

Freemasonry FAQ

Prepared by the Tennessee Grand Lodge Vision 2013 Committee and Bob Demott, Grand Historian

1. What is Freemasonry?

A fraternity of men dedicated to the upbuilding of moral character of its members and the preservation of personal freedom.

2. Is Masonry a religion?

No. Every applicant must express a belief in God, but no particular religion is required.

3. When did it start?

Informally, many centuries ago; formally in 1717 in London, England.

4. Who formed the Freemasons?

One theory is that the organization was developed by the stone masons. Another is that the Knights Templar formed the fraternity.

5. Who were the Knights Templar?

A group formed by the Pope to protect pilgrims going to the holy land. The Templars developed into a military group and young men took great pride in becoming a Knight. Many people in Europe gave huge sums of money in order that their son might be accepted as a Knight. The group became wealthy and King Philip of France desired this wealth in order to carry on his war. In cooperation with the Pope he accused the Templars of heresy and on October 13, 1307 many Templars were arrested, tortured for confessions of heresy, and many died. The King confiscated their property as he had done with the Jews in 1306.

6. Did the Knights Templar prior to 1717 take oaths of secrecy?

Yes. Their life depended upon their being faithful to their fellow Templars.

7. Do the Masons of today take these oaths?

Symbolically, yes. They are in remembrance of physical tortures imposed on Masons during the Middle Ages.

8. How do Masons teach morality?

Rituals were developed centuries ago imploring men to be faithful and charitable. These are taught by allegory and symbols.

9. How are these teachings enforced?

Masons who go astray are counseled by their brothers. Those who can not be helped are expelled from the Fraternity.

10. How are Masons charitable?

In the United States Masons contribute over two million dollars a day to charitable purposes. These funds go to the indigent for medical care, shoes, sick room equipment, scholarships, and a wide range of other help for the needy. Many hospitals are supported.

11. Are there Masons in other countries?

Yes. World wide, about 6 million.

12. How many Masons are there in the United States?

About 2.5 million.

13. How many Masons are there in Tennessee?

About 55,000.

14. Can a woman join the Masons?

No. But Masonry has many appendant bodies. Some are for men, some for women some for both, some for boys, some for girls.

15. Are Shriners Masons?

Yes, but not all Masons are Shriners.

16. Are Knight Templars Masons?

Yes, but not all Masons are Knight Templars.

17. Who is the head of the Masons in the United States?

No one. Each state is independent, as a Grand Lodge. The highest officer is the Grand Master.

18. Is there an official spokesman?

No, not for the entire fraternity. The Grand Master speaks for his Grand Lodge.

19. Is there a head of Masons in each state?

Yes. He is called the Grand Master.

20. Is he elected for life?

No. A new one is elected each year.

21. When did Masonry come to Tennessee?

Several Lodges were formed under the jurisdiction of North Carolina. The Grand Lodge of Tennessee was formed on December 27, 1813 in Knoxville.

22. Are the offices still in Knoxville?

No. The Grand Lodge moved to Nashville in 1817; now located at 100 7th Avenue, North.

23. How many individual Lodges are in Tennessee?

348

24. How much does it cost to join the Masons?

The average fee is \$104.

25. How much are the annual dues?

The average is \$41.

26. How old are individual Masons?

In Tennessee, at least 18 years old.

27. Is memory work required?

Yes. This relates to the procedure carried out when the man becomes a Mason.

28. Is attendance required?

No, but it is encouraged.

29. How long does it take for one to become a Mason?

Typically, about six months.

30. Can a Mason's wife attend Lodge?

No, but many functions are for both.

31. What notable people have been Masons?

Fourteen of the United States Presidents and many prominent people in business and the professions.

32. What notable Tennesseans have been Masons?

Andrew Jackson, James Polk, Andrew Johnson, Roy Acuff, 28 Governors, and many members of Congress.

33. Why are so many Masons in public office?

The ritual helps a person to gain self-confidence and ease when speaking in public. Masons are forbidden from discussing politics at Lodge meetings.

34. Is Masonry a patriotic organization?

Yes. Masons are taught to obey the laws of the country in which they reside. In the United States, the Masons have many patriotic activities. All meetings include the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

35. Do Masons become so involved that they neglect their families?

Masons are taught that they should never neglect their families or their church. Masonry comes after these obligations are fulfilled.

36. Do Masons have a particular kind of dress?

When in Lodge meetings they wear a white apron over regular street clothes.

37. What does this signify?

Purity. The Mason is admonished to so live his life that no stain of dishonor will show upon his apron.

38. Do Masons perform the last Rites upon the remains of a departed Brother?

When requested by the family to do so, Masons will recite the time-honored ritual.

39. Do Masons believe that by doing good works they can gain admittance to heaven?

No. The admittance into heaven falls in the realm of the spiritual, not the fraternal.

40. Are black people permitted to be Masons?

Yes. There are many Prince Hall Lodges in the United States which are made up of only black people. A few Lodges are integrated.

41. Are Holy Bibles displayed in the Lodge Hall?

Yes. In the United States this is usually the Holy Bible, but in other countries it is the book of the predominant religion. When a person becomes a Mason, the book of his faith is used in the ritual.

42. Has Masonry been attacked by religious groups?

Yes. Masonry has been attacked by radio and television preachers who stir up unrest in order to sell their books and tapes. Other persons, non-Masons who are uninformed, have also carried on hate campaigns.

43. Have these attacks been answered?

In past years Masons have ignored such talk. Recently, however, they have responded. Also two non-Masons have recently taken the lead in answering the critics; John J. Robinson, and Dr. Gary Leazer.

44. Are Masons permitted to solicit potential members?

No.

45. How do people learn about the fraternity?

Through the good works of the Masons.

46. How does a person gain entrance?

By asking a Mason for a petition to join.

47. Is admittance assured?

No. Only after an investigation as to the character of the person is he voted upon.

48. If he is not accepted will the fee be returned?

Yes.

49. If accepted, what comes next?

He is asked to come for the first degree.

50. How does he learn his memory work?

A teacher is assigned to assist him.

51. What is the Scottish Rite?

A series of 29 Degrees, teaching by drama, the moral and religious philosophies of Masonry.

52. What is the York Rite?

A system of degrees including Blue Lodge, Royal Arch, Cryptic Rite and Knights Templar.

53. Is the Shrine part of Masonry?

Yes. When a person has become either a Scottish Rite Mason or a Knight Templar he is eligible to become a Shriner.