each year. Our ritual is on its 8th printing...8th amendment. These can change and have been changed.

If you go to four Lodges in Wyoming and witness the MM Degree, the only guarantee I can give you is that you will see four different means of the SD getting from point "A" to point "B."

I would imagine that some secretaries still read the minutes, some do not. Some communicate through e-mail; some still insist on sending through the mail.

I would argue that there are as many traditions in individual Lodges as there are in the Ancient Landmarks. These have changed **and can** be changed.

Brothers if the lessons are being taught, and the Ancient Landmarks are intact, what difference does it make if the SD turns left or right when conducting the candidate / Brother? We need to focus on what is important...talking about the lessons the ritual can teach us. We need to talk about Masonry in Lodge.

Now, before everyone gets up in arms and Grand Master Christensen regrets his appointment to the Junior Grand Stewards chair in Wyoming, there are some things that should not be changed. Don't make up your own ritual, don't create your own floor work.

And make sure you take a step back; think about what traditions we have lost...like the Festive Board or making it important to show up to Lodge in a suit and tie. Respect your Lodge, your Brothers, your tradition. Funny how some forget where we came from, while insisting on taking a turn a certain way...

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And the statement about "this isn't the way we used to do it", is really about fear isn't it...?

PAUSE

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The good ole boy club. Every man that shows interest in Lodge is a potential Brother. Now, we need to keep in mind our guard at the West Gate...when I say every man that shows interest, we need to be mindful of the type of man.

If they pass the test, every man that has taken the EA Degree is a Brother. Give them a reason to continue their journey, stay with the Lodge. Stick a man or a Brother in the corner and ignore him and he will stop coming.

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Conversely, if you give a brother a task he finds distasteful, you will get the same result. Isn't part of our job guarding the West Gate learning a bit about a man before he is asked to become a Brother. Shouldn't we find out what interests he has when we are inquiring about his qualities? And maybe asking him how he would like to be involved after involving him in a few activities.

Get the entire Lodge talking about Masonry in Lodge and getting involved with your Lodge. Don't just call on the trusty Past Master that is already in the good ole boys club. Get all the membership involved, especially our new Brothers...keep them coming back for more.

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The electronic fraternity. This is where PGM Smith and I have a difference of opinion...kind of. His claim in 1963 was "attendance troubles in our Lodges may not be having and are not caused by television, nor the automobile, nor by bowling." Was this

the electronic fraternity of the 60's? Turns out my solution to this issue, is very similar to his...we were both tackling the same issue from different sides.

Today, a person can "learn" more about Masonry in 30 minutes on the web than I can in most Lodges over a year.

Then they move onto something else. It took me less than 60 seconds to find the right Monty Python video on You Tube...another 60 minutes to stop clicking on similar videos on the sidebar...

Maybe attention spans are not getting shorter, but information easier to obtain, and any movie or TV show ever made is in a person's hand with their remote, or on their computer...smart phone. I can "interact" with people on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, etc....

Brothers, I must admit that I don't know that I am a fan of mixing Social Media with Masonry, but I am also starting to realize that I am getting to be the old guy.

This isn't the way we used to do it! Right?

I understand that this is something that needs to be explored.... **BUT...AND**

When we start talking about Masonry in Lodge, and start having conversations, **that** will compete with the other electronic garbage that is out there...it will compete and win if done correctly.

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This is where I think PGM Smith and I get back on track with each other...folks are busy, and then there are those things that take up our time. The electronic fraternity is not busy...it is something that takes up time. We need to use it to connect to good men, and then use conversations about Masonry to help wean them off it. Give them good and timely advice and correct what they have read on the random websites they have undoubtedly visited.

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What is RIGHT with Masonry is its lessons.

What is RIGHT with Masonry is the accessibility to its lessons...everything is in this little book.

All we must do is talk about it. Learn from it and teach its lessons. Make the world around us better using the lessons found in our ritual.

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Get dressed up in a suit and tie, sit around a table with a good piece of meat with a group of your Brothers, and talk about Masonry...the Festive Board.

Cool, great, wonderful...what does that look like.

Have you given a lecture in your Lodge? Have you initiated, passed, or raised a Brother? Start the ball rolling. Start talking about the lecture or degree you are most familiar with in Lodge, and then start a conversation. Answer some questions, ask some questions. It doesn't have to be complicated...just a conversation about Masonry.

The worse thing that could happen is another Brother in your Lodge knows more than you do...and you learn something. That is a fantastic problem! That is why I go to Lodge.

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We have everything we need with the Ancient Landmarks and our ritual book. You don't need expensive books, pamphlets, or a program to start talking about Masonry...matter of fact, if you are in the Grand Lodge, you are already an expert in Masonry.

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Whoa, Wait, What...did I just say that...and by saying that am I claiming that I am an expert on Masonry? On the surface, yes. Enough of an expert to have a conversation about it, yes. There are many Brothers more well versed than I, and as I have already stated, by starting a conversation in my home Lodge I am hoping that they participate...just as I would work to bring the newest EA, FC, or MM into the conversation.

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Then again I like to talk, so I can be an expert about just about anything long enough to get a conversation started...then I can just step back, listen, and learn.

Remember, I have already said I learn something new every time I hear a lecture. Many of our Brothers have only heard each one once...kind of exciting if you think about it...going back to the beginning and hearing it all again, for the first / second time. And what if it had been presented in such a way that a conversation had started reflecting, sharing, educating relative to the content. Wouldn't you think that that would get the Brothers engaged. Make it worthwhile to put on the suit and tie and come to Lodge on the 1st and 3rd Thursday?

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(Hold up the book)

In my opinion this is how we thrive. Whether we go it alone Lodge by Lodge, or together, we must start talking about Masonry in Lodge. Whether it is an organized program or just Brothers having a conversation we need to get away from just talking about business and Doom and Gloom and start having positive conversations about Masonry in Lodge...with all our Brothers...not just the members of the Good Ole Boy Club.

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My definition of Masonry:

I am part of an ancient fraternity of men that have my back just as I have theirs.

There are lessons that can be learned from this little book if I pay attention.

If I apply the lessons I have learned from this little book, I will be a better man.

If I teach these lessons, I can make better men.

If I make enough men better men, I can help make a better world for myself, my family, my friends. A better future.

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What is RIGHT with Masonry are these lessons. What is wrong is we don't talk enough about it.

Thank you for your time...would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

https://www.masonicrestorationfoundation.org/documents/DLS_WhitherAreWeTraveling.pdf