

# WHAT IS MASONRY?

Masonry (or Freemasonry) is the oldest fraternity in the world. No one knows just how old it is because the actual origins have been lost in time. Probably, it arose from the guilds of stonemasons who built the castles and cathedrals of the Middle Ages. Possibly, they were influenced by the Knights Templar, a group of Christian warrior monks formed in 1118 to help protect pilgrims making trips to the Holy Land.

In 1717, Masonry created a formal organization in England when the first Grand Lodge was formed. A Grand Lodge is the administrative body in charge of Masonry in some geographical area. In the United States, there is a Grand Lodge in each state and the District of Columbia. In Canada, there is a Grand Lodge in each province. Local Organizations of Masons are called lodges. There are lodges in most towns, and large cities usually have several. There are about 13,200 lodges in the United States.

Masonry lets men associate with other men of honor and integrity who believe that things like honesty, compassion, love, trust, and knowledge are important. It's easier to practice these virtues when you know that those around you think they are important too. It's good to spend time with people you can trust completely, and most Masons find that in their lodge. While much of the lodge activity is spent in works of charity or lessons in self-development, much is also spent in fellowship. Lodges may have picnics, camping trips, dinners, and many other events for the whole family.

# WHAT IS A MASON?

**That is not a surprising Question. Even though Masons (Freemasons) are members of the largest and oldest fraternity in the world, and even though almost everyone has a father or grandfather or uncle who was a mason, many people aren't quite certain just who Masons are.**

**The answer is simple. A Mason (or Freemason) is a member of a fraternity known as Masonry (or Freemasonry). A fraternity is a group of men (just as a sorority is a group of women) who join together.**



# WHAT IS A LODGE?

The word “lodge” means both a group of Masons meeting in some place and the room or building in which they meet. Masonic buildings are sometimes called “temples” because much of the symbolism Masonry uses to teach its lessons comes from the building of King Solomon’s Temple in the Holy Land. The term “lodge” itself comes from the structures which the stonemasons built against the sides of the cathedrals during construction. In the winter, when building had to stop, they lived in these lodges and worked at carving stone.

Like many artisans today, the stonemasons centuries ago wore leather aprons to carry their tools and to protect themselves from flying chips of stone. This custom was adopted by the men who became Freemasons. Thus, modern Masons wear a lambskin or cloth apron, sometimes elaborately decorated or embroidered, to show their pride in being members of a fraternity with so long and great history.

To open and close a meeting at a lodge, there is a ceremony whose purpose is to remind us of the virtues by which we are supposed to live. Then there is a reading of the minutes; voting on petitions (applications of men who want to join the fraternity); planning for charitable functions, family events, and other lodge activities; and sharing information about members (called “Brothers”, as in most fraternities) who are ill or have some sort of need.

**But every lodge serves more than its own members. Frequently, there are meetings open to the public. Examples are Ladies Nights, Brother Bring a Friend Nights, public installations of officers, cornerstone laying ceremonies, and other special meetings supporting community events and dealing with topics of local interest.**

**Simply put, a lodge is a place to spend time with friends.**



# WHAT DOES MASONRY TEACH?

Masonry teaches some important principles. There is nothing very surprising in the list. Masonry teaches that:

*Since God is the creator, all men and women are the children of God.*

Because of that, all men and women are brothers and sisters, entitled to dignity, respect for their opinions, and consideration of their feelings.

*Each person must take responsibility for his/her own life and actions.*

Neither wealth nor poverty, education nor ignorance, health nor sickness excuses any person from doing the best he or she can do or being the best person possible under the circumstances.

*No one has the right to tell another person what he or she must think*

*or believe.* Each man and woman has an absolute right to intellectual, spiritual, economic, and political freedom. This is a right given by God, not by man.

*Each person must learn and practice self-control.* Each person must make sure that his spiritual nature triumphs over his animal nature. Another way to say the same thing is that even when we are tempted to anger, we must not be violent. Even when tempted to selfishness, we must be charitable. Even when we want to “write someone off”, we must remember that he or she is a human and entitled to our respect. Even when we want to give up, we must go on. Even when we are hated, we must return love, or, at a minimum, we must not hate back. It isn't easy!

**Faith must be in the center of our lives. We find that faith in our houses of worship, not in Freemasonry, but Masonry constantly teaches that a person's faith, whatever it may be, is central to a good life.**

**Each person has a responsibility to be a good citizen, obeying the law. That doesn't mean we can't try to change things, but change must take place in legal ways.**

**It is important to work to make this world a better place for all who live in it. Masonry teaches the importance of doing good, not because it assures a person's entrance into heaven-that's a question for a religion, not a fraternity-but because we all have a duty to all other men and women to make their lives as fulfilling as they can be.**

**Honor and integrity are essential to life. Life without honor and integrity is without meaning.**

**Masonry teaches that each person has a responsibility to make things better in the world. Most individuals won't be the ones to find a cure for cancer, or eliminate poverty, or help create world peace, but every man and woman and child can do something to help others to make things a little better. Masonry is deeply involved with helping people-it spends more than 1.4 million dollars every day in the United States, just to make life a little easier. And the great majority of that help goes to people who are not Masons.**

**Some of these charities are vast projects, like the Crippled Children's Hospitals and Burns Institutes built by the Shriners. Also, Scottish Rite Masons maintain a nationwide network of over 100 Childhood Language Disorders Clinics, Centers, and Programs. Each helps children afflicted by such conditions as aphasia, dyslexia, stuttering, and related learning or speech disorders.**

**Some services are less notable, like helping a widow pay her electric bill or buying coats and shoes for disadvantaged children. And there's just about anything you can think of in-between. But with projects large or small the Masons of a lodge try to help make the world a better place. The lodge gives them a way to combine with others to do even more good.**





# **HOW DOES A MAN BECOME A MASON?**

**Some men are surprised that no one has ever asked them to become a Mason. For hundreds of years, Masons have been forbidden to ask others to join the fraternity. We can talk to friends about Masonry. We can tell them what Masonry does. We can tell them why we enjoy it. But we can't ask, much less pressure, anyone to join.**

**There is good reason for that. Becoming a Mason is a serious thing. Joining Masonry is making a permanent life commitment to live in certain ways. For example, to live with honor and integrity, to be willing to share with and care about others, to trust each other, and to place ultimate trust in God. No one should be "talked into" making such a decision.**

**The person who wants to join Masonry must be a man (it's a fraternity), sound in body and mind, who believes in God, is at least the minimum age required by Masonry in his state, and has a good reputation.**

**Those are the only "formal" requirements. But there are others, not so formal. He should believe in helping others. He should believe that there is more to life than pleasure and money. He should be willing to respect the opinions of others. And he should want to grow and develop as a human being.**

**So, when a man decides he wants to become a Mason, he asks a Mason for a petition or application. He fills it out and gives it to a Mason, and the Mason takes it to the local lodge. The Master of the lodge will appoint a committee to visit with the man and his family, find out a little about him and why he wants to be a Mason, tell him**



**and his family about Masonry, and answer their questions. The committee reports to the lodge, and the lodge votes on the petition. If the vote is affirmative—and it usually is—the lodge will contact the man to set a date for the Entered Apprentice Degree. When the person has completed all three degrees, he is a Master Mason and a full member of the fraternity.**

**New members are not recruited; they are attracted by the example of good men performing good works and living good lives.**

## **Some famous Masons you might recognize:**

<b>George Washington</b>	<b>Irving Berlin</b>
<b>Theodore Roosevelt</b>	<b>Louis Armstrong</b>
<b>Franklin D. Roosevelt</b>	<b>Ludwig van Beethoven</b>
<b>Harry S. Truman</b>	<b>Harry Houdini</b>
<b>Andrew Jackson</b>	<b>Mark Twain</b>
<b>Benjamin Franklin</b>	<b>Oscar Wilde</b>
<b>Norman Vincent Peale</b>	<b>Sir Alexander Fleming</b>
<b>Edwin E. “Buzz” Aldrin, Jr.</b>	<b>Winston Churchill</b>
<b>John Jacob Astor</b>	<b>Edward VII, King of England</b>
<b>Christopher Wren</b>	<b>Frederick the Great, King of Prussia</b>
<b>Henry Ford</b>	<b>Francis II, Holy Roman Emperor</b>
<b>Arnold Palmer</b>	<b>George VI, King of England during W.W. II</b>
<b>Denton True “Cy” Young</b>	<b>Marquis de Lafayette, French Supporter of American Freedom</b>
<b>Cecil B. DeMille</b>	<b>Alexandre Mitterand, President of France</b>
<b>John Wayne</b>	<b>Peter the Great, Emperor of Russia</b>

# **WHY IS MASONRY SO SECRETIVE?**

**It isn't really "secretive" although it sometimes has that reputation. Masons certainly do not make a secret of the fact that they are members of the fraternity. We wear rings, lapel pins, and tie clasps with Masonic emblems like the Square and Compasses, the best known of Masonic signs which, logically, recall the fraternity's early symbolic roots in stone-masonry. Masonic buildings are clearly marked, and are usually listed in the phone book. Lodge activities are not secret. Dinners and other special events are even listed in the newspapers and websites.**

**It's a wonderful feeling, but it's something you simply can't explain to another person. That is why we sometimes say that Masonic secrets cannot (rather than "may not") be told. Try telling someone exactly what you feel when you see a beautiful sunset, or when you hear music, like the National Anthem, which suddenly stirs old memories, and you will understand what we mean.**

**If Masonry is a secret society, it's the worst kept secret in the world!**

# IS MASONRY A RELIGION?

The answer to that question is simple. NO.

However, while it may adhere to many of the same values associated with a religious faith, Masonry is not a religion. It is a brotherhood of men from every country, sect and opinion, joined in a common effort to make themselves better people to ease the suffering of others, and to make the world a better place.

That does not mean that religion plays no part in Masonry—it plays a very important part. A person who wants to become a Mason must have a belief in God. No atheist can ever become a Mason. Every lodge has an altar holding a “Volume of the Sacred Law”. In the United States and Canada, that is almost always a Bible.

Masonry encourages every Mason to be active in the religion and church of his own choice. Masonry teaches that without religion a man is alone and lost, and that without religion, he can never reach his full potential.

But Freemasonry does not tell a person which religion he should practice or how he should practice it. That is between the individual and God. That is the function of his house of worship, not his fraternity. And Masonry is a fraternity, not a religion.