

Some of the Masonic customs involved may seem unusual to non-members. For example, the presiding officer may wear a hat while doing his part in the service; the Lodge members may place sprigs of evergreen on the casket, and a small white leather apron may be placed in or on the casket. The hat is worn because it is Masonic custom for the presiding officer to have his head covered while officiating. (In some states, the hat is not worn at a funeral because it seems strange to non-Masons attending the service.) To Masons, the sprig of evergreen is a symbol of immortality. The white leather apron, called a "Lambskin," is the badge of a Mason and it is his to wear, even in death. He wore that apron when he became a Mason. It has symbolic allusions to God's care which is provided for us, but which we cannot supply to ourselves.

#### **For More Information.....**

Masonry teaches that its members are never to interfere with our obligations to God, our country, our neighbors, our families, or ourselves. It is our desire that there never be any conflict with the Church, Temple, Synagogue, Mosque, or other religious group to which our Brothers belong, in life and in death.

Members of the clergy are encouraged to contact the local lodge, before the need for a particular service arises, to become better acquainted with the Masonic Fraternity and its customs at the funeral services of its members. A representative of the Lodge -- the Master or the Secretary -- would be happy to explain the Masonic service used by the lodge, and discuss Masonic funerals at greater length.

To contact someone who can discuss this subject with you at greater length, telephone and ask for a consultation:

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*An Open Letter Concerning . . .*

# Masonic Funeral Services



The following material has been written for clergy of all faiths concerning Masonic “funeral services.” It was written to encourage and foster a better understanding between the Masonic Fraternity and religious leaders who may not be members of a Masonic Lodge.

Other fraternal groups, some veterans’ organizations and various other societies have funeral services, but this letter is primarily concerned with those of the Masonic Fraternity. To start, it may be well to point out that Freemasonry is *not* a religion, although it is religious in nature. The Fraternity does not believe itself to be an instrument of God for the purpose of reconciling men to Himself, but it does teach that men need such reconciliation and should seek it through loyal involvement with the religious faith of their preference. The lodge has no “plan of salvation” or way of atonement to offer its members. Rather, it teaches the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God. The Masonic funeral service is an expression of fraternal affection for the deceased Brother and his family.

### **Groups Providing Masonic Services**

Masonry includes many appendant groups, bodies, “rites,” orders and auxiliary organizations. The basic unit is the Lodge, often called the “Blue Lodge.” It is this group which, most often, will conduct the Masonic funeral service, because every Mason belongs to such a Lodge, whether or not he belongs to any other bodies in Masonry. However, on occasion, one of these other bodies will hold a funeral service. For example, the Order of the Eastern Star, which includes both men and women, sometimes provides funeral services, usually for its female members.

Except for a few groups, such as the Knights Templar, Masonic bodies are composed of individuals who profess different religions. The Masonic Fraternity requires only that its members believe in God. Some Masons are Christian, some Jews, some

Muslim, Hindus, Buddhists, and some are of other faiths. Therefore, most Masonic funeral services are intended to be suitable for persons of any faith. The Knights Templar are all Christians, and their funeral service is specifically Christian in nature.

### **Requesting a Masonic Service**

No one is ever obligated to have a Masonic funeral service. It is not a requirement of the Fraternity that a member have his funeral service conducted, either in whole or in part, by his Masonic Lodge. Any member who was in good standing at the time of his death may have a Masonic funeral service. Masonic participation in the service, other than the attendance of individual Lodge members as a part of the general congregation, is always by request *to* the Fraternity, through the last wishes of the brother, or at the request of his family.

### **Participation in the Religious Service**

Masonic involvement in a funeral may range from conducting the entire service to simply attending in a body while someone else conducts the service. Different religious groups have differing requirements and regulations concerning funerals and Masons are taught to respect the convictions of all clergy involved. Freemasonry has no wish to displace or hinder any Minister of God in the pastoral care of his charge. If the Fraternity is asked to participate in a funeral, it desires to cooperate with the clergy in any way possible.

It is the prerogative of the minister in pastoral relation to the family to suggest the type of involvement that is proper and helpful in a specific situation. In general, the Lodge will do as much or as little as the clergy and the family wish, and it is the minister’s right and duty to guide the family in the requirements of the faith of the deceased brother, and explain what portions of a joint service should be the clergy’s responsibility.

When Masonic participation is requested, it is suggested that the presiding officer of the Masonic group contact any clergy who are going to serve as quickly as possible, well before the hour of the service. In most cases, this contact will be made by the “Worshipful Master” of the Blue Lodge asked to conduct the Masonic portion of the service. If the minister is uncertain about what the Lodge intends to do, it is quite appropriate for him/her to contact the Master of the Lodge and suggest that the two of them get together to discuss how the service is to be held. Similarly, the “Worthy Matron” of the Eastern Star Chapter, or the “Eminent Commander” of the Knights Templar would be happy to consult with the presiding clergy when one of their groups is requested to participate in the funeral service.

When the Masonic observance is to be a part of the funeral service, it may make the service longer than usual. If the clergy has concerns in this regard, he is encouraged to discuss his/her feelings and offer suggestions and direction to the Masonic representative.

### **The Masonic Services Being Separate**

In some cases, the Masonic Service is observed apart from the religious event commending the deceased to God’s care. Often, this service is held the evening before the funeral. Sometimes the Lodge conducts the graveside services, and sometimes the Lodge provides a floral emblem and the pallbearers. Whatever the Lodge does, it desires to cooperate with the family and the pastor of the deceased in every way.

### **Content of a Masonic Service**

There is no single Masonic Funeral Service. Some Grand Lodges (the statewide organization) have a prescribed service. Others provide their subordinate lodges with several services to choose from.