

A MASONIC MINUTE

The Form of the Lodge

When anyone enters a Masonic Lodge room for the first time, they are struck by the curious way in which the room is arranged. The room is oblong, and regardless of the geographical orientation, is said to be aligned “east and west.” The seats are arranged along the sides of the room, not in rows across the floor as one might expect in a theatre, lecture hall, or public auditorium. There is a raised dais for the presiding officer, and other officers are symmetrically placed about the room.



The configuration of the seats and furnishings is based on ancient tradition. Many of our modern Masonic customs are derived from our roots in the operative stonemasons of the middle ages – the builders of the magnificent cathedrals, abbeys, and castles that are the architectural glory of Europe. Our lodge rooms are patterned after their Guild Halls, which in turn copied the form of the Quire, where the daily services were sung in the cathedrals, abbeys, monasteries and collegiate chapels they had built.

Why have we adopted and perpetuated this ancient seating arrangement? It is a symbol of equality among members of the lodge. We *‘meet on the level.’* This concept, fundamental to Freemasonry, is made clear in this note published in Dublin in 1867: *“Overlapping all geographical divisions, rising above all religious and political differences, and ignoring all diversities of race, it established a common bond of kindly intercourse among the Craft.”* Only the principal officers elected to positions of added responsibility in the ruling and governing of the lodge – the Master and the Wardens – are seated on a raised dais, in the east, west and south respectively.

An Altar stands at the centre of lodge, upon which are placed what we consider *‘the three great lights’* – the Sacred Writings, the Square and Compasses. By definition, an Altar is a place of sacrifice. It is here that Masons dedicate themselves to the pursuit of the highest standards of ‘virtue, honour, and truth’ that are the core values which Freemasonry holds sacred and inviolable. It has been well said that every man who kneels at the Altar of Freemasonry, arises a different man, henceforth obligated to play out the game of life by different rules.



Before a new Lodge room can be used by the Brethren, it must be dedicated according to ancient custom, in a solemn ceremony by the Grand Master and the

officers of Grand Lodge, setting it apart exclusively for Masonic purposes. While this is the formal rite, the real “dedication” will come from the men who devote themselves to the principles of the fraternity in this place. Only then will it become ‘sacred ground.’

Other than the Altar at the centre, the floor of the lodge is kept clear. It is the ‘workshop’ where the ‘work’ of the Craft is performed. A prominent feature is ‘*the mosaic pavement*’ – a pattern of black and white tiles surrounded by a border of alternating triangles. It is like a large checker board upon which we symbolically play out the game of life according to the rules Freemasonry teaches. The squares represent the material and the triangles represent the spiritual. $4 + 3 = 7$. In Masonic symbolism, 7 is ‘perfection.’

Veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols

In summary, everything about the Lodge – its form and contents – has profound symbolic meaning for the instruction of the conscientious and attentive inquiring mind of a Mason – those with eyes to see and minds to comprehend. Symbols, being capable of several layers of interpretation, speak more eloquently and directly than words, which themselves are symbols. Above all, symbols make the interpreter think for himself.

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