



# The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Virginia



## Committee on Masonic Education

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### Lodge Presentation Program Paper

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## Putting Masonry into Men Beyond the Ritual

By Right Worshipful John Shroeder, Division VII Provost

*“There can be no Masonic dedication without Masonic education.”*

*Allen E. Roberts, Masonic Author, PM, Babcock Lodge No. 322, PDDGM, Masonic District 15B,  
Philalethes Society Fellow and Past President*

Our beautiful ritual teaches all of the moral lessons a Mason needs to become a better man, husband, father, employee/employer, and member of the community. If we periodically review the degree obligations, lectures, and charges, we will be able to internalize the high moral precepts they contain, and make them our own. Moreover, continued exposure to the Blue Lodge degrees and the additional dramatizations of the Masonic moral allegories and symbols in the York Rite and Scottish Rite degrees serve to reinforce these lessons. In addition, the practical application of many of these principles in the charitable activities of Craft Masonry and the appendant bodies, including the Shrine, can further etch these principles on our character.

Of course, there may be periods in our lives when we are exposed to the degrees rather infrequently, and since few have memorized all of the lectures, and many may have forgotten the catechisms, the valuable tenets of

Freemasonry may not be in the front of our minds when we are confronted by distracting problems in our daily lives. However, even during these periods, and even if we only have a few minutes to spare, we can avail ourselves of the benefits of individual Masonic reading and study. Such reading and study provide an important way to gain more light and understanding, to help develop our character and strengthen our spiritual temple.

We would do well to start with the Presentation Volume of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, which each member of the Craft should have and keep close at hand. In this volume is to be found the Book of Constitutions and also the Virginia Mentor's Manual, which provides answers to many practical questions about the degrees, about the Fraternity, and about being a Mentor.

A second important source of individual Masonic education and reading is found in the work of Reverend Doctor Joseph Fort Newton (1880 – 1950). When Brother Newton was raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason in Illinois in 1907, he asked, "Where can I read more about Masonry, its history and tenets?" He was told that there were no books on Masonry because nothing could be written down about Masonry.

Fortunately, he set out to correct that misimpression. In 1914, he published *The Builders*, which many believe to be the most inspirational book written about the tenets of Freemasonry. He later became Grand Chaplain for the Grand Lodge of Iowa, which directed that his book be provided to all who were raised in Iowa, and it is still being re-published in paperback editions that are available for purchase at reasonable prices on the Internet.

Many of his addresses were published in *Men's House Masonic Addresses and Papers*, and some portions of his written works are still available as pamphlets such as: *The Masonic Lodge*, *The Future of Masonry*, *The Wonders of Masonry*, *Masonry and the Bible*, and *The Masonic Letter G*. No better source for private reading exists to keep the flame of Masonic enthusiasm and the spirit of brotherhood actively burning in one's breast than the books of Joseph Fort Newton.

A very entertaining Masonic book that tells a series of short stories about a Lodge and its members, set in an earlier and simpler time in the United States, is *The Lodge in Friendship Village and Other Stories*, which was published by The Masonic Book Club. It sets a high example of true Masonic brotherhood in an interesting series of tales, which will be long remembered like the scenes from a favorite movie. With a little searching, a copy of this book can still be found on the Internet.

There are also a number of books that will be useful for those who have an interest in more esoteric studies of the meaning of Freemasonry, its philosophy, and symbols. You may wish to start by exploring the works of an English Mason, William Lesley Wilmshurst (1867 – 1939). These include: *The Meaning of Masonry* and essay selections, "The Ceremony of Initiation," "The Ceremony of Passing," "The Mystical Basis of Freemasonry," and "The Working Tools of an Old York Master." Several of these volumes are available for reading on the Internet site of the British Bradford University on a section known as The Web of Hiram.

Another esoteric Masonic author for those who are looking for additional interpretations of Masonic symbolism and meaning beyond that explained in

our ritual lectures is George H. Steinmetz. His book, *Freemasonry: Its Hidden Meaning*, is a spiritual interpretation of the esoteric work of the Masonic Lodge that analyzes the lectures and symbols of the three degrees. Another of his books, *The Lost Word, Its Hidden Meaning*, provides a correlation of the allegory and symbolism of the Bible with that of Freemasonry. You may also wish to read a third book he wrote, *The Royal Arch, Its Hidden Meaning*. These books are not difficult to follow, and provide very interesting reading for the Mason searching for added meaning.

There are many Internet websites replete with Masonic essays. One such is the website of *Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry* which is styled “The Masonic Magazine on Freemasonry and Research into Freemasonry made by Freemasons.”

Of course, beyond individual reading, one of the most effective ways to understand the moral lessons of Freemasonry is by becoming a Mentor to a newer Mason. Many wise educators have said that the best way to learn a subject is to teach it. By becoming a Mentor, a Mason has to make himself sufficiently knowledgeable about Freemasonry and of Masonic reference material in order to answer questions asked by an interested and inquisitive Brother. Thus, mentoring often helps the Mentor, at least as much as the one being mentored and, in accordance with Masonic precepts, sets a good example – in modern parlance, it’s called “walking the talk.”

So to conclude, going through the degrees is essential to becoming a Mason, but becoming a Master Mason takes more than that. The process of making Freemasonry a guiding principle in your life requires study, reflection, and practice, and what I call “putting Masonry into men beyond the ritual” is greatly facilitated by mentoring – both by having a Mentor and by being a

mentor. And, as you mentor others and set a good example, you will be remembered with great fondness and respect as one who followed the advice in that poem by Albert Camus, which was often mentioned in talks by our much-loved late Grand Master John Robert Dean, “Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow; Don't walk behind me, I may not lead; Walk beside me, and just be my friend.”