

Grand Lodge of Quebec



A few simple answers to frequently asked questions.

Q What is Freemasonry?

A Freemasonry, or more precisely, The Order of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, is an initiatory and philosophical society whose origins are lost in time. The ancient manuscripts date from the 14th century but Masonic tradition dates back to the mystery schools of antiquity. The modern foundations, however, date from 1717, when four lodges in London developed an administrative structure (called the Grand Lodge) to organize the evolution of the movement more efficiently. After that, there was a phenomenal expansion of the Order, first in Europe, next in the British Colonies and then around the world. Freemasonry in Quebec has British origins -- the first Lodges appeared about the middle of the 18th century.

Q Why are you a secret society?

A We are not, but lodge meetings, like those of many other groups, are private and open only to members. The rules and aims of Freemasonry are available to the public. Meeting places are known and in many areas are used by the local community for activities other than Freemasonry. Members are encouraged to speak openly about Freemasonry.

A secret society, by definition, is one that tries to hide its own existence. Freemasonry is absolutely not that. Its headquarters are well known, as are the meeting places of its Lodges.

Freemasonry is, however, discrete. It does not recruit members nor does it publicize its charitable works. The Masonic oath is not incompatible with the moral, civil or religious duties of any citizen of the world.

Q Who can become a Freemason?

A Any man who believes in God, who believes that humans must act honourably in all things, that they must leave the world in a better state than that in which they found it, that they must recognize the rights of others to have their own beliefs, who believes it is not only more deserving but more pleasurable to give than to receive, who believes that there are more important things in life than financial success, who considers it his duty to be an exemplary citizen of his country, who believes that one must have compassion for others and that goodness of heart is one of the most important human values, who finally believes that all men on earth must live a life of fraternal friendship is a fit person to become a Mason. Therefore all men of good will can become freemasons.

Q How does one become a Freemason?

A Because Freemasonry forbids recruitment, the initiative must come from the individual himself. He must ask a freemason or if he does not know one, contact a local Lodge, the District or the Grand Lodge, who will put him in contact with the nearest Lodge. Once the initial request has been made, the aspirant is guided through the process by the lodge.

Not every one who wishes to join will necessarily be accepted, and the aspirant will be submitted to one or more interviews to enable the lodge to understand the individual, his motivation and his aspirations.

Q Isn't ceremony and ritual out of place in a modern society?

A No. The ritual is a shared experience which binds the members together. Its use of drama, allegory and symbolism impresses the principles and teachings more firmly in the mind of each candidate than if they were simply passed on to him in matter-of-fact modern language.

Ceremony, unlike religious ritual, does not act on the other world in order to influence this world; it acts solely on this world. Ceremony is distinguished by its "meaning and effect", which are sacred but not religious.

Q What is the Mission of Freemasonry?

A Freemasonry defines itself as "a beautiful system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." It is not a school and its teachings are not to be rigorously or scientifically applied. Jean-Pierre Bayard has written that "Freemasonry causes one to become conscious of the fact that he is not exactly what he would like to be; it causes him to acquire a mastery of himself. Thus, Freemasonry does not have a model rule, nor does it dispense a lesson, it rather awakens the mind."

The morale values which it conveys are not unique: self knowledge, love of one's neighbour, respect of legally constituted authority, obedience to a Supreme Being, etc. What is exclusive is the method of communication, that is to say the initiation rite which is in effect an elaborate allegory of life which engenders in the initiate, a profound meditation, a perception, and an interior action which reveals himself to himself enabling him to surpass his own limits, his own self.

The primary goal of Freemasonry is therefore the improvement of the individual and consequently, that of mankind. It necessarily follows that the Masonic initiation is done in an impeccable decorum with great human dignity and with the greatest respect for the individual.

Q Why do your 'obligations' contain hideous penalties?

A They no longer do. When Masonic ritual was developing in the late 1600s and 1700s it was quite common for legal and civil oaths to include physical penalties and Freemasonry simply followed the practice of the times. In Freemasonry, however, the physical penalties were always symbolic and were never carried out. After long discussion, they were removed from the promises in 1986.

Every member in good standing (up to date with his dues) can leave the Order through a simple request in writing to the lodge, which will automatically grant his request without any further obligations.

Q Isn't it true that Freemasons only look after each other?

A No. From its earliest days, Freemasonry has been involved in charitable activities. Since its inception, Freemasonry has provided support not only for widows and orphans of Freemasons but also for many others within the community. Whilst some Masonic charities cater specifically but not exclusively for Masons or their dependents, others make significant grants to non-Masonic organisations. On a local level, lodges give substantial support to local causes.

Even though it is not primarily a charitable organization, the charitable contributions of North American freemasons amount to more than 500 million dollars per year. In fact, each branch of Freemasonry selects one or several works: the Shriners maintain hospitals for children with orthopaedic problems (there is one in Montréal) and the Burn Care Center in Boston; the Scottish Rite contributes to research in mental health and cancer, as well as clinics for speech problems; the York Rite maintains a foundation for eyes and is active in biomedical research; the Craft lodges favour homes for the elderly and orphans. These groups also grant bursaries to those studying or doing research in a particular area. This only an overview, which does not take into consideration, projects by the many lodges at a local level. Freemasonry encourages its members to get involved not only financially but also through voluntary work in any laudable community project.

Q Aren't you a religion or a rival to religion?

A Emphatically not. Freemasonry requires a belief in God and its principles are common to many of the world's great religions. Freemasonry does not try to replace religion or substitute for it. Every candidate is exhorted to practise his religion and to regard its holy book as the unerring standard of truth. Freemasonry does not instruct its members in what their religious beliefs should be, nor does it offer sacraments. Freemasonry deals in relations between men; religion deals in a man's relationship with his God.

In 1723, the Grand Lodge of England published its "constitutions" in which the first article stipulates:

"A Mason is obliged by his tenure to obey the moral law and if he rightly understands the art he will never be a stupid atheist nor an irreligious libertine. But, though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, yet it is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves, that is, to be good men and true, or men of honour and honesty, by whatever denomination or persuasions they may be distinguished, whereby Masonry becomes the centre of union, and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must have remained at a perpetual distance."

Free Masonry is neither a sect nor a religion. It proposes no dogma and it does not have a spiritual leader. Founded on a belief in the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, Freemasonry is a society where men of different backgrounds, from all origins and from all religions, beliefs or philosophies show each other sincere friendship, and where they join their efforts in constructing an Ideal Temple of Truth, Justice and Harmony. It maintains the utmost respect for all religions and rejects atheism. It lets its members have full freedom of thought and only forbids two topics of discussion within the Lodge: politics and religion.

Q How many degrees are there in Freemasonry?

A

Basic Freemasonry consists of the three 'Craft' degrees (Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason) completed by the Royal Arch degree (Chapter). There are many other Masonic degrees and Orders which are called 'additional' because they add to the basis of the Craft and Royal Arch. They are not basic to Freemasonry but add to it by further expounding and illustrating the principles stated in the Craft and Royal Arch. Some of these additional degrees are numerically superior to the third degree but this does not affect the fact that they are additional to and not in anyway superior to or higher than the Craft. The ranks that these additional degrees carry have no standing with the Craft or Royal Arch.

Q How much does it cost to be a Freemason?

A It varies from lodge to lodge but anyone wishing to join can find a lodge to suit his pocket. On entry, there is an initiation fee and an apron to buy. A member pays an annual subscription to his lodge which covers his membership and the administrative cost of running the lodge. It is usual to have a meal after the meeting; the cost of this can be included either in the annual subscription or paid for at the time.

The admission fees are generally minimal, less than \$500 and they include the cost of the apron. The annual dues are in most cases around \$100. No other financial contribution is required. The contributions to the benevolent fund of the lodge are voluntary.