



FREEMASONRY

Simple  
answers  
to  
leading questions

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# Introduction

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## Speaking up for Freemasonry

We take great pride in Freemasonry – the friendships that are created; the good that is done in our communities; the tolerance that is generated by avoiding issues of a political or religious nature; and most importantly the qualities of life and action that it promotes to members.

There is no reason why we cannot speak freely about this, to Speak Up For Freemasonry – to talk publicly about what we do, why we do it and how our organization is founded on the principles and virtues of civilized society.

There is value in one on one, face to face dialogue, explaining in plain English the beauty of Freemasonry; the qualities it promotes; the involvement of our partners and families in all we do and the values it espouses - *making good men better.*



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**This booklet is designed to assist Freemasons to**

**communicate openly and freely** with the public on the many fine attributes that make up our organization. While there remains a small number of our ceremonies which are not disclosed until a candidate is made a Freemason, there is so much information that can and should be shared.

This booklet outlines some plain English explanations of Freemasonry, and will be a useful guide to our members, or the public, when the topic of Freemasonry is raised.

The material in this booklet is not intended to be exhaustive or dictatorial but aims to provide a general outline for your guidance. Use your own language, words and phrases and be mindful of the person to whom you are speaking - a young man might have a particular interest in what happens within a Lodge while a lady might have a father associated with the organization.

Let us not be afraid to talk with pride about our organization - each one of us might use different words or emphasize differing aspects of the fraternity. Think of the circumstances - speak comfortably, honestly, plainly - and be prepared to raise the topic at any time, any place.



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**Be proud**

and let us all  
Speak Up for  
Freemasonry



*Oregon*  
FREEMASONS



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# Where did it all begin?

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Freemasonry is a diverse and complex organization. It is very old, its origins lost in time. The first written evidence of its existence is dated from England in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The Grand Lodge of England was formed by four Lodges in London in 1717. Grand Lodges were formed in Scotland and Ireland in the years following.

Freemasonry subsequently spread around the world with the growth of the British Empire.

It is accepted that its origins stem from the 'Lodges' of stonemasons attached to the building of castles and cathedrals in medieval times. Reasons behind the rise of Freemasonry in the general population later are generally attributed to the changes in society at the time of the enlightenment with the growth of secularism, the scientific age and the recognition of the rights of the individual.



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# And in Oregon?

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Freemasonry came to Oregon with the early settlers, the first Lodge, Multnomah Lodge No. 1, being formed at Oregon City in 1846.

The Grand Lodge of Oregon, a statewide figurehead, was formed in 1851, before Oregon itself was a state.

The 1950s saw the peak of Oregon's membership, attributed to an influx of ex-servicemen after World War II. Today there are over 6,000 Freemasons in Oregon.



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# What is Freemasonry?

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A quick but complete answer is difficult to give because Freemasonry has many aspects of equal importance, among which are fellowship, a philosophy of life, personal development and benevolence.

It can be described as, "*A brotherhood of good men meeting and working in harmony, teaching strong moral and ethical values in personal, family and community behavior and a code of caring for others.*"

Often, it is simplified to, "*Freemasonry gives good men the opportunity to make themselves better.*"

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Freemasonry has remained steadfast in its dedication to three basic principles:

**Brotherly Love** (*humanity and compassion*)

**Relief** (*charity and support*)

**Truth** (*honesty and integrity*)





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Freemasonry centers upon principles of tolerance, care, kindness, honesty and trust. These are timeless values that are as relevant to the world today as they were 300 years ago when the organization was established. The principle aim of Freemasonry is the promotion of universal and lasting happiness for all.

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Freemasonry *is not a secret society*. Its works and finances are on public record. However, there are some traditional symbolic elements members are asked to keep confidential (pg. 21).

Freemasonry *has numerous registered charities*. It does significant charitable work in the community but charity is just one part of the teachings of Freemasonry.

Freemasonry *is not a benefit society* but the deep caring principle in Freemasonry is applied to its members as well as the community as a whole.

Freemasonry *is not a religion or sect*. Men of all faiths are welcome to join but Freemasonry does not allow the discussion of religion or politics in its meetings as a means of maintaining harmony among all members.

Freemasonry *is not a networking organization*. Using Lodge membership to promote your own, or anyone else's business, professional or personal interests is strongly discouraged.



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# What is a Lodge?

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A Lodge is a group of 30-80 Freemasons usually drawn together by location or interest. Meetings are often held monthly in a dedicated building for that purpose. The most senior position in the Lodge is the Worshipful Master, who is supported by a group of officers to run the Lodge and conduct business and ceremonies.

## What happens in a Lodge?

Meetings have a formal Masonic structure conducting the same administrative business as any club. Uniquely, the major part of most meetings is the processing of new members. This is done through a series of ceremonies all candidates experience to reach full membership and become a Master Mason. The ceremonies are the means of teaching the history and principles of Freemasonry.

Other matters at meetings include the charity and social activities of the Lodge.



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## **Lodge buildings are clearly apparent in their communities but why do some look 'closed'?**

The rituals and most ceremonies are confidential to members, and many buildings were built decades ago when members were encouraged to maintain a stricter privacy than is the case now.

While some Masonic buildings have been sold, scores are still open and operational around the state.

## **Can the public visit a Lodge?**

In a word, yes! Although Lodge buildings are private property mainly used by Freemasons for meetings, some Lodges make portions of their premises available to community groups for activities such as gatherings, dance lessons or arts and crafts. Occasionally, Lodges host open houses for those interested in joining Freemasonry and welcome the public in.

**Find the Lodge nearest you by visiting**  
**[www.masonic-oregon.com/lodge-locator](http://www.masonic-oregon.com/lodge-locator)**



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# What do Freemasons do?

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A Freemason's first Masonic commitment is to attend the regular meetings of his Lodge. If he has the ambition to become the Worshipful Master he will need to become an officer of the Lodge, and for that he needs to become practiced in its ceremonies and customs. In turn, this requires attendance and participation in the more frequent 'instruction' meetings.

Visiting other Lodges is a well-ingrained activity in which Lodges universally engage to build and widen fraternal associations and friendships. A member would usually accompany the Worshipful Master, though he may make visits independently.

All Lodges have an active social life both within and outside the Lodge in which wives, partners and families are frequently involved.

Charitable activities can include both financial assistance and hands-on involvement.



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# The Benefits of Membership

**Fellowship** - Freemasonry induces a strong bond between members and produces life-long friendships. Members enjoy mixing and working with men of high integrity and strong principle.

**Benevolence** - An essential element of Freemasonry is the care for the needs of Masonic Brothers and the whole community. All Freemasons promise to be aware of the needs of those around them.

**Self-development** - A Lodge provides opportunities in organization management, public speaking and other character-building skills.

**Life balance** - In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, life can be hectic and stressful. Freemasonry is seen by many to be an oasis where calm and order prevail, therefore providing a distinct and refreshing channel where a busy man can find diversion and relaxation.

**Family** - Most Lodges offer social programs to provide opportunity for partners and families to widen their social engagement with others with common interests.



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# Qualifications for Membership

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Freemasonry accepts men of good character. There are very few limitations, but here are some important exceptions:

- 18 years is the minimum age with no upper age limit.
- Men of many faiths are accepted and all candidates must be able to declare a belief in a Supreme Being and afterlife (open to individual interpretation).
- He must be an upright and law-abiding citizen and able to afford the modest fees without detriment to his family or livelihood.
- All Lodges ask prospective members for character references and may require a background check on those who petition for membership.



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# Freemasons & Charity

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## **What part does charity play in Freemasonry?**

Helping those in need is a cornerstone of Freemasonry encouraged in every member. Our philanthropy and charitable work responds to many needs from disaster relief and community projects to educational support and aged care. Freemasons have been involved in charitable activities since Masonic Lodges were first established. It is a major motivation for many to join the organization.

## **Why is charity so important to us?**

Benevolence is part of our philosophy. It exhibits how Freemasons value people and their rights. We have a tradition of care, trust, tolerance and encouragement of learning and advancement.

**Learn about our current charities by visiting**  
**[www.masonic-oregon.com/charity](http://www.masonic-oregon.com/charity)**



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# Women & Freemasonry

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## **How do women fit into Freemasonry?**

While Freemasonry continues today as a men's fraternity, women play an important role in the Masonic Family.

Lodges take particular care when accepting new members to ensure their wives feel welcomed and invited to participate in charity matters, Lodge social activities and friendships with other Masonic families. Freemasonry teaches that a member's Masonic duties come only after his commitment first to his family and then to his career.

All Lodges are especially called to care for the widows of members as part of their charitable duties. First to ensure they are properly provided for and further to keep in contact through social occasions and seasonal events.

## **Can women become Freemasons?**

Women are invited to join sects of the Masonic Family such as the Order of the Eastern Star, Daughters of the Nile, the White Shrine and the Order of the Amaranth.





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# Rituals & Ceremonies

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## **What are the ceremonies and rituals about?**

The main ceremonies and the ritual contained in them are the three Degrees of Freemasonry. These are stages of the membership all candidates must pass through on their journey to becoming a Master Mason. The ceremonies are in the form of dramatically portrayed allegorical stories in which the candidate is taught about Freemasonry and the principles it upholds. These steps, known as Degrees, represent three stages in a man's life from ignorance to knowledge to wisdom. They are known as 'Entered Apprentice', 'Fellowcraft', and 'Master Mason.'

## **Is any ceremony open to the public?**

Many Lodges host open houses on occasions like officer installations or anniversary celebrations. Also, the annual ceremony to install a new Grand Master (equivalent of a president) and his state-wide officers is a public ceremony.



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## What happens in an initiation?

Initiation is the first membership ceremony. It lasts for about one hour explaining Freemasonry and creating a sense of bonding and Brotherhood. Only Freemasons may attend this ceremony, however family and friends are welcome to attend the public portions of the event to support them.

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## What does it cost to be a Mason?

Like many clubs and societies, most Lodges charge annual dues, usually between \$25 and \$100, varying by Lodge.

Fees may apply for tools and basic regalia, like the Masonic apron, usually presented to the Master Mason upon his advancement. An apron previously belonging to a family member may also be used.

Should members choose to participate in social activities or answer occasional calls for charitable contributions, the annual cost may vary.



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## **Do you have to be wealthy to join?**

No. Many wealthy men are Freemasons but apart from the costs listed previously, wealth is not a consideration in Freemasonry and certainly not a factor in the qualifications for membership.

## **How do Freemasons have so much money?**

It is true that Freemasonry gives millions of dollars to charitable causes each year. The bulk of these funds is the income earned from investments made of donations and bequests from members over 150 years in Oregon.

The administration and operation of The Grand Lodge of Oregon (and all Lodges) is predominantly funded from investment earnings, member dues and contributions.

## **Do you tithe or have to give to the organization and charity?**

There is no tithing in Freemasonry, nor pressure on members to contribute money to charity. Generally, Freemasons contribute through a combination of time, skill and money at their own personal choosing. It is not uncommon for such but the choice is purely the member's personal decision.



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# Is Freemasonry a Religion?

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To become a Mason, one must assent to a belief in a Supreme Being and an afterlife. How that belief is interpreted or how it is addressed in one's daily life is left up to the individual.

Freemasonry is not about claiming a belief of a specific religion - it's about recognizing the faith-based similarities and bonding despite our differences. Some Masons are Christian, others Buddhist or Jewish, and some don't subscribe to a particular religious belief set.

Exercising care and tolerance, Freemasonry teaches many moral lessons, promotes individual freedoms, supports societal harmony, equality and respect for the family as the key unit of society. These are good things, certainly, but do not make Freemasonry a religion.



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# The Secrets

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## **What are the secrets of Freemasonry?**

Many are the myths and rumors about Freemasonry. Conspiracy theories too abound, yet much accurate information is readily accessible in public libraries and on the web about Freemasons, their ceremonies and traditions.

In fact, the only part of Freemasonry that is confidential to members is the means of recognition between themselves. This stems from historical times when intelligent but illiterate stonemasons sought to prove to employers they were skilled and competent to design and build, and worthy to receive payment for their talents.

Freemasons retain this custom as a symbolic statement of their reliability, integrity and trust. These means of recognition include words, signs and a handshake.

We welcome you to learn more about Freemasonry, but if you want to know the handshake you'll have to join.



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# Masonic Dress & Titles

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## **Aprons, suits and collars**

Formal dress is part of past tradition and style. Most men own a business suit and dress in such attire at Lodge meetings out of respect for the institution, its principles and traditions.

The basic dress of all Freemasons is an apron, symbolic of the stonemasons of old, over a dark suit. As members advance in the hierarchical structure, the regalia worn becomes more decorative - collars, medals and color.

## **Titles and rank**

In modern Freemasonry, titles serve a symbolic purpose and are tied to Old English terms. For example, the term 'Worshipful Master' may be used to address the head of a Lodge and continues an ancient meaning of 'greatly respected.'

At the most basic level however, all Masons may be referred to as 'Brother' regardless of rank or leadership.



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# Frequently asked questions

## **Do you have to be invited to join?**

No, any man may inquire on membership regardless of family affiliation or personal connection. In fact, current members are not allowed to 'solicit' for new members, but may answer questions about the organization and what it is like to be a member. If you are interested, contact a local Mason (pg. 26).

## **What is 'proper solicitation'?**

While directly asking a man to join is not allowed, all Masons may provide appropriate answers to questions or offer further information to men interested in Freemasonry. It is improper to apply any pressure or coercion. The candidate must be allowed to decide for himself.

## **Is Freemasonry open to all men?**

Almost. As described on page 14, one of the biggest things about Freemasonry is that all men - regardless of race, religion, financial or social status - can come together as equals and share a common bond of friendship and mutual respect.



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# The Masonic Family

Freemasonry is composed of several layers of membership, including organizations of men, women and youth. This system creates a large body of support and friendship for all members and their families.

Here are two well-known offshoots of Freemasonry:

**The Shrine** - Wearing their signature fez, Oregon Shriners have a lot of fun participating in parades, fundraising and volunteering at the local Shriners Hospital for Children, supported by the membership since 1924.

**The Scottish Rite** - Leading Master Masons beyond the first three Degrees, thirty additional educational Degrees are offered to further expand Masonic teachings.

Organizations also exist for women (pg. 16) and children including; Rainbow for Girls, Job's Daughters and DeMolay.

## Is the organization dying out?

Freemasonry has seen a slow decline following WWII, similar to many social organizations. Due to the increasing pace of society and the growing commitments on personal time, new candidate numbers have been lower, albeit steady.

However, don't confuse the lack of numbers with a lack of vitality - we're committed to make joining and attending worthwhile to those who seek the opportunity.





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# Why do men join Freemasonry?

There are many reasons but the most common are:

- To share the company of like-minded men
- To fulfill a desire to further develop personally
- To expand their involvement in community assistance
- To widen both their own and their family's connections in the community
- Because of a relative or friend's current or historical connection with Freemasonry
- To enjoy the social opportunities

Invariably, it is a combination of these reasons that draw men to the organization.

## **Why Freemasonry over other civic or service groups?**

While charitable service and caring about people is a cornerstone shared by many service groups, there are other equally important parts not found elsewhere. Men become Freemasons to develop as individuals; meet other like-minded people; and to enjoy its tradition, rituals, regalia, ceremony and the sociable nature of the organization.



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# Joining Oregon Freemasonry

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It is not true that an interested person must wait to be asked to join Freemasonry.

A man may inquire on membership to any Freemason he may know or contact the Lodge nearest him.

More information is available online at  
**[www.OregonFreemasonry.com](http://www.OregonFreemasonry.com)**

Phone: (503) 357-3158

Email: [info@masonic-oregon.com](mailto:info@masonic-oregon.com)



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'Speak Up for Freemasonry' seeks to bring public notice to the activities of Masonic Lodges - maintaining traditional high values of personal and civic responsibility and the extent of their charitable and benevolent work in the community.

More information is available online at  
[www.OregonFreemasonry.com](http://www.OregonFreemasonry.com)