

# Freemasonry — Just What Is It?

By Tim S. Anderson, Deputy Grand Sec./L.S.C. Dir.

There are several patented answers that can be given to that question, but are those answers really meaningful? Masonry has as many definitions as there are definers. There are some definitions we hold in common, but there are many that we do not. Why is this so? I have an explanation that works for me, which I will share with you. Freemasonry is a very personal thing we do together and



I will attempt to explain why. When a man enters the Fraternity he usually has little knowledge of Masonry. Speaking from my personal experience I had NO CLUE as to what the Masonic Fraternity was or what it did. I did, however, hear in the voices of the men I knew to be Masons, men who were highly respected in the community, a profound respect for the institution of Masonry. I was informed that each man is elected only by a unanimous ballot and is required to participate in a Ritual Initiation Ceremony. The ceremony is the same for each man but the information is presented as an

allegory, allowing each man to make a personal interpretation. As the bonds of trust, brotherly love and friendship develop, and he is present at more Initiation ceremonies, the new brother is better enabled to share with the other brothers. As he continues to grow in the Fraternity his interpretation of the material presented also changes. These interpretations determine how each of us define Freemasonry. Thus the many definitions.

The reason you get patented answers is also not a mystery. What Masonry means to people is commonly confused with its purpose. The purpose of the Fraternity is often stated as taking a good man and making him better. I have a good friend in the Fraternity who described the purpose of his lodge as follows: Freemasonry has been described as kindness in the home; honesty in business; courtesy toward others; dependability in one's work; compassion for the unfortunate; resistance to evil; help for the weak; concern for good government; support for public education; and above all, a life-practicing reverence for God and love of fellow man. It encourages good citizenship and political expression but is not a political organization. Its charitable activities are many, yet it is not a welfare or benefit organization.

Masonry offers men of all faiths the opportunity to join in practicing to be men of integrity in all their actions in life. The Fraternity is essentially an institution providing moral instruction. Freemasonry teaches man the understanding, which enables him to live in harmony with himself, his fellow man and his God.

I may not have exactly described what Freemasonry is but there are several things that I can definitively tell you it is not.

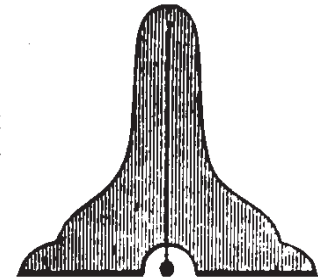
Freemasonry is not a secret society! A secret society is generally one that wraps itself in a cloak of absolute secrecy. That means no one knows who the members are, where they meet, what they do or what they stand for. That is not Masonry at all! Masonry may have "secrets," but it is not a secret society. Masonic secrets are few in number and deal with the general method of initiation, the ways we recognize each other, and very little else. Those parts of the Ritual, which are called the esoteric side of Masonry, have been handed down by word of mouth for centuries. If a person really wants to know, even this "secret" part of Masonry



is available as there have been exposures of Masonry written for two centuries and at least some of them are available at most libraries.

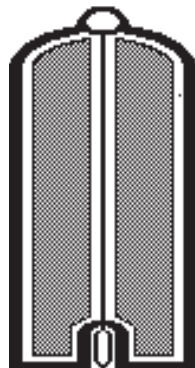
Masonry's purposes, ideals, and principles may be learned by anyone who inquires. There are numerous books on these subjects which are available to the public. Masonry often has public notices in the newspapers and our members are usually numbered among the more prominent citizens in the community.

Freemasonry is not a Religion! Freemasonry is understanding and tolerant of all religious thoughts. Masonry has no specific creed, no dogma, and no priesthood. There are no requirements as to religious preference in becoming a Mason. Masonry does ask you to state your belief and trust in a Supreme Being. Nonsectarian Prayers are a common part of all our ceremonies, but are not offered to a specific deity. Masonic Ritual does incorporate lessons and examples from the Bible, but they are given as representative illustrations. Masonry does not require you to belong to a church, synagogue or mosque although many Masons are very active in their religious organizations, and among our members are leaders in many denominations.



Freemasonry accepts your right to belong to any church or religious organization of your choice and does not infringe on that right. Neither does Masonry try to be a substitute for your church. Masonry wants to unite men for the purpose of brotherhood; not as an organized religion.

There are also some things Masons don't do and here are some of them. Sectarian religion and partisan politics are not discussed in lodge, and there are very good reasons why. When we meet in



a lodge, we are all on a common level, and are not subject to the classes and distinctions of the outside world. Each brother is entitled to his own beliefs and may follow his own convictions. Our objective is to unite men, not divide them. These two subjects create honest differences of opinion which might well cause friction among brothers. No member running for political office has the right to expect the support of any other member because of lodge affiliation. That does not mean, however, that matters which concern themselves with the nature of government or individual freedoms are not proper concerns of Masons as good citizens. Masonry teaches every Mason to be a good citizen and to perform his civic duties. We do not try to keep anyone from expressing his opinion, or from serving his city, county, state, or nation in an honorable manner. Anyone who serves in political office should not act politically as a Freemason; nor should he act in the name of Freemasonry in exercising his rights.

To sum up: Masonry is a foundation upon which to build. "To build what you may ask." I believe to build your lives, families and communities. How it this so? By practicing and reaffirming the principles of honesty, integrity and truth in our daily lives and having fun doing so. In these days of too little time and so many unhealthy influences a positive influence is so necessary.