

FREEMASONRY: THE DIGITAL CHALLENGE

by Bro. Ronald J. Watkins

Wayfarers Lodge #50 – Grand Lodge of Arizona.

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Ordo ab Chao

Every generation of Freemasons has faced the issue of the state of the Craft, as it exists in its day and as it will exist in the future. So it is for us today. In this first decade of the 21st century, Freemasonry faces yet another century of challenges, but within those challenges are also opportunities, opportunities unprecedented in their value to the Craft. If these opportunities are properly recognized and responsibly acted upon, the Craft will enjoy a resurgence that it has not experienced since the eighteenth century.

THE MIRAGE

Masonic membership in America reached a high water mark in 1959 at just over four million. Since then there has been a steady decline in numbers until today membership stands at just under 1.5 million. It now appears that the decline will cease at between one million and 750,000.

This decline led to a great deal of soul searching and a reexamination of the Craft. There was an understandable, all too human, preoccupation with numbers. This examination led to doubt, criticism and significant change.

It is understandable that Masons would have looked inward in seeking the causes of this decline in membership. But we were responding to a mirage, as was every other fraternal and service organization in America. Robert D. Putnam's landmark essay and subsequent book both entitled "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" established that our loss of membership is a consequence of a general decline in social participation which has effected every aspect of American civic life.

By focusing on ourselves and failing to perceive the true cause of our decline in numbers, we have gone down many false paths. One day classes, reduced proficiencies, and lately a loss of respect for our obligation towards secrecy are all a part of these changes. To stem this decline many Grand Lodges focused significant resources towards charitable activities in the belief that Masonry should be perceived more as a fraternal organization working for the public good. This, it was thought, would serve to lift the veil from our private functions, to depict us as another form of Elk or Lion. In recent years, lodges have opened themselves up and allowed ritual to be recorded knowing it would be publicly broadcast. This was done, as well, to say we have no secrets, when in truth we do.

The consequence of these measures, however, has not stemmed the decline in membership. And today a healthy reconsideration of what was discarded in the pursuit of numbers is well underway. The issue for Masons in this first decade of the 21st century is what are we going to do, not about our declining numbers which are at last poised to turn, but for the future of Freemasonry? In short, what Craft do we wish for ourselves and for the future? The answer to those questions lies in a new and unexpected place.

THE COMMUNITY AND FREEMASONRY

Masonry has always been based on community. Our membership has been drawn largely from those who already have an existing association with a Mason. Historically, it has not been unusual for a lodge to consist primarily of men who work together, or who live in the same immediate locale. The percentage of a community who are Freemasons has historically been higher in small towns than in big cities.

Until just before the Second World War, America was still largely a rural nation with just under half the population living and working on a family farm. With the war, and the subsequent post-war industrial explosion, a profound migration occurred from the farm to the city until today eight in ten Americans live in a city.

Initially, Masonic membership numbers did not suffer with this migration. The community of the small town was largely transferred to that of the city neighborhood. But with the advent of freeways and the increasing use of cars, significant numbers moved from the inner city to the suburbs. This relocation coincides with the change in social capital recorded by Putnam. Days now involved a significant amount of commute time and wives began working in greater numbers. There was, as a result, less of an opportunity to reestablish community ties and once broken by a generation they were not restored.

As a consequence, the traditional American community in which Freemasonry prospered has largely vanished. Remnants still exist in certain areas of suburbia, small towns and in sections of our large cities, but for the most part the communities from which we drew members and new lodges were formed have disappeared. This has adversely affected Masonic membership.

But a new form of community has arisen to replace that which we lost. It is a community, however, that is not widely recognized as such, though it is in large measure the future of the Craft.

THE INTERNET AND FREEMASONRY

It is said that the Internet is the best, and worst, thing to ever happen to Freemasonry. It is the best because it makes the tenets of Masonry more widely available than has ever been possible previously. It is the best because it makes for more effective lodge communication. It is the best because it allows Masons removed by distance to remain in active touch with their home lodge and lodge brothers.

It is the worst because that which we'd prefer to keep secret has never been more readily available. Every aspect of Craft ritual can be found with just the a few clicks of a mouse. It is the worse because never before has it been so easy to disseminate lies about us. It is the worse because never before has it been so easy for the profane to pretend to be brothers and gain the unwitting trust of those who truly are. It is the worst because never before has it been so tempting for a brother to forget his obligation while in the comfort of his own home, surfing in the artificial intimacy of Internet Masonry.

There exist today Internet lodges, both regular but more typically irregular. There are also individual websites, blogs, online forums and MySpace accounts. Anything and everything about Freemasonry is available somewhere in the digital universe.

To this development the various Grand Lodges have reacted in widely disparate ways. In some cases they have suspended or expelled certain brothers and ordered websites shut down. In other situations they have taken a *laissez-faire* approach, giving wide berth to the publication of information and activities clearly covered by a Mason's obligation. If any North American Grand Lodge has yet adopted a formal policy related to the Internet it is not widely known.

The consequence of all this has been confusion about what a lodge and/or a brother as a Mason can and cannot do on the Internet. There is today no coherent approach to digital Freemasonry by the Grand Lodges or any national Masonic body. The state of Freemasonry on the Internet is most accurately described as chaotic.

Today those men interested in Masonry do not go the library or buy a book. They surf the Internet. Likewise, contemporary Freemasons conduct their research largely on the Internet. Though still in its infancy, the Internet is already the single largest depository of Masonic information in history. Books long out of print and once not commonly available are now displayed in full on various websites. This body of work continues to grow every few weeks. This is, and will continue to be, an enormous boon for Masonic research.

Significantly, the Internet is also the world's largest depository of anti-Masonic information and is the new home of clandestine masons and irregular lodges.

THE INTERNET AND CLANDESTINE MASONRY

The dark side of the Internet as it relates to Freemasonry is that it allows irregular or clandestine masons a wide audience. In fact, such masonry has latched onto the Internet with a vengeance. Google the word "Freemasonry" and more often than not at least half of the initial hits will be websites condemning Masonry or featuring irregular masonry. Google "Freemason blogs" and many or most hits will be irregular websites or those that provide irregular information and opinions, or link to such sites.

Of the three most popular Masonic websites on the Internet only one is regular. One of the other two is decidedly irregular, even hostile to Grand Lodges and traditional Masonry, while the other features links to such sites. The former, joined by any number of Masonic blogs, endorsed a presidential candidate in the 2008 election, which gave those not knowledgeable about Freemasonry the false impression that the Craft is involved in politics.

In this confusing digital world it can be very difficult for a non-Mason or a prospective Mason to differentiate between clandestine and regular Masonic websites. Even regular Masons can be easily misled. Popular Masonic forums often feature routine postings from regular Masons, and from irregular European ones, as well as from co-masons and feminine masons. All are mixed together and mingled in a way that gives each equal credibility. Many blogging Masons, especially the most prominent sites, tend to come from angry men with an ax to grind, men who want radical change in the Craft.

The Internet allows regular brothers to post anonymously or under false flags and publish information in violation of their obligation without being held to account. One prominent poster, who is generally in support of regular Masonry, routinely publishes the exact text of the California ritual to support his positions.

Another phenomenon on the Internet is that irregular and clandestine groups have a representation out of proportion to their true numbers. A single disgruntled former Mason can change his Internet identity repeatedly, post messages and give the very false impression that a certain site is representative of the feelings of large numbers of Masons, or that a certain dissident point of view is widely held when neither is the case. It is commonly thought that two popular sites hostile to regular Masonry that often write in support of one another are actually authored by the same malcontent expelled Mason, and that he is the force behind an irregular grand lodge.

For centuries irregular Masons have languished because they've never had the numbers to achieve real impact. The Internet has changed that. Disgruntled and expelled Masons have formed several clandestine groups which have a strong presence on the Internet. One expelled Mason founded or participated in the founding of the Rite of the Rose Cross of Gold, the Modern Rite of Memphis, the United Grand Lodge of America, and most recently the Grand Orient of the United States of America which claims to have received recognition from the Grand Orient of France. He and others present that they are the new wave of Masonry in the 21st century.

This "new wave" has certain troubling aspects. The proponents veil their anger towards regular Masonry by claiming to be supportive of traditional Masonry, when in fact they are not. They tend to depict regular Masonic Grand Lodges as monolithic and oppressive. They view subordinate lodges as dysfunctional and archaic. They envision a future in which anyone claiming to be a Mason is accepted as such, a world in which regularity all but ceases to exist. In the name of what they term "universal brotherhood" they seek a Masonic world in which anyone wearing a compass and square is accepted as a Mason. If they have their way it will be the end of regular Masonry.

Following is a sample from such a site:

Mainstream Masonry has always been a dictatorship, a benevolent one and in many Grand Lodges guided by a voting body which is increasingly ignored. That seemed to serve Masonry well for many years. Perhaps there has always been some back room arm twisting and an Oligarchy working out of smoke filled rooms. But we always had the sense that our leaders had our best interests at heart and that they listened to the wishes and feelings of the average Mason.

We had a simple system for simple times...

As easy, fast communication has brought Masons from many different traditions together, the rise of universal Masonry reaching out across jurisdictions, seeking consensus and some kind of all encompassing identity has enjoyed an interstate bonding. Brothers from many different jurisdictions with the ability to communicate well on a daily basis seek to break down barriers of territorial exclusiveness. Naturally when power is eroded, dispersed and questioned it seeks to preserve the status quo, sometimes by whatever means.

Such postings appear weekly on various popular websites. Clandestine masons understand the impact of the Internet and its potential significance to their cause. Consider this, even more seditious posting from a recent blog, intended apparently to lure regular Masons into attending irregular lodges of the clandestine Grand Orient of the United States of America:

Masonic recognition is a hotly debated topic on the Internet these days but is it really as important as it appears? In truth it's a game played by Grand Lodges and a few overzealous brothers. Most lodges give a wink and a grin to recognition to keep their Grand Lodge from harassing them.

For centuries Masons having been visiting one another in lodges whether recognized or not, and the age old tradition continues to this day. Masons from the State Grand Lodges and UGLE have been visiting and joining the Grand Orient of France for over a hundred years. Other Masons have visited Price Hall lodges even in jurisdictions where they're not recognized. The GOUSA has members that still belong to their State Grand Lodge. The bottom line is that most Masons care more about the brotherhood than they do about Masonic recognition.

Such is the nature of clandestine Internet masonry, but the threat here comes not from the likelihood that, as one example, the so-called Grand Orient of the United States of America will become a viable Grand Lodge with a competing network of subordinate lodges. The clandestine and expelled masons forming such groups have a history of dissent. They form alliances and fall out with one another with frequency. On a practical level the Grand Orient of the United States of America and such groups are not a threat to regular Masonry because they cannot get along with each other. Having broken with regular Masonry they are by practice rebellious and prone to active dissension, even from one another.

No, the threat here comes in a different form.

Non-Masons, prospective Masons and new Masons visiting the Internet cannot today readily distinguish regular Masonry from irregular masonry and in many cases are unlikely to know that such a profound distinction exists. The threat to the Craft is that we have lost the Internet message to irregular masonry.

The state of today's Internet Masonic message is largely unrepresentative of regular Masonry. Clandestine masons and disgruntled regular Masons engaged in unMasonic conduct are primarily driving a destructive digital discourse. It is essential to our future that regular Masonry take control of the digital Masonic message. If we don't, these forces will.

The reality is that if the Internet Freemason message remains unchanged it will become dominant. It will not only influence how non-Masons think of us, new members will be influenced by it and will form an initial false belief in the actual nature of regular Masonry, a belief that participation in lodge activities may not alter. As they rise in leadership they will seek to change Freemasonry to conform to this influence and, given time, these leaders will decide the direction and future of Freemasonry.

THE INTERNET AND REGULAR MASONRY

Generally speaking, regular Masons are reluctant, or unwilling, to spread light on the Internet. They are by nature reticent when it comes to discussing the Craft outside of the lodge. Others are not certain what can be discussed or do not know how to write certain matters in a form the profane can access. Still others hold the opinion that we are a fraternity and that light, that is, our understanding that comes from reading and study, can only truly be shared face-to-face.

There already exists a form of regular digital Freemasonry. The United Grand Lodge of England has chartered an Internet lodge, as just one example. Certain long respected research lodges and societies have blossomed in this new digital age. Masons all over the world meet and communicate in chat rooms and in forums. Information is exchanged, friendships are formed. The consequences for all this are not as yet fully apparent, though the dangers are.

This is not to say that the Internet and Internet lodges will replace the traditional Craft lodge. They will not. Masonry depends on fraternity that can only exist within a lodge, and upon our ritual, which can only be truly experienced there as well.

Recent non-scientific polls conducted by widely read Masonic blogs reveal surprising results. One is that as many Masons over the age of 40 as under it routinely visited Masonic blogs. In addition, just as many Masons who have been members more than 20 years visited the blogs as those new to the Craft. The polls suggest results that are initially counterintuitive, that is, that Masons of all ages express their interest in Masonry by visiting Masonic websites.

All North American Grand lodges have websites and it is likely that most subordinate lodges have them as well. It is clear from a review of these sites, however, that those in authority are uncertain how to proceed. Craft lodge websites are noteworthy for their haphazard design, unpolished appearance and utter lack of timely information. The single most important function such a site can perform, that of keeping brothers informed of events, does not take place. It is as if once a site is constructed it no longer receives the attention of the Master. Though more professionally designed, most Grand Lodge websites are little better. In nearly every case, both for the Grand Lodges as well as for the Craft lodges, the worth of websites is simply squandered.

PORTAL FOR NEW MASONS

We routinely ask where the new brothers will come from. They will come from the Internet.

The Internet is already the portal for most prospects and those interested in researching Masonry. In visiting the blogs created by new Masons and in speaking to new candidates, it is apparent that the Internet is the primary means they employed in making their decision to join. This is true for nearly any man today who becomes a Mason.

As a consequence, a striking and contemporaneous website is vital to the continued well being and functioning of any lodge in the 21st century. New Masons and those considering joining expect a lodge to have such a site. It is through websites they select most of the companies with which they conduct business and they associate a quality website with a worthwhile organization. More often than not, the mere existence, as well as the condition of a lodge website, will *of itself* influence the potential Mason in deciding to submit a petition and will determine to which lodge he will submit it.

Any primary focus on membership other than on the Internet by the Grand Lodges and subordinate lodges is misdirected. Digital Freemasonry is a significant dimension in the future of Freemasonry. A well designed website that provides the right kind of information

and is kept current is not just a boon to the brothers of that lodge, but it also plays a vital role in attracting new brothers to the Craft and that lodge.

The consequence today of our haphazard, untimely, sloppy sites is to present a very poor image of Freemasonry. It is so bad, in fact, the Craft would be better served if there were no Grand or subordinate lodge websites at all.

GRAND LODGES AND THE INTERNET

The Internet and Masonic websites within the jurisdiction of a Grand Lodge can be an invaluable resource for brothers, and can do a great deal to correct misinformation about Freemasonry. In this digital age, Websites should be the primary educational resource for Grand Lodges and their subordinate lodges and should receive substantial resources of every Grand Lodge.

The Internet is the present and future of Masonic education and it requires a significant commitment by the various Grand Lodges. It is not a question of simply adding a new program which will primarily serve to diffuse our traditional educational efforts. What is required is a determined, balanced and comprehensive Internet and website advocacy. It may even be necessary to divert resources from more traditional educational programs because in the end what we do in brick and mortar schools pales beside what can be accomplished, and needs to be accomplished, on the Internet.

Though Grand Lodge websites by and large are adequate, nearly all of them fall short of their potential and of the role they should properly serve. There is an enormous lack of vision when it comes to Freemasonry and the Internet. Grand Lodge websites themselves must first be models of what a Masonic website should be. They should be reservoirs of Masonic information to educate Masons and non-Masons alike. They should as well provide information Craft lodge officers require to serve their lodges. The Grand Lodge constitution and Grand Master edicts should be posted. The websites should also provide a wide-range of links to other respected Masonic resources, *contemporaneous* information on meetings and activities, and provide information about what is taking place in Masonry throughout the jurisdiction. They should also provide information to brothers that in the past has only been available by visiting the Grand Lodge personally to obtain. This should include a list of all Grand Lodges with which it is in amity. This is essential information to brothers active on the Internet.

Every Grand Lodge should make possible, and mandate, the construction of quality websites for subordinate lodges and adopt policies designed to create the finest websites that best serve Masonry within its jurisdiction. This means more than simply having a Grand Lodge webmaster to consult with subordinate lodges. It means making decisions about design and updating, about what can and should be publicly posted. It means setting reasonable standards and following them, not assigning the matter to a committee that meets a few times during the year, reports progress at the annual Communication, but in the end does nothing.

There have already been conflicts between Grand Lodges, subordinate lodges and individual Masons over website content. Establishing clear standards so that everyone understands what can and cannot appear on the Internet will go a long way in preventing such conflicts.

It is not said lightly that this is the most important challenge the Craft faces in the 21st century.

THE CRAFT LODGE AND THE INTERNET

Increasingly, Masons of all ages are turning to the Internet and websites for information. They will tend to be more engaged, and certainly more informed, if their lodge has a well designed, fully functioning, updated website. Lodges today lose roughly half of all new members almost at once. While many remain dues payers they are effectively nonparticipants in the life of the lodge. Others are in time suspended for non-payment.

In terms of membership our problem is not the passing of older Masons but rather our inability to retain those we raise. Proper websites, both for the Grand Lodge as well as the Craft lodges, can be an important instrument towards negating apathy among newly raised Masons. Email, as just one example, is a simple, yet highly effective, means of communication yet few lodges routinely employ it.

A Craft lodge website must contain timely information about the lodge and its activities. It should be linked to the reservoir of educational material contained on the Grand Lodge website, and linked as well to that portion of the Grand Lodge website that lists Masonic activities throughout the jurisdiction. It should go without saying that the lodge website should be attractive, easily navigated and worthwhile, both for brothers and prospective Masons.

The Internet has created an enormous temptation for lodge officers and brothers that is very destructive to the Craft. There already exists today video programs on the Internet which can be downloaded and used within the lodge as part of its education program. Many of these are quite engaging but they are often the product of non-Masons and contain information which we are obligated not to disclose. Because it comes from the Internet, and because anyone can view it there, there is the tendency for Masters and brothers to disregard their obligation. They justify this by arguing that because so much that violates Masonic secrecy is readily available, there is no harm in their violating their obligation.

Setting aside the utterly lack of judgment such a decision represents, it also reveals a failure to understand the true nature of our obligation. One consequence is that newly raised Masons who have been aggressively charged in the Third Degree to never violate their obligation are then exposed to a cavalier disregard for it by long standing brothers. They form from that the notion that the obligation is not to be taken seriously, and if the obligation is not a serious matter than neither are the other teachings of Freemasonry. The steady erosion of our commitment to secrecy which has been encouraged by the spread of the Internet is a great threat to our Craft. Every Grand Lodge should have an educational program to impress upon all Masters and line officers what information they can, and cannot, use in the lodge.

The Internet and lodge websites will also draw to Masonry prospects who in some cases will be very different from those traditionally attracted to the Craft. This will mean a greater need for those serving on investigation committees to do their job properly and for brothers to be more willing to exercise proper judgment when voting. A suitable waiting period to allow brothers the opportunity to get to know the prospect should be scrupulously observed, and ideally the lodge should conduct regular Masonic education sessions with

them. In addition, they should be urged to attend all functions of the lodge which a non-member can, including work days. The vetting process will of necessity be more involved than it has been in recent decades.

MASONIC ISSUES AND THE INTERNET

The presence of regular Masonry on the Internet should not be simply to recruit members but to improve the public perception of the Craft in general. From that members will come, as will a greater recognition and understanding of Masonry.

There are, however, important issues unique to Freemasonry which are created by our use of the Internet. These issues must be addressed by the various Grand Lodges. Here are just a few of them:

- What constitutes Masonic communication in a digital world?
- Should a regular lodge website link to an irregular site?
- May a regular Mason post on a forum that allows irregular masons to post?
- Is it a Masonic offense to post on the Internet using an assumed identity?

There are many perils for regular Masons on the Internet. It is easy to join forums that allow irregular and feminine masons to participate. Discussions of disputes between a Grand Lodge and a subordinate lodge, discussions that should not take place in public, are widespread on the Internet. The greatest threat is that it is very easy to form a false impression of Freemasonry because so much of what is widely available on the Internet is irregular or clandestine. This false impression then leads to counterproductive behavior within the lodge and will eventually have an adverse impact on the Grand Lodge line and Grand Lodge itself.

Another peril is the ready access of our ritual to anyone with an Internet connection. Returning to the subject of our obligation, this can easily lead Freemasons astray. The ritual of Masonry has always been available to the profane since the mid-19th century to those willing to make the effort, and while we should safeguard that which we do so that it does not become common knowledge, that is only one reason for our obligation. The primary purpose of Masonic secrecy is the positive effect it has on the nature and character of the brother who keeps his obligation. The Internet is a potential threat to all Masons for many reasons, but especially to those who have not yet fully developed the practice of secrecy or who have ceased to appreciate its importance.

CONSEQUENCES OF INACTION

There are times when doing nothing is the right thing. In fact, an argument can be made that most action, in most situations, meant to create a positive outcome has had the opposite or no effect. This is not one of those occasions. Inaction is not an option. Freemasonry is already a reality on the Internet. Blogs, forums and Masonic websites exist by the tens of thousands, and will soon number in the hundreds of thousands. Freemasonry and the Internet are now, and will continue to be, inexorably tied. The overriding question is: To what end?

Freemasonry, ultimately, is not about the ritual, nor is it about the rich and vast reservoir of knowledge that has been set down in print. Whatever Freemasonry is, or becomes, is always determined by the dominate view of each generation of Freemasons. The majority beliefs of Masons as expressed on the greatest means of mass communication in world history, *clandestine or not*, will inevitably determine the direction of Freemasonry in the 21st century. It will influence thinking, identify issues and create change. This is especially the situation because irregular masons on the Internet *intent* to create that change.

It is absolutely essential that regular Masonry be the dominant view. We cannot concede the message to those with greater motivation, computer skills and/or a desire to transform our Craft for the worse.

THE SOLUTION

What exists today on the Internet as concerns regular Freemasonry is chaos, hence the title, *Ordo ab Chao*. This chaos places us not only at a decided disadvantage but presents a negative face of Freemasonry to the world and to our brothers. We must find a way out of the existing chaos, and that path will not be easy. It requires new thinking and a willingness to embrace the opportunity of this digital age and the Internet. Half measures and indifference will not longer serve, and, in fact, are the path to our own demise.

Taking control of the Masonic message on the Internet will be a demanding and long-term endeavor. Efforts not sustained over time will fail. The forces desiring to change regular Masonry will not go away. What is required is a set of Internet standards for all regular Masonic websites, blogs and forums, as well as for the participation of Masons on the Internet.

There must exist a means for sanctioning the Internet presence of each regular Masonic website, of whatever type. The Grand Lodges must agree to these standards and in America, at least, a national body should be established to that end.

To identify regular Masonry on the Internet means adopting an icon only websites that meet this standard can display. The granting of this icon should be given by a national body with the authority and the means to legally pursue sites which use it improperly. Given our history absent national control the question of who will do this is crucial. Equally important is determining what standards for Internet regularity will be established.

The actual changes, however, will be the responsibility of the Grand Lodges. Only they have the ability to enforce rules of Masonic conduct on the Internet within their jurisdiction. But to avoid 51 different set of standards it would be wise to follow the lead of the national organization responsible for creating the standards.

This is not about control but about identity. It is about identifying those Internet sites which constitute regular Masonry, and in so doing, indicating by exclusion those which do not.

The most popular blogs and forums tend to be the most heretical. When standards for regular Masonic blogs exist, those without the icon will be identified as outside the norm. This alone will have an enormous positive effect for both Mason and non-Mason.

From this new Internet endeavor, Grand Lodges, Craft lodges, Masonic groups and brothers will all know what they can and cannot do on the Internet. Those who elect to

remain regular in their digital exposure will be identified as regular, while those who chose to go their own way will not and can call themselves what they will.

We cannot control information on the Internet nor do we desire to. Clandestine and irregular Masons are going to continue as they will. Regular Masons and lodges will also continue to have a presence on the Internet. Identifying those sites that represent regular Masonry, then, will serve at the least two important objectives:

- Visitors, both Mason and non-Mason, will know this site represents traditional, globally accepted Masonry, the kind of Masonry they see at the lodge down the street.
- It will in effect identify all other sites as irregular, clandestine or non-traditional. These sites will be recognized as outside the mainstream, comprising imposters, disgruntled Masons, or anti-Masons. Those seeking genuine Masonic information will tend to shun them. At the least, they will know them for what they are.

Whatever body is given, or is recognized as having, the right to grant this icon to regular Masonic websites should operate the way many similar Internet groups already do. A standing committee, or group, would have a network of dozens, or hundreds, of regular Masons who routinely visit Masonic sites of all types. These brothers will be knowledgeable about the standards that have been set and will call attention to those sites that have gone astray. There are any number of ways this could work but ideally it should be a digital age version of “mouth to ear”. This is a well established technique used, as just one example, by Wikipedia to prevent certain information on its site from being misused. It is, for example, how Wikipedia cleaned up much misinformation posted there by persons hostile to Freemasonry.

CONCLUSION

There will be many positive consequences as a result of establishing regular Masonic standards and identifying regular Masonry on the Internet.

- Regular Masonic information will be delineated from irregular information.
- We will have a significant presence which will improve the public understanding of us.
- It will provide a more contemporary portal for new members and for ongoing Masonic education.
- Regular Masonic thought and research will spread at speeds unknown heretofore.

We can only benefit from all these.

The reality Freemasonry faces today is that the definition and practice of community has been profoundly altered. The roots of the Craft have always been in the community, and we must see to it that continues to be the case in the future.

Addressing our needs on the Internet is an enormous undertaking. Bringing order which serves our ends from the current state of chaos cannot be accomplished simply or in the short-term. But if we do this right we are at the birth of a golden age for the Craft we love so dearly.