

Living the Journey: If Your Masonry is Based on Stated Meetings, Perhaps You're Doing It Wrong!

Bro. William Boyd, PM

Senior Warden

Valley-Hi Lodge #1407

San Antonio, Texas

Creator and Administrator of "BroBill's Masonic Education" FaceBook Group for Master Masons

((This paper was published by "Midnight Freemasons" on July 24, 2020))

July 6, 2020

My brethren, can we talk about stated meetings for a few minutes? They seem to be a hot topic among many of us, so I would like to explore the issue of the place stated meetings occupy within freemasonry as a whole, and our personal masonic experiences specifically.

This is an amazing time in masonry with new tools available that allow us to meet virtually, research inexpensively and from home, and share our findings widely. We can study and learn nearly everything we desire about masonry and pursue those passions as far as technology will take us. Even considering the many opportunities now available to us, I frequently find in my travels, in my reading, and in various podcasts I listen to, a chorus of voices begging to eliminate or reform the dreaded stated meeting. How is it that of all of the various masonic topics, functions, and activities that the stated meeting has become the focus of so many searching for the fulfilling masonic future? I have developed some thoughts and suggestions on ways for you to put and keep stated meetings in their proper masonic place.

Let me ask you a question, is your personal masonic foundation based mostly or completely on your experiences with stated meetings? Are stated meetings the central focus of your own masonic experience? What do I mean and how would you know if it is? Let's do a quick review by answering a few checklist questions. Are stated meetings your main reference point in your discussions about masonry? If someone asks you about masonry, do you eventually find yourself explaining about paying bills and reading minutes? When you talk with brothers from other lodges about your experiences in masonry, do you find yourself mostly recounting events from stated meetings? Have you told, or do you tell other brothers that your biggest frustration with masonry is the way stated meetings are run and how long they are? My brother, for the purpose of this discussion, I would propose that if you answered yes to those questions, and if you find that all or most of your memories, impressions, and opinions revolve around stated meetings, then your masonry is mostly based or centered on stated meetings – and if you were looking for more from masonry when you joined the craft, then perhaps you're doing it wrong.

The natural question becomes “how do we, how do I fix this”? Can we re-center our own personal masonry so that stated meetings are reduced or relegated to its true minor but necessary role in our personal and collective masonic experiences? I truly believe that we can and we *must* if we are to truly improve ourselves, enjoy and expand our masonic experiences, and take control of our masonic journey rather than being pulled along from one stated meeting to the next.

There are fixes, but we need to properly understand how the stated meeting has become so large and (to some) so impactful that we are generating papers (yes, like this one), podcasts, and an endless series of books on how to improve masonry by fixing stated meetings. It seems hating the stated meeting has become something of an industry within the fraternity. Let me provide some context for what a stated meeting *SHOULD* be and why they should *NOT* be the center or focus of your masonic life.

Conceptually and historically when lodges were very busy places, making new masons, conducting practices, and hosting social and community events, it became efficient to set aside one meeting a month to take a breather and review the lodge business and records, giving the brethren a chance to review and approve finances, spending, and minutes. Paid members are *entitled* to know how and where their lodge funds are being spent, and the status of lodge projects and candidates, so providing one meeting a month to review these matters *is* a reasonable ask. That’s it; that’s all a stated meeting is. A business meeting held for the purpose of conducting necessary lodge business. These twelve meetings each year should not define the masonic heart and soul of a lodge!

Over time and generations, the pace of lodge operations has slowed compared to historic post-war membership spikes the fraternity experienced after World Wars I and II. Our society has changed, our work-life patterns have changed, and our family construct has changed. As the lodge activities slowed and family needs increased, the number of lodge meetings naturally decreased. Where the stated meeting may have been one of 10 or more meetings each month depending on the lodge, it grew in stature to one of four, or five, or maybe six. It also became the one regularly-scheduled meeting brothers could count on to see each other and to socialize, often united over a meal either before or afterwards.

Eventually, family work schedules, the increased pursuit of higher education by men seeking improved salaries and professional progression, and time for family gatherings all began competing with the lodge for a brother’s time. For many brothers, the stated meeting became the one lodge night he could set aside every month to visit with his brethren. As this competition between family and lodge was waged, the stated meeting continued its rise to prominence in the masonic life of many masons.

And here we are. Lodges of varying sizes, varying levels of activity, and the common complaint heard throughout the fraternity, “stated meetings will be the death of freemasonry” and “if we don’t fix the stated meetings, masonry is doomed”. When you reach this point, the stated meeting *is* the center of your masonic focus.

Whatever they now provide content-wise, stated meetings have become – in my mind – distractions and convenient excuses for *some* brothers that are unfulfilled and unsure of how to find satisfaction or a way forward. It is too easy to withhold a question or an idea, or to sit out from discussion in the name of

not wanting to extend an already-lengthy business meeting and that becomes the natural impulse for many on the sides, depriving themselves and their brethren of rich discussion and the exploration of ideas.

How can we, as individual travelers with individual interests and journeys shift our center, or refocus our masonic attention to topical, substantive, informative masonic facets of our own choosing? To this end, and in the name of offering solutions when identifying problems, I offer you these suggestions:

1. Personal Study. Go forth and find the topics or questions that capture your attention, then go out and research the answers and learn about the topic to your own satisfaction. There are plenty of resources like books, podcasts, Vlogs, Blogs, speakers, masonic conferences, and more. Once you have answered your question, or learned about your topic, you will find it vastly rewarding to share your newfound knowledge with brethren of your lodge and, perhaps, other lodges; do not hold your new knowledge as a “masonic secret” that you keep close. When you share knowledge, you will find knowledge seekers – perhaps not every brother in your lodge, but passion attracts the passionate!

2. Organize Topic-specific Meeting Nights. Perhaps your lodge is one that only has one meeting a month – the dreaded stated meeting. In this situation, prepare the materials on the topic you are interested in and ask the Worshipful Master if you can schedule two hours of lodge time some evening to provide a program. If it is successful, plan out four or five months’ worth of programs where your topics can be presented and members can attend knowing why they are there and what to expect. An active schedule offers brothers choices and opportunities to grow and expand their knowledge. Do not be discouraged if only a few brothers attend, rather understand you’ve tapped into the curious of your lodge in search of masonic substance and seize the initiative! If your lodge isn’t offering an experience or opportunity you are interested in beyond the stated meeting, *create it and offer it yourself!*

3. Start a Club. Clubs are growing in popularity and can offer you and your brother’s terrific opportunities to enjoy programs, experiences, or topical education based on commonality with other brothers. Book clubs provide brother opportunities to read and discuss masonic books. A masonic history club might provide for discussions on the history and origin of freemasonry or historical events in masonry. The type of a club is limited really only by the imagination of the brothers. Set a schedule and provide form and structure so that brothers incorporate it as a serious aspect of their masonic life and actually plan time around it. Clubs can have discussions or speakers, and they can travel on “field trips”, all of which can strengthen the bond of brotherly love and affection among lodge members.

4. Travel! Travel and visit lodges as often as you can. Meet brothers; enjoy their programs and degree work. Offer a program from your lodge to other lodges and then travel to those lodges to provide it. Traveling offers terrific opportunities to provide and receive education, expand your masonic network, assist other lodges, and learn about other masonic activities. You might even see if another local lodge has its own clubs that you might visit!

In all of these suggestions, the key to your success will be communication. Publicize, announce, and discuss your plans and programs with other brothers. When you announce a program or club meeting, use your local lodge means of communication to spread the word. Some lodges use social media, some

use email groups, and some use combinations of several means. Find out which you can use and spread the word to grow your support! Announce your program nights, advertise your club, discuss your planned visits to other lodges – you never know who may come along as part of their own search for “more”.

Ultimately it is up to each one of us to assess and define our relationship with masonry and decide if our journey is going in the direction that satisfies our interests and our desires. There are some simple tools a brother can use to implement change and to focus his masonry on a firm and satisfying center. Those tools are:

Ask – ask your lodge leaders and brethren for their ideas, guidance and counsel for opportunities and content that fulfill your longing for intellectually satisfying experiences. Identify the influencers in your lodge and ask them for their support and active participation. Ask experienced brothers how to implement your ideas and invite them to see your results.

Seek – seek the content and those opportunities for personal growth and ways to ignite or tap into those sentiments among your brothers. Search outside the confines of the stated meeting and your lodge in your effort and consult with learned brothers on their opinions, experiences, and recommendations on how to turn your aspirations into reality. Find those resources that address your own questions and thirst for knowledge.

Knock – knock on the door; take those first actions and steps that set your ideas into motion. Alarm the brethren of your lodge that an opportunity has arrived and is ready to be admitted, recognized, and engaged.

Ask, Seek, Knock; these are the working tools of change my brothers and they are yours to apply! We talk of change, and we talk of a hunger for substance and direction, yet often our working tools remain silent and unused. It is time my brethren, time to blow the dust off your working tools!

I believe once we identify our priorities and assess whether we are addressing them, and then employ our working tools, the dreaded stated meeting will naturally gravitate to its rightful place in our collective masonic experience, that of a necessary administrative function that supports your lodge separate and apart from your loftier, masonic pursuits. Perhaps you will someday agree with me when I suggest that if the stated meeting is the center of your masonry, then it is possible my brother that you are doing it wrong.

I close with this observation. For those of you waiting for change to come to you someday in the future, this waiting may ensure that change will never come. But to those who set their own change in motion and zealously pursue their interests, a rich and fulfilling masonic experience outside and apart from the stated meeting waits. Ask, Seek, Knock, and focus on the masonry that excites and challenges! Lodges are simply our universal construct providing us the infrastructure and initial lessons to use in designing our individual masonic journeys. Masonry itself is ours, it is mine, it is yours and it is completely within our own control how we apply ourselves to masonry and masonry to our lives. Do not allow yourself to be distracted and lulled into focusing on the stated meeting as your masonic center!

I remain sincerely and fraternally yours!