

What is Freemasonry?

In 17th and 18th Century England, Masons defined their fraternity as “a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” Today we might define it as “an organized society of men symbolically applying the principles or operative masonry and architecture to the science and art of character building.” What Freemasonry teaches is not at all secret. It teaches its members to be better men. However, based upon tradition, Freemasonry teaches through ritual, some of which is secret.

What is Freemasonry's Purpose?

Basically, Masonry tries to build a better world by making “better men out of good men,” by strengthening their character, improving their moral and spiritual outlook and broadening their mental horizons. The principals of personal responsibility and righteousness Understanding of and feeling for Freemasonry's character How to put these lessons into practice in daily life In short, Freemasons believe in universal peace made possible by teaching its doctrine through the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God.

How did Freemasonry Originate?

Medieval stonemasons were highly skilled craftsmen urgently needed at the various building projects in different countries. Therefore, the church and state gave them the unheard of privilege of traveling freely from project to project.

Masonic scholars are not sure of the exact time at which our Craft came into being and numerous theories have been advanced over the years. One of the more plausible is that modern Freemasonry originally came from the “lodges” which traveling stonemasons formed at building sites in Europe in the middle ages. They early established the apprentice-to-journeyman-to-master system of educating men in their craft. They also kept secret their methods of building and used passwords and other means to identify themselves to each other as masons. In addition, they gave apprentices and journeymen moral instruction.

With the growth of cities, the Renaissance, the Reformation and Counter Reformation, and the decline in demand for great building projects, the special privileges of stonemasons as traveling craftsmen disappeared. As a result, they began to take in non-masons as patrons. This led, in the 17th century, to large numbers of speculative or non-working-masons entering the masonic “lodges.” By the end of that century, Masonic lodges were almost wholly speculative, made up of Masons who never touched chisel to stone.

Freemasons kept the old traditions. Today, we still begin new members as Entered Apprentices, then make them Fellowcrafts (Journeymen) and finally Master Masons. We preserve some of the original secrecy of how we teach friendship, morality, brotherly love, relief and truth. And we still utilize the old passwords and signs.

What is a Grand Lodge?

The structure of modern speculative Freemasonry as we know it today came into being with the formation of the first Grand Lodge in London in 1717. Other Grand Lodges took their charter from this and other early Grand Lodges. Today, there are Grand Lodges in most of the countries in the world and each of the United States.

During the mid-18th century, the Grand Lodge of England began to introduce many innovations in their ritual which alienated many members, especially those who had migrated from Ireland. A schism was created splitting the Craft in two Grand Lodges. The original was labeled the “Moderns,” while those who harkened to the traditional ritual were called “Ancients.” Long suffering efforts brought about a merger of the two in 1813. However we still see the effects today of the schism in the variations of the initials A.F. & A.M. Some Grand Lodges, such as Illinois, are titled A.F. & A.M., which stands for Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. Other states use F. & A.M., Free and Accepted Masons, while one uses F. A. A. M.. However today, all Grand Lodges work toward the same end.

What Does “Free and Accepted” mean?

Here again, we are uncertain as to the exact origin. Some scholars believe the term “free” referred to the fact that the most skilled craftsmen worked in freestone, a softer material that permitted carving of the beautiful window tracery and other designs. Others suggest that the term comes from the medieval practice of allowing these valued artisans to travel throughout Europe without exacting the usual tolls for passage.

Because non-masons wanted to become affiliated with such skilled and privileged craftsmen as stonemasons, over the years stonemasons found it useful to accept them as members of their mason's lodges. Such non-working (or speculative) masons thus became “accepted.” As the practice grew, the old stonemasons' lodges likely transformed into the speculative lodges we know today.

Is Masonry a Secret Society?

Not at all. We make no secret of our existence. Our Masonic Temples are publicly marked. We often advertise, in advance, the times and places of our meetings. Our ritual books are copy righted, so the Library of Congress holds copies of them. Since they are thus already public, you will find them in bookstores and public libraries everywhere. Masons usually wear Masonic rings and lapel pins in public, and often appear in parades wearing their Masonic regalia.

As we said, what we teach is not secret. How we teach it is. In addition, we try to keep secret our modes of recognition and our obligation for the sake of tradition.

Is Masonry a Religion?

No! Masonry is not a religion, nor is it designed to substitute for or replace religion in its members' lives.. We do ask, however, that each prospective member state that he believes in and trusts in a supreme being.

Can An Atheist Become A Mason?

Since we require that each prospective member profess his belief in a supreme deity, which atheists refuse to do, no atheist can become a Mason.

Can Political Beliefs Prevent a Man from becoming a Mason?

Masonry takes no account of a man's political beliefs. Masonry only requires that each member support his country's government and obey its laws.

How do Masons Behave in Lodge?

Inside a Masonic lodge, all men are equal and work on a common level toward the same purposes. The classes and distinctions of outer world do not intrude there. In fact, only two subjects are banned from discussion in a lodge: religion and politics.

What are the Qualifications for Petitioning for membership?

In Illinois to be a Mason you must:

Be a man
Believe in a supreme deity
Be 18 years old
Be able to read and write English
Have resided in Illinois for at least six months

How Should a Candidate Prepare Himself for Initiation?

Our ceremonies involve no hazing, horseplay, or physical mistreatment of any kind. Candidates find the initiation ritual a solemn, beautiful and moving experience. Every word is spoken from memory, as has been our practice from Masonry's earliest days. The ritual itself has remained virtually unchanged over nearly three centuries. Finally, every man in the lodge is a friend-and will be a brother.

What do Freemasons Support?

Freemasonry is more than just a fraternal organization or social association. Our fraternity is based on friendship and brotherly love, so we make many worthwhile contributions to society.

Nationwide, Masons contribute more than a million dollars a day to charity. Children in need are cared for at our Children's Home in LaGrange. Shriners Hospitals for burned and crippled children are constantly called upon for services to the unfortunate who might otherwise suffer for a lifetime.

We fund programs in Illinois schools, training teachers to intervene in substance abuse cases among our children. We sponsor an Academic Bowl program to encourage Scholarships. Nurses training, scholarships and many other programs help our youth. Masons work with DeMolay, Jobs Daughter, and Rainbow Girls, both locally and nationwide which benefit our society.