



McAlester Scottish Rite

Orient of Oklahoma, AASR Southern Jurisdiction



www.mcalesterscottishrite.org

Newsletter Date

February 2023

Editor : Don Jones, 33°



Masonic Center Hours:

8:00 AM to 5:00 PM(closed Noon to 1:00) Monday–Thursday, Closed on Fridays
305 2nd St.
McAlester, OK 74501
918-423-6360

Upcoming Events:

1st Wednesday of the Month

Duncan Scottish Rite Chapter, 11:30 AM,
Jimmie's Egg, Duncan

1st Thursday of the Month

Oklahoma County Scottish Rite Chapter,
OKC 11:30 AM I40 & Meridian

2nd Monday of the Month

Lodge of Perfection Meeting,
Meeting at 7:00 pm

2nd Wednesday of the Month

Indian Chapter, Scottish Rite Noon
McAlester Scottish Rite Cente

3rd Wednesday of the Month

Muskogee Chapter, Scottish Rite
Masonic Temple Noon

Note: Scottish Rite Chapters and Societies, be sure to notify the office of any changes in meeting place and times.

Advisory Council and Officers

Jack Inman, 33°, Chairman
Mike Ebert, 33° General Secretary
William C. Cox, 33°, Member
Thomas S. Crowl, 33 G.C., Member Emeritus
Wade Massey, 33°, Member
Phillip Johnson, 32° KCCH Member
Samuel Box, 32° KCCH, Venerable Master
Brent Heilman 32°, KCCH, Wise Master
Mike Wright, 32°, KCCH, Commander
Russell Davis 32°, Master of Kadosh

Freemasons: Why is our Membership Declining? By Tom Keenze, 33°

Editor: The following essay by Brother Keenze is not to be construed as the position of the Scottish Rite or the Grand Lodge of Oklahoma. It is one brother's thoughts on the state of the Craft and it's future. It is provided here to stimulate thought and encourage conversation on an important matter facing the craft.

First and foremost, Freemasonry is a fraternal organization. This is defined as an organized society of men associated together in an environment of companionship and brotherhood; and dedicated to the intellectual, and social development of its members. Further, a fraternal organization may be considered a membership organization formed around a common bond, ideology, or personal background. In Freemasonry, our common bond is our ritual and ceremonies. Our ritual is the glue holding us together. It is the tie that binds. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we take our obligation to preserve our ritual traditions and perform them to the best of our ability very seriously. We also need to be familiar with our twenty-five Landmarks and adhere to them as well. If we violate any of those Landmarks, we would no longer be a Masonic Lodge. It is those Landmarks that define us.

As you may know, our fraternity was established in American in 1733. Many other fraternities were formed here in the mid 19th and early 20th century. Among them, the Druids, the Improved order of Red Men, York Rite, Scottish Rite, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Loyal Order of Moose, and the Knights of Columbus (who dress very much like Knights Templar).

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[Upcoming Reunions:](#)

2023
April 1-2
October 21 & 22

[Masonic Website on Interest](#)

[Supreme Council 33 Southern Jurisdiction, Scottish Rite of Freemasonry](#)

[Supreme Council 33 Northern Jurisdiction, Scottish Rite of Freemasonry](#)

[Grand Lodge of Oklahoma](#)

[Scottish Rite, Valley of Guthrie](#)

[Scottish Rite, Valley of Tulsa](#)

[Scottish Rite Research Society](#)

Why is our Membership Declining? (continued)

Masonry is not a Service Club, such as Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis International, or Jaycees. A service club is a voluntary nonprofit organization where members meet regularly to perform charitable works either by direct hands-on efforts or by raising money for other organizations. A service club is defined first by its mission and second by its membership benefits, such as social occasions, networking, and personal growth opportunities. The common bond in a service club is the mission

Do we do some of the functions of a service club? Yes, we do. However, those community charitable works we perform, whether we realize it or not, are primarily for the purpose of good public relations. Yes, we do community charitable work because it is the right thing to do, but our fraternity was not formed primarily for that purpose. Our primary charitable efforts should be directed to our members, and their wives widows and orphans.

To do that effectively a lodge needs to have a solid financial foundation, which unfortunately, many of our lodges today are lacking. If we want to be able to provide financial support where needed, if we want to be an effective force in our members and communities 100 years from now, we need to have a 100-year plan. Not the 3 to 5 year plan many corporations aim for. Will Rogers Lodge was chartered in 1892. One of the members figured out that had the Lodge put the equivalent of one member's dues each month into a savings account since the Lodge was chartered, it would now have over \$3.5 million dollars in its treasury. Having a solid financial foundation also allows a Lodge to have an up-to-date facility. One that no member would be ashamed to invite a friend to visit.

Now for some background information: Fraternal organizations began witnessing a substantial drop in membership during the 1980s and 1990s. And that trend is continuing. As of 2018, membership was reported down significantly in such groups as the Lions (down 12 percent since 1983), the Elks (down 18 percent since 1979), the Shriners (down 27 percent since 1979), the Jaycees (down 44 percent since 1979), and our fraternity (down 39 percent between 1959 and 2018).

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Why is our Membership Declining?^(continued)

In sum, after expanding steadily throughout most of the last century, many major fraternal and civic organizations have experienced a substantial decline in membership over the span of a few decades. And that decline is not restricted to fraternities and service clubs. It includes church groups, PTAs, sports groups, professional societies, book clubs, labor unions, veterans' groups and even bowling leagues.

Research shows that Between 1980 and 1993 the total number of bowlers in America increased by 10 percent, while league bowling decreased by 40 percent. Robert Putnam, Harvard University Professor and author of "Bowling Alone" sees this as evidence of social disengagement in contemporary America.

Putnam also notes the technological transformation of leisure. Deep-seated technological trends are radically "privatizing" or "individualizing" the use of our leisure time and disrupting opportunities for social interaction. The most obvious and probably the most powerful instrument of this revolution is television. Time-budget studies in the 1960s, a mere decade after television become available to American homes, showed that the growth in time spent watching television dwarfed all other changes in the way Americans passed their days and nights. Television has made our communities wider, but also shallower. In short, electronic technology enables our individual tastes to be satisfied more fully, but at the cost of the positive social experiences that were associated with earlier forms of entertainment.

This same logic applies to the replacement of vaudeville by the movies and movies by VCRs, and now VCRs by video streaming. The new "virtual reality" helmets that are currently trending will allow us to be entertained in complete isolation. Technology is driving a wedge between our individual interests and our collective interests. Clearly, technology is the largest contributor to the decline of membership in many fraternal and social organizations. And yet technology may have the potential to help us grow again.



Why is our Membership Declining? (continued)

A range of additional changes have transformed the American family since the 1960s: fewer marriages, more divorces; fewer children, lower real wages, and so on. Each of these changes may account for some of the lessening of civic and social engagement. Though married, middle-class parents are generally more socially involved than other people. Moreover, there are changes in scale that have swept over the American economy during this period. The corner grocery has been replaced by the supermarket, the supermarket by electronic shopping at home, the replacement of community-based businesses by big box stores owned by distant and sometimes multinational firms. All this has likely added to the undermining of the material and even physical basis for social engagement.

Think about this. Before the invention and wide-spread use of air conditioning, people sat on their porches and visited with neighbors. Because of air conditioning, that no longer happens, and many of us don't even know who our neighbors are. Another impact: very few new houses include porches since they are rarely used. Thus, air conditioning has changed our preferences in home design. Soon after air conditioning came along, television began proliferating society. The combination of those two technologies has led to what some call "the cocooning of America". These two technologies allow people to stay in their homes in comfort and be entertained and/or educated by technology.

What can we, as Freemasons, do about this? I think we need to focus on the unmet needs arise from being cocooned and entertained at home, though many men may not realize the nature of that need.

I submit to you that what is missing is interaction with like-minded men of good moral character. This is what I think men who have been deprived of this natural male human need would recognize and appreciate it, were they given an opportunity to experience it. Unfortunately, many of our lodges are failing to fulfill our fraternal obligations and provide that experience.

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Why is our Membership Declining? (continued)

For instance, how many times have we as members of this fraternity telephoned a brother merely to ask how he is doing. This is a situation where a personal call, rather than a text or email message is far more effective. Brethren, we should know, second only to next-of-kin, when something major has happened in the life of a brother. Such as illness, loss of a job, death of a family member, and so on.

I believe men would respond very favorably to having fraternal brothers who truly care about him. But we must demonstrate that care at every opportunity. We fulfill our fraternal obligation to our brothers when we greet them at a stated meeting or degree. When we are together, we need to make each other feel needed, wanted and important. Are we doing a good job of that?

When we close a lodge meeting, we say that we act on the plumb of rectitude, meet on the level of equality and part on the square of virtue and morality.

What is rectitude? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word comes from the Latin adjective *rectus*, which means both "right" and "straight." Rectitude therefore means either "straightness" or "rightness" of character

Meeting on the level of equality refers to the idea that in the Lodge room, we are all equal, regardless of our status outside of the lodge. In our ritual, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family; the high and low, the rich and poor; who, as created by one Almighty Parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support and protect each other.

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Why is our Membership Declining? (continued)

When we part on the square of virtue and morality, we are reminded to “square” our actions. Each of us has our own Square within us, our conscience, which we must use to test our every thought, action, and word to determine if it is true by the Square of Virtue. The Square is a symbol of the moral law upon which human life must rest if civilization is to survive. Without the moral law as our guide, we flounder and fall in this world.

When we raise a brother, we inform him we will never hesitate to aid and serve him. That we will remember him in our devotions. That we will keep his secrets. That we will aid and assist him should he fall in some way. That we will give him good counsel when needed. That we will tenderly remind him of his faults. That we will aid his reformation. And that we will notify him of all approaching danger. All this in addition to all the promises we make in our several obligations. My question to all of you is: how seriously do you take these obligations? And how much more attractive to profane men would our fraternity be if all of us took them seriously and lived those values, especially when we are together in Lodge?

Finally, I submit to you that growth isn't the only thing we should focus on. In fact, I think growth is the wrong thing to focus on. I believe that quality is far more important than quantity. Men will be much more interested in and much more likely to desire membership in a group of high-quality, knowledgeable men who live by high moral values and who willingly share their knowledge.

Tom Keenze, 33°
PM Will Rogers Lodge #53

