

# WHAT IS FREEMASONRY



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Freemasonry is the oldest and largest world-wide fraternity dedicated to the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of a Supreme Being. Although of a religious nature, Freemasonry is not a religion. It urges its members, however, to be faithful and devoted to their own religious beliefs.

The organization of Freemasonry is based on a system of Grand Lodges, each sovereign within its own territory. There is no central authority governing all Grand Lodges. However, to be acknowledged by others, acceptable traditions, standards and practices must be maintained.

In our Province the governing body is called the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario. It is under the leadership of a Grand Master. He presides over the 57,000 Masons who belong to one or more of the 604 lodges in our jurisdiction. Each of these lodges is under the direction of a Master.

## **WHAT IT DOES**

As a fraternity, Freemasonry provides an opportunity for men to meet and enjoy friendly companionship. In the spirit of helpfulness and brotherly love and guided by strict moral principles it encourages goodwill toward all mankind. Freemasonry is of a personal nature in its private ceremonies. Its ritual dramatizes a philosophy of life based on morality. It promotes self-improvement. The tools of operative masons are used to symbolize and teach the basic principles of brotherly love, charity and truth which Masons are encouraged to practice in their daily lives. Charity is a tangible way in which Masons help those whose circumstances in life fairly warrant it.

The fraternity does not conceal its existence, purpose, aims or principles. Masonic Halls bearing the lodge name and emblem are familiar sights in towns and cities throughout Ontario. Many members proudly wear Masonic insignia on rings and pins.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Our traditions can be traced directly to the associations of operative masons. They were men of outstanding character and high ideals, who built the cathedrals, abbeys and castles of the Middle Ages.

With the decline of cathedral building in the 17th Century, many guilds of stonemasons, called "Operative" masons, started to accept into their membership those who were not members of the masons' craft and called them "Speculative" or "Accepted" masons.

It was in these groups, called lodges, comprised mainly of "Accepted" masons that Freemasonry, as we know it today, had its beginning. In 1717, four such lodges, which had been meeting regularly in London, united to form the first Grand Lodge of England under the direction of a Grand Master. From that first Grand Lodge, Freemasonry has spread throughout the world. Today, some 150 Grand Lodges have a total membership of approximately four million Masons.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

One of Freemasonry's customs is not to solicit members. However, anyone should feel free to approach any Mason to seek further information about the Craft.

Membership is for men, 21 years of age or older, who meet the qualifications and standards of character and reputation, who are of good moral character, and who believe in the existence of a Supreme Being.

A man who wants to join a lodge must be recommended by two members of that lodge. He must understand that his character will be investigated. After approval by the members of that lodge, he will be accepted as an applicant for membership in Freemasonry.

The doors of Freemasonry are open to men who seek harmony with their fellow man, feel the need for self-improvement and wish to participate in making this world a better place in which to live.

Any man who becomes a Mason is taught a pattern for living — reverence, morality, kindness, honesty, dependability and compassion. He must be prepared to honour his country, uphold its laws and respect those in authority. He must be prepared to maintain honourable relations with others and be willing to share in Masonic activities.

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