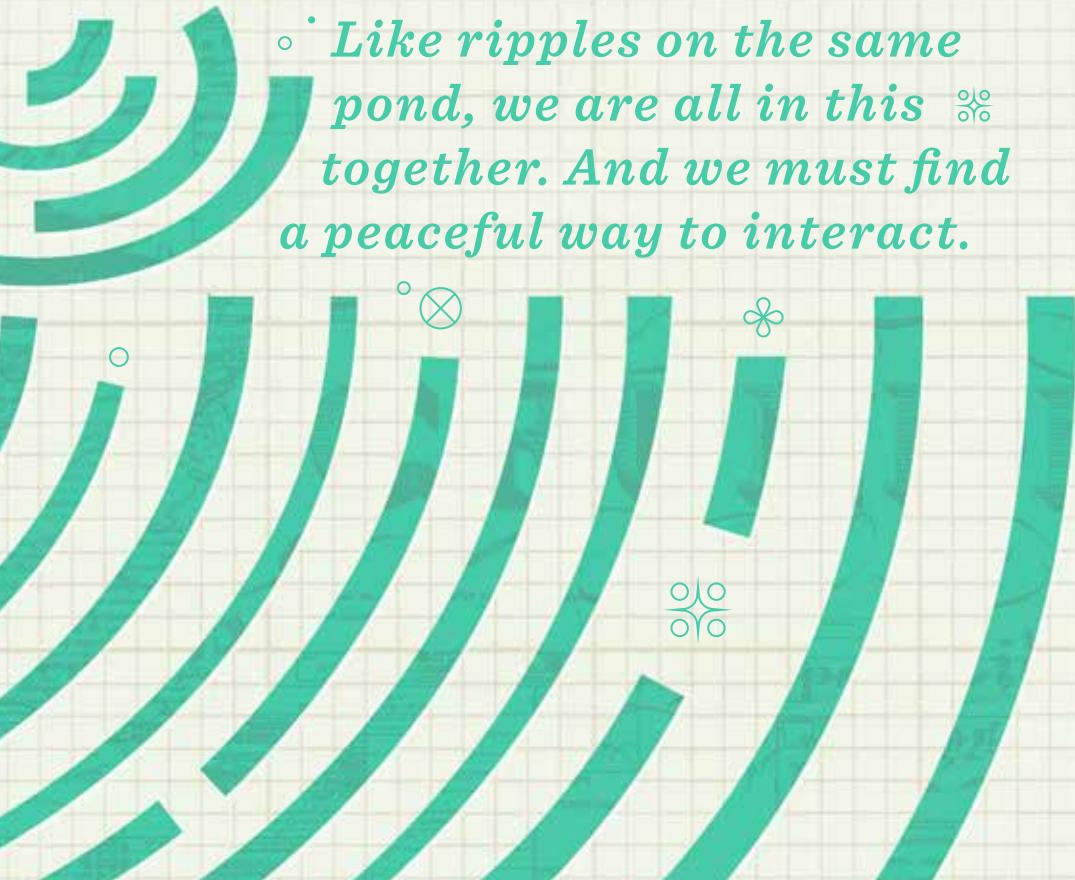


CALIFORNIA

FREEMASON

The
MASONIC *for* MODEL PEACE

*Lessons on the complicated
issue of religious tolerance*



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Russell E. Charvonia, Grand Master



The Beauty and Harmony of Freemasonry

To become a brother Mason in California, it is necessary that each candidate express his belief in a Supreme Being. We do not question his expressed belief, or insist that it agree with our own. Such is not the case throughout the world. In some jurisdictions, atheists are allowed, perhaps even encouraged, to become Masons.

So why is this expression of belief so important to us in the United States, particularly in California? The obvious reason to me is that it provides a certain bond between us, as friends and as brothers – a bond that is fundamental and more important than almost any other we could share. But its value may be even greater than this: Our requirement of an expression of belief, without insisting on a particular belief, naturally engenders tolerance and acceptance of beliefs that are different from our own. We at once gain a common bond, while encouraging individuality and freedom of thought.

This epitomizes the true beauty of our craft.

In May, many of us will travel to the Holy Land, the birthplace of the three Abrahamic religions, where religious tolerance is embraced by some and rejected by others. We will have the

opportunity to sit in lodge with Muslims, Christians, and Jews, where for some 90 minutes, we will experience blessed harmony and true Masonic values, while outside the lodge room differences over religious beliefs are often divisive and destructive. My dream is that we can help extend this harmony beyond the confines of lodge walls.

Our world needs what Masonry has to offer. Intolerance and incivility have become so prevalent and habitual that they are deteriorating our moral fabric. As Masons, we hold dear our guiding values and principles, share a common moral code, and make use of our allegorical working tools to demonstrate to our fellow citizens the proper way to treat one another. Imagine a world where all people would not only tolerate others' differences, but where we would actually embrace and appreciate those distinctions. Consider for a moment how much each of us can personally grow if we allow curiosity and a thirst for knowledge to replace cynicism and narrow-mindedness.

Now is the time for us to put our Masonic values to work for the betterment of society. My sense is that the world is ready for our message and teachings. I believe it is incumbent upon us to fulfill our duty to society and the next generation. For it may be that it is only by improving ourselves and becoming more tolerant and accepting of those who have different beliefs from our own that we will be able to repair our world. ♦

NAILED INTO A PICKLE BARREL

A FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE GAVE
ONE MAN THE STRENGTH TO MAKE
A STAND FAR AHEAD OF ITS TIME

by John L. Cooper III, Past Grand Master

On March 12, 1683, a baby was born to a Protestant minister and his wife in the city of La Rochelle, France. That baby grew up to be the third grand master of the Premier Grand Lodge of England in 1719, and he has often been called “the father of speculative Freemasonry.” This is his story.

On April 13, 1598, King Henry IV of France published the Edict of Nantes, by which tolerance was granted to all Christian religions in the country. The Edict remained law until October 1685, when a failing King Louis XIV repealed it. The repeal of the Edict of Nantes made the Roman Catholic Church the only legitimate church in France, and made it thenceforth illegal to be a Protestant. Protestants in France were called “Huguenots,” and the Huguenots were required either to convert to the Roman Catholic faith or leave the country. The one catch was that if they chose to leave, they could not take their children with them.

John Desaguliers’ father, a minister of the Huguenot Church, fled to England. Shortly thereafter, he managed to get his wife out of the country, as well as his son, 7-year-old John Theophilus Desaguliers, by having the boy nailed into a pickle barrel and put aboard a ship bound for England. While the boy arrived safely in England, there is no doubt that this event traumatized the young Desaguliers, who would never forget the horrible things that people did to one another in the name of religion.

Desaguliers grew up and followed his father into the ministry – except that he became a priest in the Church of England, the dominant faith of his new home. Desaguliers was also



HUGUENOTS
WERE REQUIRED EITHER
TO CONVERT TO THE
ROMAN CATHOLIC FAITH
or leave the country.



Continued next page

MASONIC EDUCATION

devoted to education and science. He joined the Royal Society, England's premier scientific organization, and eventually became its curator of experiments. His friendship with men of such stature as Isaac Newton brought him into contact with the best minds of the day and no doubt also attracted him to Freemasonry, in which many of his Royal Society friends were involved. Desaguliers' progress within Freemasonry was rapid, and in 1719 he was elected grand master of the Premier Grand Lodge.

Desaguliers and his friends in the new Grand Lodge of England were firmly committed to religious tolerance and the acceptance of men of all faiths as Freemasons. This commitment is clearly set forth in the first constitution adopted by the Grand Lodge in 1723. Here is the statement written by Desaguliers' friend, Dr. James Anderson, a Presbyterian minister:

Concerning GOD and RELIGION.

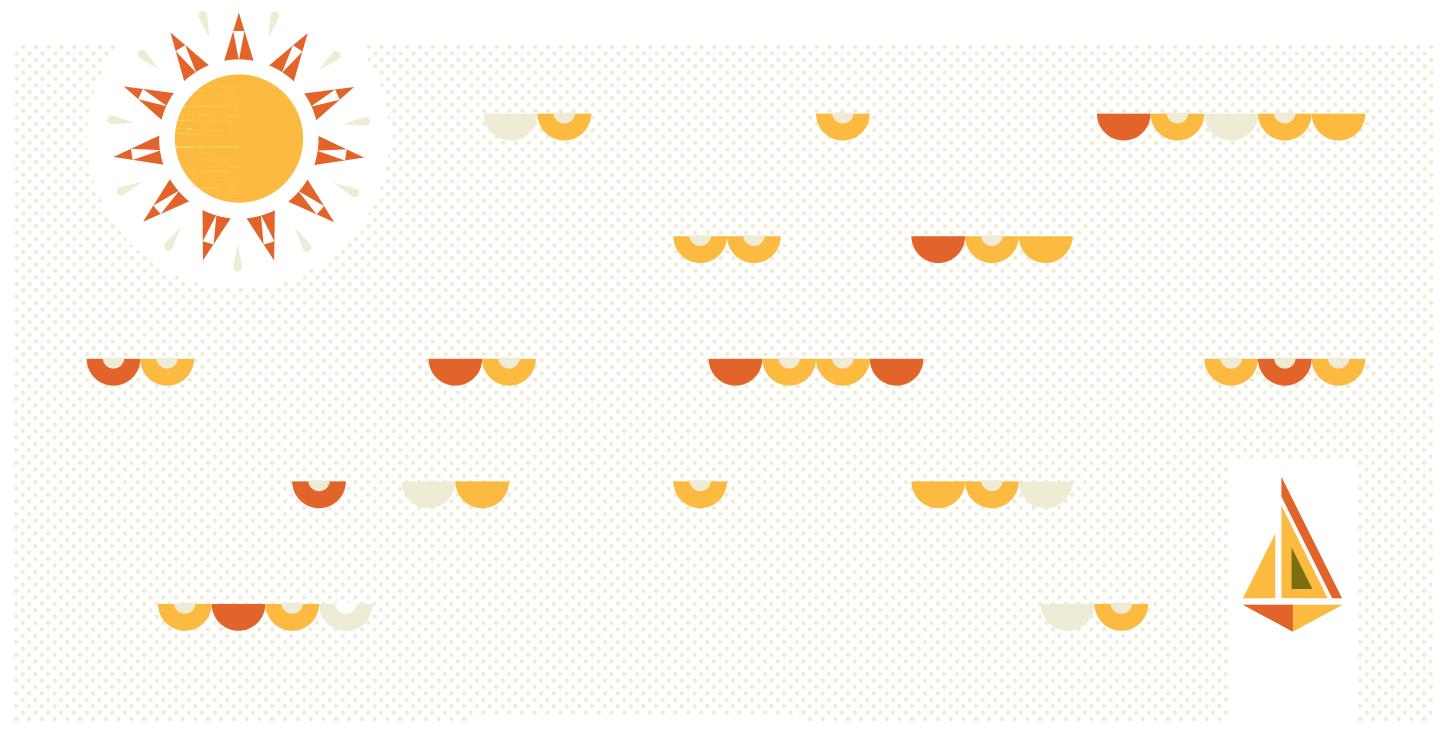
A Mason is oblig'd by his Tenure, to obey the moral Law; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid Atheist nor an irreligious Libertine. But though in ancient Times Masons were charg'd in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation,

whatever it was, yet 'tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves; that is, to be good Men and true, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguish'd; whereby Masonry becomes the Center of Union, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remain'd at a perpetual Distance.

This was a bold statement of tolerance for all faiths on the part of the new Grand Lodge of England. It was adopted at a time when there was religious discrimination even in England, although not as severe as that prevailing in France.

The year after Desaguliers was grand master, the Grand Lodge elected its first Roman Catholic grand master. In that same decade, the first Jews joined lodges in England. Freemasonry was taking a stand on religious tolerance that was far ahead of its time. And two of the strongest proponents of this policy were Desaguliers, a priest of the Church of England, and his close friend Anderson, a Presbyterian minister. They understood that forcing people to support a religious faith that is not their own is never right.

Desaguliers also had a personal reason to support such a policy. After all, nailing a 7-year-old boy into a barrel to help him escape religious persecution would more than likely make a deep and lasting impression. It is no wonder that he teamed up with his friend Anderson to write what has become a foundational stone of Freemasonry to this day: the first Charge of 1723. Tolerance of all religious beliefs was, and is, a fundamental principle of Freemasonry. And it all may have started in a pickle barrel. ♦



FACES OF MASONRY

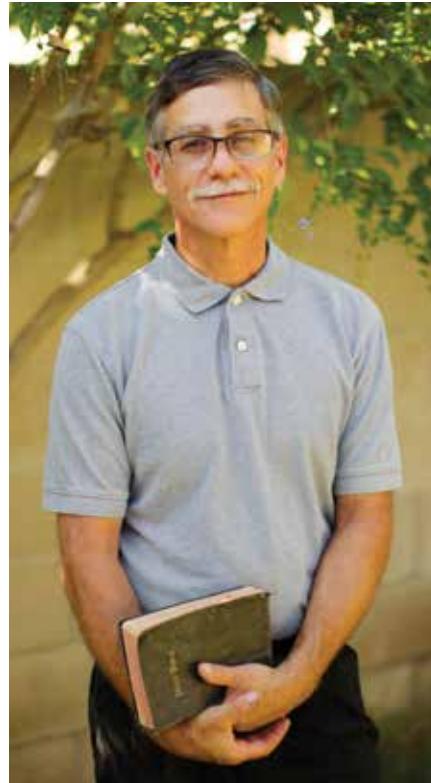
MEET STEVEN BASS: ELECTRICIAN, MASON FOR 12 YEARS

by Michelle Simone

For Steven Bass, past master and chaplain of Veritas Lodge No. 855, Freemasonry is synonymous with heritage. He treasures the regalia his grandfather wore as eminent commander of the Ohio York Rite. And, a favorite memory is when, as master of Saddleback Laguna Lodge No. 672, he presented his father, then treasurer, with a 50-year pin. But while tradition led Bass to Freemasonry, its commitment to diversity has defined his Masonic journey.

Several years ago, Bass attended lodge with the Grand Lodge of Iran (in Exile) at Saddleback Laguna. The ritual was performed in Arabic, but Bass quickly realized that he 'got' it. Though the language was lost on him, the familiar symbolism shone through. It was a transformative moment.

"During an era that, for them, has been ridden with strife, these brothers joined together to form a new lodge," Bass says. "Watching them perform the ritual let me experience how we, as all Masons, are connected."



Soon afterwards, the chaplain position opened at Veritas Lodge and Bass stepped in, inspired by his Iranian brothers to unite members of various faiths. "I believe we can move beyond prejudices and stereotypes of any kind. When everyone sits around the table to discuss Masonry, it's a wonderful feeling."

In his own words

HOW DO YOU PROMOTE TOLERANCE WITHIN YOUR LODGE?

Acknowledging and respecting others' beliefs is the first step. The simple gesture of offering another volume of sacred law so that non-Christian brothers don't have to use the Bible is a good start.

AS CHAPLAIN, WHAT ADVICE DO YOU OFFER YOUR LODGE?

It's important to have a dialogue, for everyone to think beyond his own beliefs. And we must study the laws that are given to us – whichever religion we select – to truly absorb them in our hearts. Then, we carry them forward with us; not just knowing the rules but living them.

HOW IS MASONIC TOLERANCE A STARTING POINT FOR LARGER CHANGE?

Tolerance has a threshold of what we can endure when faced with adversity or differences. Acceptance is limitless. We move beyond prejudices and stereotypes by "practicing out of the lodge those great moral duties inculcated in it." ♦

MORAL ADVANTAGES OF GEOMETRY

IN THE FELLOW CRAFT DEGREE, THE LESSONS OF GEOMETRY PROVIDE NEW INSPIRATION

by R. Stephen Doan, Past Grand Master

In the master's lecture of the Fellow Craft degree, we are told that "Geometry, the first and noblest of sciences, [is]... the basis upon which the superstructure of Freemasonry is erected." By the time we reach this lecture in our Masonic journey, we probably have figured out that the medieval stonemasons from which our fraternity evolved used geometry to design and erect the structures on whose construction they were employed. At this point in the lecture, we expect additional instruction on the symbolism inherent in the builder's trade.

Instead, the master throws us a curve: He tells us that geometry can help us trace nature to her most concealed recesses in order to discover the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Great Architect of the Universe.

But what does Geometry have to do with God? Geometry is mathematics. Builders use it to resolve questions of shape, size, and relative position of the parts of a structure.

The master then states that through geometry we can "discover how the planets move in their respective orbits" and "account for the return of seasons, and the variety of scenes which each season displays to the discerning eye."

More confusion. How do the movements of planets and the change in seasons help us learn how to do good and be better men?

The master continues: "Numberless worlds are around us, all framed by the same Divine Artist, which roll through the vast expanse, and are all conducted by the same unerring law of nature."

What is the master's message? The reference to the "unerring law of nature" is an important hint. Geometry is a Masonic symbol but its symbolism goes far beyond the lessons of the

builder's trade. It is much more profound. Geometry relates to the nature of God, or the Supreme Being as we Masons refer to the divine. This symbolism is designed to help us better understand the nature of the divine and what is expected of a moral life.

Most of us would probably agree that God is not a person sitting on a Carnelian throne with wheels of fire. God has been referred to in that fashion, but we understand the reference to be symbolic. We cannot see God – we can only know God by what God does.

This is nature's role. The planets move predictably in their orbits, and seasons change in a repeating cycle. There are forces in nature, sometimes violent, which can disturb the predictability of life. Yet, all things return to a pattern we recognize. The world may change, but a certain balance or harmony always reemerges. Nature has a way of correcting the forces that disturb its predictability, and we can count on that.

Quantum physics helps the scientist understand the most elemental nature of our physical existence, and even at the subatomic level we find laws that cannot be violated. In them, Masons are invited to find equilibrium, harmony, and evidence that God exists. We are invited to find God by what God does.

How does geometry fit in? Geometry helps the astronomer predict the movement of planets. It helps the meteorologist predict the return of the seasons by charting the sun. Geometry helps the botanist find symmetry in plants. In other words,

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geometry proves that there is a repeating pattern in nature, and this is our evidence that God exists, as the creator and sustainer of that harmony. Geometry is therefore shorthand: It refers to the work of God and therefore God itself.

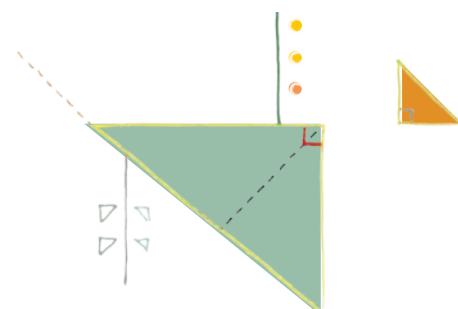
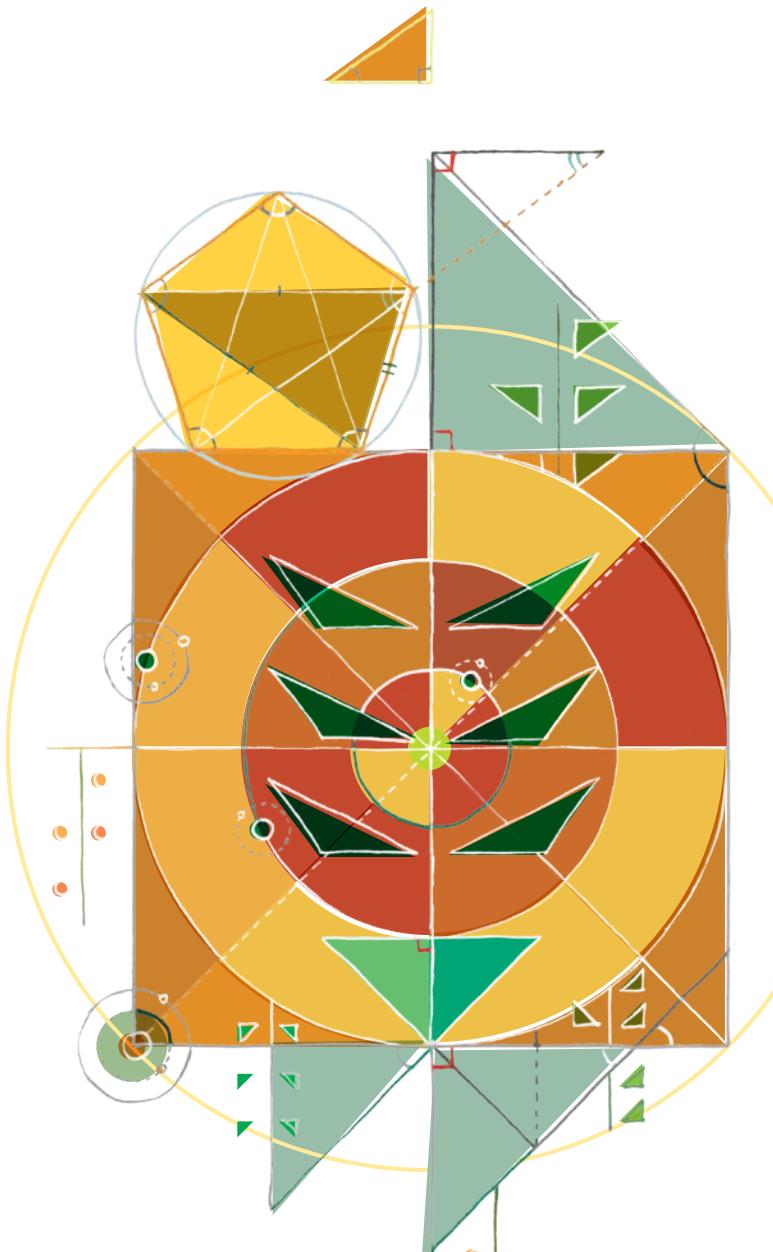
Understanding this relationship between geometry and God helps us understand not only what we need to do as Masons, but also who can become a Mason. We require an applicant for the degrees to affirm a belief in a Supreme Being. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, among other religions, include such a belief.

But geometry encourages us to take a broader view of God than is often found in the teachings of any specific religion. It encourages us to find the Supreme Being in the harmony of nature – that religion in which all men can agree, as Rev. James Anderson wrote in his Constitutions of 1723. It is only logical that a man who finds the Supreme Being in the harmony of nature can be a Mason, too.

GEOOMETRY proves that there is a repeating pattern in nature,

and this is our **EVIDENCE**
that GOD EXISTS.

Geometry is about morality, the values and principles of right conduct, because it gets to the root of what morality is: harmony. If God is about harmony, then we should be, too. ☙



THE SEEDS OF TOLERANCE

IN 18TH-CENTURY EUROPE AND BEYOND, FREEMASONRY STRUGGLED WITH CONFLICTING MORAL AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD TOLERANCE

by Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire

Pre-Enlightenment Europe was not a friendly place for those outside the majority. During the 18th century, two out of every three years was marked by war, revealing bloody divides between dueling Christian factions. Tolerance was perceived as a weakness – a failure by men and kings to bring others back to the “true faith.”

But as the Enlightenment dawned over the Western world, so did curiosity about other cultures. A new notion of what it meant to be a “citizen of the world” gained popularity, along with the idea of a global community. Within this atmosphere of cosmopolitanism, Freemasonry was created.

The 18th century went on to be a period in which the virtues of tolerance were learned throughout Europe, both in society at large and in Masonic lodges. It would prove to be a long, difficult learning process, punctuated by outbursts of intolerance.

A complicated “universality”

The founding text of Freemasonry, the 1723 Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of London, first defined the contours of a genuine universal spirit within the fraternity. Its first section, “concerning God and religion,” opened the brotherhood to all except the “stupid atheist” and “irreligious libertine.” From a practical standpoint, this accommodated the religious plurality of the British Islands, dominated by various forms of Christianity. But theoretically, it also opened the door for brothers of any religious belief, Christian or otherwise. It made it possible for a truly universal fraternity, united in values, if not beliefs.

In theory, then, the brethren were agreed on the issue of religious tolerance. But this was not so easily put into practice. Within Templar Masonry, Catholics, particularly in Italy, found it difficult to submit themselves to the authority of German Protestants. In Scandinavia, where false rumors were circulating about the King of Sweden possibly converting to Catholicism, Lutherans feared their Catholic brothers would try to bring them back into the bosom of Rome.

Masonry’s claim to universality also struggled to move beyond the frontiers of Western Christianity. Catholics and Protestants could socialize in 18th-century lodges, but Jewish and Muslim access to Freemasonry tested brotherly tolerance, as did the admission of men of color.

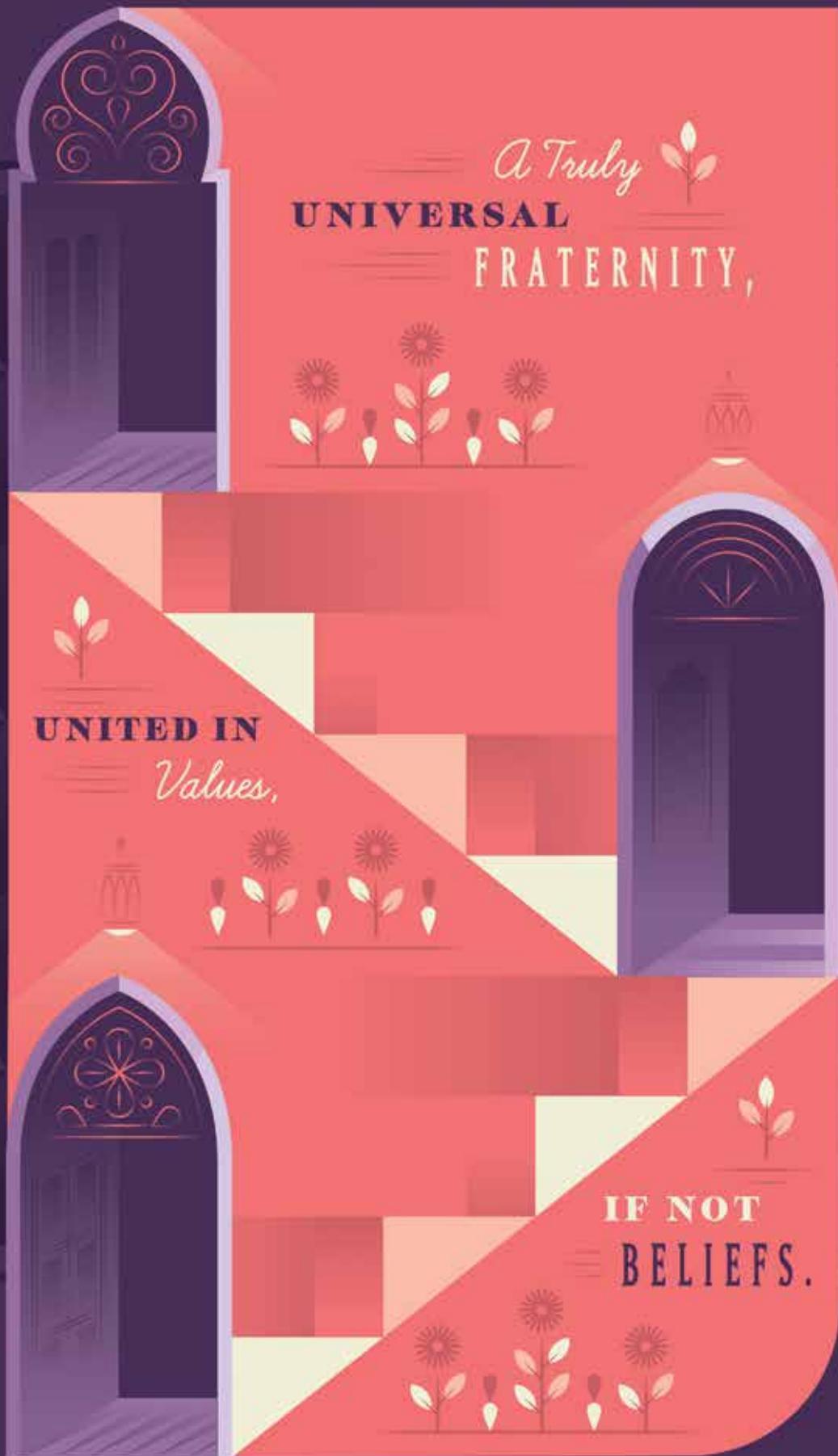
Acceptance and prejudice

The challenge was immense: In a society based on religious prejudice and slavery, was it possible to recognize such individuals as equals without plunging established order into chaos?

In continental Europe, granting Jews a high rank that carried Christian significance, like Sovereign Prince of Rosicrucian, triggered the wrath of Christian Freemasons. “Those who have the circumcision for baptism” were frequently excluded from lodges altogether.

In major European capitals far from the Mediterranean, Muslims were warmly welcomed in Masonic lodges and even

Continued next page



rescued from financial difficulties. In the mid-1780s, Mohamed Techeliby, a sea captain and privateer from Algiers, made a Masonic tour of Europe with a certificate from the English Lodge of Gibraltar. But in Mediterranean ports, where Barbary privateering was still a reality, it was nearly impossible for a Muslim to enter the brotherhood.

Enlightenment lodges of the main European capitals did not have major objections to accepting free men of color; they considered such members proof of progress of the spirit of tolerance and enlightenment. Active members of the famous Société des amis des Noirs, “Society of the Friends of the Blacks,” were Masons. The lodge Les Émules d’Hiram was made up of free men of color. But colonial lodges, such as those in the French Caribbean and the French territories of the Indian Ocean, were often violently opposed to it. When the French Caribbean lodge Les Cœurs Unis petitioned for a constitution in 1781, the powerful merchant lodge Saint-Jean d’Ecosse of Marseille wrote to the Grand Orient that the alliances of some of the members with free people of color was unbearable and a *casus belli* – an act worthy of war.

After the 18th century

As some lodges stumbled, others made strides. In the late 1800s, progressive lodges supported the Esperanto movement, which sought to create a universal language as an instrument of mutual understanding and sharing. With Masonic support, an annual international convention – the Congreso Universal de Esperanto – was created in 1905. Some lodges, especially in Spain and Latin America, still function today in Esperanto, including Vienna’s Universela Framasona Ligo and the Spanish lodge Afortunada.

As time went on, the fraternity grew more tolerant, and in many ways, so did the world outside it. But after World War

I, Masons faced new sources of persecution, from fascist powers in the Western world in World War II to those in the former Soviet Union until 1991; from Pinochet’s coup in Chile of 1973 to the Iranian revolution of 1979. Each political upheaval has prompted the exile of Freemasons to new lands.

By and large, the global fraternity has risen to welcome them. Russians and Mencheviks created Masonic lodges under the auspices of the Grand Lodge in Paris after October 1917. Chilean Freemasons in exile in France founded lodges under the protection of the Grand Lodge of France, and the Grand Lodge of Chile in exile was founded to join all exiled Chilean Masons in Europe. After Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979, a Grand Lodge of Iran in exile was organized with members in Paris, New York, Boston, and Washington, D.C. It is currently established in Los Angeles.

Each band of displaced Masons has served as a living reminder of the imperative of tolerance; each time they have been welcomed by brothers, as brothers, they prove its impact. The seeds of this attitude were planted in 18th-century European lodges. Although the seasons have been harsh, they continue to grow today. ♦

Editor’s note: Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire is a professor of history at the University of Nice and a fellow at the Institut Universitaire de France.

The Masonic Path to Religious Tolerance

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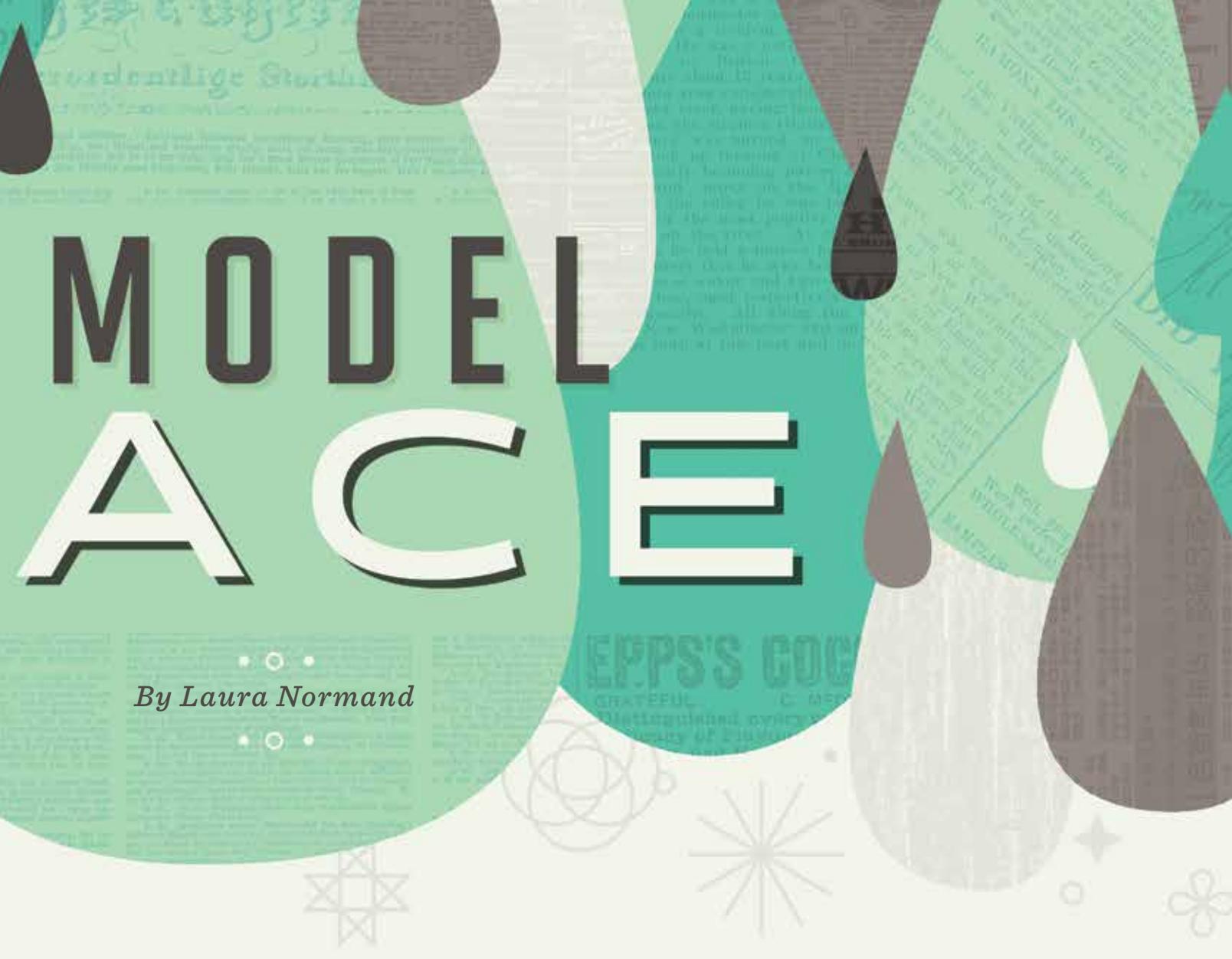
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EFORD'S

Racy Cady

Lessons on the complicated issue
of religious tolerance

Lessons on the complicated issue of religious tolerance



ACURIOUS THING HAPPENS WHEN TWO WAVES MEET. IMAGINE A POND AS A RAIN SHOWER BREAKS OVER IT. THE FIRST RAINDROP STRIKES THE WATER, AND A RIPPLE SPREADS ALONG THE SURFACE. A FEW FEET AWAY, ANOTHER RAINDROP STRIKES, AND A SECOND RIPPLE APPEARS AND GROWS OUTWARD. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE TWO SETS OF RIPPLES MEET?

You might assume they'll collide like billiard balls, scattering in all directions. We are accustomed to thinking that two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time (or at the very least, not comfortably – ask anyone who's tried to squeeze onto a packed subway car). But that's not what happens at all. In fact, waves can pass through each other and emerge intact. Our two ripples share a

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brief, amicable moment in space, and then each continues merrily on its way. The same thing happens if there are three sets of converging ripples; the same thing happens if there are four, five, or 50. None comes away weaker. None is bullied off its trajectory. The chance encounter does not compromise each one's unique path across the pond. Perhaps it just makes the journey a little less lonely.

The tolerance problem

Religious intolerance is, in Donald Morrison's words, "an enormous problem in today's world." Few in his field would argue. Morrison, a professor of philosophy and classical studies at Rice University, directs the Boniuk Institute for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance, founded in 2013.

"Religious intolerance is in the headlines every day," he says. "The militants of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq are committing violence against everyone who does not share their religious views, whether Muslim, Christian, or others. The violence of Boko Haram in Nigeria has a religious motivation. Here in the United States, anti-Semitism is still a problem. We have a strong tradition of religious freedom and religious tolerance in this country, but intolerant attitudes and behavior persist."

And none of this is new. From crusades to genocides, harassment to exclusion, history is darkened by examples of religious intolerance. Even within faiths, differing views lead to conflict. All too often, we seem to regard our beliefs as billiard balls, hasty to claim their space on some cosmic pool table.

Today, universities, non-profits, and communities are creating programs to untangle the knotty problem of religious intolerance, and to foster acceptance, understanding, and appreciation for different beliefs. From the Niagara Foundation, which hosts community programs, to Notre Dame's Kroc Institute, which offers a doctorate in international peace studies, the topic of religious tolerance is a priority. In Modesto, California, the school district introduced a requisite "world religion" class for ninth grade students in 2000, and the program remains well received by parents, students, and educational researchers. In Houston, Morrison's Boniuk Institute has developed a continuing education course for the community, "Religious Diversity and Understanding in Today's World," taught by professors of comparative religion, sociology, and philosophy.

That it takes a multidisciplinary team of experts to educate a willing community on how to begin studying differences – never mind reconciling them – underscores the complexity, and the fragility, of religious tolerance in the world today. Our reaction to differing beliefs changes from one part of the world to another, from one household to the next, from one side of the dinner table to the other. But one thing is universally true: Like ripples on the same pond, we are all in this together. And we must find a peaceful way to interact.

It is a mighty challenge, but every day there are success stories. For 300 years, the fraternity has been one of them.

Beyond tolerance

In "Morals and Dogma," a publication for Scottish Rite Freemasonry, Albert Pike wrote, "No man truly obeys the Masonic law who merely tolerates those whose religious opinions are opposed to his own. Every man's opinions are his own private property, and the rights of all men to maintain each his own are perfectly equal. Merely to tolerate, to bear with an opposing opinion, is to assume it to be heretical; and assert the right to persecute, if we would; and claim our toleration of it as a merit. The Mason's creed goes further than that. No man, it holds, has any right in any way to interfere with the religious belief of another."

The word tolerance is a bit limited in its dictionary definition, but in modern usage, and especially in the context of Masonic discussion, it takes on an expanded meaning. For the purposes of this article, let's agree that tolerance is not about merely putting up with another set of beliefs; it is about cultivating respect for the person who holds them. It is not about flaunting our own goodness and righteousness; it is about goodwill. It is about a generosity of spirit, and an earnest hope that there is a way for all of us to win. At its best, it is a sincere effort to accept others as they are. It is about being open to the possibility that they have their own wisdom to share, and resisting the impulse to feel threatened by it.

In his book, "For the Sake of Heaven and Earth," Rabbi Yitz Greenberg talks about living in a pluralist society such as the United States, in which people of different social classes, religions, and races live together but continue to maintain distinct traditions and interests. "Pluralism means more than accepting or even affirming the other," Greenberg writes. "It entails recognizing the blessings in the other's existence, because it balances one's own position and brings all of us closer to the ultimate goal. Even when we are right in our own position, the other who contradicts our position may be our corrective or our check against going to excess ... Pluralism is not relativism, for we hold on to our absolutes; however, we make room for others' as well."

Tolerance, in these contexts, is certainly not about ignoring differences or eradicating them. That oversimplifies the issue and minimizes everyone's faith. It's not even necessarily about trying to close the gap between one's own beliefs and someone else's. Rather, it's about building bridges over our disconnects. A bridge might be a cup of coffee and a conversation. Or it might be the Masonic lodge.

For faith, not theology

Freemasonry has been remarkably successful at building these bridges. With few exceptions, it accepts applicants of all faiths, with the sole requirement that they believe in a Supreme Being. (Globally, there are minor variations on that theme.) Many of Masonry's rituals and symbols are rooted in a Christian past, but since its modern origins in 1717, the worldwide fraternity has not promoted one religion over another. Applicants may take their obligations on the holy writings of their choice. Within the lodge, sectarian religious topics are off-limits — Masons may not proselytize. They have other work to do.

"Belief in God is faith; belief about God is theology. As freemasons we are interested in faith only and not in theology," reads a 1952 "Statement on Freemasonry and Religion," prepared by the Masonic Information Center of North America. "When Freemasonry accepts a Christian, or a Jew, or a Buddhist,

Continued next page

or a Mohammedan, it does not accept him as such, but accepts him as a man, worthy to be received into the masonic fraternity."

Of course, the fraternity has not always lived up to its own promises. Freemasonry is shaped by the societies in which it exists, and so the fraternity's spectrum of religious tolerance has varied by geography, by culture, and by the behavior of the individuals who comprise it.

Every jurisdiction around the Masonic world has had its challenges, but there has also been consistent, long-term progress. Here in California in the 19th century, there were lodges in San Francisco with only Jewish members, and even a Jewish Scottish Rite valley. In the generations since, those divisions have gradually disappeared.

In Utah, the Grand Lodge of Utah banned Latter-day Saints from joining in 1925, the result of religious tension within the organization. The ban, which had been supported by numerous American grand lodges, was only just rescinded in 1984. And, 2008 marked another indicator of progress: Glen Cook became Utah's first acknowledged Mormon grand master in a century. (In Utah, applicants disclose their religious preference during their preliminary investigation.)

"Our fraternity reflects the biases and prejudices of the culture in which it is located. This includes both racial discrimination and religious discrimination," Cook says. "The fraternity, to a great extent, has risen above that. We evolve as a people and as a culture. The fraternity reflects this evolution as well."

A Masonic model: The glue

Although individual Masons, lodges, and even entire jurisdictions may falter, religious tolerance remains a universal goal. Just how has Masonry gone about it, and why has it largely succeeded? How, as Cook puts it, has the fraternity risen above the biases and prejudices of its surrounding culture?

Perhaps the most succinct explanation is this: It focuses on those things that unite brothers and it deliberately avoids discussing those things that divide them – religion and politics, namely. But there's an important addendum here. Rather than muting or discounting differences between brothers, the fraternity uses symbols – deliberate in their vagueness – for each Mason to interpret through his own lens of faith. Masons do not check their individual beliefs at the door; they store their beliefs within the symbols of the craft, where they remain front and center.

Russell Charvonia was installed as California's grand master on October 12. "The shared belief in a Supreme Being is a very powerful metaphor," he says. "At the same time that Freemasonry binds us with similarities, it recognizes the importance of the individual to have his own belief." This distinction leads to discussions that are heartfelt and challenging, while roundly avoiding divisive arguments.

In Masonic lodges, "you don't hear conversations about Judaism as a religion, about Islam as a religion," says Allan Casalou, grand secretary. "But there is plenty of discussion about ideas that are foundational to different religions – charity, justice, and mercy; joy and friendship and love."

Brothers might use religious text to aid such conversations. Some might even give examples of religious practices. But "we don't talk about whether religions are right or wrong," says Casalou. "We talk about what we're supposed to learn from them."

The head, the heart, and the matter of trust

In their article “Higher Education and Reducing Prejudice,” researchers Victoria L. Guthrie, Patricia M. King, and Carolyn J. Palmer offer preliminary evidence that an individual’s tolerance for diversity is related to his or her ability for “reflective thinking,” the critical thinking process of analyzing, evaluating, and making judgments. As Casalou points out, Masonry makes a habit of this kind of complicated thinking, teaching brothers how to cultivate it over a lifetime. Masonry also turns the onus of tolerance on brothers themselves, leading its members on a lifelong quest for self-examination and self-improvement. It’s difficult to dismiss another’s beliefs outright when we must continually admit that we do not have all the answers ourselves. Humility and curiosity are byproducts of critical thinking. Perhaps they’re also precursors to peace.

“Some of the times I am most proud of who I am as a person is when I am able to change my stance on a topic based on what I learn from another person,” says Charvonia. “We all have developed biases and prejudices that influence how we think about and treat one another. It is very easy to become hardened in our attitudes toward other people. Masonry teaches us to subdue our passions so that we are able to take that extra moment to consider how we respond to each other.”

Masonry is a model for tolerance in a less cerebral way, too: genuine interaction. Friendships that begin in lodge extend outside of it. Brothers attend each other’s weddings and funerals. They comfort each other in times of grief. They counsel each other in times of uncertainty. They celebrate with each other in times of joy. They may incidentally learn each other’s religions through such experiences, but that’s not the point. Even if they can never identify the other’s religious preference, they feel a deep kinship – outside presumable differences in belief.

In the advancement of tolerance, human interaction is paramount. Brian Flanagan is an assistant professor of theology at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. He witnesses this



phenomenon every day among students in his theological inquiry class.

“If someone remains entirely unknown to you, it’s very easy to fill in that empty space with your own images, positive or negative – which are likely to be wrong,” he says. “Meeting a person, learning about their very particular story, finding out that they’re just as complex as you are – that’s what really breaks through any stereotypes or preconceived notions.”

Numerous studies suggest that insecurity, or the perception of threat from an outside group, is strongly related to intolerance. A college classroom like Flanagan’s can be a great example of a safe, accepting space where those perceived threats dissipate. So

Continued next page

can the Masonic lodge. Through its inclusive principles and shared experiences, its fraternal obligations and emphasis on fellowship, Freemasonry breaks down insecurities and breeds trust – in our ability to believe something without being ridiculed for it; in another's ability to believe something different and not harm us.

Brother by brother

Flanagan says that one of society's best bets for advancing religious tolerance is to promote common spaces where people can come together and speak to each other, as opposed to talking about each other.

"If you're going to reach the level of trust beyond politeness that is key for real dialogue, you need to make a real commitment to walk with, to abide with, your dialogue partners over a longer period of time," says Flanagan.

This echoes Charvonia: "If we are able to find sacred time inside the lodge to practice decorum and civility and build trust with each other, we can have those more difficult conversations outside the lodge."

Charvonia hopes Masons will use the skills they hone in lodge – finding things that unite them, engaging in meaningful conversations, learning to respectfully disagree – to advance religious tolerance outside lodge walls. Currently, the California fraternity is teaming up with the National Civility Center and other U.S. Masonic



jurisdictions to create resources for communities and families to build civility, and hopefully, religious tolerance with it.

But, like any great movement, religious tolerance begins with the individual. Glen Cook, Utah's past grand master, recalls the moment when he realized that his trust in his Masonic brothers was truly absolute: "A number of years ago our youngest son was comatose with meningoencephalitis," Cook says. "At the same time, our older son was being married in the temple of our faith. What does the parent do? With which son do the parents go? Our older son and his bride offered to postpone their wedding. We counseled them that we did not know where our youngest son's spirit was. Surely, we could be closer to him in the holy temple. Yet, we still wanted someone at his bedside in case the worst occurred. It was two past grand masters who undertook this difficult duty. I didn't know their religious faith then and I don't know it now. And I don't care. They were there to comfort our family."

Masonry's greatest priority is still to foster an attitude of tolerance and acceptance within its lodges. If the fraternity can lay this foundation among its own members and families, the world can build a path to peace upon it. ♦

A FEELING OF ACCEPTANCE

LOS CERRITOS LODGE NO. 674 BRIDGES DIFFERENCES THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

by Jay Kinney

When asked to characterize Los Cerritos Lodge No. 674, Secretary Jeffrey Schimsky shares a bit of its fascinating history: When the lodge was founded in 1929, there were more than a dozen lodges in the greater Long Beach area, but due to the cultural climate of the time, it was often hard for Jews to join a lodge. So some Jewish brothers in the area decided to establish an affinity lodge where they would be more welcomed.

The Ku Klux Klan was then active in Southern California and its members had recently staged a march through the Los Cerritos neighborhood of Long Beach. Thus, in an ironic gesture, the brethren of Los Cerritos Lodge decided to name their lodge "Los Cerritos," as a way of thumbing their noses at prejudice.

For much of its life, the lodge was known as a "Jewish lodge," with many of the most active players in the local Jewish community being members. However, according to Schimsky, by the time he joined in 2003, "Most of the older members' children weren't interested in joining and most of the newer guys weren't Jewish."

Bill Melanson is one of those newer brothers. He joined in 2006 and had been intrigued by Freemasonry since his youth. Los Cerritos was the lodge closest to his home.

"I went over there to visit and found a bunch of friendly guys who welcomed me in," Melanson notes. "I didn't even think about it being essentially a Jewish lodge. I was raised as a Christian, but what religion you are doesn't really come up in lodge."

Schimsky indicates that Los Cerritos has Catholics, Protestants, a Muslim, a Mormon, and an Armenian Christian

among its members. As he sees it, "We're all just celebrating the 'Big Man,' only with different names and words and sometimes different languages."

Melanson, who was master of the lodge in 2013, underscores that sentiment. "Other than some light-hearted joking, religion doesn't really come up. We're all brothers who share the same values." As an illustration of the lodge's open-minded approach, he recalls announcing committee appointments at the beginning of his year as master. One of the lodge's past masters was appointed director of Yiddish affairs – an office that was well received.

Dan Moran, who served as master from 2005–2006, credits the lodge's Jewish heritage with adding humor and a relaxed atmosphere to meetings and social occasions. Moran's father was Jewish, but his mother was Catholic, and he was raised with a foot in both traditions. Moran suggests that, "perhaps I understood the lodge's mix better than most."

"It's not about religion; it's about cultural heritage," says Moran. "Over the past decade, almost all of our older past masters have passed away, but we still try to maintain the lodge's cultural traditions." As one specific example, he notes, "The holy writing typically used in lodge is the Torah."

Los Cerritos' officer's coach, Victor Lindsey, can relate to Moran's dual experiences. Lindsey was raised Christian, but embraced Judaism when he married 24 years ago. He was drawn to Los Cerritos

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LODGE SPOTLIGHT

“We’re all just celebrating the ‘Big Man,’ only with different names and words and sometimes different languages.”

JEFFREY SCHIMSKY, SECRETARY, LOS CERRITOS LODGE NO. 674



LOS CERRITOS LODGE MEMBERS DEFUSE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THROUGH FAMILIARITY AND RESPECT
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BILL MELANSON, JEFF SCHIMSKY, DAN MORAN, AND VICTOR LINDSEY.

through his father-in-law, who had served there as master and candidate coach. Joining in 1995, Lindsey presided in the east in 2000. He has been with the lodge

long enough that some of the newer members now consider him an “old timer.”

Melanson estimates that an average of 20 members attend lodge. Due to its past investments, the lodge has a certain



financial security, but membership numbers continue to slip due to the older generation's passing. Still, "there are three men coming through the degrees this year, and another couple of applications," notes Melanson.

Lindsey, who works in computer programming and website development, notes, "There are a lot of techies in the lodge," and the average member age is beginning to skew younger.

Clearly, Los Cerritos is a lodge in transition, from older to younger and from mainly Jewish to a wider mix. Helping navigate the transition are members who see their varying backgrounds as opportunities to learn and share. Moran chuckles, for instance, as he notes that Melanson, a Christian, seemed to immediately embrace the lodge's Jewish aspects to the point that Melanson's nickname at the lodge is "Melansky." Schimsky adds, "Bill and I have become great friends."

Masonic tradition speaks of the craft bringing men together as friends "who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual

distance." At a time when religious differences around the world often feed wars and conflicts, the Masonic values of tolerance and brotherhood allow men of varying faiths to join together in harmony.

"Masonry allows what is uncommon about each of us to become common," Schimsky observes. Or to put it another way, cultural and religious differences that might otherwise be a source of suspicion or tension are defused through familiarity and respect.

Bill Melanson still speaks fondly of his early months at Los Cerritos, before he became a Master Mason. After dinner, when most brethren adjourned to the stated meeting, he would remain at a table with some of the older Jewish members who ate Kosher together, listening to them swap stories and acquaint him with lodge history. And so the bonds of brotherhood forged. ♦

LIGHT, EXPANDING

PRESSED BY CULTURAL FORCES,
IRANIAN AND CUBAN FREEMASONS
STILL FIND A WAY FORWARD

by James Lincoln Warren, PM

Brothers in the Grand Lodge of Iran (in Exile) show respect for diversity in a simple but moving tradition: In a degree ceremony, rather than a single holy book upon the altar, they stack five – representing the faiths of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Baha'i.

Even in the United States, where we benefit from the world's longest-lived liberal democracy, this is a poignant gesture. In nations where religious freedom is restricted, it is also courageous. It suggests the kind of thinking that sent the Grand Lodge of Iran into exile in the first place.

From Iran, persecution and tolerance

At the fraternity's height in Iran, there were 43 lodges and more than 1,000 Freemasons. But with the Islamic Revolution of 1978, Iran's laws were replaced with strict Islamic rule, and Masonry was declared illegal. By some accounts, more than 200 Masons were executed; many more imprisoned and had their property sequestered. A large number were purged from government offices and universities.





Many Masons fled for Europe, Canada, and the United States. In the 1980s, a group of past masters sought and received permission to continue operating the Grand Lodge of Iran in exile, sponsored by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. In 2009, the Grand Lodge of California authorized it to confer degrees in California, too.

Today, the Grand Lodge of Iran (in Exile) is headquartered in Los Angeles, and has lodges in Washington, D.C. and France, as well as in California. Back in Iran, religious tolerance still has a long way to go. Although the Iranian Constitution guarantees the rights of protected religious minorities to practice their faith, non-Shi'a Muslims encounter barriers to universities and employment and occasionally face police harassment. Freemasonry is still banned. But from their posts in exile, Iranian Masons continue to work toward the ideals that could bring them back home.

In 2013, the Grand Lodge of California interviewed the grand master of the Grand Lodge of Iran (in Exile), Ramin Bagherzadeh, for the video "The Holy Writings." When the candidate enters a lodge for the first time, Bagherzadeh says, "all the tools and all the signs that have so much meaning to us are meaningless.... The only thing we have in common with him is the belief in God."

And as proof, there are the holy books, stacked one upon the other on the lodge altar. In one sense, they are there to guide the master in his teachings and behavior, Bagherzadeh says, so you might expect

Continued next page

the book of the master's preference to be displayed first. However, in nearly every instance, the master lays the book of the candidate's faith on top. It is there to greet him, to bind him with his brothers, and to remind him that inside the Masonic lodge, his beliefs are welcome.

A complicated coexistence

Of course, Iranian Masons are not the only ones faced with the challenge of upholding Masonic values that may clash with that of their culture. Often throughout history, when totalitarian governments have suppressed religious freedom, they have also suppressed Masonry. But there is at least one surprising exception: Cuba. Freemasonry, and its message of religious tolerance and acceptance, has survived under the communist government of this tiny island nation.

Like Iran, the Cuban Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief; but also like Iran, the government has a history of restricting freedom of religion nonetheless, both in law and in practice. Religious persons encounter employment discrimination in certain fields, such as education. The government denies Internet access to many religious groups. Private houses of worship still experience government harassment and evictions.

And yet Freemasonry has never been banned. Perhaps it's a matter of patriotism: Many heroes of the Cuban resistance to Spain in the 19th century were famously Masons; officially, the government praises

Freemasonry for being associated with the noblest moments of Cuban history. Another theory refers to the failed assault on the Moncado Barracks by Fidel Castro against the Batista dictatorship in 1953. After the action, Batista ordered that Castro be found and executed without trial. The officer leading the unit that found Castro was a Master Mason named Lieutenant Pedro Sarría. Unwilling to commit murder, Sarría disobeyed the order and captured Castro alive, saving his life. After the 1959 revolution, Castro is said to have allowed the Grand Lodge of Cuba to continue to exist out of gratitude.

Whatever the reason, Freemasonry has continued to exist in Cuba, although it has contended with varying levels of government restriction. For many decades, the government prohibited the fraternity from participating in most public ceremonies. According to "Freemasons for Dummies" – a blog maintained by Christopher Hodapp, who authored a book by the same name – it wasn't until the fall of the Soviet Union that the Cuban government allowed the fraternity to charter its first new lodges since 1967. Today still, anything more than regular meetings requires government permission, and the publishing of Masonic books and pamphlets is severely limited.

In 1992, the Cuban government removed its requirement for members of the Communist Party to be atheists; along with other reforms, this has contributed to an expansion and greater acceptance of Cuban Masonry. By 2008 membership stood around 28,000, up from just 20,000 in the early 1980s. The Grand Lodge of Cuba today includes Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Santeros, and Abacua – a "cross-section of contemporary Cuban society," in the words of Jorge Luis Romeu, Ph.D., of Syracuse University. This wide constituency is unlike any other civil society organization inside Cuba today, writes Romeu.

And so, although pressed by the governmental and cultural forces around them, Iranian and Cuban Freemasons have found a way to continue to expand. Their resilience and courage are helping cast the fraternity's light into some of the darker corners of our present world. Hopefully, they are illuminating the way to a more tolerant future. ♦

KEEPING FAITH

AT MASONIC OUTREACH SERVICES,
FAITH IS A VITAL COMPONENT
OF LIFE AND OF HEALING - FOR
OUTREACH MANAGERS AND THE
CLIENTS THEY SERVE

by Michelle Simone

A prayer, a new beginning

It had been six months since the Hospice center closed, taking with it Yvonne Dolinka's livelihood, the most rewarding job of her life. She'd spent every day that week, and the weeks and months before it, trying to make a new plan and emailing her resume into the faceless vapor of the Internet. Only a few leads had surfaced and all were fruitless. She was exhausted, discouraged, and, with bills mounting, scared.

"It felt like the end of the road," Dolinka says. "So that night, as I said my prayers, I said, 'I surrender. I don't know what else to do – I've done everything I can and this is out of my hands.' I truly meant it; I put all of my trust in God. The next day, Masonic Outreach Services (MOS) called and offered me the job. It truly felt like a miracle. I had interviewed there months before and didn't even realize I was still being considered."

Seven months later, it is clear to Dolinka, now an MOS care manager, that her patience and faith were worth the wait. She finds herself fully vested in the values of Freemasonry, and is continually inspired by the staff at all levels.

"At other organizations where I've worked, people on the ground lived the mission, but the administration didn't," she says. "From the bottom to the top at the Masonic Homes, we all live our mission and stand behind our principles."

The bonds of faith

When Donna Karnes' husband passed away about 20 years ago, she knew she couldn't live on her own, but wasn't sure what was next. She couldn't imagine leaving her home in

Cambria and lively menagerie of wild turkey, deer, songbirds, and squirrels; the town where she'd lived for more than 31 years; or her Baptist church and its faith community that was the bedrock of her social and spiritual life.

When MOS came to Karnes' aid, her care manager, David Blood, knew the move would be a major transition. To help Karnes understand her options, Blood brought her to Union City to tour the Masonic Home. But although Karnes enjoyed the visit, she knew it wasn't the right fit. She needed to be close to Cambria.

"All of my oldest friends live in Cambria," she says. "We have a wonderful church family. Everyone is so supportive of everyone else. And my minister is so inspiring."

So, Blood located an assisted living facility in San Luis Obispo, just a short drive from Cambria. The complex is pet-friendly, so Karnes is kept company by her beloved poodle, Jackie Sugarfoot. And, every week, her 96 year-old-friend from church, "Papa John," visits for lunch. She receives the supportive services she needs, while maintaining her independence – and her treasured relationship with her church.

Though it's been several years since Karnes moved to San Luis Obispo, she continues to attend service in Cambria each Sunday and participates actively in church activities. Once a month, she spends a day at the ministry, sending personalized birthday cards to members of the congregation.

Continued next page

MASONIC ASSISTANCE



DONNA KARNES (RIGHT) AND HER FRIEND ELIZABETH FITZGERALD AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CAMBRIA.

"When people get the cards in the mail, they know someone from our church is sending them prayers. It means a lot," Karnes says. "Holly [Sweeney], who is my care manager now, helps me in a similar way. She's always thinking of me and is so wonderful. She's a godsend; I am blessed."

The gifts of Masonry

Before MOS, it would have been difficult for Dolinka to imagine an outreach success story like Karnes'. Though she's been a social worker for nearly 30 years, her ability to help has often been hampered by insufficient resources and bureaucracy.

"As a social worker, you want to help as much as possible. But at other places, it's nearly impossible to give people the

help you want to. Here, I'm able to actually be a social worker; to truly help my clients. I don't know of another organization that works like this."

When asked why MOS is so successful, Dolinka replies simply: "It's a partnership. It's not *only* care managers, *only* MOS, or *only* a lodge. We all work together to help clients get the resources they need to survive."

She recalls that recently a lodge banded together to help a widow obtain a used car. "I just sent an email about her situation and a week later, they had come to the rescue," she says. "I've always wanted brothers; now I have them."

Love, passed on

Karnes' gratitude to Sweeney has been echoed by many of Dolinka's clients. "More than one person has told me, 'MOS saved my life,'" she says. "It's humbling for me to be a part of that."

Dolinka grew up in a Jewish household where charity was revered. "In the Jewish faith, a person is supposed to fulfill 'mitzvahs' – good deeds. One is 'Tikkun Olam,' which means 'to repair the world.' I became a social worker because of my experiences watching my parents show charity and kindness to others and wanting to fulfill my mission of Tikkun Olam," she explains.

"When I interviewed to be a care manager, I researched Masonry. The more I read, the more it resonated with me – particularly that everyone is accepting and equal. People sometimes aren't comfortable that I'm Jewish. It's important to me to be part of an organization that treats everyone with respect."

And, she adds, "Now that my parents are gone, I live to make them proud. One of the lessons I continue to learn is to be humble and grateful, to live my life and work my job with love in my heart. Every day, the Masons give me an opportunity to live the principles of brotherhood, charity, acceptance, and love – to honor my faith and fill my purpose." ♦



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