



The MASONIC INFORMATION CENTER

Statement on

FREEMASONRY AND WOMEN

In Freemasonry, as in all other areas of life, women play an important role. The opportunities for women to participate in Freemasonry are widespread and meet a variety of needs, from social interaction in the Orders for both men and women, to the unique needs met in the "women only" Masonic-related organizations. The moral and ethical values that Freemasonry encourages are universal and not gender-based.

Masonic Lodges maintain today a long-standing tradition of restricting membership in Freemasonry to men. This tradition is based on the historical all male membership of stonemasons guilds. During the Middle Ages, men traveled far from home and lived in lodges while constructing great cathedrals throughout Europe.

However, in the middle 1800s the fraternity took the progressive step, for that time, of creating organizations that included women, so that men and women could share Masonic fraternalism. The Order of the Eastern Star (the largest of these Masonic-related groups) was established in 1855, the Order of the Amaranth in 1873, and the White Shrine of Jerusalem in 1894.

Two national Masonic-related youth organizations are for young women: the International Order of Job's Daughters, founded in 1920, and the International Order of Rainbow for Girls, founded in 1922. Rainbow and Job's Daughters are involved with local charities, community services, and educational programs.

Other Masonic-related organizations limit their membership to women only, such as the Daughters of the Nile, the Daughters of Mokanna, and the Social Order of Beauceant. These Masonic-related organizations, like many organizations in North America, both social and professional, base their membership on gender. Junior League, P.E.O., National Association of Female Executives, and Girl Scouts, for instance, are organizations created exclusively for women, established to fulfill their unique interests and specific needs.