



WHEN AND HOW DID FREEMASONRY FOR MEN AND WOMEN BEGIN?

In this brochure we present a brief overview of when and how Freemasonry for Men and Women began.

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest non-religious fraternal societies. It is a society concerned with moral and spiritual development. Its members explore this development through a series of ritual dramas, symbols and allegories.

There is no actual proof or historical fact indicating the origins of Freemasonry. But it appears to be accepted that Freemasonry as we know it today was born out of the Master builders of cathedrals and other large buildings in the Middle Ages. Because of their skills and the need for numbers of them to gather together to build complex structures, they were free to travel from one building site to another. To identify one another and protect their skills they formed their own Guilds and eventually became known as Freemasons.

WOMEN IN FREEMASONRY

There is written evidence that influential women were initiated into the precursors of Freemasonry from as early as 1256. But these were predominantly men only organisations. The tradition of the involvement of women was perpetuated when a woman named Marie Deraismes, was initiated into a French masculine Lodge called, appropriately, "Les Libres Penseurs" (The Free Thinkers) in 1882.

A year later, in 1893, Dr. Georges Martin, a French Senator and advocate of equal rights for women, joined Marie Deraismes along with other male Masons in founding La Respectable Loge, Le Droit Humain, Maçonnerie Mixte in Paris.

The International Order of Freemasonry for Men and Women, LE DROIT HUMAIN (originally translated as Co-Freemasonry or Universal Co-Freemasonry) traces its origin to this foundation.

Through its title LE DROIT HUMAIN, the Order proclaims its desire that men and women throughout the world be entitled to benefit in equal measure from social justice.

WHAT DOES "LE DROIT HUMAIN" MEAN?

The French expression "Le Droit Humain" is difficult to translate into English. It refers to Natural Law and Justice in human life, as distinct from laws that human beings make. It denotes the rights and responsibilities that every person is born with. The South African

Constitution recognises these values when it says that South Africa is founded on: “Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms”.

The first LE DROIT HUMAIN Lodge outside France was established in Britain in 1902. There are now Lodges in over 60 countries. In contrast to other Masonic Orders, LE DROIT HUMAIN is a global Order with its headquarters in Paris from where it is administered by the Supreme Council with the Grand Master at its head.

THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN FEDERATION OF LE DROIT HUMAIN

In 1913, three members of Emulation Lodge No 14, of London, applied for a provincial charter for South Africa. Arising from this the first formal group, The Star of Africa, was formed in Johannesburg. But this failed to develop and, sometime later, a further approach was made to Europe. Annie Besant, British theosophist and women's rights activist, working under the auspices of the Supreme Council in Paris, had founded the Lodge Human Duty No 6 in London and the South African group approached her. The South Africans involved were entrusted with a provincial charter, rituals and some rudimentary instruction. They returned to Durban to start the order in South Africa. Thus the South African Order arose in 1914.

LE DROIT HUMAIN IN SOUTH AFRICA.

The International Order of Freemasonry for Men and Women, LE DROIT HUMAIN, is one of only two Freemasonic Orders in South Africa that admits men and women on an equal basis. It now (2020) comprises five Lodges in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. The South African Federation is administered by a National Council and is registered in South Africa as a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) in terms of South African legislation.

Over its 100 years of existence it has led many through a process of spiritual, personal and philosophical growth and made considerable donations to charity.

The 1996 Constitution of South Africa (Section 15) is aimed at ensuring that everyone is free to adhere to deeply held beliefs and values, whether they are derived from religion, a system of personal morality, or a secular world view.

For more information visit our website: <https://ledroithumain.international/southafrica/>

