

## **Raising the Cost of Being A Master Mason – Is It Worth It?**

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The title of this talk identifies two very distinct points that I want to cover. The first is for us to consider whether we need to raise the cost of being a Master Mason. The second is to consider if Freemasonry is worth that additional cost.

More and more of our Lodges are finding that they can no longer operate effectively, if they have to depend on the dues structures and candidate fees of the past.

Many Lodges provide the new candidate with his lamb skin apron, Masonic Bible, a Presentation Volume, and other memorabilia. The cost of these items has risen over time. The cost of maintaining our Lodge buildings has also risen rapidly, especially when one considers the cost of heating and air conditioning. In addition, Lodge roofs need to be replaced; kitchen equipment needs to be updated, and the list goes on and on. Even minimum programs cost more to have. Lodge dinners, refreshments, picnics, Ladies night out events, family night dinner, etc. all have become more expensive.

These are the practical realities of life. Lodges trying to make due on income that has not kept up with inflation have trimmed the fat out of their budgets years ago, they are now cutting into muscle, and many are on life support.

The costs experienced by our Lodges are not very different from that experienced by the Brethren in their own personal lives. Every day, they

see the rising cost of food, clothing, utilities etc., but it is interesting to see how they react to the problems their Lodge is experiencing.

Some of our older members do not relate the increases they experience in operating their own homes to the increase in Lodge operating costs. When they receive their yearly dues notice, or if the subject of a Lodge dues increase comes up, they are often very negative – noting sharply that “Lodge dues sure are getting high.”

But there is often a different reaction from new Masons. When a Lodge Secretary presented a newly raised Master Mason with his dues notice of around \$89.00, the new Mason asked “is this per month?” to which the Secretary replied “No, it is per year.” The new Mason then asked, “How can the Lodge survive on only \$89.00 per year per member?” The young men now coming into Freemasonry have not experienced the so called “good old days,” and they have a more realistic understanding of the costs of doing business in today’s environment.

The bottom line is that if you compare the current cost of Lodge dues and candidate fees to other organizations, both Fraternal and non-Fraternal, you will see that we are actually selling Masonry cheaply.

Now to the second point – should we consider Freemasonry worth the additional cost? Wow, what a question. How does one put a “price” on Masonry?

One way of looking at the cost of membership is to consider what is on the other side of the ledger. Frankly, if we consider the programs and entertainment, the meals, and refreshment at each of the meetings, we probably have received more value than we have paid in annual dues.

But, of course, Freemasonry is not about tangible items but rather about the intangible, the spiritual, moral and intellectual growth of men who come together as Masons, and the joy and fulfillment of travelling the path toward becoming a better person through the teachings and practices of Freemasonry.

Consider the friendships, the camaraderie, the growing together toward becoming “better men,” the lifetime of memories of past Lodge meetings, the Brethren whom you have met while attending the Grand Lodge sessions, various leadership conferences, and visiting other Lodges within and without our Grand Jurisdiction. Think also about the many opportunities you have had to increase your knowledge in areas you may otherwise never have considered exploring. How does one put a price on all of that? You don’t. You really can’t.

If all a Brother sees in Masonry is the annual dues bill with his responding check, then unfortunately, he is missing the whole point. For my part, what I value is the excitement, when after numerous degree conferral attendances, the “light” suddenly comes on, and I truly begin to appreciate the underlying meaning of the words I keep hearing, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for Brothers to dwell together in unity!” How do I put a dollar amount on that?

So we each have to ask ourselves, “Is it worth it?” I hope your answer is a resounding yes! Indeed, in growing numbers, our older Brethren are coming to this conclusion and are purchasing a Life Membership in Perpetuity. They are not doing this because it is a bargain – which it is for our younger members. On the contrary, they are doing it in order to leave

a legacy for their Lodge, and to ensure its survival long after they have departed for the Celestial Lodge above. These Brethren clearly have not forgotten the duties.