

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION and RESEARCH
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(The opinions expressed in the following paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research)

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?

Presented to the VLE&R on September 18, 2001 by V. W. Bro. Arthur Scott, Camosun Lodge No. 60 BCR

The topic addressed in this paper tonight is one that has come to mind time and time again when I have been asked by friends and acquaintance to explain what Freemasonry is upon their learning that I am a Freemason. When friends and family become aware of the time and effort that we put into our Freemasonry, they often ask what there is about it that makes us do so so willingly. What do you tell them?

I have yet to see a comprehensive yet concise definition of Freemasonry that effectively captures the essence of our fraternity in a manner that is understandable to the reader, whether they be a freemason or the uninitiated. I have yet to hear a brother vocalize a short, concise and fully encompassing definition of Freemasonry in plain language that answers the question: "what do Masons do?"

Let me give you some examples of some existing definitions:

"Freemasonry is the (UK's) largest secular, fraternal and charitable organization. It teaches moral lessons and self-knowledge through participation in a progression of allegorical two-part plays." ¹

"Freemasonry is a system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols."²

Freemasonry is a worldwide fraternal organization where members are joined together by a common belief in a Supreme Being and a desire to live by high moral standards.³

The Grand Lodge of Illinois defines Freemasonry as "an organized society of men who symbolically apply the principles of operative masonry and architecture to the science and art of character building. What Freemasonry teaches is not at all secret. It teaches its members to be better men. ... based upon tradition, Freemasonry teaches through ritual — some of which is secret." ⁴

Here is a definition from the Missouri Grand Lodge where former President Harry Truman was Grand Master: "It is organized as a fellowship of men, a system of morals, a philosophy taught by degrees through the use of symbol, story, legend, pictures, and drama. It has served as a center of union among differing backgrounds, cultures, and countries. It serves as the means of conciliating true friendship among persons, who, because of differences, must have otherwise remained at a perpetual distance." ⁵

Or how about this one:

"Freemasonry is.... Kindness in the home, Honesty in business, Courtesy in society, Fairness in work, Pity and concern toward the unfortunate, Resistance toward the wicked, Help for the weak, Trust in the strong, Forgiveness for the penitent, Love for one another — and above all — Love for (your) God. Freemasonry is many things, All of these and more, But in a few words : Freemasonry is a way of life."

Do you have a better grasp of "what freemasonry is" yet? Perhaps you will when I read the following synopsis of three different Grand Lodge of England publications which I have compiled onto one:

Freemasonry is a fraternal organization with a strong social purpose whose members have high moral standards and work to the benefit of others

Freemasonry (one of the world's oldest secular fraternal societies) is a society of men concerned with moral and spiritual values. Its members are taught its precepts by a series of ritual dramas, which follow ancient forms and use stonemasons' customs and tools as allegorical guides.

Freemasons believe that the three great principles of Brotherly Love Relief (the practice of charity) and Truth represent a way of achieving higher standards in life.

Freemasonry demands from its members a respect for the law of the country in which a man works and lives. Its principles do not in any way conflict with its members' duties as citizens, but should strengthen them in fulfilling their private and public responsibilities.

The use by a Freemason of their membership to promote his own or anyone else's business, professional or personal interests is condemned, and is contrary to the conditions on which he sought admission to Freemasonry. His duty as a citizen must always prevail over any obligation to other Freemasons, and any attempt to shield a Freemason who has acted dishonourably or unlawfully is contrary to this prime duty.

Freemasonry is not a secret society, since all members are free to acknowledge their membership and will do so in response to inquiries for respectable reasons. Its constitutions and rules are available to the public. There is no secret about any of its aims and principles. But like many other societies, it regards some of its internal affairs as private matters for its members. The real point of a Freemason promising not to reveal them is basically a dramatic way of promising to keep one's promises in general. Masonic ceremonies are secular morality plays that are learned by heart by members of the lodge for the benefit of the person who is becoming a Freemason or who wishes to explore Freemasonry further. Each ceremony has a message for the candidate. The three degrees look at the relations between people, man's natural equality and his dependence on others, the importance of education and the rewards of labour, fidelity to a promise, contemplation of inevitable death, and one's duty to others.

Freemasonry has enjoyed times of great renown and prestige, and it has experienced times of adversity. (Here's a statement I have some difficulty with) Today it remains a vibrant organization that is attracting adherents over all the civilized world.

Freemasonry is the science by which morality is taught through the visible symbols and instructive traditions associated with the erection of King Solomon's Temple some 3,000 years ago. Like every science and permanent institution, Freemasonry is built on certain conceded principles. These include a belief in the one living and true God, a revelation of His Will, the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul. When we say "one God," we refer to whatever Supreme and Benevolent Being in which a man places his ultimate trust. We are a non-denominational institution accepting men of all faiths. Freemasonry is the ardent supporter of every religion. It denies to no man his particular theological or secular beliefs, but rather complements and fulfills those beliefs

Furthermore, Freemasons are expressly forbidden to discuss religion or politics at masonic meetings. These rules ooth stem from Freemasonry's aims to encourage its members to discover what people from all different backgrounds have in common. Debate about religion and politics has all too often led to discrimination, persecution and war.

The Masonic Fraternity stands before the world today, not merely as a marvelous monument of antiquity, older, larger and more widely spread than any other human institution, but as having maintained for so many centuries the essentials of its primary organization. It has long outlived the circumstances which gave it birth. Originally an association of operative stonemasons and builders, whose monuments of rare skill still adorn almost every part of the old world, the hands of time have brought those operative labors to a close. The Everlasting Principles, however, upon which our beloved Craft was founded, are as intact today as they were when it emerged from the very shadows of prehistory. Thus, over the centuries, as the demand for builders of physical temples has subsided, Freemasons have transitioned their efforts to building "spiritual temples" in the hearts of men. Freemasonry teaches us that the most important part of life lies in the discharge of our duties toward God and our fellow man.

Freemasonry is a broad system of Morals and Ethics. That is, a science of human duties, whose principals are accepted by all religions as essential to human excellence. The cornerstone of these principles rests upon the recognition of a Divine Truth that mankind has a common origin and a common destiny; and that God is the Creator and Father of all of us. Out of that relationship with Deity grows the Brotherhood of Man. Freemasonry's great purpose is to intensify that relationship. Thus, Freemasonry teaches Love, Faith, and Duty, unites man in the strong embrace of fraternal fellowship, and induces emulation of who can best work and best agree. Freemasonry thus becomes a system of spiritual education wherein is taught not only the virtues, but also the useful lessons of everyday life.

The Temple of King Solomon signifies to us the Temple of our bodies, that is, our Inner Spiritual Temple. The tools and implements used in the building of Solomon's Temple signify to us the cultivation of the virtues to be practiced in the erection of the inner spiritual temple of man. The traditions associated with Solomon's Temple serve as worthy examples for our imitation, and to inspire in us a love of all that is good and true.

Freemasonry is not a mere pastime; not a mere amusement. It is an active, living principle. Its ritual, its symbolism, and its drama are not empty ceremonies. Formed and perfected over the centuries, they serve to exemplify and impart important truths for mankind. Freemasonry adapts its theories, its ethical thought, and its teachings to the practical relations of life.

Man is a social creature. As such, our nature compels us to seek the companionship of others. We, therefore, see our Brothers and their families, animated by the same noble purpose, meeting in the Lodge where they can feel the

hearty touch of the hand, hear words of inspiration and encouragement, and enjoy the pleasure, entertainment, and fellowship of this time-honored institution. While gathered in these great assemblies, we confer our ceremonial degrees, provide relief to the indigent, assistance to the worthy, and administer systems of care to those who are less fortunate. Freemasonry is all of this and much, much more. Beneath and beyond all of these is the deep, permanent passion for the betterment of the Brotherhood of Man. Freemasonry, as the ardent supporter of religion, benevolence, and morality places before man the incentives to goodness through the contemplation of the Holy Principles of Divine Truth.

The tenets our Ancient Order are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth -- and first among them is Brotherly Love. It is the very cement which holds together the social edifice of this world. No one can measure the extent of human sympathy or brotherly love, but we know it to be one of the mightiest social forces of all time, and that without it, life would be a merciless and cruel existence. We know that when there is an unselfish love in the hearts of men, the better nature within each of us responds in kind. It is this kindly spirit of Brotherhood, the gentle touch of the hand, and the sympathetic word that brings forth a harvest of good deeds, noble thoughts, and the highest aspirations of mankind.

This, my friends, is Freemasonry. May it live on through us for countless ages, and may we be ever worthy to spread Masonic Light for the generations yet to come. To these, our principal beliefs and poetic truths, we say as our forefathers did before us: "So mote it be."

We hope that men of a higher character who seek to share in our Brotherly Love, who wish to contribute to the relief of others less fortunate, and who use Divine Truth as the cornerstone of all their endeavors will consider joining the oldest, largest, and most prestigious fraternal organization in the world - Freemasonry.

Today, the more than four million Freemasons around the world come from virtually every occupation and profession. Within the Fraternity, however, all meet as equals. In fact, one of the most fascinating aspects of Freemasonry (and an obvious source of irritation for those who thrive on the seeds of discontent) has always been: how so many men, from so many different walks of life, can meet together in peace, ignoring political or religious debates, to conduct their affairs in harmony and friendship and to call each other "Brother!"

Here is a totally different attempt to define "What is Freemasonry?" This was written in 1953 by Bro. Dewey Wollstein:

To try to define it, Freemasonry is a sublime effort on the part of Masons to give living proof to the world that all men are brothers. The best definitions are inadequate. Freemasonry is Understanding, Tolerance, Love, Hope, Reverence, and Charity, all working through men who believe in the nobility of mankind, in the God-made destiny of men, and in the final triumph of good over evil.

Our description is inadequate. Freemasonry is the cable tow that joins the hearts of Masons. It is felt in prosperity; it tugs at the heart of the brother in distress and at the heart of the brother who answers the call of distress. Freemasonry is the Spirit that goes with a handshake. It is the mystery of Love, the silent working of Nature. It is God's justice administered by men who know God's mercy.

Freemasonry is that which brings sweet tears to the eyes of a father when his son knocks at the inner door.

Have we described Freemasonry? No, but there is something else to add: Freemasonry is that which dictators despise.⁸

Having shared with you these somewhat platonic definitions of Freemasonry, let me now direct your thoughts to the basis of Freemasonry, and thus lead you towards my own conclusion on the definition of Freemasonry. These ideas were formulated in part from a paper entitled *Our Masonic Responsibilities* by M. W. Bro. H. Dwight McAlister.⁹

"Every Master Mason is charged with the practice of Masonic ideals and principles as taught in Masonry's degrees. Every Master Mason must realize the gravity of his responsibility as a Mason, and practice, in his everyday life, the principles taught at the Altar of our Lodges. Although we do not actively solicit members, we do solicit by the lives we live before the world. Every Master Mason should realize and be conscious of his responsibility to live Masonry in his daily life. In short, we should practice what we preach."

M. W. Bro. Mcalister goes on to say, "One of the most tragic truths I know is that Masonry means so little to so many who call themselves Masons. Can you imagine the impact if suddenly every Lodge member would become a Mason in deed as well as in word; if suddenly every Lodge member would become what he professed to be; if suddenly every Lodge member would do what he is obligated to do; if suddenly he should practice what he preaches; if suddenly he should measure up to his Masonic Responsibilities?"

Let's look at a few of the specific areas of our responsibility as Masons:

"RESPONSIBILITY to the LODGE: Every member has a duty and responsibility to the organization to which he belongs. For a Brother to forget the Lodge that gave him his Masonic birth is like a son who would forget his mother that gave him physical birth. Suppose no one attended Lodge meetings any more than you do, nor took any more of an active part than you do, nor showed any more interest than you do, what would have happened to your Lodge? Would it still be in existence? I quote from the charge given to you in the first degree, "Although your frequent appearance at our regular meetings is earnestly solicited, yet it is not meant that Masonry should interfere with your necessary vocations, for these are on no account to be neglected." Some interpret this to mean that it is all right for anything and everything to interfere with their Masonry.

"RESPONSIBILITY to GOD: I quote again from the charge given in the Entered Apprentice Degree: "There are three great duties which, as a Mason, you are charged to inculcate - to God, your neighbor, and yourself. To God, in never mentioning his name but with that reverential awe which is due from a creature to his Creator; to implore his aid in all your laudable undertakings, and to esteem him as the chief good." A true Mason is a Godly man.

"The real bounds of the Lodge go beyond its membership: A Lodge is said, symbolically, to extend in length from the east to the west; in breadth from north to south; in height, from the earth to the highest heavens; in depth, from the surface to the center. A Lodge is said to be of these vast dimensions to denote the universality of Masonry, and to teach us that a Mason's charity should be equally extensive. In other words, the Lodge is a symbol of the world.

It is important that we keep the organization of Masonry alive, but we must not forget the ideas and ideals that gave it birth. Our responsibility goes beyond the Lodge.

RESPONSIBILITY to YOUR NEIGHBOUR: Again, we read from the charge: "To your neighbor, in acting upon the square, and doing unto him as you wish he should do unto you."

RESPONSIBILITY to YOURSELF: We read again from the Entered Apprentice Degree Charge: "To yourself, in avoiding all irregularity and intemperance, which may impair your faculties, or debase the dignity of your profession."

I believe that it is my duty and your duty to take the life that God has given us and make the very best out of it that's possible for us to make.

"Your task: to build a better world," God said.
I answered, "How?"
"The world is such a large vast place,
So complicated now
And I so small and useless am;
There's nothing I can do."
But God in all His wisdom said,
"Just build a better you."

Simply put, Freemasons believe that *it is OK to be a good person*, and that good persons should encourage each other *to become better persons*.⁹

I said earlier that I have yet to see a definition of freemasonry that captures the essence of our fraternity in a manner that is understandable to the reader, whether they be a Freemason or the uninitiated. I have yet to hear a brother vocalize a concise and fully encompassing definition of Freemasonry. Perhaps the reason for this is not that no one is capable of formulating such a definition, as many well educated and well skilled men have put their thoughts to paper very eloquently. Rather, could it be that Freemasonry itself is of such a variable metamorphic nature (esoteric) that it is difficult if not impossible to grasp? Can it change from one form to another, sometimes subtly, sometimes quickly? Or is it that we have tenaciously clung to traditional Freemasonry while at the same time ignoring or failing to take into account that society, and us as members of society, have changed?⁹

Resistance to change is inherent in freemasonry yet could it be part of the problem?

We must also consider generational thinking - thinking that transcends generations. Some think we are an old man's fraternity looking for young members. In this regard, here is yet another definition: Freemasonry is a mechanism to link with men of like kind regardless of age and provides a wonderful opportunity to meet men of similar moral and ethical standards. It provides an opportunity to make lasting friendships with men of similar interest.⁹

I'd like to share an excerpt from an editorial called *Winding Back the Clock* that I published a few months ago:

When a mason heads to lodge today he meets several obstacles. Physical obstacles such as fighting the "rush hour" traffic. Logistics obstacles like juggling the requirements of his job and his domestic and family responsibilities to mesh with his attendance at lodge. Anxiety obstacles like trying to clear his mind of all other concerns so that he can enjoy his lodge meeting once he arrives.

When our harried brother finally arrives at lodge, he says hello to everyone he encounters, sits down and wonders why he's attending a meeting where he really doesn't know many of those present except for the fact that all are masons. He's probably never spent any private time with more than one or two members of the lodge — they all live too far away from one another or are too busy to socialize with any sense of frequency!

Now imagine that we were to wind back the clock - say to around the latter part of the nineteenth century. Picture a brother being picked up for lodge by another brother. As they ride the horse-drawn wagon the 15 miles or so to lodge they may pick up a couple of more brethren along the way and together they will go over parts of the ritual for that evening. Maybe they'll discuss the meaning of a line or two of the work.

In those days, brethren lived in very close communities. Everyone knew each other and helped each other. In the United States, the majority of brethren were men who not long ago had cowered together under fire while a civil war had raged for five perilous years. They knew the price of brotherhood and fraternity. Their masonry was an extension of that experience. Their lives may very well have depended upon it. Today, many would suggest that the "golden remnants" of our bygone days of Masonic lodges are fast leaving us. Our cities have grown to monstrous size. We hardly even know our next door neighbours, never mind our lodge brothers.

Back then, men turned to their tattered books at night by candle or coal oil lamp. Preachers, ministers, and lecturers gave them pause for thought. They had time to think. They prized and elevated thinking. Men pondered what "Masonic light" really meant. And they could provide thoughtful responses beyond just lines from a ritual book or cipher. Men do not think publicly today. How many produce new thoughts as opposed to standing up and reacting? How many stand to discuss light? How many stand to discuss "inner light"? How many can explain what Freemasonry is without reverting to time worn and repetitious cliches?

Today we do not think, we react. We try to get as much done as possible and be unscathed from this or that element which we perceive to be working against us.

Masonry doesn't need to change. Perhaps we need to. A variation in how we perform ritual or teach a lecture isn't going to solve the problem.

Education is a lifetime thing It is complete when we go to our final sleep. The same is true for Freemasonry. It is only completed when we wrap the drapery of our couch about us and lie down to pleasant dreams. If we do not stop to see, feel, experience, and sense life then we have missed it. The same is true for Freemasonry. We can't recite the ritual in many instances because we don't understand what it means. Therefore we can't retain the lines.

If we grab candidates off the street, that's what we will have — people filling up a room. Whereas if we take time to sit down, hear our own breathing, talk with our elders and ask them question after question after question (thus making them bring back Freemasonry into their own minds) then we might gain it all back again. Our fast and harried life has closeted us from the elder masons who could potentially contribute so much.¹⁰

I included that piece because I wanted to introduce the concept of a time line - a time line that we cannot ignore if we are to contemplate "What is Freemasonry" in its current setting.

Now I'd like to address my remarks to a current survey being conducted by the Grand Loge of England and focus on some relevant questions contained therein:

These preliminary results are from a total of 1045 submissions. 35% from the UK, 38% from North America, 15% from Europe, 6 % from Australia and 6% from other countries. Of those responding, 13% were in their 20's, 23% were in their 30's, 30% were in their 40's, 21% were in their 50's, and 13% were age 60 and over.

When asked the question, "I enjoy my Masonry and look forward to the meetings." 10.4% indicated that they did not enjoy their Masonry and did not look forward to the meetings, 67.2% enjoy Freemasonry and look forward to the meetings, while the other 23 % were somewhere in the middle. 40% agreed that the way the meetings are organized, at the moment, is acceptable, 30% were of no strong opinion, and a significant 24% expressed

dissatisfaction with the meetings in their present format. Only about 5% indicated that they only go to the meetings because of the socializing at the meal afterwards. 61.5% disagreed, meaning they attend lodge for more than the sandwiches and the tea.

When asked if they regularly take an active part in the ceremonies by performing parts of the ritual, 14.3% indicated that they took no part at all, 30% were in the middle, and an encouraging 54.3% said they regularly take an active part in the ceremonies by performing parts of the ritual. Here's a good indicator: 62% reported that they had been or will be an Officer of the Lodge and are enjoying it very much.

Fortunately, only 3.3% said that the only reason they joined a Lodge was to further their career.

But here's a red flag: When asked if they believe that Lodges are too often run by people who have hidden agendas and are only there to further themselves, less than half of those polled (45% disagreed) The remaining 54% felt that there was some degree of truth to this statement, with 7% strongly agreeing.

And yet another warning: When asked if they would propose a friend or colleague into their Lodge as a member, only 59% answered in the affirmative. An alarming 41% expressed some degree of reticence, with 13% going so far as to say they would definitely not propose a friend or colleague.

Only about 5% of the brethren surveyed thought that Masonry is too expensive.

Here's a very disappointing observation: only 52% strongly agreed that Masonry had widened their circle of friends to the benefit of their family and themselves, with about 40% in the undecided class.

When asked if they would like to see the ceremonies dropped altogether and replaced with a simple membership system, 79% disagreed.

Here's another indication that we are not as healthy as we would hope to be: While 61% would recommend Masonry to their friends and colleagues, 33% of those surveyed were undecided and 6% stated that they would not recommend Masonry to their friends and colleagues.

When asked if they felt that "if they hit a bad patch in their life, that their Masonry and Masonic circle of friends would help them out," only 46% replied that they strongly agreed. Another 20% agreed somewhat, with 25% undecided. Is that an acceptable response from a fraternity whose virtues I extolled by the definitions cited in the first several pages of this paper?

Another question was "I dislike the way Lodges appear to have a 'them and us' within them." 23% disagreed, more than 60% had no opinion, but 15% felt that there was divisiveness in their lodges.

When asked the question, "I am thinking about leaving Masonry because I have lost interest" 76% disagreed, about 20% had no strong opinion, but about 5% indicated a significant degree of disinterestedness. Brethren, that's 5% too many.

With respect to the ceremonies conducted within our lodges, 67% disagreed that the ceremonies should be modernized in some way, while only 13% agreed, and 20% had no opinion. When asked if they thought that the ceremonies are irrelevant, out of date and pointless, only 5% agree, with over 80% indicating that the ceremonies should remain as is. "

So what am I leading up to?

I am going to conclude by leaving you with a gentle suggestion that this recent survey does not substantiate the many definitions of Freemasonry that I read in the opening part of this paper. The facts do not support the philosophical ideals.

And perhaps that's the key word: "Ideal."

Some of the definitions I glanced at while preparing this paper begin with the phrase, "Ideally, Freemasonry..... But regrettably, Freemasonry is far from ideal. Piques and quarrels do exist. There are times when we should reach forth a hand or whisper tender counsel as promised when we are raised on the five points of fellowship, Instead we sometimes gossip and denigrate a brother behind his back. The most tangible reinforcement of this observation is our current Grand Master's Theme: *"Positive Thinking Freemasonry. " If you cannot say anything positive about Freemasonry or a Freemason, best leave it unsaid. "* Did you ever think that there would be a need for a gentle reminder such as this?

So whether we want to admit it or not, there is dissatisfaction. There are piques and quarrels. There are some whose egos push aside the obligation they took on bended knee. And why is this? Because in this world, nothing is perfect. All we can do is to *strive* for perfection - to do the very best that we can do - to reach for a star, even if we know we can't reach it. We must try. We must never give up.

May I suggest that Freemasonry is an ideal that we strive for - a star in the sky that we all reach for - a 'dream' if you will allow me to call it that without taking offence. But dreams are fragile and fleeting.

Let me conclude by sharing with you a short piece I wrote not too long ago called "The Great Masonic Dream."

Some time long ago a group of men banded together as brothers and set forth the outline of a noble Masonic dream. Since then every Mason has had a part in bringing about the reality of that dream. In part, it is a dream of a universal Brotherhood. Not the superficial guise of brotherhood in which men glibly couch words with insincere piety but a sincere and genuine brotherhood in every sense of the word.

But Freemasonry's dream of universal brotherhood will only become a reality when we realize that religion, science, and philosophy form a trinity that unites men. Do we not refer to Masonry as the 'science of morality'? We do not say that Freemasonry is a religion, but who can deny that Masonry is an expression of the best in all religious teachings?

We as mortal men are dreamers. We as Masons are also dreamers when it comes to the exemplification of the ideals of our fraternity. We dream of a time when man will live in the positive knowledge of the unerring accuracy of moral and spiritual laws. We dream of a time when our lodges will be a place of peace and harmony, of brotherly love and truth. We are taught to symbolically use the trowel to spread the cement of brotherly love and affection — that cement which unites us into a body of friends and brothers among whom no contention should ever exist. We dream of a time when the Golden Rule will not be merely a phrase we utter, but a motto by which all Masons live. We dream that the moral and spiritual lessons contained in our ritual will be illustrated by all who wear an apron. We dream of a time when men will take to heart those three great obligations they so solemnly swore on bended knee to exemplify and to live by.

As we dream we work, and as we work we hope, and as we hope we pray that the Great Masonic Dream will come true. It can come true, but only when we realize that every time we behave in an unMasonic manner, we keep that dream from becoming a reality. Our dream slips from our grasp when egos get in the way, when unkind words are said, when unMasonic acts are committed, or when our conduct cannot be measured by the Golden Rule.

Not until the day, if ever, when we become convinced that the moral virtues that Masonry teaches are the answer for universal Brotherhood will we realize our dream. But what a dream!¹³

And so, my brethren, I leave you with this closing thought: Freemasonry is an ideal we all strive for. The closer we come to achieving that ideal, the better we experience, enjoy and cherish the precepts upon which freemasonry is founded. Freemasonry is a wonderful institution, but it can only give us satisfaction and delight when we all adhere to its precepts without deviation.

I conclude with an excerpt from the book *Why Did Joseph Smith Become a Mason?* by W. John Walsh:

Today, the more than four million Freemasons around the world come from virtually every occupation and profession. Within the Fraternity however, they all meet as equals. They come from diverse political ideologies, but they meet as friends. They come from virtually every religious belief, but they all believe in one God.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Freemasonry has been: how so many men, from so many different walks of life, can meet together in peace, never have political or religious debates, always conduct their affairs in harmony and friendship, and call each other "Brother!"¹⁴

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