

Congratulations! Your partner is now, or is in the process of becoming a member of the ancient and honored fraternity of Freemasonry. Most family members of Freemasons are often left with many questions about what Freemasonry is; what the benefits are; and quite simply, what it all means.

This guide provides a quick, although non-extensive, summary of some of the rights and benefits your partner may enjoy as a Freemason. If you ever have *ANY* questions about the society of Freemasons or Masonic activities, don't hesitate to ask your partner, or a member of the Lodge. We welcome you and your family member to this important society and to the journey it provides its members.

What is Freemasonry?

No one knows for sure how or when the Masonic Fraternity was formed. Masonry is speculated to have formed from the stone-masons guilds of the Middle-Ages which traveled across Europe building the grand castles and buildings that are present in many European cities today. Others suggest its roots extend back more than 3,000 years to the times of King Solomon, or perhaps even earlier.

However old or young the fraternity may be, Freemasonry, as it is known today, is officially recognized as originating in London, England in 1717. Records show that in that year, four lodges formed to create the Grand Lodge of England. The Grand Lodge of England still exists today and is now known as the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE).

Shortly after its "grand" formation, Freemasonry traveled rapidly across Europe and to the newly settled American colonies. In fact, many of the founding fathers of the United States were Freemasons to include George Washington "The Father of Our Country", Benjamin Franklin and Robert Livingston, two of the five men who drafted the Declaration of Independence, Paul Revere who made his famous ride to warn of British approach, John Hancock whose name boldly appears in defiance of King George III, John Paul Jones who helped establish the Continental Navy and traditions which continue to our modern fleet, the French liaison to the Colonies *Marquis de Lafayette*, without whose aid the war could not have been won, and Pierre-Charles L'Enfant, designer of the city of Washington, D.C.

Freemasons could be found during this time period in many countries that held the ideals of individual enlightenment, democracy and equality. In fact, Freemasons were prominent as founding fathers in several nations during the late 1700's to mid 1800's such as Canada and Mexico.

These are but a few of the men and ideals with whom your partner has become associated. With them he shares an eternal bond of duty, courage, and service to liberate humanity from tyranny, injustice and intolerance.

Freemasonry is also a charitable organization. During the 1800's and 1900's, before the Federal government enacted measures ensuring these rights to all Americans, Masons directly provided for the shelter and assistance to its members, widows and orphans through insurance, orphanages, homes for the aging, and other vital social services.

Today, Freemasons contribute more than \$2.5 million every day to causes ranging from the Shriner's Hospitals for children suffering from burns or bone diseases; Scottish Rite Centers which provide services to children suffering from hearing, eye, speech and other communicative disorders; medical research funding for childhood illnesses; direct financial contributions to local schools and communities; and providing care to disabled and infirmed Masons and their families at Masonic Homes across the country.

Who can be a Freemason?

Nearly 3 million men are Freemasons in the United States today, with another 2 million worldwide, and the numbers are growing. Freemasonry can be found in almost every country of the world and is highly visible in almost every major historical occurrence in the United States from the Revolutionary War to the laying of the Capital cornerstone.

Freemasonry is open to any man regardless of race, religion, nationality, social status or wealth as long as they hold a belief in a supreme being and have good moral character. Freemasonry does not interfere with duties that a man owes to his God, his country, his neighbors or his family. It helps a good man become a better man, father, husband, brother or son.

Is Freemasonry a Religion?

Freemasonry is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion. It does however require of its members a belief in a supreme being as part of the obligation of every responsible adult, but advocates no particular devotion, practice or expression of deity. Thus, Freemasonry welcomes men of any faith or creed, but the doctrines of religion are not discussed, nor permitted to be discussed at Masonic meetings.

Masonic Meetings: How Many & When?

Here in the District of Columbia, there are several primary Masonic Centers, and different bodies of Masonry where members meet at various times of the week to conduct the business of the Craft. Though each Masonic Lodge has a specific, established time for the conduct of meeting as determined by the Bylaws, there are times when they may be open meetings or public events. By example, La France Lodge No. 93 usually meets at least once every month, on the second Monday, at 7:00 pm, except in July and August.

Ask your partner when he is obliged to attend, and also of those occasions when you can attend with him. Most lodges will have several such events during the year in which family and friends are invited. Some may be casual and include just the members of the Lodge, while others are quite formal with every Mason in the Jurisdiction invited to join the important function or celebration.

And while each Lodge or Body of Masonry actively encourages attendance, members are also reminded to be mindful of family and work obligations and that these take priority over the Craft.

What are the costs of Freemasonry?

As with any organization, there are certain expenses associated with operating the Craft – rent, utilities, insurance, food, etc. To pay for these necessary costs, each lodge sets its own annual

dues. Thus membership may be different from one Lodge to the next depending on these, the number of members, and several other important factors. Most lodges also offer a life membership which can be purchased for a one-time fee. This allows a member to take advantage of the present value of his dollar without having to worry about dues increases to cover inflation or other costs, over the course of his Masonic life.

It is also important to note that membership in each Lodge, or associated Body of Masonry, establishes and requires its own dues. So while, membership in one Lodge will allow your partner to visit other Lodges, it does not permit him to participate in the governance of any Lodge or Body to which he is not a member.

Another important consideration is the several events which will occur during the course of each year. There are Lodge functions such as picnics, holiday parties, and social outings to which you and your partner will be invited; as well as annual Masonic banquets, conferences and such. Many Lodges pay for some or all of these costs, while others may subsidize only a part. Although attendance is not required, your presence at these activities is strongly encouraged. It's at these functions where you will get the best opportunity to meet the many others involved in this important work, and better learn and understand the fullness of Freemasonry.

As your partner progresses within the fraternity, he may decide to take on greater roles and responsibilities as an officer of his Lodge. In most instances, this will require a modest investment in formal "Black Tie" attire: tuxedo, pleated shirt, shoes, and bow tie. Additional accessories such as cummerbund, vest, shirt studs, cuff links are not required, but certainly help to create a finished look. All said and done, your partner should be able to fashion a polished appearance for approximately \$500. Of course, your various evening wear in accompaniment of him is quite another matter.

Again, be sure to speak with your partner about the dues of his Lodge and any other Body of Masonry he may be interested; of the costs for social and formal events; and of any special attire or function. While each usually asks a nominal amount, it is essential you remain educated about all the costs of becoming involved in this sacred society of men.

What are all the Titles and Symbols?

If you haven't heard your partner addressed as "Brother" yet, you most certainly will. The term "Brother" is used to recognize another member of the Craft. It is a term used with respect toward its members. It is used in place of Mister or Sir to recognize the equality of all members of Freemasonry.

You may also hear your partner refer to someone in the Lodge as Past Master, Senior Warden, Brother Secretary or many other terms representing their current or past station in the Lodge. When you hear a term you are not familiar with, we ask that you inquire of the member what the term means and to whom it is referring. As Masons, we all too often fall into the trap of familiarity without recognizing that it may be foreign to our families.

One title important to note is that of "Worshipful Master". This is an ancient word usage as a complimentary expression. It has NO religious connotation, and certainly nothing to do with "worshipping" any particular individual. Rather, it is merely the British equivalent of "honorable," or "venerable" with a similar meaning to the honorific "Your Honor."

To assist in following your partner's progression in the Lodge, the following comprises the list of officers (senior to junior) who are responsible to the brethren for the conduct of meetings and other important functions of the Lodge:

Worshipful Master
Senior Warden and Junior Warden
Secretary and Treasurer
Senior Deacon and Junior Deacon
Senior Steward and Junior Steward
Chaplain, Marshal and Tiler

Freemasonry is a revealer of secrets. The great truths of ancient man were, in their time, also great secrets and few were admitted into the sanctuaries where these truths were taught. Today, the Craft teaches these lessons to all worthy men who ask to learn them. These truths or lessons, are taught in the language of symbols. Thus, it is your partner's obligation to receive, interpret, and practice his own understanding of these symbols in relation to his God, his world, and himself. Thus, there can be no single definition of any symbol, but a host of unique interpretations.

Are there other Masonic groups?

There are several bodies of Freemasonry of which your partner may become a member AFTER he has been raised a Master Mason. Some of these bodies you may have already heard of, but didn't know they were comprised entirely of Masons such as the Shriner's or Knights Templar. Essentially Freemasonry is divided into two primary bodies – the York Rite and the Scottish Rite, along with the Shrine and several appendant bodies.

The York Rite is composed of the Craft or Blue Lodge through which your partner initially joined Freemasonry. There are fewer degrees in the York Rite than in the Scottish Rite, and are characterized as the Royal Arch, Cryptic Council and Knights Templar. These bodies provide opportunities for additional contemplation of the lessons taught in Craft Masonry, but a brother who progresses through all the bodies in Freemasonry is no "more a Mason" than that of a Master Mason. For more detailed information, please visit <http://www.dcgrandlodge.org>

The Scottish Rite is a more recent evolution, which as strange as it may sound, originated in France. It developed as additional lessons to those taught in the York Rite. Unlike the York Rite, Scottish Rite degrees are simply numbered 4-33 with the 33rd Degree being honorary. Moreover, as in the York Rite and as all Masons understand, a 32nd or 33rd Degree Mason is again no "more a Mason" than any Master Mason. For more information, please visit <http://www.dcsr.org>

Since October 2008, La France Lodge No. 93 is chartered to conduct its meetings and degree work in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite thereby bridging the gap between the Blue Lodge system and the Scottish Rite degrees. It is the only lodge in the United States, outside Louisiana, that offers the first three degrees of the Scottish Rite in a Blue Lodge.

The Shrine is what some may consider the public view of Freemasonry. It is founded on the principles of the Craft but without the solemnity of the Blue Lodge. Among its many public and

charitable functions, the Shrine is especially noted for its operation of the many Children's Hospitals and Burns Institutes, as previously mentioned. For more information, please visit: <http://www.almasshriners.org>

In addition to the above Masonic bodies there are several "appendant" organizations including the Order of Eastern Star, Job's Daughters, Rainbow Girls, DeMolay, National Sojourners, High Twelve, Grotto, Tall Cedars of Lebanon, and others. In fact, there is a Masonic organization for every member of the family. For example, the Eastern Star is for partners of Masons, the DeMolay for boys, and Rainbow Girls for young ladies. For more information we encourage you to visit the Masonic Service Association of North America at www.msana.com or for a full listing of the U.S. National Masonic Appendant Bodies please visit: <http://www.bessel.org/append.htm>.

Your Partner's Apron: Handle with Care!

When an individual is raised as a Mason they are presented with a white leather apron. It denotes innocence and purity. It is more precious to them than was ever the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle to any man; and more honorable than the Star and Garter or any other badge that may be conferred upon another. It is always worn in a Masonic lodge to represent these Masonic ideals. When your partner was presented his white leather apron upon being raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason and was instructed to take great care of it, as it is the only time he will be presented with a white leather apron in his Masonic career.

Your partner should have also instructed you that it is Masonic custom and his right to have this apron placed upon him at the time of his burial or cremation. A Masonic ceremony is given which describes its significance during a funeral service. More is given on this topic later. But until your partner should be called to the Celestial Lodge above, please help him to protect and preserve it till that fateful day.

A Masonic Partner's Responsibilities

Freemasonry prides itself on taking care of its members, their widows and orphans. As such, it is important that you are aware of the rights and benefits of a Freemason and how they apply to the member's family.

As previously mentioned, a very important benefit is the right of a Masonic funeral service. When in the course of human events your partner shall meet his fateful end, we ask that you immediately contact his Lodge, particularly the Secretary or Worshipful Master. Because these moments are tragic and often difficult to comprehend, we further recommend you speak with your partner in advance to express not only his last wishes, but to keep the lines of communication open with his Lodge. In the days when our brother may not be as active as he once was, ensuring we are informed of any address changes is of critical importance to helping us monitor his well-being.

In those instances if your partner has taken ill or is confined to the hospital; or if you, or your child(ren) are in need of financial or other assistance we further encourage and ask that you also contact your partner's Lodge as soon as it is possible for you.

A monthly “**Stated Communications**” bulletin is provided to your partner for as long as he remains a current member of his Lodge. We highly recommend you keep at least one copy of the latest December or January issue on hand. It will contain the latest contact information for all the officers of the Lodge. If we are not aware of pressing health, financial or other serious issues, we cannot fulfill our obligation to him as Freemasons or his family, especially when they are most in need. It is vital to our society that our members and their family’s needs are always met.

The contact information for most Lodges can also be found on the Internet, or you can find the contact information on your partner’s annual dues card. The website for the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia FAAM is www.dcgrandlodge.org. This website will contain information on how to contact the Secretary of your partner’s lodge, or you may write the Grand Secretary if you are unfamiliar to which Lodge request should first be made.

**Grand Lodge
Free And Accepted Masons
District of Columbia**

Protecting Masons at Home and Afar!

The unthinkable often occurs...you may be traveling and have lost all of your money or passport. Your car may have broken down hundreds of miles from friends or family, or you may need a doctor, but don’t know of any in an area. As noted earlier, Masonry is an international organization that prides itself on taking care of its members and their families. If you should ever need ANY assistance, you can contact a Masonic Service Association which can be found in almost every major city. If one doesn’t exist nearby, contact a local Masonic lodge which can provide assistance to you or connect you to someone who can.

College Scholarships & Other Charity

The Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia each year offers up to \$100,000 in college scholarships and educational awards to students and teachers within our community. Please inquire through your Lodge or to the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, FAAM whether your child(ren) or school may be eligible to compete for such scholarships and awards.

Freemasonry also provides cost free help for certain communicative disorders at our Scottish Rite clinic, as well as free treatment and transportation for children at the appropriate Shriner’s Hospital. For qualifying information, please contact the Almas Temple of the District of Columbia at: <http://www.almasshriners.org> or other nearest Masonic Shrine in your area.

Freemasonry also understands that sometimes, life happens; that it can be harsh and unfair. If you, or your family are ever in dire financial constraints, the Masonic society and your partner’s Lodge can and often do assist its members with limited or emergency funds. **DO NOT FEEL EMBARRASSED** to ask! It is our obligation in life - or after a member’s death - to ensure that the families, widows and orphans of our members are taken care of in a time of need.

Elder Care and Assisted Living:

Many Masonic members are not aware that in each Grand Lodge jurisdiction in the United States, Masonic organizations care for members and their spouses who need additional care and assistance to support themselves. This right extends to the widow of a member who may be in need of such assistance as well. To learn how to qualify for this benefit, please contact the Grand Lodge of the state in which you live, or the Lodge(s) which your partner is/was a member.

The Last Rights of a Mason: The Masonic Funeral

Again, any member who was in good standing in Freemasonry at the time of his death is entitled to a Masonic funeral if he or his family requests it. Such a request should be made to the Master of his Lodge who will make the necessary arrangements with the family, the mortuary, and the minister. As noted earlier, Lodge information can usually be found on the member's dues card, on the monthly Bulletin, or via the Internet.

The service must be authorized by the Masonic jurisdiction in which your partner is located at the time of his passing. The service itself may consist of participation at the mortuary, the beginning at the mortuary and the closing at the graveside, or graveside only. Pallbearers, if requested however, should be furnished at the request of the family, although some Masons may choose to participate if asked.

In general, the Lodge will do as much or as little as you, or the nearest relative, wish(es) it to do, that is not inconsistent to our established customs and instructions. While we celebrate the contributions your partner makes in his daily Masonic endeavors, so shall we also cherish his memory when the roll of the workmen is eventually called, and this Master Mason does not answer to his name.

Summary:

We hope that you have found this guide useful. While it by no means encompasses the broad Masonic teachings and principals, it will assist you with a general understanding of your partner's Masonic obligations and to the rights and benefits accorded to him, and you as such. For further information, please feel free to contact La France Lodge No. 93 at <http://LaFrance93.org/>, or the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia FAAM at www.dcgrandlodge.org.