



FREEMASONS

New Zealand

Simple answers to leading questions

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Introduction

Explaining Freemasonry

We take great pride in Freemasonry – the friendships that are created; the good that is done in our communities; the tolerance that is generated by avoiding issues of a political or religious nature; and most importantly the qualities of life and action that it promotes to members.

There is no reason why we cannot speak freely about this, and to talk publicly about what we do, why we do it, and how our organisation is founded on the principles and virtues of civilised society.

One on one, face to face dialogue, explaining in plain English the beauty of Freemasonry, the qualities it promotes, the involvement of our ladies and families in all we do, the values it espouses making good men better men.

This booklet is designed to assist Freemasons to communicate openly and freely with the public on the many fine attributes that make up our organisation and while there remains a small portion of our ceremonies which is not disclosed until a candidate is made a Freemason, there is so much information that



can and should be shared.

This booklet outlines some plain English explanations of Freemasonry, and will be a useful guide to our members, or the public, when the topic of Freemasonry is raised.

Let us not be afraid to talk with pride about our organisation – each one of us might use different words or might emphasise differing aspects of the organisation. The material in this booklet is not intended to be exhaustive and not designed to be dictatorial but aims to provide a general outline for your guidance. Use your own language, words and phrases, and be mindful of the person to whom you are speaking –

For example, a young man might have an interest to find out about Freemasonry and what happens within a Lodge; a lady might be more interested in our charitable activities on a national scale or might have a father or grandfather associated with the organisation.

Think of the circumstances – speak comfortably honestly and plainly – and be prepared to raise the topic at any time, any place.



“ Making a difference in New Zealand



Jim Watt

Grand Master
2022 - 2025



Where did it all begin?

Freemasonry is a diverse and complex organisation. It is very old its origins being lost in time. The first written evidence of its existence is dated from England in the 14th century. The Grand Lodge of England was formed by four Lodges in London in 1717. Grand Lodges were formed in Scotland and Ireland in the years following.

Freemasonry subsequently spread around the world with the growth of the British Empire.

It is accepted that its origins stem from the 'Lodges' of stonemasons attached to the building of castles and cathedrals in medieval times. But the reasons behind the rise of Freemasonry in the general population later are generally attributed to the changes in society at the time of the enlightenment with the growth of secularism, the scientific age and the recognition of the rights of the individual.



And in New Zealand?



Freemasonry came to New Zealand with the early settlers, the first Lodge being formed in 1842, and most towns soon had a Lodge.

The Grand Lodge of New Zealand, also known as Freemasons New Zealand, was formed in 1890.

The early 1970's saw the peak of New Zealand membership, attributed to an influx of ex-servicemen after World War Two. Today there are 5518 Freemasons in 203 Lodges in New Zealand.



What is Freemasonry?

A quick answer is difficult to give because Freemasonry has many aspects of equal importance amongst which are fellowship, a philosophy of life, personal development, and benevolence.

In a nutshell it can be confidently said that:

'Freemasonry is a brotherhood of good men meeting and working in harmony, teaching strong moral and ethical values in personal, family and community behaviour and a code of caring for others'

And it could be shortened, as Bro Mozart put it, to:

'Those who are working for the enlightenment and well-being of their neighbours – striving for the triumph of good'

In the never-ending quest to define Freemasonry one expression is often used, which is a fair but inadequate attempt to create a 'sound-bite';

'Freemasonry takes good men and makes them better men'



Freemasonry is founded upon principles of tolerance, care, kindness, honesty and trust. These are timeless values that are as relevant to the world today as they were 300 years ago when the organisation was formally established.

The principal aim of Freemasonry is the promotion of universal and lasting happiness for all people.

Freemasonry is not a secret society. Its workings and finances are on public record. But there are some traditional symbolic elements members are asked to keep confidential (see page 25).

Freemasonry has a registered charity. It does significant charitable work in the community, but charity is just one part of the teachings of Freemasonry.

Freemasonry is not a benefit society. But the deep caring principle in Freemasonry is applied to its members as well as the community as a whole

Freemasonry is not a religion or sect. Men of all faiths are welcome to join but Freemasonry does not allow the discussion of religion or politics in its meetings as a means of maintaining harmony amongst all members.

Freemasonry is not a networking organisation. Using Lodge membership to promote your own, or anyone else's business, professional or personal interests is strongly discouraged.



What is a Lodge?

A Lodge is a group of Freemasons usually between 30 and 80 drawn together by location, or interest. Meetings are usually held monthly in a dedicated building for the purpose. The most senior position in the Lodge is the Master who is supported by a group of Officers in running the Lodge and conducting the ceremonies.

What happens in a lodge?

Meetings have a formal Masonic structure conducting the same administrative business as any club. But uniquely the major part of most meetings is the processing of new members. This is done in a series of ceremonies, all new members experience, to reach full membership and become Master Masons. The ceremonies are the means of teaching the history and principles of Freemasonry.

Other matters at meetings include the charity and social activities of the Lodge.



Lodge buildings are clearly apparent in their communities but why do some look so 'closed' and uninviting?

The rituals and most ceremonies are confidential to members and many buildings were built decades ago, when brethren were encouraged to maintain a stricter privacy than is the case now.

Masonic building design follows no set architectural style. They vary from the classic stonework and timber of the 19th Century to utilitarian glass and steel of today and all in between.

Modern Lodge buildings are now the home to several Lodges and may have commercial businesses as anchor tenants.

Can the public visit a Lodge room?

In a word, yes! Although Lodges buildings are private property mainly used by Freemasons for meetings, some Lodges make parts of their premises available to community groups for activities such as health and fitness, dance lessons, and arts and crafts.

Occasionally Lodges may hold meetings in their Lodge rooms for those interested in joining Freemasonry.



What do Freemasons do?

A Freemason's first masonic commitment is to attend the regular meetings of his Lodge. If he has ambitions to become the Lodge Master, he will need to become an officer of the Lodge and for that he needs to become practiced in its ceremonies and customs. In turn this requires attendance and participation in the more frequent 'instruction' meetings.

Visiting other Lodges is a well ingrained activity in which Lodges universally engage to build and widen fraternal associations and friendships. A member would usually accompany his Master though he may make visits independently.

All Lodges have an active social life both within and outside the Lodge in which wives, partners and families are frequently involved.

Charitable activities can include both financial assistance and hands-on involvement.



The benefits of Membership

Fellowship: Freemasonry induces a strong bond between members and produces life-long friendships. You will enjoy mixing and working with men of high integrity and strong principle.

Benevolence: An essential element of Freemasonry is the care and needs of your Brothers and the whole community. All Freemasons promise to be aware of the needs of those around them.

Self-development: A Lodge provides opportunities in organisation management, public speaking and is character-building.

Life balance: In the 21st Century life can be hectic and stressful. Freemasonry is seen by many to be an oasis where calm and order prevail, therefore providing a distinct and refreshing channel where a busy man can find diversion and relaxation.

Family: Most Lodges offer social programmes providing opportunities for wives and families to widen their social engagement with other families with a common interest.



Qualification for Membership

Freemasonry accepts all men of good character. There are very few limitations but there are some important exceptions.

18 years is the minimum age. There is no upper age limit.

Men of all faiths are accepted, and all candidates must be able to declare a belief in a Supreme Being.

You must be an upright and law-abiding citizen and able to afford the modest fees without detriment to your family or livelihood.

Most Lodges ask prospective members for character references, but if well known by an existing member, this might not be necessary



Freemasons Charity

What part does charity play in Freemasonry?

Benevolence and helping those in need is a cornerstone of Freemasonry encouraged in every member.

Freemasons have been involved in charitable activities since Masonic Lodges were first established in New Zealand. It is a major motivation for many to join the organisation.

What is The Freemasons Charity?

The Freemasons Charity is a registered charitable Trust and the charitable arm of our national body, Freemasons New Zealand.

The Freemasons Charity acts on a national basis having two parts to its activities. One is the programme it runs on behalf of all New Zealand Freemasons for the benefit of the community. The second is to support Lodges and Districts in local programmes and assistance to people in need.



Major activities include:

- The Freemasons University Scholarships is the largest privately funded university scholarship programme in New Zealand.
-
- Assistance for The University of Auckland's research programmes into brain diseases.
-
- Funding for The Royal Society of New Zealand's promotion of science in secondary schools.
-
- Providing research Fellowships in paediatrics at The University of Otago.
-
- Providing funding to the Malaghan Institute in Wellington for CAR T-Cell cancer research.
-

Lodge projects and individuals

Community causes are chosen locally and vary widely - health care, education, children's groups, senior citizens, and many others.



Where does the money for charity come from?

Unlike many other charities Freemasons do not ask the public for funds. All Masonic giving comes from internal resources through members voluntary and accumulated donations over many years.

To further identify the Freemasons Charity succinctly we use the words - 'a tradition of caring'

There are many Masonic Trusts

Within Freemasonry there are many other registered charitable Trusts which have formed over the years for specific purposes. For instance, the Freemasons Foundation in Auckland was founded on the provision of care of the elderly at the former Roskill Masonic Village.

The Potter Masonic Trust, dedicated to children's needs, originated from the bequest of a wealthy Freemason over 80 years ago. Both are very substantial and active. Many others are regional and very localised based on individual Lodges or groups of Lodges.

Some are providing housing for the elderly and many are caring for local communities in small but important ways.



What is the total extent of Freemasons charity?

The total value of Freemasons giving each year is estimated to be in the millions of dollars.

What is the Acacia Society?

The Acacia Society is administered by The Freemasons Charity and recognises those Freemasons who have made a bequest in favour of The Freemasons Charity.

While some Freemasons prefer to remain anonymous, others are comfortable wearing a small Acacia pin to signify their bequest.

The Acacia Society assures a member that their contribution will continue to support the masonic principles that they, as a Freemason, endorsed in life.

Why is charity so important to us?

Benevolence is part of our philosophy and liberal views. It shows that Freemasons value people and their rights, have a tradition of caring and trust, tolerate diversity and encourage learning and advancement.



Women & Freemasonry

How do women fit into Freemasonry?

From its beginnings, centuries ago, Freemasonry has always been a fraternal organisation and despite the vast changes in society the organisation around the world, Freemasonry has remained so.

Lodges take particular care when accepting new members to ensure wives and partners understand the nature, age, traditional essence and meaning of Freemasonry.

Wives and partners may support their men's membership if they wish, by participating in Lodge life through friendships formed with other Lodge families, through charity matters and in the active social life of the Lodge.

Freemasonry teaches that the Masonic duties a member come only after his commitments first to his family and then to his work. Wives, partners and families are welcomed by Freemasonry.



Can women become Freemasons?

The Order of the Eastern Star, an international Masonic-styled organisation for women, started by a Freemason in the United States, operates in New Zealand.

The Order only has a limited number of Eastern Star Lodges in New Zealand.

Freemasonry cares for Lodge widows

All Lodges are especially called to care for the widows of members as part of their charitable duties. First to ensure they are properly provided for and further to keep in contact through social occasions and seasonal entertainment.

The Freemasons Charity provides further assistance to Lodges for the care of their Widows



Rituals & Ceremonies

What are the ceremonies and rituals about?

As we mentioned earlier, the main ceremonies and the ritual contained in them, are the three Degrees of Freemasonry. These are stages of membership all Candidates must pass through on their journey to becoming a Master Mason.

The ceremonies are in the form of dramatically portrayed allegorical stories in which the Candidate is taught about Freemasonry and the principles it upholds. These steps or stages, known as Degrees, represent the three stages in a man's life from ignorance, to knowledge, to wisdom.

They are known as 'Entered Apprentice', 'Fellowcraft' and 'Master Mason'

Is any ceremony open to the public?

The triennial ceremony to Install a new Grand Master and his national officers is a public ceremony.



What happens in an initiation?

Initiation is the first membership ceremony. It lasts for about one hour explaining Freemasonry and creating a sense of bonding and Brotherhood. Only Freemasons can attend the ceremony. Family members and friends who are Freemasons can attend to support the new Freemason.

What does it cost to be a Freemason?

Like many clubs and societies most Lodges charge an initiation or joining fee.

Annual dues are usually between \$150 and \$350 depending on the type of Lodge. Dining Lodges are more expensive and Daytime Lodges are less.

With 'supper' fees and occasional calls for charitable contributions, the annual cost is between \$300 and \$1000. Participation in social activities is additional.

An apron, the basic regalia of all Freemasons is usually an additional cost. An apron previously belonging to a family member is encouraged to be used.



Do you have to be wealthy to join?

No. Many wealthy men are Freemasons but apart from the costs listed previously wealth is not a consideration in Freemasonry and certainly not a factor in the qualifications for membership.

How do Freemasons have so much money?

It is true that Freemasonry gives millions of dollars to charitable causes each year. The bulk of these funds is the income earned from investments made up from the donations and bequests of members over 129 years in New Zealand.

The administration and operation of The Grand Lodge of New Zealand and all Lodges is predominantly funded from member's subscriptions.



Do you tithe or have to give to the organisation and charity?

There is no tithing in Freemasonry, nor pressure on members to contribute money to charity. Generally, Freemasons contribute through a combination of time, skill and money at their own personal choosing.

Then does a Freemason have to leave money or a proportion of their estate to the organisation?

No. There is no pressure or even expectation that members bequest money or property to Freemasonry. It is not uncommon for such, but any decision is purely the members' personal decision.



The Secrets

What are the secrets of Freemasonry?

Many are the myths and rumours about Freemasonry. Conspiracy theories too abound yet much accurate information is readily accessible in public libraries and on the internet about Freemasons their ceremonies and traditions.

The only part of Freemasonry that is confidential to members is the means of recognition between themselves. This stems from historical times when intelligent but illiterate stonemasons sought to prove to employers that they were skilled and competent to design and build and worthy to receive payment for their talents.

Freemasons today retain this custom as a symbolic statement of their reliability, integrity and trust.

These means of recognition include words, signs and a handshake.



A new open attitude

Until quite recently Freemasons were very reticent on their organisation and work. Today a more open attitude is being taken and Freemasons are being encouraged to talk to all about their membership and what it means to them, about their charity and what they do.

This book is an example.

To non-mason readers we urge you to feel free to ask any Freemason for more

But if you want to know the handshake you'll have to join!



Masonic Dress

Aprons, gloves and collars

It is customary at Lodge meetings for regalia, signifying Masonic rank, to be worn.

The basic dress of all Freemasons is an apron and gloves, symbolic of the stonemasons of old, over a dark lounge suit

As members advance in the hierarchical structure of Freemasonry the regalia worn becomes more decorative- collars, cuffs, medals ('jewels' in Masonic dictum) and colour.

Why do Freemasons use formal dress?

Formal dress is part of past tradition and style. Today most Lodges see a business suit as suitable, yet some retain the more formal practice of dinner suit. It is the decision of each Lodge.

It is usual for officers of Grand Lodge, on formal ceremonial occasions, to wear 'tails'.



Are casual clothes acceptable?

Freemasonry has a proud tradition and most men own a business suit, and dress in such attire at Lodge meetings out of respect for the Institution its principles and traditions.

But there are business and social events where casual clothes are appropriate.

Is regalia supplied?

With some exceptions, aprons are usually a cost to the member.

Collars and other regalia for Lodge Officers is supplied.



FAQ's

About membership

What is 'proper solicitation'?

The rules concerning solicitation of membership to Freemasonry are often mis-understood. Providing it is clear that a man is evidently suitable, with the qualities required to join, then it is permitted to enquire if he is interested, to answer his questions and provide further information. It is improper to apply any pressure or coercion. The candidate must be allowed to decide for himself.

Is Freemasonry open to all men?

Well almost – as described on page 14. One of the greatest things about Freemasonry is that 'all' men—regardless of their race, religion, financial and social status—can come together as equals and share a common bond of friendship and mutual respect.

Is there a trial period before joining?

No. But 'full' membership is not attained for a period until all the ceremonials of membership have been completed - perhaps 6 months or sometimes more.



Why do men join Freemasonry?

There are many reasons but the most common are:

- To share the company and fellowship of like-minded men.
- To fulfil a desire to further develop their life interests.
- To actively expand their involvement in community assistance.
- To widen both their own and their family's connections in their communities.
- Because of family or friends current or historical connections with Freemasonry.
- To enjoy the social opportunities.

Invariably it is a combination of these reasons that draw men to the organisation.



Is the organisation dying out?

For quite some years membership of Freemasonry has been in slow decline. It is widely accepted that many membership organisations, social, sport and others, are in a similar state reflecting the increasing pace of society and the growing commitments on personal time.

There have been small adjustments, but Freemasonry today continues in the very same manner as it has always done – and there is every expectation membership will begin growing within three years.

Contrary to common belief, Freemasonry, once explained, has genuine appeal to all men who admire its traditional values, its fellowship and benevolent qualities as well as its ceremonial spectacle.



How is Freemasonry different from service organisations?

While charitable service and caring about people is a cornerstone of Freemasonry, there are other equally important parts not found in other service organisations. Men become Freemasons to develop as individuals and meet other like-minded people and to enjoy its tradition, rituals, regalia, its ceremony and the sociable nature of the organisation.



Joining Freemasonry

It is not true that an interested person must wait to be asked to join Freemasonry.

He may enquire, from any Freemason he may know, what steps are necessary.

Alternatively, he should contact Freemasons New Zealand for further information including direction to the Freemasons in his locality.

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John in turn is happy to accept that the idea was Diana's whose apprehension concerning how, as the Grand Masters wife, she was to answer questions on Freemasonry, was daunting.

Freemasons New Zealand has now adapted the original work 'Plain English Guide to Freemasonry' for use by the Brethren in the public awareness campaign

This is our third edition of the publication. Mark Winger, Past Grand Master 2016-2019, added 'Speak up for Freemasonry' to the booklet. This version continues with the same thrust by empowering our members to Speak Up, Step Up and Show Up for Freemasonry.



Thanks Diana & John



