



# A Mormon Mason: New grand master is the first in a century who is LDS

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 GRID VIEW



**Glen Cook, the 137th grand master of Freemasonry in Utah, stands on the stage of the main auditorium at the Masonic Temple in downtown Salt Lake City.** | Mike Terry, Deseret Morning News

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It's been nearly a quarter of a century since Freemasons in Utah rescinded a 60-year ban that prohibited Latter-day Saints from joining their fraternity. And while many remember the religious division that had characterized Freemasonry in the Beehive State from pioneer times, Glen Cook believes he is evidence that things are changing among his Masonic brethren.

Cook, a Salt Lake criminal defense attorney and Brigham Young University law school graduate, is believed to be the first member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to be elected grand master in Utah in nearly a century, overseeing the activities of several lodges around the state and looking to make the group more open to public understanding.

During a recent tour of the Masonic Temple in downtown Salt Lake City following his installation in February, Cook said there are definite misconceptions about Freemasonry in Utah, particularly among Latter-day Saints, "but there's also some reality there as well."

Church founder Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, were members of the Masonic lodge in Nauvoo, Ill., in the early 1840s, and historians have written in detail about the role of fellow Masons in the murder of the two men in June 1844. Smith's successor, President Brigham Young, and the three succeeding presidents of the church all were made Masons in the Nauvoo Lodge, as were many who presided in church hierarchy during and following Joseph Smith's death.

After leaving the Midwest for what was then the Utah Territory, most Latter-day Saints eventually ceased active involvement with Freemasonry, despite the fact that lodges were chartered here beginning in 1859. Cook said he thinks pioneer Latter-day Saints simply were too busy trying to build a city in the desert and serving their church to participate. Some historians have speculated about whether Freemasonry was discouraged by LDS leaders.

Whether or not that was the case, religious tension within the organization escalated to the point that, in 1925, "the Utah Grand Lodge Code precluded any Mormon ... totally from any relationship whatsoever" with Masonry in Utah, according to author Mervin Hogan's 1978 book, "The Origin and Growth of Utah Masonry and Its Conflict With Mormonism."

That provision of the code remained in force until 1984, when it was rescinded.

Freemasonry is not a religious practice, but confusion about what it is stems in part from the fact that the fraternity is believed by many historians to have originated in the ancient world because its symbols and rituals bear some similarity to sacred ceremonies that existed among the Egyptians, Coptic Christians, Israelites and even the Catholic and Protestant liturgies — all thought to have some common biblical source.

Many believe it originated with the stone masons who worked on Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, though no definitive evidence of that legend is known to exist. Others speculate that its tenets were had by Enoch, and possibly by Adam. Scholars have documented evidence that institutional Masonry dates back only to the Middle Ages, when great European cathedrals were being built by guilds of stone masons who practiced "the craft."

Cook said the fact that membership requires belief in a supreme being and a willingness to make obligations to fellow Masons through Masonic rituals and symbols that bear some limited similarity to LDS temple ceremonies also foster a misunderstanding of what the fraternity is, and is not.

"There is no question that elements of the (LDS temple) endowment and Masonic ritual are similar," Cook said. "The question for faithful Latter-day Saints is whether that makes a difference. I tend to be a rather concrete thinker."

For those who accept Joseph Smith as a prophet and believe he actually saw God and Jesus Christ in vision as a precursor to restoration of Christ's ancient church, "then the rest, I would suggest, should be a corollary" of that belief.

"I think sometimes we spend too much time worrying about issues that don't really matter to our salvation."

Nothing in LDS faith or practice precludes Latter-day Saints from becoming Masons, he said, though family and church obligations may limit the amount of time Mormon men can spend in other pursuits like Masonry.

"Freemasonry should be an adjunct to your faith and not a barrier to its exercise," Cook said. "I tell people that the only secrets we have are modes of recognition and the passwords. For those, you have to look on the Internet."

The "Encyclopedia of Mormonism" addresses questions about the faith's view of the fraternity, noting "the philosophy and major tenets of Freemasonry are not fundamentally incompatible with the teaching, theology and doctrines of the Latter-day Saints. Both emphasize morality, sacrifice, consecration and service, and both condemn selfishness, sin and greed. Furthermore, the aim of Masonic ritual is to instruct — to make truth available so that man can follow it."

The ritual resemblances between the two "are limited to a small proportion of actions and words," according to the encyclopedia, and "where the two rituals share symbolism, the fabric of meanings is different."

Cook said he sees signs within the Utah fraternity that a new openness is developing toward the community at large, and toward Latter-day Saints in particular, evidenced not only by his recent installation in ceremonies that were open to the public, but also in a willingness to acknowledge the faith in ways it hasn't previously been recognized.

On Feb. 2, during meetings before his formal installation took place, Cook said "a seasoned brother came to me and said, 'We should have a moment of silence for (deceased LDS Church) President (Gordon B.) Hinckley,'" as his funeral was taking place. "At 11 a.m., the grand master called the Grand Lodge of Utah to silence for that."

Later in the day, as members were having lunch together in the Masonic Temple downtown, someone mentioned that President Hinckley's funeral cortege would be passing their building shortly. "A group of Masons gathered on the front steps for that, not limited by religion, and stood with their hands over their hearts as the cortege passed," Cook said.

"I think those three things really signaled to me the change that has come about. ... I think LDS culture has changed, and that today, civic activities are not inappropriate."

As for what he plans to emphasize during his term as the 137th grand master of Utah, Cook said he will focus on the fraternal tenets of brotherly love, belief and truth.

"I find Freemasonry to be something at which to marvel, to be something which I view in awe," Cook wrote in a recent message published in a fraternal newsletter. "In a world in which men war and shed the blood of the innocent based on race, ethnicity and tribe, we have united ... without regard to the color of a man's skin, caring only about the tenor of his heart."

In short, Masons "are men who try to lead moral and upright lives. They contribute significantly not only on a private basis, but in a public way" as well, he said, noting they fund Shriner's Hospital for Children, help with arthritis research and other community causes.

"It's the place where I've found friends, men who have cared for me and my family and hold the moral values that I hold."

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