

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?



Introduction

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest fraternal societies.

It is made up of men who are concerned with moral and spiritual values and who pursue a way of life that complements their religious, family and community affiliations. They seek a better way of life and treat all men as equal regardless of race, religion or social standing.

Freemasonry requires that Candidates hold a belief in the Divine Creating God Who is Creator of the Universe and Giver of its life. The Masonic Ritual explains and teaches that Faith in the Divine is given expression in the life of the man who acknowledges his dependence on God by invoking His aid on all his undertakings, and who prays to the Almighty Creator for guidance to live faithfully in His service. This is further explained in the Masonic Ritual as the loving relationship a Freemason has with the Almighty Creator in which the Freemason prays to the Almighty for His continual guidance and "Divine Wisdom". He prays for the "grace" that his life will "unfold the beauties of true godliness" to the honour and glory of the Creator's Holy Name. This, therefore requires that whatever a man's creed may be it shall clearly state that, by whatever name, the Divine is known to him as the Creator and Giver of Life. Those writings which reveal the Divine Creator, His works and His Will for mankind are deemed Sacred Writings (Volumes of the Sacred Law) for Freemasonry. While Freemasons hold religious beliefs they do not promote a particular religion.

Every true Freemason:

- seeks ways to share in building a better community;
- shows tolerance and respect for the opinions of others
and behaves with kindness and understanding to his fellow creatures;
- practices charity care for the community as well as his own family,
through charitable giving and by voluntary work; and
- strives for the truth, requiring high moral standards
and aiming to achieve them in his own life.

Freemasons believe these principles represent a way of achieving higher standards in life.

The Essential Qualification for Membership

The essential qualification for admission and continuing membership of Freemasonry is a belief in a Supreme Being and a desire to strive for:

- * high moral standards;
- * kindness in the home;
- * courtesy in society;
- * honesty in business; and
- * fairness in all dealings.

What do Freemasons do?

Freemasons are deeply involved in helping other people. They hold Lodge meetings once a month to share each other's company and follow their pursuit of a better way of life.

From its earliest days, charity has been the most visible Masonic activity, with Freemasons concerned with the care of orphans, the sick and the aged. Large sums are given to national and local charities, with Masons around the world giving away millions of dollars to various charities each day. They are also actively involved in a great deal of community volunteer work.

In South Australia, the charitable works of Freemasons are conducted through the Freemasons Foundation.

The Freemasons also are very significant providers of aged care facilities, which are operated through the Masonic Homes.

Where do they meet?

Freemasons hold their meetings in halls known as Lodges. There are about 3,500 Freemasons in 109 Lodges in South Australia and the Northern Territory, and about 5 million Freemasons throughout the world.

Each State has a Grand Lodge, which is made up of members from the various Lodges throughout the State and is a representative body for them.

How old is Freemasonry and how did it evolve?

According to the legends contained in the rituals of Freemasonry, the Masonic fraternity dates back to the construction of the Temple of King Solomon as described in the Bible - a project so vast that an organisational structure was devised to ensure that the Temple was built properly and completed on time. This led to the stone masons and architects being organised into various grades and classes, each with their own responsibilities.

Masons in the Middle Ages constructed many buildings, but particular attention has always focused on the great cathedrals of England and Europe. To build these marvels it was necessary for Masons to gather in large groups, sometimes moving from one finished castle or cathedral to the next.

To construct them, it was necessary to have considerable knowledge of geometry, arithmetic and engineering and as a result, bodies of Stone Masons - including architects - became one of the few places of learning outside of the clergy.

The term "Freemason" appears as early as 1375 in a City of London manuscript that includes regulations for the society; duties to God, church and country; and repeated references to brotherhood.

The Masons used a series of rituals and procedures to teach their trade and by the 17th Century, as

their numbers and status grew, Lodges began accepting honorary members who were not actually stone workers. These same rituals and teachings were used to instruct non-working Freemasons about the craft.

From the early 18th century, Freemasonry spread from England to the Continent and then to America and Latin America. It was introduced to Australia in 1802 when a ship's officers and several citizens met in Sydney.

By 1816, Freemasonry had become firmly established in this country. The first Lodge in South Australia was the Lodge of Friendship, which was established in London in 1834 for intending settlers to the new colony. Charles Kingston brought the warrant to establish the Lodge with him when he arrived in South Australia with Governor Hindmarsh on the Buffalo in 1836.

However, because there weren't enough Freemasons in SA at the time, the first Lodge meeting was not held until 1838, when a number of Masons met at Blacks Hotel in Franklin Street.

No one knows just how old Freemasonry is, because its origins have been lost in time.

What is a Lodge and what does it look like?

A Lodge is a term for a meeting place for Masons and for the Freemasons who actually meet there.

It is an English word from the Middle Ages and refers to the temporary buildings the Masons erected alongside their construction projects.

For mutual protection and to with education and training, the Masons gathered in a lodge - a building put up at the construction site where they could eat, rest, plan the construction project, receive their pay and socialise after work. This building was called a lodge and the term has remained down through the ages.

The Lodge is a rectangular room with a tiled central floor and seating around the perimeter of the room. The Worshipful Master, who is head of the Lodge, sits at one end of the hall, with two principal officers sitting on two of the other three sides and the other Lodge members seated around the perimeter.

Tours of the Adelaide Masonic Centre are available.

If you wish to take a look at a Lodge, **the Masonic Centre on North Terrace is open for public tours every week**. These tours, which are escorted by Freemasons, include a brief introduction to Freemasonry and an inspection of the building, including Lodge rooms.

Enquiries: phone (08) 8223 1633

What happens at a Lodge meeting?

There are two aspects to any Lodge meeting.

The first is the same as the business meeting of any organisation, although it takes a little longer to call the meeting to order because Freemasons use a ceremony that is quite formal, drawing on elements from the very foundations of Masonry.

This ceremony reminds Freemasons of the virtues they strive to live by. Once this aspect is completed, minutes are read, business is taken care of and projects planned, just like any other organisation.

The other aspect of a Lodge meeting is where new members are received. This is done in a formal ceremony that is centuries old and is designed to teach Freemasons important lessons and start them thinking about their own nature as spiritual beings.

Why is there so much secrecy surrounding Freemasonry?

Masonry is not a secret society. But it is a society with a few secrets - mainly modes of recognition. Masons are well known and proudly display their existence.

Lodges are clearly marked as such. The Freemasons have a listing in the Telephone Book. There are thousands of Masonic web sites on the Internet and an enormous amount of information can be obtained from them.

Why do Freemasons dress up for their meetings and have secret handshakes?

The secret forms of recognition among Freemasons go back to the Middle Ages when they were careful to protect the knowledge they drew on to build the great cathedrals.

The different forms of dress - which are largely based on ceremonial aprons, collars and gauntlets - are to distinguish rank and also reflect protective garments worn by the original stone masons.

In medieval times the apron was made of leather, tied around the waist and worn - probably from neck to knee - to protect the mason as he handled stone. The aprons that are worn at Lodge meetings are ceremonial and as the Mason progresses through the various degrees, the aprons and other ceremonial regalia become more ornate, to indicate different degrees. The most identifiable symbols of Freemasonry are the common tools that were used by the medieval stone masons - the gavel, the rule, the compass, the square, the level and so on. Various degrees of Freemasonry are associated with particular tools.

The different levels of Freemasonry

In the Middle Ages when a person wished to join a craft he was apprenticed to learn the tools and skills of the trade. When he had proved his skills he became a fellow of the craft and when he had developed exceptional skills he became known as a master mason.

Craft Freemasonry consists of the three degrees called the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason.

There are fourteen other orders derived from Freemasonry existing in South Australia, one of which has 33 degrees.

Who is the head of the Freemasons?

No one. Each Lodge has a Worshipful Master and each State a Grand Lodge, which has full authority within its jurisdiction.

Our Grand Lodge is led by a resident South Australian Grand Master. He is elected by the members on an annual basis, and usually serves a three year term of office.

Grand Masters are no different to most of us: they follow Australian Rules football, they play golf or other sports and join in other leisure and Church activities along with their families.

Their community service and caring is typical of many Freemasons.

Why do Freemasons have titles like Worshipful Master and so on?

The titles have their origins from Middle English about the time of Chaucer. Just as mayors in Local Government are addressed as *Your Worship* and are referred to as *His* or *Her Worship*, so the Master of the Lodge is called '*Worshipful Master*', meaning "greatly respected". Serving beneath him are senior and junior Wardens, while Lodges have a secretary and a treasurer just like any other organisation.

Is it an old boys' network?

Freemasons are of varying ages from under 30 to over 70. The older Masons reflect the huge increase in membership in most fraternal orders after World War II, when men returning from overseas sought the male companionship they had become accustomed to while on active service. During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, increases in mass forms of entertainment and greater demands in the workplace saw a decline in new membership of most fraternal organisations, business clubs, churches and the like. However, membership seems to have levelled out and is gaining in some areas.

How do Freemasons differ from Rotary/Lions, etc?

In some respects these organisations are similar, but Masonry is distinguished from other fraternal orders by its emphasis on moral character, its ornate rituals and long-established traditions.

Belief in a Supreme Being and the three great principles of Freemasonry - tolerance, charity and truth - make Freemasonry a way of life, rather than being a fraternal organisation with business and community interests.

Most Freemasons believe it is un-Masonic to trade with each other purely because they are Masons. However, it is not surprising that many trade with each other, knowing that they are dealing with people who are of good character and can be trusted.

However Masonry is not a place to network.

Famous Freemasons

Over the years many men of importance have been Freemasons. This is a reflection of the fact that these people have shared the philosophies of Freemasonry.

They include several Kings, political leaders and industrial identities - among them, King Edward VII and VIII, King George IV, V and VI, Sir Winston Churchill, Henry Ford and American Presidents and Vice Presidents including George Washington, Theodore and Franklin D Roosevelt and Harry S Truman. In music, people like Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, W.S. Gilbert, Sir Arthur Sullivan and George Gershwin were Freemasons.

Famous Australian Freemasons include explorers John Oxley and John McDouall Stuart; aeronautical pioneer Lawrence Hargrave (shown on the \$20 note 1966-1994); aviator Sir Charles Kingsford Smith (also shown on the \$20 note 1966-1994); cricketer Sir Donald Bradman; Prime Ministers, Sir Edmund Barton, SM Bruce (later Lord Bruce), Earl Page, Sir Robert Menzies, Arthur Fadden, Sir John McEwen, Sir John Gorton and Sir William McMahon; and entertainers Smokey Dawson, Roy (Mo McCackie) Rene and Chips Rafferty. Australia's current Governor-General, Major General Michael Jeffery, MC is a Freemason, as were his predecessors Lord Stonehaven (G-G 1925-1930) and Lord Gowrie, VC (G-G 1936-1944). Edith Cowan, social reformer, feminist and first woman elected to an Australian Parliament (in 1921), was a member of Co-Freemasonry; she is shown on the \$50 note.

A number of Freemasons, including *Messrs* Gouger, Gilbert, Morphett, Mildred and Kingston, arrived in South Australia in 1836-7 with other first settlers.

Other famous South Australian Freemasons include Sir James Hardy; former Lieutenant-Governor Chief Justice Sir Samuel Way; former Governors, Brigadier-General Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, VC (later became Lord Gowrie), Sir Malcolm Barclay-Harvey, Sir Robert George and Sir Eric Neal; mayors and lord mayors of Adelaide including John Lazar, Sir Lewis Cohen, CRJ Glover; brewer Sir ET Smith; and Premiers and politicians including John Hart, Sir James Penn Boucaut, Sir John Cockburn, and Sir Thomas Playford.

How does one join?

If you know a Freemason, ask him about membership. If you don't know a Mason, write to your local Lodge or:

The Grand Lodge of Freemasons
PO Box 19, Rundle Mall
Adelaide SA 5000

To register your interest online, click [here](#).

You can also telephone the Grand Lodge Office (08) 8223 1633.

As with other fraternities and clubs, any application will be considered by a committee who will ask for character references and will meet with the applicant to make sure he has been properly informed about Freemasonry. The application will then be considered by the local Lodge.

Do Freemasons have to pay to be members?

Yes. Like all organisations, Lodges have bills to pay. Freemasons pay annual dues or subscriptions the same as do members of any other organisation. The dues are not excessive.

Need to know more?

Most large libraries have a number of books on Freemasonry. If you contact the Grand Lodge, you will find publications that provide further information.

We would welcome your involvement - but we won't be pushy.

Men of good character are always welcome in Freemasonry and any man who is at least 18 years old and believes in God may join the fraternity. But you won't be pressured into becoming a Freemason. You must join us because you want to - not because you have been talked into it.

Joining Freemasonry makes a permanent commitment to live in certain ways ... to live with honour and integrity; to be willing to share and care for others; to trust each other; and place ultimate trust in God.

No man should be talked into making a decision like this.

If you would like to talk to someone about becoming a Freemason:

- * call into the Grand Lodge office at 254 North Terrace, Adelaide
- * or call (08) 8223 1633
- * Alternatively, you may enquire [online](#).

Freemasonry ... a way of life.