



# OPENING THE DOOR

A Simple Guide to Masonry in Washington



## INTRODUCTION

# Talking About Freemasonry

### **HOW DID YOU FIRST LEARN** about Freemasonry?

Was it by stepping into a lodge hall in your town and meeting with members? Was it at a community event? Searching online? From a film or TV show?

In all likelihood, you learned about Freemasonry from someone you trust—your grandparents or parents or a colleague or friend. Research shows that by far the most common introduction that current members had to the organization came from a personal connection, not the Internet.

It's important, then, that members feel comfortable talking about Freemasonry and well-informed about it—and that those considering joining are provided with simple and accurate information. Despite the persistent myth about Masonry being a “secret” group, members are absolutely allowed to and even encouraged to discuss their experience with people around them. It's how the tradition stays alive, from one person to the next.

This booklet is intended to help with that. Use it as a guide or give it to a friend or relative who wants to learn more. Don't worry about memorizing answers. The most powerful thing you can do is share your personal experience. Here are some examples to get you started.



# What Is Freemasonry?



**LET'S START WITH AN EASY ONE**—or, rather, a common question. Put simply, Freemasonry (also called Masonry) is a 300-year-old worldwide organization born out of medieval tradesman's guilds. It's also a set of teachings for a life well-lived. Masonry is both a group you join and a moral scaffolding for personal growth.

Ancient Freemasons built castles and cathedrals. Today, we build character. We believe in strong values, self-improvement, giving back to our communities, and

helping each other in times of need. Our traditions center on moral teachings told through the symbols and allegory of stonemasonry.

That's serious stuff, and we take it seriously. But we also like to have fun. Many members meet their best friends through Freemasonry.

## ***IN A NUTSHELL***

Freemasonry is an organization of like-minded members dedicated to improving themselves and their communities.



# What Is a Masonic Lodge?

## BY THE NUMBERS

**151**

The number of local lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Washington State.

**10,027**

Members of the Masons of Washington State.

**556**

The number of new members created between 2017 and 2021.

**THE LODGE IS THE LOCAL CHAPTER** of the fraternity. The term “lodge” refers to both the members of that chapter and the building in which they meet.

Each lodge is run independently and reflects the personality of its members and community. Some emphasize family get-togethers, for instance, while others exist for the purpose of studying philosophy. But big or small, old or new, all lodges share the same Masonic traditions and rituals.

To learn more about a lodge, the best thing to do is reach out and attend an event. Since no two are quite the same, it’s smart to visit more than one to find the right fit.

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

A lodge is the local meeting place—and group—of Masons.



# So: What Do Masons Do?

**THIS MAY BE** the single biggest question people have about Freemasonry. What actually goes on inside a lodge room?

Officially, the lodge is centered around regular “stated meetings,” at which members vote on new members and do the ongoing work of running the lodge, which is a nonprofit. Members also prepare for and hold the ritual performances through which new members advance through the degrees of Masonry.

But there’s a second part to this answer, and that’s that Masons do what any other group of friends might do: We meet up for a cup of coffee. We arrange golf outings. We hold barbeques. We attend lectures. We host community events, mentor young people, volunteer for worthy causes, and help one another in times of need. The vast majority of Masonry happens outside of the lodge hall.

## ***IN A NUTSHELL***

Inside the lodge, Masons advance new members through the degrees. But most of Freemasonry happens out in the world!







# How Is Masonry Different from Other Service Organizations?

**WHILE SERVICE IS** one key part of who we are and what we do, it's not the extent of it.

Freemasonry is about three things: personal development, true friendship, and community service. Unlike other volunteer groups, we spend a lot of time working on becoming our best selves. That includes building leadership skills and working to be better partners, parents, and friends.

Because we're a 300-year-old organization with a love for symbolism, we also have a lot of pomp and circumstance: fancy regalia, unusual titles, very old rituals. That means when you join a Masonic lodge, you are joining an important part of history, with traditions that you won't find anywhere else.

## ***IN A NUTSHELL***

Masonry combines public service with a cultural and philosophical tradition unlike any other.



# What Happens Outside Lodge?

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**WHILE THE OFFICIAL STUFF** happens inside the lodge, most Masons will tell you that the most meaningful connections they make come outside those four walls. For example, we get together to:

**SOCIALIZE.** That includes everything from camping trips to black-tie dinners.

**HOST SPECIAL EVENTS.** Many lodges recognize people in their community, like standout teachers and students.

**LEARN.** Masonic clubs and groups meet for lectures or to hold discussions about history, philosophy, or other topics.

**GATHER.** Masons love to form clubs about common interests—for instance, the group of vintage Italian scooter lovers seen here.

**GIVE BACK.** Masons support their community and local causes, particularly around public education and childhood literacy.

**MENTOR.** Masons frequently work closely with students, including members of the Masonic youth orders.







# What Can—and Can't—Members Say to Non-Members?

**HERE'S WHERE THAT LITTLE SLICE** of secrecy comes in.

Masons are totally free—even encouraged—to discuss the history of the fraternity, the nature of their lodge, and their own experience in it with anyone they choose.

The only things they can't discuss are the signs, grips, and passwords that Masons use to greet one another, or the specifics of the degree ceremonies. These rituals are partly a

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

Members cannot discuss the specifics of the ritual, or handshakes and passwords. That's it.

test of the candidate's knowledge, so for one thing, we don't want to give away the answers. But more importantly, having meaningful degree ceremonies is a cherished part of Freemasonry, and keeping them private preserves that specialness. Same goes for the handshakes.

Masons' stated meetings and the degree ceremonies are open only to Masons. However, a lodge dinner, social hour, or a meet-up is open to guests. That's it!

That means we can talk about Masonic symbols and what they mean. We can talk about the roles of different lodge officers, and why they wear certain regalia and sit in certain positions. Perhaps most importantly, we can talk about how Masonry has impacted our life, and what it means to us.



# Is Freemasonry a Secret Society?

**FINALLY, AN EASY ONE!** The answer is no. It's a common misunderstanding, though.

When Freemasonry first began in 18th century Europe, Masonic ideals of tolerance and equality were quite radical, and sometimes illegal. So Masonic lodges didn't exactly advertise. (In the United States, though, Masonic lodges have almost always been highly visible in their communities.)

Times have changed. Freemasonry is at its best when we engage openly with the world. That's why our lodges have websites, social media pages, and public events. We can and do talk freely about almost everything we do—with just a very few exceptions.

***IN A NUTSHELL***

**No!**



# SPOTLI



## Stephen Sykora

Behavior Specialist

CONCORDIA No. 249

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### WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO FREEMASONRY?

I was brought to Freemasonry by a fellow Mason I'd been friends with for several years and he had never divulged he was a Mason until I kind of asked him about it. That was my "proverbial ask". I figured if there were more guys like

him in lodge then I would be in good company, so I made the "formal ask" – as one does – and joined the fraternity that way.

### WHAT WERE YOU LOOKING FOR?

At that point the Mason I referenced was really the first friend I had made outside of college, the first friend I'd made in my community, so I was really looking to meet other like-minded men who would treat me with respect,



# GHT

active listeners, and like my friend – good mentors. I think I was looking for a place where I could hone my young adult identity and ultimately was looking for a bit of “mystery” as well. I was raised (in a particular church) and by the time I got into college I wasn’t practicing that faith any longer and had a bit of a void that I can’t explain and I needed some of that “spiritualism”. I think now, looking back, that’s exactly what I was looking for was a way to remain entrenched in “the mysteries” and Masonry eventually provided that.

## **HOW HAS FREEMASONRY CHANGED SINCE YOU BECAME A MEMBER?**

Well, the membership is getting younger, and I think the younger guys who are coming in – I’m talking in their 30’s and 40’s – they’re actively interested in being community members, and they want to do more for their communities. For context, when I joined my home lodge, a couple of the guys - who were also my

friends that I didn’t know were Masons until I joined – they had dropped out because they were tired of doing “pancake breakfast fundraisers”, so I kind of had that worry. But, we haven’t done one of those since I showed up. What I have seen is that all of the Masons we’ve created since I joined have been very like-minded in coming up with unique community projects and are passionate about improving the lodge experience. There’s an incredible re-energization, or revitalization, of the younger guys in the craft bringing their talents whereas I think in previous narratives it was kind of an “old guys’ club.” We’ve made some changes that I hoped to see. We’re doing more social outings—baseball games, some hockey games. Dinner and drinks. It’s not g to more people. It’s about helping members get more out of lodge life.





## LIVING THEIR VALUES

**97 percent** of Master Masons remain members for life.

**89 percent** of all members say they “value” or “strongly value” their membership.

**81 percent** of members surveyed described Masonry as an “organization I am proud to be part of.”

## Is Masonry a Religion?

**NO.** Our members come from all spiritual backgrounds. But to get the most out of Freemasonry, you have to believe in a higher power. In fact, it’s a requirement of membership. But what that means is personal to you. One Mason may identify their higher power as God or Allah. Another might not have a name for it at all.

Because Freemasonry was created in Medieval England and Scotland, many of its rituals borrow symbols from Christianity. But make no mistake about it: We welcome members of all spiritual faiths.

### IN A NUTSHELL

No. Masonry is open to people of all faiths and traditions.



# What's the Deal with Politics and Religion?

**THE MASONIC LODGE** is designed to be a special space—one that exists as a fundamentally different place than regular life. In the words of Masonry, this is described as the difference between the “sublime” and the “profane.” For that reason, while Freemasons are sitting in lodge, we don’t discuss politics or religion. That’s been the case for 300 years.

That doesn’t mean our members can’t hold fierce political beliefs or commit their life to their faith. Indeed, many famous Freemasons over the years have been spiritual and political leaders, from priests to presidents. And outside of lodge, members are encouraged to engage in respectful, open discussion about whatever they please.

But for the few hours that we meet as a lodge each month, we agree to table these two topics.

Masonic lodges exist to encourage lifelong friendships and provide a supportive space for self-improvement. One of the keys is emphasizing what unites us, rather than what divides us. By intentionally setting aside politics and religion while we’re at lodge, we protect that space.

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

To preserve harmony between members, politics and religion are not discussed while in session.



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## **Caleb Frey**

Tattoo Artist/Studio Owner

MANITO No. 246

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### **WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO FREEMASONRY?**

PROBABLY FIRST OFF, CURIOSITY....AND THEN, THE HISTORY OF IT.

### **WHAT'S KEPT YOU COMING BACK?**

THE CAMARADERIE. IT'S PROBABLY THE MOST POSITIVE THING I'VE EVER BEEN A PART OF, AND STABLE.

### **HAS MASONRY CHANGED SINCE YOU JOINED, AND IF SO, HOW?**


IT'S MUCH YOUNGER NOW. I NOTICE THERE'S A LOT YOUNGER LEADERSHIP NOW. THEY SEEM TO HAVE A DIFFERENT "FIRE" IN THEM, MORE

PROGRESSIVE. BEFORE THERE WERE A LOT OF OLD GUYS. I LIKE BEING AROUND THE OLD GUYS, SO IN SOME WAYS I'M KIND OF DISAPPOINTED, BUT I KNOW THE YOUNG GUYS HAVE A LOT OF GREAT IDEAS THAT ARE INCREASING THE MEMBERSHIP AND MAKING THE LODGES MORE PRODUCTIVE.

### **ANY ADVICE FOR SOMEONE WHO MAY BE THINKING ABOUT BECOMING A FREEMASON?**

GET TO KNOW THE GUYS IN A LODGE BEFORE YOU JOIN BUT AVOID THE TEMPTATION TO LOOK INTO FREEMASONRY TOO MUCH ON THE INTERNET AS YOU'LL SOMEWHAT RUIN SOME OF THE "MAGIC" OF THE INITIATION.



A photograph of four women standing in a row, facing slightly to the right. They are wearing dark blue robes with white Masonic symbols on the left chest. The woman on the far right is speaking into a microphone at a podium. An American flag is visible on the left side of the image.

# Are There Masonic Groups for Women?

**THERE ARE SEVERAL** Masonic-related organizations for women in Washington State, often referred to as "appendant" or "concordant" Masonic bodies, including the Order of the Eastern Star, the Order of the Amaranth, the White Shrine of Jerusalem, Ladies Oriental Shrine and Daughters of the Nile.

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

There are! Check out the websites listed within this article for more information.

The Order of the Eastern Star is the largest Masonic organization for women and is open to women who are related to a Master Mason or who have been members of a Masonic youth organization. The Order of the Amaranth is open to women who are related to Master Masons or members of the Order of the Eastern Star. The White Shrine of Jerusalem is open to women who are related to Master Masons or members of the Order of

the Eastern Star and Daughters of the Nile is open to women who are related to Shriners. To find out more information about these organizations, you may want to reach out to your local Masonic lodge. [easternstar.org](http://easternstar.org), [amaranth.org](http://amaranth.org), [daughtersofthenile.org](http://daughtersofthenile.org), [ladiesorientalshrine.org](http://ladiesorientalshrine.org)

# What Is Prince Hall Masonry?

**PRINCE HALL MASONRY** is a branch of Freemasonry founded to serve the Black community. It began in Boston in 1775, when many Masonic lodges denied membership to Black applicants.

Today, Prince Hall Freemasonry is the oldest and largest predominantly Black fraternity in the country. It continues to provide a meaningful experience to hundreds of thousands of members, and is open to people of all races and ethnicities. Although we are two different organizations, we sit in on one another's meetings and often partner together on community and philanthropic projects.

## ***IN A NUTSHELL***

Prince Hall  
Masonry is a  
historically Black  
branch of the  
fraternity.





# Who's Joining Today

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**TO BORROW A TIRED PHRASE,** this isn't exactly your grandfather's fraternity. Today, the average age of new prospects is 38, the lowest it's been in generations. Members and prospects come from all cultures and walks of life. In fact, Masonry is one of the best ways to meet great people from different backgrounds.







# WHY JOIN A LODGE?

**MANY MEMBERS SAY** joining a Masonic lodge is one of the best decisions of their lives. It's a way to step back from the grind of daily life and enter a different mental space. It's a way to meet with friends and make new ones. It's a refreshing change of pace.

Of course, the specific reasons to join are unique to every member. Here, we've collected some of the commonly cited reasons people say they join. If any of these sound appealing to you, Freemasonry has a lot to offer. To join or learn more, visit [freemason-wa.org](http://freemason-wa.org) and hit the "Want to be a Freemason?" button.

1

Forming lifelong friendships

2

Focusing on personal development

3

Helping others

4

Being part of a historic organization you can take pride in

5

Meeting new people from different backgrounds who share your values

6

Engaging with the community

7

Learning time-tested leadership skills

8

Enjoying regular social activities

9

Connecting with a global network



# What Causes Do Freemasons Support?

**ONE OF THE MOST** important goals of a Freemason is being a good citizen. That's why Masons are known for giving back.

At a local level, we support causes that are important to our communities. We also take care of vulnerable members and their families through the Washington Masonic Services, an outreach organization that

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

Primarily, public education and senior care.

supports seniors and at-risk Masons and families with health care services and emergency funds.

Globally, we're known for supporting public schools. Many of the first public schools in the United States were launched by Freemasons, who believe that equal access to knowledge is the basis for a civil society. Today, we continue to support public schools and youth education initiatives through Washington Masonic Services which sponsors many student scholarships, awards, and literacy efforts.

## **YOUR DOLLARS AT WORK**

**Total Contributions & Grants Income \$415,036 (2021-2022)**

**Over the last five years, donated income totaled \$2,404,179 (2017-2022)**

### **Masonic Outreach Services**

**Support For Masons, their families and community members in need totaled \$291,196 (2021-2022)**

**Approximately 500 clients served**

**Over the last five years (2018 through 2021-22) Support For Masons totaled \$1,221,899.**

**Living Support – minor home repairs, and Skilled Care – home care and assisted living.**

### **Scholarships**

**WAMS granted 7 scholarships: 4 Legacy awards of \$3,750 each to dependents and grandchildren of Washington Masons, and 3 Masonic Youth awards of \$3,000 each.**



# Is Anyone Turned Away from Masonry?

**YES, SOME PEOPLE** are turned away. Each Masonic jurisdiction has basic membership requirements. For example, to join a lodge that's part of the Grand Lodge of Washington, you must be a man, profess a belief in a higher power, and be at least 18 years old.

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

**Yes. All Masonic organizations have specific membership requirements.**

Beyond that, applicants go through a sort of mutual interview process with a lodge. They meet with members to learn what it means to be a Mason and get a glimpse of the lodge's unique culture. They talk about whether they're ready to commit to Freemasonry in general and that lodge in particular.

The lodge members eventually vote on whether to accept each applicant. The vote must be unanimous. The most important requirement is to be of strong moral character.



# SPOTLI

## Natural Allah

Restaurateur

STEILACOOM LODGE No. 2

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### WHAT DREW YOU TO FREEMASONRY?

I HAVE AN UNCLE IN NEW YORK WHO'S A FREEMASON, SO I'VE ALWAYS KIND OF KNOWN ABOUT IT. I GOT MORE INVOLVED WHEN I CAME HERE TO WASHINGTON STATE IN 2006, WAS WORKING FOR A NON-PROFIT GROUP THAT I'M STILL INVOLVED WITH AND I WANTED TO DO MORE.

### WHAT ONE OR TWO THINGS IN PARTICULAR WERE YOU LOOKING FOR?

THE ABILITY TO DO MORE IN THE COMMUNITY THAN I WAS ABLE TO DO BY MYSELF, AND ALSO

JUST TO HAVE THAT CAMARADERIE. THAT ABILITY TO HAVE SOME BROTHERS THAT CAN BOUNCE THINGS OFF OF, WHO WOULD GIVE ME THAT RAW AND 'UNCUT' PERSPECTIVES THAT I NEEDED.

### WHAT WERE THE MOST REWARDING ELEMENTS OF YOUR TIME AS MASTER OF YOUR LODGE?

WHEN I FIRST BECAME A MASON AND ENTERED THE LODGE, THAT WAS KIND OF MY GOAL: WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO BECOME THE WORSHIPFUL MASTER? HE, OF COURSE, EXPLAINED TO ME THE VARIOUS 'CHAIRS' (OR OFFICES) LEADING UP TO WORSHIPFUL MASTER, AND I THINK THAT AT THE TIME I WAS ALSO THE FIRST BLACK WORSHIPFUL



# GHT

MASTER IN THE HISTORY OF STEILACOOM LODGE. IT WAS A THRILL! I HAD A GREAT TIME, AND I THINK WE ACCOMPLISHED QUITE A BIT.

## **HOW HAS FREEMASONRY CHANGED SINCE YOU BECAME A MASON?**

WE'RE STARTING TO GET A LOT YOUNGER MEMBERS. I THINK THAT'S A GOOD THING BECAUSE THAT'S OBVIOUSLY HOW YOU KEEP A LODGE ALIVE. WHEN I CAME IN IT WAS, HONESTLY, A LOT OF OLDER GUYS AND I LEARNED A LOT FROM THEM. I FOUND BASICALLY THREE TYPES OF MASONS: THOSE WHO JOINED BECAUSE THEY JUST WANTED THAT CAMARADERIE – THAT CLOSE FRATERNALISM;

THOSE WHO JOINED AND JUST WANTED TO BE THE LEADER, HEAD TO THE EAST OF THE LODGE AND BE THE WORSHIPFUL MASTER, AND THEN I THINK THERE IS THAT SMALLER GROUP OF BROTHERS WHO ACTUALLY WANT TO KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT WE DO, AND WHY WE DO IT.



# What's Happening Now?

**LODGES ARE REFLECTIONS** of their members—in other words, they're constantly changing.

**WE'RE HOLDING LECTURES AND DISCUSSION GROUPS.**

At lodge and online, Masons hear from expert speakers on a wide range of subjects, from philosophy and self-improvement to history and symbolism. Among these educational events are an annual academic conference and an ongoing online lecture series.

**WE'RE HELPING OUR COMMUNITIES.** As they have for centuries, Masons continue to get involved in their communities. Statewide, Masons give to several programs through Washington Masonic Services.



## WHAT IT TAKES TO JOIN

### BE A MAN AGE 18 OR HIGHER.

Masonic Youth  
Orders serve  
younger people.

### BE OF STRONG MORAL CHARACTER.

Applicants with  
certain criminal  
histories cannot  
join a lodge.

### BE RECOMM- ENDED BY TWO MEMBERS.

Once an  
applicant is  
nominated by  
two members,  
he must be  
unanimously  
voted into the  
lodge. That's  
why it's important  
to get to know  
members before  
applying.



## How Can I Apply?

**THE BEST WAY** to get started is to learn about the lodges near you. To do this, fill out a request for information form at **[freemason-wa.org](http://freemason-wa.org)** and we'll reach out to help answer any questions and connect you to a lodge in your area. If there are multiple lodges near you, it's often a good idea to visit several. Since each lodge has a unique identity, you'll get a better sense for which one suits your personality and needs.



# How Can I Learn More?

The easiest way is to ask a Mason! They'll be happy to discuss the organization with you and answer any questions. There are also lots of resources available online, all free and easily accessible:

## **FREEMASON-WA.ORG**

Discover more about what Freemasonry is, sign up for an event, and learn about becoming a Mason. You can also find a lodge near you and request information about membership.

## **MASONSCARE.ORG**

Learn more about our philanthropic partners, the charities we support, and the good work Masons are doing together all around the state—and donate.

# In Review

## **WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?**

Freemasonry is an organization of like-minded members dedicated to improving themselves and their communities.

## **WHAT IS A MASONIC LODGE?**

A lodge is the local meeting place—and group—of Masons.

## **WHAT DO MASONS DO?**

Inside the lodge, Masons advance new members through the degrees. But most of Freemasonry happens out in the world.

## **HOW IS MASONRY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS?**

Masonry combines public service with a cultural and philosophical tradition unlike any other.

**WHAT CAN—AND CAN'T—MEMBERS SAY?** Members cannot discuss the specifics of the ritual, or handshakes and passwords.

**IS FREEMASONRY A SECRET SOCIETY?** No.

## **IS MASONRY A RELIGION?**

No. Masonry is open to people of all faiths and traditions.

## **WHAT IS THE DEAL WITH POLITICS AND RELIGION?**

To preserve harmony between members, politics and religion are not discussed while in session.

**WHAT IS PRINCE HALL MASONRY?** A historically Black branch of the fraternity.

**WHAT CAUSES DO FREEMASONS SUPPORT?** Primarily, public education and senior care.

**IS ANYONE TURNED AWAY FROM MASONRY?** Yes. All Masonic organizations have specific membership requirements.





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