

What is Freemasonry?

St. John's Lodge No. 17 – March 13, 2012

Most of us proudly wear the well known symbols of Masonry and rightly so. Often, when out in public displaying our logo, people will ask “so you are a Mason, what’s Masonry all about?” Are you prepared to answer that frequently asked question “What is Freemasonry?” Do you carry with you the “Freemasonry is ...” card published by Grand Lodge? Are you carrying one with you now? Do you start with what Masonry is not? Often our first response is “that it is not a religion” or “that it is not a secret organization”.

This negative response leaves most people wondering then what is it. Our brains have great difficulty in thinking in the negative. For example when you get home tonight and your wife asks “Who was at lodge tonight?” You respond with “No one was there from New Zealand.” She looks confused so you say “Well we didn’t have any blind people.” She looks even more confused and so to straighten it out you inform her that “That there were no convicts present.” Wouldn’t it have been better to say that “There were 50 good looking, well dressed gentlemen who had dinner together and later 70 in all gathered to witness the degree work.”

Negative responses to describe Masonry encourage the view of Masonry as a questionable, secretive gathering of men. I like to rephrase the typical negative response and say what we are. Let me share with you some of my ideas of what Masonry is so as to be helpful for you when asked “What is Masonry?”

- 1) – Masonry is more than a religion. Dan Brown stated that “In a world where men do battle over whose definition of God is most accurate, I cannot adequately express the deep respect and admiration I feel toward an organization in which men of differing faiths are able to ‘break bread together’ in a bond of brotherhood, friendship, and camaraderie.” Masonry is religious in nature and promotes all religions that believe in a Supreme Being. Masonry promotes the regular attendance of their members and their families at a church of their choice. Secretarian religion is not to be discussed during a lodge meeting.
- 2) – Masonry is more than a service club. Masons promote and encourage the practice of charity in its many forms. They give of themselves to help mankind in general and members of the craft and their families in particular. Masons and Masonic Lodges quietly give assistance to many charitable causes and individuals.
- 3) – Masonry is more than political. Masonry promotes loyalty, patriotism and nationalism. Masonic leaders are committed to supporting the laws of the country in which they live and to their government in general by not creating insurrection or rioting against their government. Partisan politics is not to be discussed or debated during a lodge meeting.

- 4) – Masonry is more than a fraternity or brotherhood. Masonry encourages the support of families of Masons and that of Mason's widows. Masonry promotes the practice of good will among mankind. Masonry promotes the democratic process and many named Masons have been credited for the founding of democracy in the free world.
- 5) – Masonry is more than a family. Masons enjoy each other's company as each lodge has a family feeling. Our Masonic family stretches throughout the jurisdiction, throughout Canada and internationally. If a Mason is travelling abroad and is in need of help, that help is as close as the local Masonic Lodge.
- 6) – Masonry is an educational institution. Masons can try their public speaking, leadership, and management skills in a friendly environment and use them later in other walks of life. Masonry provides the opportunities to study the history of the craft and even has a College of Masonry course for deeper study. Our first Grand Master, M. W. Bro. William Mercer Wilson, identified the object in Freemasonry as "the cultivation and improvement of the human mind."
- 7) – Masonry is an organization with some secrets and meets in private. Most if not all organizations, corporations, governments and families have some secrets and meet in private. This is the same for Masons.
- 8) – Masonry is a very ancient organization. Some would suggest that it has roots back to the building of King Solomon's Temple. There is no question that Masons respect the quality of workmanship in that structure. We are familiar with recorded information when lodges came together in England in 1717. Prior to that we know that for several hundred years Masons were building Cathedrals and Temples throughout Europe.
- 9) – Masonry has a very long tradition. One which Masons are proud of. It has been said that "tradition is the rudder that guides us through modern day life", a quote from an anonymous source. Masons know that what is right and wrong has never changed through-out the eons that humans have been on the face of the earth. Masonry's goal is to make good men better – one at a time.
- 10) – Masonry is a place and a time to escape from today's high speed and fast changing times. It is one of the few institutions left where men can meet for fellowship sequestered from the outside world. It is a place where values remain constant.
- 11) – Masonry is a philosophical men's club. As described by M. W. Bro. Raymond Daniels it is "a progressive curriculum of self discipline – self-examination, self-discovery, self-analysis, self-realization and self-fulfillment.

12) – Masonry is spiritual and aids in the understanding of one’s reason for being. I attend lodge to find myself as it is so easy to lose my way.

13) – Masonry is a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.

When you are asked “what is Masonry?” or “What do you do at a lodge meeting?” always be ready. Be ready to pull out of your pocket one of the Grand Lodge cards “Freemasonry is ____” and expand the knowledge of our wonderful organization. Be positive about Masonry, be proud of the Craft and show how enthusiastic you are about one of the greatest and largest fraternities in the world.

Ceremony of Installation and Investiture of Officers of a Lodge

Builders of Empire – Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs

Dan Brown’s Letter to the Southern Jurisdiction of Scottish Rite Masons dated October 6, 2009

The Entered Apprentice Degree a paper by M. W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels

The Work

R. W. Bro. Douglas E. Galt

DDGM Ontario District