



# PAPER

## What is Freemasonry? - FAQs

### What is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry means different things to each of those who join. For some, it's about making new friends and acquaintances. For others it's about being able to help deserving causes, making a contribution to family and for society. But for most, it is an enjoyable hobby.

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest and largest non-religious, non-political, fraternal and charitable organisation. It teaches self-knowledge through participation in a progression of ceremonies. Members are expected to be of high moral standing and are encouraged to speak openly about Freemasonry.

### How and when did Freemasonry start?

Freemasonry is one of the oldest social and charitable organisations in the world, the roots of modern Freemasonry lie with the medieval stonemasons that built our castles and cathedrals, yet it is as relevant today as it was hundreds of years ago.

The earliest recorded 'making' of a Freemason in an English Lodge is that of Elias Ashmole in 1646.

Organised Freemasonry began with the founding of the Grand Lodge of England on 24th June 1717; the first Grand Lodge in the world. Ireland followed in 1725 and Scotland in 1736. All the regular Grand Lodges in the world trace themselves back to one or more of these early Grand Lodges.

### How many Freemasons are there?

Under the United Grand Lodge of England, there are over 200,000 Freemasons.

There are Grand Lodges in Ireland, which covers both Northern Ireland and Eire, and Scotland which have a combined total of approximately 150,000 members.

Worldwide, there are approximately six million Freemasons.

Depending on the demography of the area, it is probably true to say there is usually a Lodge which meets in every town and city.

### Can anyone become a Freemason?

Freemasonry is open to people from all walks of life, regardless of their race, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic position in society.

Membership is open to any man over the age of 21 irrespective of their race or religion. In total, we have more than 7,000 Lodges, with students over 18 able to join one of the 85 University Scheme Lodges.

Women are invited to join one of two female-only Grand Lodges: *The Order of Women Freemasons* and *Freemasonry for Women*.



### Are there women Freemasons?

Women Freemasons have two separate Grand Lodges. For more information, please contact *Freemasonry for Women* (hfaf.org) and *The Order of Women Freemasons* (owf.org.uk).

In 2018, in line with the Gender Recognition Act of 2004 and the Equality Act of 2010, UGLE published its gender reassignment policy. The policy outlines that a candidate for admission to Freemasonry under UGLE must be a man. Should a person who has undergone gender reassignment and has become a man apply to become a Freemason then his application must be processed in the same way as for any other male candidate. A Freemason who after Initiation ceases to be a man does not cease to be a Freemason.

### What are the values of Freemasonry?

For Freemasons, there are four important values that help define their path through life:

INTEGRITY

FRIENDSHIP

RESPECT

CHARITY

In today's world filled with uncertainty, these principles ring as true as they have at any point in the organisation's history.

**Integrity:** Building good people

Freemasons are focused on building themselves as people of integrity and membership provides the structure to help achieve that goal.

**Friendship:** Building together.

Freemasonry provides the common foundation for friendships between members, many of which will last for life.

**Respect:** Building unity.

Freemasonry brings people together irrespective of their race, religion or any other perceived differences that can divide us as a society.

**Charity:** Building compassion

Kindness and charitable giving are deeply ingrained within the principles of Freemasonry and the organisation provides the structure for members to make positive contributions to their communities and various causes.

### Who do the Masonic charities donate to?

Some Masonic charities cater specifically, but not exclusively, for Masons or their dependents, via the Masonic Charity Foundation <https://mcf.org.uk>.

We also give generously to many national and local non-masonic charities and deserving causes. If you go on UGLE's Website <https://www.ugle.org.uk/charity> you will see how much we have given to charity over the year, and many Provincial, District and local websites reflect our support for local causes.

### **Is Freemasonry an international Order?**

Freemasonry exists throughout the world. However, each Grand Lodge is sovereign and independent. There is no international governing body for Freemasonry.

### **Why do Freemasons take oaths?**

New members make solemn promises concerning their behaviour both in the Lodge and in society. Members also promise to keep confidential the way they recognise each other when visiting another Lodge. Freemasons also promise to support others in time of need but only so far as it does not conflict with their family and public obligations.

### **Are Freemasons expected to give preference to fellow members?**

Certainly not. This would be unacceptable that would be a misuse of membership and members who did it would be suspended or expelled. On his entry into Freemasonry, each candidate states unequivocally that he expects no material gain from his membership.

At various stages during the three ceremonies of admission and when he is later presented with a certificate from the Grand Lodge to verify that he has completed them, he is reminded that any attempt to gain preferment or material gain for himself or others, is a misuse of membership which will not be tolerated.

### **What is Freemasonry's relationship with religion?**

All Freemasons are expected to have a religious belief, but Freemasonry does not seek to replace a Mason's religion or provide a substitute for it. It deals in a man's relationship with his fellow man not in a man's relationship with his God.

### **Why don't some churches like Freemasonry?**

It would appear that some churches seem to misunderstand Freemasonry and confuse secular rituals with religious liturgy. Freemasonry for its part has always encouraged its members to be active in their own religion.

### **Does Freemasonry accept Roman Catholics?**

Yes. Four Grand Masters of English Freemasonry have been Roman Catholics. Today there are many Roman Catholic Freemasons.

### **Why do you call God the Great Architect?**

Freemasonry embraces all men who believe in God. Its membership includes Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Parsees, amongst others. The Great Architect is not a specific 'Masonic God', or an attempt to combine all gods into one, but rather a universal description used in our ceremonies to prevent disharmony, and allow men of differing religions can enjoy each other's company without offence being given.

### **Why do you call it the Volume of the Sacred Law and not the Bible?**

To the majority of Freemasons, the Volume of the Sacred Law is the Bible and it is usually present in an English lodge. But as the organisation welcomes men of many different faiths for whom the Bible is not their sacred book, and they make their promises on the book which is regarded as sacred to their religion. Hence when the Volume of the Sacred Law is referred to in ceremonies, to a non-Christian it will be the holy book of his religion, and to a Christian it will be the Bible.

### **What is Freemasonry's relationship with Politics?**

Freemasonry, as a body, will never express a view on politics or state policy. The discussion of politics at Masonic meetings has always been prohibited.

### **What happens at a lodge meeting?**

Lodge meetings are typically held in two parts. The first involves more administrative procedures, such as proposing and balloting for new members and receiving news about charitable fundraising. The second part focuses on ceremonies, which might relate to areas such as the admittance of new members or the installation of the Master of the Lodge and his officers – a process made up of three degrees, or stages, each one marked by a special ceremony.

True to the sense of friendship and togetherness among Freemasons, meetings are also social events, providing an occasion for members to dine together. Outside of the Lodge, activities include community fundraising and volunteering activities, as well as a varied programme of events where spouses, partners and families are welcome.

### **Why do you wear regalia?**

Wearing regalia is historical and symbolic and, like a uniform, serves to indicate their role and rank of members in the organisation.

We very rarely wear it in public and generally do not wear regalia outside the lodge-room, so as to create a relaxed atmosphere when we dine after a meeting.

### **How many degrees are there in Freemasonry?**

Basic Freemasonry consists of the three 'Craft' degrees (Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason) completed by joining the order of the Royal Arch (Chapter). There are many other Masonic degrees and Orders which are called 'progressive' 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.

### **Why do Masons use ritual?**

Historically, by not reading the ritual, all were enabled to take part, whatever their level of literacy. Whilst not committing the ritual to print emphasised its secrecy which was fashionable at that time. What is more, it can't be denied that the ceremony has far more impact on the Candidate when delivered from memory.

It is part of a shared experience which binds us together. Its use of drama, metaphor, allegory and symbolism, impress 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.

### **Why do people join and remain members?**

People become Freemasons for a variety of reasons, some as the result of family tradition, others by being introduced by a friend, or simply out of a curiosity to know what it is all about. Those who become active members and who grow in Freemasonry do so principally because they enjoy it. They enjoy the challenges and fellowship that Freemasonry offers.

There is more to it than just enjoyment. Participation in the dramatic representation of moral lessons and in the working of a lodge, and discussions in and around the 'festive-board' stimulate its members to think about the various symbols and allegories. Thereby they learn more about themselves, and are encouraged to always be in search of becoming a better man and an exemplary member of society.

As a Freemason progresses through a series of degrees, he gains insight into increasingly complex moral and philosophical concepts, and accepts a variety of challenges and responsibilities which are both stimulating and rewarding.

The structure and working of the lodge and the sequence of ceremonial events, which are usually followed by social gatherings, offer members a framework for companionship, teamwork, character development and enjoyment of shared experiences.

### **How much does it cost to be a Freemason?**

It varies from lodge to lodge.

There is a joining fee which will be about £100. Depending on where the Lodge you join is located and how often it meets the annual fees will vary from £100 to £400. Some Lodges meet four times a year, whilst others in the Provinces meet most months; except perhaps in the summer.

The Lodge meals vary in price from around £12–£15 in the Provinces, and start at about £45 in London; though some Lodges find less expensive alternatives.

It is entirely up to the individual member what he gives to charity, but it should always be without detriment to his other obligations. In some Lodges both the annual subscription and the donation to charity can be paid monthly by standing order.

Similarly, he may join as many lodges as his time and pocket can allow. Joining one or more of the additional Masonic orders may also seem attractive, but should only be considered if it does not adversely affect his family life and responsibilities.

### **Interested in becoming a Freemason?**

Either visit the United Grand Lodge of England website or your local county (Provincial) or District website, where you will find contact details.

In the case of the UGLE website, go to *Interested in becoming a Freemason*. It will ask you to fill in a simple on-line form based on where you live, work or study and then add a few details which they will forward to your local masonic area. Please visit:

**<https://www.ugle.org.uk/contact-us/interested-in-becoming-a-freemason>**

Someone from your local area will then be in touch and be happy to tell you more about Freemasonry and answer your questions. If you do not live within an area that UGLE has lodges, then they will let you know which Grand Lodges are active in your area so that you can enquire about joining them.

If you visit your local Provincial or Lodge website, they too should return the contact, start a conversation about Freemasonry and similarly answer your questions.

Please find a list of all the Provinces here:

**<https://www.ugle.org.uk/about-us/provinces>**

And a list of the Districts here:

**<https://www.ugle.org.uk/about-us/districts-groups>**

## Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
  - Followed by 'any questions'
  - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
  - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

For further papers and other learning materials visit *Solomon* at [solomon.ugle.org.uk](https://solomon.ugle.org.uk)

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