

# What it Means to be a Mason

Membership in the brotherhood of Masons means many things.

It means being part of an unbroken tradition that stretches back over 500 years to a time when guilds of freemasons traveled throughout Europe laying the stones of the great Gothic cathedrals.

It means sharing the values of our nation's founding fathers; men who believe in the brotherhood of man are firmly rooted in the Constitution of the United States and that of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It means becoming a better person while helping to improve the quality of life for others. It means forming deep and lasting friendships that transcend the boundaries of race, religion and culture, as well as those of geography.

But most of all, being a Mason means the kind of deep satisfaction that comes only from selfless giving; from doing for others without asking, or expecting, anything in return.

## Sharing the Traditions of Our Founding Fathers

Masons were active in Massachusetts even before 1733, the year the first Provincial Grand Lodge of Masons was formerly organized by Henry Price. Today, the Grand Lodge in Boston remains the oldest continuously operating Masonic organization in the Western Hemisphere.

In its early years, Masonry numbered among its members some of the nation's most influential citizens - among them George Washington, Henry Knox, Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock and Paul Revere.

In Massachusetts, many of those who participated in the Battle of Lexington and Concord, and the Battle of Bunker Hill were Masons. Many of the patriots who participated in the Boston Tea Party were believed to be Masons and others, such as Dr. Joseph Warren, who was a Grand Master, sacrificed their lives in the struggle for independence from British rule.

The values that were important then - loyalty, patriotism, liberty, courage and faith - are just as important to Masons today. The principles upon which this country was founded are deeply embedded in Masonic tradition.

## Improving Yourself and Those Around You

Basic to most of the world's great religions is the belief in what some might call the "old fashioned" values of honesty, fair play and unselfishness in dealing with others.

Freemasonry shares many of the same beliefs; and, through its traditions and teachings, attempts to instill in its members both the desire and the means to improve themselves and the lives of others.

However, while it may adhere to many of the same values associated with a religious faith, Masonry is not a religion. It is a brotherhood of men from every country, sect and opinion, joined in a common effort to make themselves better people to ease the suffering of others, and to make the world a better place.

To achieve these goals, Masonry does not promote itself or its individual members. Instead, it teaches by example. New members are not recruited; they are attracted by the example of good men performing good works and living good lives.

No one is asked to join the Brotherhood. To become a Mason, one must ask.

## Having Friends Wherever you Go

Who becomes a Mason: anyone and everyone, accountants, businessmen, teachers, contractors, professional men and laborers. Masons come from all walks of life and all levels of income. They represent every race, creed and culture.

In Masonry, it doesn't matter whether a man is a bricklayer or physician, a waiter or the mayor of the city. All are on equal footing in the Lodge room.

The creaminess and practices of the Masons have remained unchanged for hundreds of years. No matter where a Lodge is located, its members share the common bond of having passed through the same degree work, rites and rituals.

Because of this, members can find brother Masons wherever they go. In Massachusetts alone, there are over 300 lodges with nearly 70,000 members. Across the country and around the world there are Lodges in virtually every city and most smaller communities.

It is a good feeling to know that wherever a man's travels may take him, he has friends that he can depend on and trust.

### **Committing Yourself to a Code of Moral Ethics**

Freemasonry is built upon three basic tenants - Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Brotherly Love is the practice of the Golden Rule. Relief embodies charity for all mankind. Truth is honesty, fair play and adherence to the cardinal virtues.

These moral lessons are taught during three ceremonies, or "degrees" through allegory and symbolism using the traditional stonemasons tools.

The First Degree uses the gavel and gauge to remind the new member of his dependence on others and subordination to God. In the Second Degree, the square, level and plumb are used to reinforce the central moral lesson of brotherly love and service. And in the Third Degree, the trowel and other tools encourage the candidate to reflect on the end of life and on the value of faithfulness to his promises.

After the Third Degree, members may move into other branches of Masonry such as the Scottish Rite, York Rite, and Shrine.

Masons are not a secret organization. However, because Masonry values confidentiality and trust, many of its rites and rituals are secret except to the membership.

### **Giving Freely of Yourself and Asking Nothing in Return**

Of all of the cardinal virtues, none is more valued in Masonry than selfless giving. Examples of Masonic charity are legion.

Nationally, Masons contribute nearly \$2 million every day to relieve suffering and for the enrichment of mankind. Masons are founding sponsors of the Shriners Burns Institutes and the Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children, both of which offer their services free of charge.

Masons are also responsible for the Scottish Rite Museum of our National Heritage, the Masonic Retirement Home in Charlton, The Knights' Templar Eye Foundation, and Schizophrenia Research programs; in addition to supporting such programs as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), DeMolay for Boys, Rainbow for Girls, and hundreds of other programs nationally and locally.

Here in Massachusetts, Masons are the largest group of blood donors to the Red Cross, giving over 20,000 pints annually.

The satisfaction derived from these endeavors cannot be measured in ordinary terms. We will say,

however, that it is in helping others that man most helps himself.