

“Who are the Freemasons” Video Presentation Guide

My Brother,

This video has been produced to assist you in making presentations to groups of men or individuals who are interested in our Masonic fraternity, its history, values, and relevance in modern times. Many of these men may be curious for intellectual reasons and others may be genuinely interested in becoming part of our Masonic family. This guide should allow you to be able to introduce the video, present it to a group of men, and engage in a productive and informative discussion addressing questions and concerns that may arise.

This video can be used for presentations in the community to men's clubs, church groups, civic organizations, and may be used in a Lodge for an education program, family night, or friendship night. There is nothing in this video that can be considered "secret."

Fraternally,

Grand Lodge Education Committee

Summary of Video: The video specifically focuses on several important aspects of our fraternity. The brotherhood we all enjoy, the fact that the fraternity forms an extended family, and that we have a goal of promoting moral improvement to help "good men" become "better men."

It provides a brief history of our fraternity focusing on the fact that we are living the ideals put forth in the enlightenment and that Masonic values have had an important impact on American history. These values are evident in many of our founding documents.

It discusses the benefits of participating in the modern practice of Freemasonry which provides us with social outlets, mentors, personal connections, assistance and support from trusted individuals, as well as lifelong friends. It introduces our core Tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth and discusses how Freemasonry can teach us important lessons to become better men, better members of our family, and better citizens in our community.

It provides a brief overview of the structure of our three degrees and emphasizes that we learn through rituals. It points out that there are other appendent bodies that provide other experiences including charitable activities, philanthropic activities, and an opportunity to explore the Masonic fraternity in greater depth.

Presenting the Video

Introduction: This video should be introduced with an introduction of yourself and of your purpose. A sample paragraph is included below.

Sample introduction:

"I would like to thank you for inviting me to come to talk to you about modern Freemasonry. My name is ***** and I have been involved with Freemasonry for several years. What initially attracted me to Freemasonry was *****(talk about some of the things that attracted you to the fraternity) *****. I have found it to be a positive experience because of *****(list some of the highlights of your experiences as a Freemason) *****.

I realize that many of you may be curious about Freemasonry and I hope that this short video will help you understand a bit more about our fraternity."

Show the Video: The video should be shown in a manner where the screen is clearly visible without glare or distraction yet the room lights are bright enough to feel comfortable so no one feels isolated. The volume should be at a comfortable level where everything can be clearly heard without distortion or difficulty.

Following the video, it is important that you be able to discuss the points that were made and which are summarized above. It is also important that you feel comfortable entertaining questions about the fraternity and be prepared to answer them. (See frequently asked questions below)

Closing: In closing, you can direct those with additional questions or seeking additional information to the website of the Grand Lodge of Ohio which is www.freemason.com. Please encourage those with specific questions to ask them individually as many may not be comfortable bringing them up in a group or public setting.

Frequently Asked Questions.

Below are several important questions or topics that are likely to come up with suggestions about information to address them appropriately. For further information, I encourage you to read the Grand Lodge of Ohio publication "Preparing the Ashlar, a Member's Guide" which provides additional information on these topics as well as on other interesting subjects about the details of Lodge operation.

Isn't masonry a religion? Religions define a "path to salvation" and are focused on the status of the human soul and its place in eternity. Freemasonry is a fraternity focused on promoting individuals behaving admirably in their day-to-day lives, building close, trusting, and supportive relationships, and supporting their values. As Freemasonry does not deal with salvation or the status of the human soul, it is not a religion. Freemasonry does share and promote many values that are common with most religions such as "do unto others" and other fundamental truths of civilized human living.

Freemasonry does insist that each man believed in a single, perfect God generally referred to as the Great Architect of the Universe. This term is chosen because of its connection to the building trades as the source of our symbols and metaphors for teaching our values and lessons.

Freemasonry encourages each man to embrace and actively participate in his own religion and its practices. We promote tolerance for various differences in religious practices recognizing that we ultimately have more in common than we have differences. Our teachings and discussions in Lodge focus on those actions and beliefs that unite us for the common purpose of improving ourselves and the world around us.

Our ceremonies and rituals do expressly require you to declare a belief in God as the Great Architect of the Universe. The Holy Bible or other Volume of Sacred Law is always opened and at the center of our Lodge on the altar, and prayers are used in every meeting for various purposes recognizing that our connection with God or the Great Architect of the Universe is critical for any endeavor to be successful.

But what about terms like "Temple," "Worshipful," and so on? Labor unions meet in a Labor Temple. A museum may be called the Temple of Fine Arts. This does not mean that they are religious institutions. The same is true of Freemasonry. Masonic buildings are also called Lodge Halls and Masonic Centers as well as Masonic Temples. Some Scottish Rite buildings are called "Cathedrals," but that is from a Greek word meaning "chair," and referring to the seat of authority of any sort.

The term "worshipful" stems from 18th century English usage, when Freemasonry in its present form was being organized. The term has nothing to do with religious worship but is an old synonym for "honorable" or "respected." Check any good dictionary!

Similarly, Freemasons engage in group prayer and have a chaplain, just as do the armed services and the houses of Congress. That does not make Masonry into a religion.

Why do certain fundamentalist groups oppose Freemasonry? Mostly out of ignorance and misinformation, although possibly out of fear of competition for time and attention with the church (churches have been suffering the same loss of active membership over the past few decades as has Freemasonry). Ignorance of Masonry allows misinformation to spread. For example, it is claimed that Freemasonry has a "plan of salvation" that is in opposition to that of the Christian Church. Simply not true; nothing in any of the Masonic degrees refers to salvation.

Isn't Freemasonry racist? There has never been anything in the philosophy, teaching, or the values of Freemasonry that supported any discrimination or exclusion based upon race, religion, or other unrelated factors. Although there have been times in the past when matters of race and religion have divided the fraternity in various ways, we are endeavoring to remove these stains of society from the practices of Freemasonry in today's Lodges. Administrative differences separating two important groups in Ohio were removed in 1995 when mutual recognition was established between the Grand Lodge of Ohio and the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Ohio.

Isn't Freemasonry a secret society? Definitely not. A secret society conceals its existence, membership, and purposes. Freemasons proudly wear their rings and pins, identify their buildings, and our meeting times are often posted around the community.

We are a society or organization that has secrets. We do keep some things secret for three primary reasons. One purpose of the secrets are symbolical as they connect us with our ancient brothers of the operative or working trades. Secrets also serve to assist us in identifying true Brothers of the Craft from those who have merely purchased jewelry in an attempt to gain what ever benefits they perceive to be available.

Lastly, Freemasons are, above all else, men who keep their word. Each of us has pledged to keep certain things secret and to share these secrets would be to violate our pledge, a truly dishonorable action. Thus, keeping secrets is as much an act of honor and commitment to our word as it is protecting truly valuable pieces of information.

Meetings are also closed for the purposes of keeping our internal business within the organization much like many organizations have private meetings. Our purposes, ideals, goals, and values are things of which we are rightfully proud and will freely share with anyone.

Why do Masons insult non-Masons as being profane? Again, this is a misunderstanding over the use of archaic language. The word "profane" comes from two Latin words, "pro," meaning "before," and "fanum," meaning "temple." In earlier usage, "profane" had a more literal meaning of "outside the temple." It was simply an antonym for the term "sacred," just as "secular" still is.

In more recent usage, dating from well after the language of Masonry became fixed, the term "profane" was most often coupled with the term "language," to denote speech which would not have been uttered inside a temple or other sacred precincts. Gradually, this became the most common application of "profane" and, in the popular mind, became its only meaning. "Profane" became a synonym for swearing, cursing, and blasphemy, all of which are now called "profanity."

But when a Mason refers to "profanes" or the "profane" world, he means only those who are not initiated into Masonry and thus must remain "outside the temple." Nothing more; no insult is intended.

Why do Masons want to hoodwink people? This is a misunderstanding arising from the use of archaic language in Masonry when modern meanings are different from what they were a couple of centuries ago.

"Hoodwink" comes from two words, "hood," meaning to cover, when used as a verb, and "wink," an archaic term for the eye. Thus, "to hoodwink" means to cover the eyes, originally. At the time when this word was adopted by Freemasonry in the early 18th century if not before, this was its primary meaning.

Since that time, it has come to be synonymous with the phrase "pull the wool over the eyes," which is to say "to deceive." The word, however, is just as often used as a noun in Masonry as a verb, and when used as a verb is accompanied by the action of using a blindfold, the modern term for a hoodwink, making its meaning clear at the time.

The word "hoodwink" has only one meaning in a Masonic context, and that is "blindfold."

What about "blood oaths" and hideous penalties of the degrees? It is true that Masons must take solemn obligations to be faithful to the principles of Masonry, and their very nature and seriousness implies that there should be

penalties. However, the language of these obligations makes it clear that the penalties are not actually inflicted by the Lodge or any body of Masonry but are expressions of how disgraced and contemptible one should feel for violating such an obligation. In some jurisdictions, the candidate is told that the penalties are of "ancient origin and symbolic only." Later degrees make this even more apparent, even if the actual information is not specifically addressed to the candidate. But the true penalties for violation of the laws of Masonry are three only: Admonition (or reprimand), suspension, or expulsion. Stories about Masons being maimed or murdered for violation of their oaths are just that: fiction. Not one single instance can be documented, despite the many attempts by the enemies of Masonry to promote this slander.

What are some of the things Freemasons do? Freemasons have three general types of activities that they pursue. First is the portrayal of our ritual degree work to teach new candidates, through symbolism, experiences, and metaphorical lectures the important values we hope to promote. Second is our social activities that vary from Lodge to Lodge. For example, the Lodge I belong to often has *****(discuss activities of your Lodge that are fun and social)*****.

Third is our contributions to the community which take many forms. On a national level, Freemasons, through the Shriners, support hospitals for children with orthopedic problems and those who have suffered serious burns. On a state level, the Grand Lodge of Ohio supports the State games of Ohio Special Olympics contributing over \$200,000 annually. On a local level, lodges often provides scholarships to local youth, and engage in other activities such as *****(discuss activities of your Lodge that are charitable)*****. It has been estimated that Freemasons, through their charitable work in various organizations, donate several million dollars every day to charitable causes. Through these contributions to our community, we are able to put our Masonic values to work to the betterment of all.

Are there any women Freemasons? Freemasonry is a Fraternity and, as such, specifically excludes women. This is not because we believe women are not able to benefit from the kinds of experiences that we have to offer or that they are incapable of sharing in the values we purport.

We remain a fraternity partly because of tradition. The operative trades were clearly dominated by men in medieval times. This is also done because of the unique benefits available from activities that center around groups exclusively of one gender.

This is not to say we do not value the importance of family. Many lodges have family activities and include wives, significant others, and other family members in activities of the Lodge. In fact, we highly encourage Freemasons to be active in and to honor their families through the wise use of time. There are organizations

related to Freemasonry specifically for women that are based on Masonic values and many of our wives, sisters, daughters, and other female relatives are active in these organizations.

To further promote Masonic values in our families, several youth organizations have been formed by the fraternity to participate in events, activities, and symbolic ritual work designed to promote Masonic values. These organizations are available for both young men and young women.

Don't Masons get "a free pass" if they run into trouble with the police or get "special deals" with many businesses? Any Mason who is following his obligations and living the life described in our ritual will never have to worry about needing "a free pass" with the police.

It is true we are pledged to help and assist brothers and me. However, this does not require us to give anyone "special treatment." Instead, we are pledged to provide needed assistance to worthy individuals as a way of expressing our Masonic values. There are no assurances or promises of any tangible or monetary benefits associated with membership in our fraternity.

Are there secret Masonic symbols on the dollar bill? Some commentators have claimed that there are Masonic symbols on the US \$1 bill, and that they were put there by the Masonic president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt to show that the country had been taken over by Masons.

Well, perhaps the symbols are Masonic, but the material on the dollar bill dates from the late 1700s, not Roosevelt's term. The two circled objects on the back of the bill are the two sides of the Great Seal of the United States. It is said that Ben Franklin, a Mason, had some influence in the design.

What are these purported Masonic symbols? One of them that is claimed to be Masonic is the representation of an eye and an unfinished pyramid. The All-Seeing Eye of Deity is certainly mentioned in Freemasonry, but that concept dates back to the Bible, at least. An unfinished pyramid symbolizes that the work of nation building is not completed, but the pyramid is not a particularly Masonic symbol; any unfinished building would have done. Some say that there is an owl in the engravings in one corner of the bill, but that is a product of an overactive imagination. The owl is also not a Masonic symbol.

Why hasn't anybody asked me about joining? Freemasons are prohibited from "recruiting" for membership. It is our hope that as men learn about our fraternity, the values we promote, and observe the actions of its members, they will form a favorable opinion and inquire on their own about the requirements of membership.

In Ohio, the requirements are that you be a resident of Ohio who is at least 19 years old, of good moral character, and profess a belief in God. He must then ask a member of an existing Lodge for a petition to join. That brother will then discuss with you at greater length specific requirements and the process that is likely to follow.