



Top Ten Frequently Ask Questions about Freemasonry

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1) Where can I get more information about the Freemasons?

The best way to get information is to talk to a Mason – either in person or online. You may have some of the same questions as those below – so take a look at the FAQ's. If you want more historical information, Mark Tabbert's book, *American Freemasons*, is a good place to start. More lighthearted, yet accurate and thorough, is *Freemasons for Dummies* by Christopher Hodapp. Both books published in 2005 and are available in your local bookstore, or you may find them at online stores like Amazon and Borders.

2) What is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry aims to promote Friendship, Morality, and Brotherly Love among its members. It is, by definition, a fraternity; comprised of men from every race, religion, opinion, and background who are brought together as Brothers to develop and strengthen the bonds of friendship. With over 3 million members, Freemasons belong to the largest and oldest fraternal organization in the world. Freemasonry proposes to “make good men better” by teaching – with metaphors from geometry and architecture – about building values based on great universal truths.

3) Where did Freemasonry come from?

Part of the mystique of Freemasonry can be attributed to speculation about its roots. Over the years, researchers have never been able to conclusively determine exactly when, where, how, and why Freemasonry was born.

The order is thought to have arisen from the English and Scottish guilds of practicing stonemasons and cathedral builders in the Middle Ages, but certain Masonic documents actually trace the sciences of geometry and masonry to the time of ancient Egypt, and some historians say that Masonry has its real roots in antiquity.

The formation of the first Grand Lodge in London in 1717 could mark the beginning of the Modern (or “Speculative”) era of Freemasonry, when members were no longer limited to actual working stonemasons. These “Accepted” Masons eventually adopted more enlightened philosophies, and turned what was a tradesmen's organization into a fraternity for moral edification, intellectual recitation, benevolent service, and gentlemanly socialization.

4) Is there a difference between Masons and Freemasons?

The names are interchangeable. The term Freemason is often used today in public to differentiate the fraternity from actual operative stonemasons, and is said to more accurately describe the enlightened “freethinking” of the membership.

5) Why is there so much interest in Masonry today?

Over the last four centuries, Freemasonry seems to have flourished during times of great enlightenment and change. It is no coincidence that Freemasonry rose to prominence during the Age of Enlightenment in both Europe and America – where a new generation believed it could discover ways to gain personal improvement, bring order to society, and understand the whole universe. This statement is perhaps even stronger today than it was in the 18 th century.

Today, men seek out Masonry for the same reasons – to better themselves and improve society in the company of like-minded Brothers. As we learn more about how our physical world works, there’s also new interest in those things we don’t understand – especially things bound around tradition or that have a more mystical nature. Also, books like The Da Vinci Code and movies like “National Treasure” have brought up both new interest and renewed speculation about the nature of the Fraternity. Though these books and movies are a product more of a vivid imagination than fact, the real history of Masonry is perhaps the best story of all – one learned only by Asking – and becoming a Freemason.



6) Can Freemasonry actually prepare me for greatness?

No organization can guarantee to make anyone great, but the powerful values and important truths that are taught as part of the Masonic tradition has proven to inspire, challenge, and develop leadership in men. Benjamin Franklin may have said it best, describing the Fraternity as a place to “prepare himself.”

Perhaps one of the things that has kept Masonry a strong and vital organization for so long is the fact that the fraternity proposed only to “make good men better,” not to make bad men good. This distinction is critical in that from its early days the Fraternity took itself out of the “rehabilitation” game -- which became the purvey of both religion and the criminal justice system.

Today, men are preparing themselves for greatness in Lodges the world over. If you think there’s greatness in you, we invite your interest.

7) Is Masonry a secret society?

No. It is sometimes said that Freemasonry is a “Society with secrets, not a secret society.” In point of fact, however, any purported Masonic “secrets” were made public several centuries ago in London newspapers, and today can be found in the Library of Congress,

on the Internet, and in many books on the subject. As Benjamin Franklin once said, “The great secret of Freemasonry is that there is no secret at all.”

8) What about secret handshakes, ritual, and passwords?

Freemasonry, often called the “Craft” by its members, is founded on metaphors of architecture. Following the practice of the ancient stonemason guilds, Freemasons use special handshakes, words, and symbols to not only to identify each other, but to help, as William Preston said in 1772, “imprint upon the memory wise and serious truths.”

Although every new Freemason takes an oath – and vows to keep secret the metaphors of Masonry – the metaphors are only used to help Masons become better men; and there’s certainly no secret surrounding what it takes to be good and true.

9) How do I become a Freemason? Ask!

Because Masons have not traditionally recruited members, and do not hold public meetings, there has long been confusion about how to join the Fraternity. Does someone ask you? Do you ask? Today, because of widespread interest in the Fraternity – along with the plethora of both information and misinformation found on the Internet – the following information was put together on how men can join:

Most men can become a Mason by simply asking – like Washington, Franklin, and most every Mason from the past to the present day. Membership is open to men of every race, religion, culture, and level of income. The requirements for membership are that you be over the age of 18, believe in Supreme Being, and *can be found to be of good character*. The belief in a Supreme Being is said to be a requirement that is needed to take certain oaths, otherwise “no obligation would be binding upon you.”

Generally, men seek out a Lodge near their home or workplace, or ask someone they know who is a Mason to recommend a Lodge to them.

Not all men can become Masons, however. Masonry does not purport to make “bad men good,” only “good men better.” Only men of good character are accepted into the Fraternity. Masonic lodges review every applicant’s moral character – and the centuries-old “blackball” system is still in place; members must be voted in by a 100% vote of Lodge members present.

10) What is a Grand Lodge?

Grand Lodges were formed – first in England and Ireland, and later in America, to help standardize ritual, traditions, and customs among various Lodges. The first Grand Lodge in America was formed in Massachusetts in 1733. Today there is a Grand Lodge in every state – and virtually every country in the world. There is no “central” Grand Lodge, though Grand Lodges also meet to help facilitate unity and uphold tradition within the Craft.