

# Approaching The Portals

**General Information Regarding Masonry**



**The Grand Lodge of  
Free and Accepted Masons  
of The State of Hawaii**

## Welcome To Masonry...



You have made an important step, one which we are sure you will value not only now, but for many years to come. Masonry is an unique institution that has been a major part of community life in America for over 250 years. Masonry, or more properly Freemasonry, is America's largest and oldest fraternity...and one that continues to be an important part of many men's personal lives and growth. Your decision to enter the ranks of Freemasonry had to be your own decision without the undue influence of others. That simple fact makes your membership in Masonry one of your choice. And that's important. Men join Masonry for a variety of reasons. Each is valid and important.

Millions of men have travelled this path before you. A Majority of these men had little knowledge or concept of the fraternity or what it could mean to them. For this reason, we wish to give you some information which we feel you are entitled to before the conferral of the Degrees.

## What Is Masonry?

Masonry is a Fraternal organization. It has many and important charitable projects. Freemasonry is rich in history, both as an institution, and as an organization that has had a worldwide impact on history. It provides a real working plan for making good men even better.

Mason are me men who have joined together to improve themselves. This is accomplished through the principles and ceremonies of the fraternity. They endeavor to extend Masonic lessons into their daily lives in order to become positive influences in their homes, communities, nation, and throughout the world. They base their efforts on morality, justice, charity, truth and the laws of God. Worldwide, membership encompasses millions of men who believe and support the same fundamental principles.

In short, Masonry is what you make of it for yourself.

## What is Modern Freemasonry?

Masonry is many things to many people. It might be defined, as it was many years ago in England as "a system of morality, veiled in allegory (or a story) and illustrated by symbols." It is a course of moral instruction which uses both allegories and symbols to teach its lessons. The legends and myths of the old stonecutters and masons, many of them involved in building the great cathedrals of Europe, have been woven into an interesting and effective way to portray moral truths.

In Masonry, the old tools and ways of the mason craftsmen are used to help dramatically portray those truths. For example, in the first, or Entered Apprentice degree the main symbols are the 24 inch rule and common gavel. Just as the ruler is used to measure distance, the modern Mason uses it as a symbol or a reminder to manage one of his most precious resources, Time. And as the gavel is used to shape stones, so is it also the symbol for the necessity of all of us to work to perfect ourselves.

The modern definition is "Freemasonry is an organized society of men, symbolically applying the principle of Operative Masonry and architecture to the science and art of character building." In other words, Masonry uses ageless methods and lessons to make each of us a better person.

## **What is the purpose of Masonry?**

Simply put, the overall purpose of Masonry is to provide a way to help each member become a better person.

We try to place emphasis on the individual man by:

1. Strengthening his character,
2. Improving his moral and spiritual outlook.
3. Broadening his mental horizons.

We try to impress upon the minds of our members the principles of personal responsibility and righteousness; to give each member an understanding of and feeling for Freemasonry's character; and we would like to have every member put these lessons into practice in his daily life. We try to build a better world by building better men to work in their own communities. Freemasonry believes in universal peace made possible by teaching its doctrine through the Brotherhood Of Man and the Fatherhood Of God.

## **What are Lodges?**

A Lodge is a meeting place for Masons. Masons may use this place for regular business meetings, degrees, social activities, other Masonic groups, or even community activities. Lodge buildings are prominently marked. and are often recognized as special landmarks in the cities, towns, and states.

The local lodge is a group of Masons granted a charter by a Grand Lodge. There are specific guidelines set by the Grand Lodge as to how this local Lodge may function and what it can and cannot do. These guidelines are set forth in a book of constitutions and ritual. The leaders of the Lodge are elected by the Lodge membership each year.

## **Origins of Freemasonry**

We are not sure at what point in time our craft was born. We do know it goes far beyond written record, and we believe it was not always called Freemasonry.

Some of the ancient mysteries of Egypt, Greece, and the Orient influenced the ceremonies used today. These ceremonies were designed to test men, and to admit only those who were worthy. Our ceremonies are somewhat the same, only less physical in nature, and more spiritual in form.

Over the ages Freemasonry, as we know it, slowly took form. It has evolved into a comprehensive, and effective form of fraternal teaching of basic morals, truths, and personal fulfillment. It ranks the development of the individual's reasoning capabilities highly and encourages the questioning mind.

## The Two Types of Masonry

There are two types of Masonry. "Operative" and "Speculative".



Operative Masonry can be traced back to the Middle Ages and beyond. Operative Masons, back then, formed groups with structures similar to ours today. They had officers and stations just like ours. Other men were admitted only after they had served a number of years of apprenticeship. This is the origin of the first or Entered Apprentice.

Operative Masonry refers to the time in our history where Masons actually did the physical labor of building. They were the best at their craft, and they kept secret their methods of building. Speculative Masonry refers to the period of time when men were accepted into the Craft without being physical builders, that is, they were spiritual builders. Speculative Masonry adopts the terms and concepts of the actual improvement rather than the actual construction of buildings.

## "Free" and "Accepted" Masons

How did the words "Free" and "Accepted" originate?

The ancient craftsmen were very skilled and their craft was considered to be indispensable to the welfare of both church and state. They were the men who built castles and cathedrals. For this reason, they were not placed under the same restrictions, as were other workers. They were "free" to do their work, travel, and live their lives in a manner that was in line with their duties.

The Masons organized into "guilds," something akin to a trade union, and individual companies or groups of Masons contracted for specific construction projects. In the England of that time, various crafts (carpenters, distillers, pewterers, ironworkers, etc.) also organized into guilds, but most of the population worked under band to the owners of the land on which they lived.

The word "Accepted" also goes back to the time of the Operative Mason. During the later years of the Middle Ages, there were few educated outside the monasteries of the church. The "accepted" Mason was originally a man who, in a lodge operative in origin or still partly so in character, was for aU practical purposes of membership accepted as a mason. From this practice grew in course of time the use of the words "accepted" and "adopted" to indicate a man who had been admitted into the inner fellowship of symbolic masons. Candidates were "accepted" into freemasonry no earlier than the mid-seventeenth century. We first meet the phrase "free and accepted" in 1722.

By the late 1600's the demand for the type of architecture that lent itself to the guild type of operation was declining. Architecture itself was changing; and the numbers of men, as well as the number of operative lodges, were declining. Increasingly, Masonry adopted the legends and habits of the old operative lodges, for spiritual and moral purposes. As time went on, there became many more "Accepted" members than there were "Operative" members. Sometime in the eighteenth century, the "Accepted Masons" outnumbered the "Operative Masons" and Masonry became exclusively a speculative organization rather than an operative one.

## Origin of The Grand Lodge

In 1711 four Lodges in London met together and decided to form a Grand Lodge, possibly for no other reason than to strengthen and preserve themselves. In 1723 they adopted a Constitution. Their success led to the establishment of still other Grand Lodges. In 1725 some of the Lodges in Ireland formed a Grand Lodge and a similar body was instituted in Scotland in 1736. Moreover the original Grand Lodge in England did not remain without rivals, and at one time in the eighteenth century three Grand Lodges existed in England in addition to the one organized in 1717. Two of these died out without influencing the history of Masonry in general, but the third had a great part in the spread and popularizing of Masonry throughout the world. It called itself the "Ancients Grand Lodge." The two surviving Grand Lodges were long and vigorous rivals, but they finally united in 1813 into the present United Grand Lodge of England. Thus, from one of these two Grand Bodies in England, or from those of Ireland or Scotland, all other Grand Lodges in the world today ascended.

Titles of Grand Lodges in the United States also vary. Some Grand Lodges are called A. F. & A. M., which means Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. Another common title is F. & A. M., or Free and Accepted Masons.

Masonry was established in France sometime between 1718 and 1725. The first lodge in Spain was established in 1728. A lodge was established in Prague in 1729, in Calcutta in 1728 and in Naples in 1731. Masonry came to Poland in 1734 and Sweden in 1735.

The growth of Freemasonry and its ideals and beliefs came not without opposition. Masons are taught that all men are equal - we meet upon the level. Individual freedom of thought and action, as well as morality and ethics, are the concepts and ideals upon which our order is founded. The teachings are a condemnation of autocratic government, who in turn condemns Freemasonry.

## Masonic History in the United States



It was inevitable that Freemasonry should follow the colonists to America and play a most important role in the establishment of the thirteen colonies. Freemasonry was formally recognized

for the first time in America with the appointment by the Grand Lodge of England of a Provincial Grand Master in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in 1730. American Masons worked under foreign jurisdiction until 1731, when the first American Grand Lodge was established in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

One of the most romantic portions of all Masonic history lies in the story of the part played by Freemasons in the formation of our country. Without exaggeration, we can say that Freemasonry and Masonic thinking contributed most significantly to the founding of this great Republic. Many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, as well as the drafters of the Constitution, were members of the Fraternity. George Washington was a staunch Freemason. He was the first of fourteen Masonic Presidents

and the only one to serve as Worshipful Master of a Lodge and President at one and the same time. The others after Washington are Monroe, Jackson, Polk, Buchanan, Andrew Jackson, Garfield, McKinley, both Teddy and F. O. Roosevelt, Taft, Harding, Truman, and Ford - of whom Truman and Andrew Jackson served also as Grand Master.

In the struggle for independence many well known patriots, such as Paul Revere, Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, Marquis de Lafayette, and Baron von Steuben were members of the Craft. No doubt Freemasonry was responsible for and shared much of their thinking and opinions. Much has been written about the participation of the Fraternity in the Revolution and the founding of America, and it is an episode of which we can be proud. Ever since that period, Freemasonry has grown and flourished, following closely the growth and expansion of the United States.

## **Is Freemasonry a Secret Society?**

**The answer is "NO"!**

A secret society is generally one that wraps itself in a cloak of absolute secrecy. That means no one knows who the members are, where they meet, what they do and what they stand for.

That is not Masonry at all! Masonry may have "secrets", but it is not a secret society. Masonic secrets are few in number, and deal with the general method of initiation, the ways we recognize each other, and very little else. These parts of the ritual, which are called the esoteric side of Masonry, have been handed down by word of mouth for centuries.

Masonry's purposes, ideals, and principles may be learned by anyone who inquires. There are numerous books on these subjects which are available to the public. Masonry often has public notices in the newspapers, and our members are usually numbered among the more prominent citizens in the community.

A common principle among Masons is to answer questions about Masonry forthrightly and honestly, but generally to not officially respond to any criticism that might be levied against it.

## **Is Freemasonry A Religion?**

**The answer is NO!**

Masonry, as an organization is understanding and tolerant of all religious thoughts. It has no specific creed, no dogma, no priesthood. There are no requirements as to religious preference in becoming a Mason.

Masonry does ask you to state your belief and trust in a Supreme Being. Prayers are a common part of our ceremonies, but are not offered to a specific deity. Masonic ritual does incorporate lessons and examples from the Bible, but they are given as representative illustrations.

Masonry does not require you to belong to a church although many Masons are very active in their churches, and among our members are pastors of many denominations. Freemasonry accepts your right to belong to any Church of your choice and does not want to infringe on that right. Neither does Masonry try to be a substitute for your church. Masonry wants to unite men for the purpose of brotherhood; not as an organized religion.



## What We Do Not Do

Secular religion and partisan politics should not be discussed in Lodge, and there are very good reasons why not. When we meet in a Lodge, we are all on a common level, and are not subject to the classes and distinctions of the outside world. Each Brother is entitled to his own beliefs and may follow his own convictions. Our objective is to unite men, not divide them. These two subjects can cause honest differences of opinion which might well cause friction among Brothers.

There will be subjects concerning the Lodge's business that have to be discussed. These discussions should be kept within the bounds of propriety, and everyone should show tolerance for the opinion of the other. Every Master wants harmony in his Lodge; and once a matter has been put to a vote in the Lodge, and a decision made, the decision should be accepted by all members regardless of how they voted.

Masonry teaches every mason to be a good citizen and to perform his civic duties. We do not try to keep anyone from expressing his opinion, or from serving his city, county, state, or nation in an honorable manner. Anyone who serves in political office should not act politically as a Freemason; nor, in the name of Freemasonry in exercising his rights.

## What Masonry Stands For

**Masonry has some principles which it feels are very important.**

In the United States it is a strong supporter of constitutional government... of quality public education... of the freedom of religion and expression... of the equality of all men and women... of the need for strong moral character... and of meaningful charity. Masonry, and the organizations that are within the Masonic family, contribute millions of dollars every year to numerous charities. Local Lodges work to help their communities and individuals within those communities.

Masonry's charity is always given without regard to race, sex, or color.

## Qualification of A Petitioner

**In asking to be initiated into Masonry, there are a few requirements.**

The candidate must be a man. Although the Masonic family has several organizations for women and young people, the Masonic Lodge itself has remained a man's organization.

He must believe in a Supreme Being.

He must be of legal age (18 years of age in Hawaii). The candidate must request membership of his own free will, without undue pressure being placed upon him.

He must have good moral values. There are internal and external qualifications necessary to become a Mason. These qualifications include not only being a peaceable citizen, loyal to his country and its laws but his reputation in the community his motives and designs for seeking membership into the Fraternity are looked at.

Because Masonry both requires and fosters a strong sense of brotherhood, it is a long-standing tradition that all new candidates must be elected by unanimous ballot.

## Other Masonic Organizations



You have asked to join the Masonic Lodge, or Blue Lodge. It is the base of all Masonic organizations, one of more of which you may want to join sometime in the future.

Although we are not sure where the name "Blue Lodge" originated. We think it is because blue is generally regarded as the color used to characterize friendship. Finally, blue has been used to trim and decorate Masonic aprons, collars, and clothing for centuries and this is probably why it is called the "Blue Lodge".



Two of the organizations, the York Rite and the Scottish Rite, expand on the teachings of the Blue Lodge, or basic Masonry, and further explain the values of Masonry.



Another group, commonly called Shriners, is not formally connected with Masonry, but has, as its own requirement, the restriction of its membership to Masons. This organization is socially-oriented, and has as its major project the funding and operation of nearly two dozen hospitals for crippled and burned children.



The Order Of Eastern Star and the White Shrine Of Jerusalem admit both men and women.



There are several Organizations, DeMolay, Rainbow Girls and Job's Daughters for young people.

## What To Expect

**First of all, relax.**

All of the ceremonies of Masonry are very serious and performed in a dignified manner. There is no horseplay, no hazing. You will not be compared to other members or candidates.

Enter the Lodge with a attitude which will help you appreciate the serious and solemn ceremonies that you will receive.

The degrees, or teaching lessons, are done in the form of short plays, in which you play a part, prompted by a conductor. The language and methods in which the degrees are portrayed are very old. The language is beautiful and the content both meaningful and interesting.

When you receive a degree it is suggested that you dress as if you were attending church. When you arrive at the lodge for your degree you will be asked to wait a short time in an outer room while the lodge prepares to conduct the degrees. A small committee will meet with you formally. You will be asked a set of questions, then prepared to receive the degree by temporarily exchanging your street clothes for the plain garment of a candidate.



The degree itself will be recited to you by a team of Masons. Listen to the contents of what is being said. These are spiritual lessons given with great dignity.

You should have no worries about entering a Masonic lodge. The degrees are simply lessons and you will be treated as the friend and brother that you are.

## The Proficiency



As you take each degree, you will be asked to show that you understand what has been said and portrayed. This step is called "the proficiency". The proficiency is a symbol that the candidate is qualified for advancement, just as in the days of operative masonry, when the worker had to show that he was qualified to do more complicated tasks.

A candidate is asked to memorize a portion of the lecture that accompanies each degree. A coach will be assigned to you to help you learn the material and to answer any questions you may have.

You are expected to meet with your coach as often as you need to acquire a basic knowledge of Masonry.

A booklet similar to this one will be given you at the end of each degree. It will contain an explanation of the degree and will explain the symbols and actions of each of the degrees.

## Your Duties as a Mason

You will become a member of the fraternity when you have received the three degrees, proved your proficiency in each of them, and signed the by-laws of your lodge. In assuming the obligations of the degrees and signing the by-laws, you enter into an agreement with the Lodge, wherein you bind yourself to perform certain duties, and the Lodge binds itself to protect you in certain rights and privileges.

Always your duties will be loyalty to Masonry, faithfulness to your superior officers and obedience to Masonic laws. These are fundamental conditions of membership.

As a Mason, it will be your duty to hold membership in some Lodge. If necessary or expedient you may transfer your membership to another Lodge.

Membership in a Lodge necessarily requires some monetary obligation. Dues should be paid promptly as an imperative condition of membership. While the Lodge is not an organized charity, it teaches love and charity for all mankind and especially for Brother Masons, their widows and orphans. It will, therefore, be your duty to stand ready to lend a helping hand to a Brother Mason in sickness or distress, and to aid in the charities of the Lodge so far as your conscience will guide and your means permit.

If you are present at your Lodge when a ballot is taken on a petition for degree, you must vote. Voting on a petition for membership is not a right or privilege to be exercised at your choice, but an obligation and a duty. This is only another way of saying that the responsibility for deciding who shall be Masons rests on every member.

You may be summoned by the Worshipful Master to attend a meeting of your Lodge for some special purpose, or to discharge some duty required of you as a Mason and, unless circumstances at the time make it impossible, it will be your duty to obey.

A Lodge differs from any other organization in many fundamental respects; duties and obligations may not be laid down or taken up at pleasure and membership is not a mere gesture of honor or an idle privilege. A member may not stand aside until an opportunity occurs to secure something from it for his own selfish purpose, nor may he evade his responsibilities by shifting his burdens to more willing shoulders. The Mystic Tie that binds him to his fellows holds him fast.

When among strangers you will have certain means of recognition by which to prove yourself to another Mason and to prove him to you, to enable you to establish Fraternal relations with men whom you might never have met. To know that wherever you go in the world and whatever your financial or social position, you will find Brothers ready to extend to you the hand of fellowship, is one of the greatest of all the privileges of membership.

## **Your Rewards as a Mason**

If you go through the degrees, receive the work, decide that Freemasonry is a fine institution and then do nothing about the teachings presented to you, then you are wasting our time as well as your time and money. If you recognize the opportunity which is yours, take the various doctrines and truths presented to you, study them, analyze them, contemplate their meanings, and apply them to your own life, then your investment of time and money will be richly rewarded.

Do not adopt a double standard of conduct, whereby you apply Freemasonry to a part of your life, but feel that it doesn't apply to other phases. The thoughtful Freemason will apply the teaching of our Institution to each and every phase of his life, and we sincerely hope that you will see fit to follow such a practice. This great opportunity for self-improvement is one that you should grasp to such an extent that the principles of Freemasonry will eventually spread through every facet of your life; when you do you will have allowed Freemasonry to become one of the greatest of your personal experiences.

**This document is revised  
from the original content distributed  
by the Masonic Renewal Committee**