

# The Diverse Grand Lodges of France

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*Editor's Note: This paper was presented at an online meeting in place of our regular stated. I used a PowerPoint presentation to highlight certain elements, the slides are included within this paper.*

We know that a Lodge is a certain number of Masons gathered together with a charter or warrant from some Grand Lodge empowering them to work. Most of you, like me, would assume that there is only ONE Grand Lodge for a given jurisdiction. Setting aside our Prince Hall duality for the United States, we would naturally conclude that every country in the world would have a single Grand Lodge over all the Lodges in that country. This is not the case, especially in France, which has two dozen Grand Lodges and Supreme Councils currently claiming authority.

Freemasonry is often said to consist of two branches that are not in mutual regular amity. The first are the Anglo/American "Regular" tradition of Grand Lodges, typified by the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE); while the second are Grand Orient, the European or "Continental" tradition, with varying and shifting amity.

## List of Grand Lodges

These are the fifteen current Grand Lodges and Supreme Councils in France, in order of their founding. The major Grand Lodges and Supreme Councils are displayed in the slide.

- Grand Orient of France (GODF)
- Supreme Council of France (SCDF)
- Grand College of Rites
- Le Droit Humain International
- Grand Lodge of France (GLDF)
- Grand National French Lodge (GLNF)
- Women's Grand Lodge Of France (GLFF)
- Grand Lodge Traditional and Symbolic Opera (GLTSO)
- Supreme Council for France (SCPLF)
- French National Lodge (LNF)
- Global Mixed Grand Lodge (GLMU)
- Mixed Grand Lodge of France (GLMF)
- Rectified and Reformed Scottish Rite Grand Lodge of Occitania
- Regular Grand Lodge of France
- United French National Lodges (LNFU)

### Grand Lodges and Supreme Councils

Grand Orient of  
France (GODF)

Grand Lodge of  
France (GLDF)

Grand National  
French Lodge  
(GLNF)

Grand Lodge  
Traditional and  
Symbolic Opera  
(GLTSO)

Supreme  
Council of  
France (SCDF)

Supreme  
Council for  
France (SCPLF)

There are other organizations within France that consider themselves Supreme Councils:

- The Supreme National Council of France, linked to the Grand National French Lodge (GLNF).
- The Supreme Universal Mixed Council "Human Right", linked to La Droit Humain.
- The Supreme Women's Council of France, linked to the Women's Grand Lodge of France (GLFF).
- The Supreme Mixed Council of France, linked to the Mixed Grand Lodge of France (GLMF).
- The Supreme Council "Lux Ex Tenebris", bound by a single protocol to the Grand Lodge Traditional and Symbolic Opera (GLTSO), denounced by the GLTSO.
- The Supreme Council of the REAA "Pax Opera" linked to the GLTSO.
- The Supreme Council of Aquitaine of the REAA, independent of any Grand Lodge.

## Grand Orient of France

Although the Grand Orient of France (GODF) broke away from the Grand Lodge of France, that original body no longer exists, so GODF may lay claim to being the oldest Grand Lodge in that country. Indeed, they place their origin date as 1728, not 1773. They are well known as the cornerstone of Continental Masonry. They lay claim, though not undisputed, to playing a major role in the first French Revolution. The second French Revolution advanced the concept of secularism, which the Grand Orient adopted wholeheartedly, unlike the Supreme Council. This led to the decision to strike the requirement of belief in one God altogether, which led to the Great Schism with the United Grand Lodge of England. To this day, the GODF is considered irregular by most if not all American Grand Lodges.

The GODF does not shy away from involving itself deeply into politics, either. They played a major role in establishing the left-wing Radical Republican Party in 1901, and support the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are vocal supporters of the separation of church and state as well as same sex marriage. Obviously, they have no restrictions on discussion of politics or religion during their meetings, but one could imagine how those discussions would lean.

The GODF has close ties over the centuries with several Supreme Councils, but their Lodges are permitted to confer degrees in the French Rite, the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, the Rectified Scottish Rite, the Rite of Memphis-Misraim, and possibly others.

## Grand Lodge of France

The Grand Lodge of France (GLDF) also lays claim to being the unbroken continuation of the original, and also regular, French Masonry. Formed out of the Supreme Council of France in 1821 as the Central Grand Lodge to govern the first three degrees, they broke away from the Supreme Council in 1894 and took on their current name. The GLDF, like the Supreme Council, preserves the tradition of requiring belief in a Supreme Being. They confer the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite degrees in their Blue Lodges.

They manage to maintain recognition of Grand Lodges in Continental Freemasonry, while avoiding the adoption of their irregular practices. They are not recognized by the UGLE, but several American Grand Lodges extended them recognition during World War II. Discussions of a political or religious nature are permitted within a Lodge meeting, but the Grand Lodge studiously avoids making public declarations in favor of any political issue.

## Grand National French Lodge

The Grand National French Lodge (GLNF) broke away from the GLDF in 1913, and is not recognized by the other two major Grand Lodges. It is recognized by UGLE and most American Grand Lodges, and is considered the most regular of the three. It also has close ties to the other Supreme Council, the SCPLF.

GLNF Lodges may confer their degrees in any of the following rites, and may visit another Lodge even if they practice a different ritual:

- Scottish Rite Rectified
- Rite Emulation
- Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite
- French Rite
- York Rite
- Standard Rite of Scotland

Although the most regular and most recognized, the GLNF is not without controversy. Grand Master François Stifani was at the center of several scandals from 2009 to 2012, which led to the UGLE withdrawing recognition. Stifani revealed Masonic ritual on television, actively supported several brutal African leaders who are Masons, refused independent audits of Grand Lodge finances, and had a close relationship with French President Nicholas Sarkozy. Stifani resigned in 2012 and was expelled. Grand Lodges that had withdrawn their recognition have since restored them.

## Grand Lodge Traditional and Symbolic Opera

The Grand Lodge Traditional and Symbolic Opera (GLTSO) broke from the GLNF in 1958. Incidentally, the word opera in French, in addition to the better known definition, can be translated as "work". The reason for the split was concern over the strong influence of

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English Masons on the GLNF, and the desire to have fraternal relations with other French Grand Lodges.

The Rectified Scottish Rite is used by sixty five percent of their Lodges. Other rites permitted by the GLTSO include:

- Emulation Rite
- Traditional French Rite
- Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite
- Scottish Standard Rite
- York Rite

### Timeline

There are two schools of thought about the origin of Masonry in France. After the founding of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, English Masons began to form speculative Lodges in France and began initiating French gentlemen. But some assert that among Scottish and Irish Guards of the Stuart Family were Freemasons, who formed the first French Lodge at Saint Germaine in 1688, the Lodge of Perfect Equality.

In either case, in 1728 the English Grand Lodge of France was formed with Philip, Duke of Wharton, as its first Grand Master. He was a Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of London.

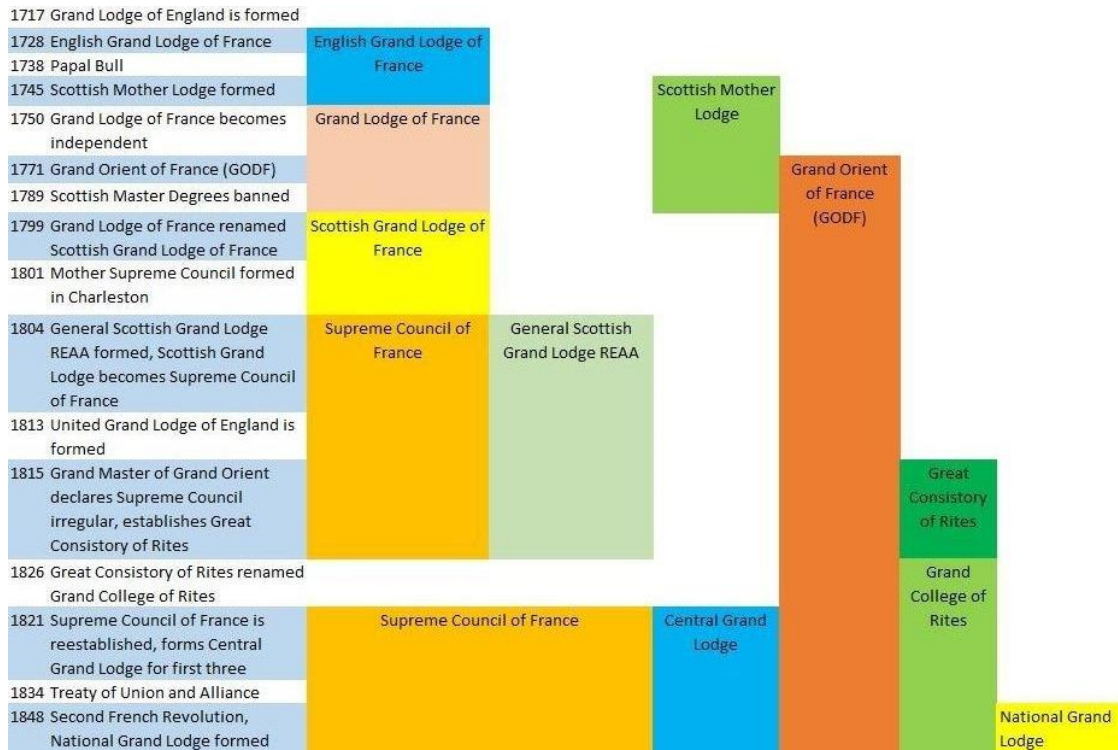
In 1738 the Duke of Antin was installed as the first French Grand Master.

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Also in 1738 Pope Clement XII issues a Papal Bull against Freemasonry, forbidding Catholics from becoming or remaining Masons. But this was in response to and specifically targeted against Italian Catholics, and was never enacted in France.

In 1743 Louis de Bourbon-Condé, Count of Clermont, was installed as Grand Master. During his reign he promoted the Eccosais, or Scottish Master Degrees. These ten degrees were expanded over the next sixty years to become the 33 Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Degrees.

In 1745 Etienne Morin founded in Bordeaux the Respectable Lodge of the Perfect Elected, the first Scottish Mother Lodge, which conferred the Eccosais Degrees. These ten degrees culminated in the Scottish Master Degree, later Grand Elect Perfect, or Perfect Elu. This includes the first three degrees of the Blue Lodge, but at some point, Scottish Rite Lodges offered their own version of these degrees.



**Timeline: 1717 - 1748**

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In the 1750s the English Grand Lodge of France became wholly independent and became the Grand Lodge of France.

In 1771 a new assembly of Masons declared the Grand Lodge of France to no longer exist, establishing the Grand Orient of France (GODF) as the new Grand Lodge.

In 1773 the Grand Orient of France (GODF) was officially constituted, but most Lodges remained loyal to the Grand Lodge of France, which had not yet disappeared.

From 1789 to 1799 during the first French Revolution many Lodges went inactive and the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of France (GODF) resigned his position.

During this period, the Eccosais or Scottish Master degrees had become quite popular in France, and the Grand Orient resisted them, banning their conferral within the confines of the city of Paris.

In 1799 the Grand Lodge of France was renamed the Scottish Grand Lodge of France. Also in 1799 the GODF reunited with the Grand Lodge of France, but this union did not last more than a few years.

In 1801 in Charleston, South Carolina, the first Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite is formed. The ten Scottish Master degrees have grown to 32 degrees culminating in Master of the Royal Secret. The Supreme Council is composed of nine members who receive the 33rd and last degree. Alexandre de Grasse-Tilly, who was instrumental in establishing the Mother Supreme Council, returns to France in 1804.



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On October 22, 1804, shortly after de Grasse-Tilly's return, several Scottish Master Lodges, who were at odds with the GODF, meet to establish a "General Scottish Grand Lodge of the Rite Ancient and Accepted" (REAA). They install Prince Louis Bonaparte as Grand Master with de Grasse-Tilly as his deputy.

On November 27 Louis' oldest brother, Joseph Bonaparte, becomes Grand Master of the GODF, with Louis as Deputy Grand Master.

On December 1st Louis' older brother, Napoleon Bonaparte, is crowned Napoleon 1st, Emperor of the French by Pope Pius VII.

Here is where we have conflicting information. One source claims in 1799 the Grand Lodge of France, the blue lodges that remained after the GODF broke off, was renamed the Scottish Grand Lodge. Another source claims that a new Grand Lodge, the "General Scottish Grand Lodge of the Rite Ancient and Accepted", was formed from a handful of Scottish Master Lodges in 1804. So there may have been two Scottish Grand Lodges of France. In either case, an agreement is reached that the GODF will manage the 1st through 18 degrees, while the Scottish Grand Lodge, now known as the Supreme Council of France (SCDF), will manage the 19th through 33rd. Incidentally most of the Supreme Councils throughout the world came via the Supreme Council of France (SCDF).

In 1813 in England the Ancients and the Moderns set aside their differences and formed the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE).

In 1814 the Grand Master of the GODF declares the office of Grand Master of the Supreme Council to be vacant and removes a number of officers. He makes several demands of

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the remaining members of the Supreme Council and many simply resign. Those remaining reject the demands of the Grand Orient.

In 1815 the Grand Master of the GODF declares the SCDF to be irregular. He then establishes the Great Consistory of Rites to replace it.

In 1826 the Great Consistory of Rites changes its name to the Grand College of Rites, Supreme Council for France and the French possessions.

In 1821 the SCDF, after much turmoil, is reestablished. They create the Central Grand Lodge to oversee the first three degrees, while the 4th through 33rd degrees are controlled by the Supreme Council, much like how things are done in the United States with our Supreme Councils.

In 1834 the Supreme Councils of France, Belgium, Brazil and Western Europe enter into a "Treaty of Union and Alliance", these meetings will lead to the Lausanne Congress in 1875. The Treaty affirms that no Supreme Council can be part of another Rite (such as a Grand Lodge) without losing their independence and authority.

The 1848 French Revolution, also known as the February Revolution, brought the ideas of Secularism, Liberty, and Hope to the people of France, ideas that began to take hold among French Freemasons. At the time, the Catholic Church was the official religion of the state. Despite the Papal Bull, most Masons in France are thus Catholic. But many of them did not want the church or the state to dictate how Masons should behave.

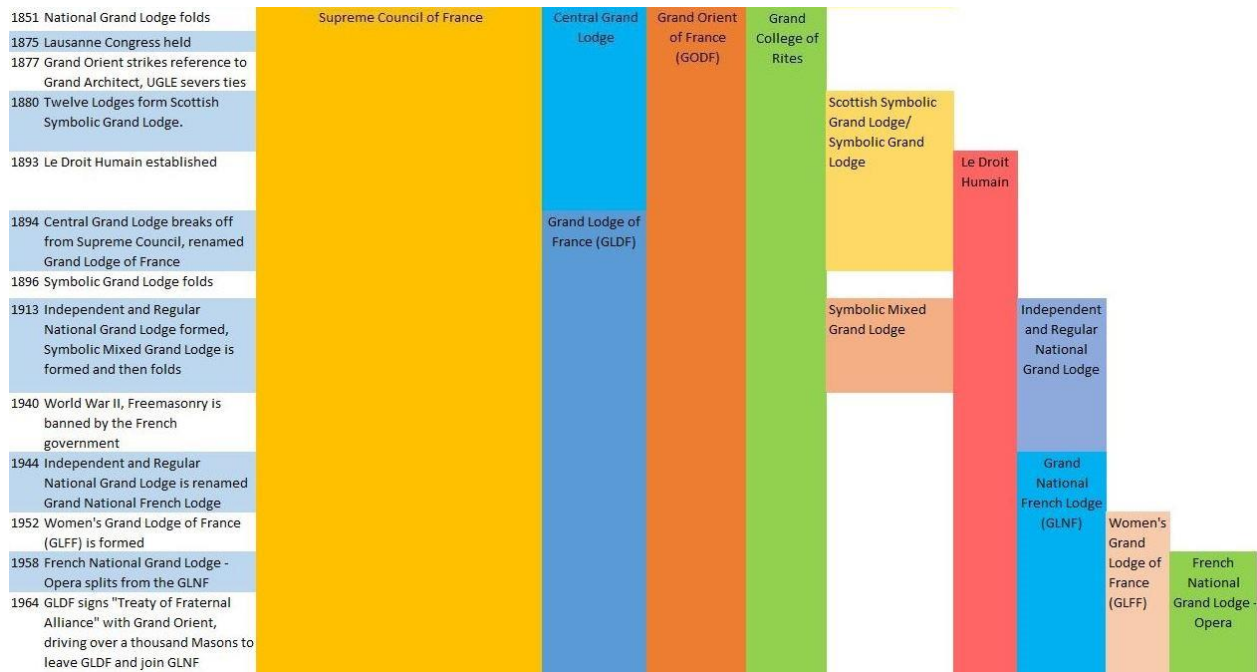
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As a result of the Revolution and this new way of thinking, a handful of lodges form the National Grand Lodge, limited to the first three degrees and advocating a single Rite. It was never recognized and was dissolved by the government in 1851.

In 1873 to sidestep the Secularism movement, the Supreme Council of France (SCDF) declared that all documents must begin with "To the Glory of The Grand Architect of the Universe, under the name and the auspices of the Supreme Council of France, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity".

In 1875 the Central Grand Lodge and the Supreme Council of France (SCDF) adopted the decision of the Lausanne Congress, stating that "The Grand Architect of the Universe is the Principle Creator of the Universe". They follow this definition to this day.

In 1877 the GODF strikes the reference to the Grand Architect from their rituals, leading the United Grand Lodge of England to sever ties with them.



**Timeline: 1851 - 1964**

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In 1880 twelve Lodges form the Scottish Symbolic Grand Lodge, later renamed the Symbolic Grand Lodge of France.

In 1882 Maria Deraismes was initiated into the "Free Thinkers" Lodge, which was then disbanded by the Symbolic Grand Lodge of France. She and Dr. Georges Martin (a French Mason and politician) then founded Le Droit Humain, a Masonic organization dedicated to allowing both women and men to join, also known as "co-masonry". Le Droit Humain was established as an international order in 1893. Not a Grand Lodge precisely, it has Lodges in various countries, and offers recognition to almost all Grand Lodges throughout the world. With a handful of exceptions, Grand Lodges do not return the favor.

In 1894 the Central Grand Lodge breaks off from the Supreme Council of France (SCDF), changing its name to the Grand Lodge of France (GLDF). The GLDF controls the Blue Lodges, working in Scottish Rite ritual, and continuing Regular French Masonry.

In 1896 most of the Lodges belong to the Symbolic Grand Lodge of France join the GLDF and the Symbolic Grand Lodge ceases to exist.

In 1904 the last administrative ties between the GLDF and the Supreme Council of France (SCDF) are severed.

In 1913 the Independent and Regular National Grand Lodge (GLNIR) was formed. Also in 1913 the Symbolic Mixed Grand Lodge is formed, with the goal of co-masonry. That attempt fails, but the GLNIR survives World War I and is renamed the Grand National French Lodge (GLNF) at the end of World War II.

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In 1940 Freemasonry is banned by the French Government and the German occupying forces. This is a low point for French Masonry and many Lodges are closed, never to open again.

In 1944 the Grand College of Rites and the Supreme Council of France (SCDF) enter into a discussion of a merger. This fails over disputes about the Great Architect of the Universe and how the Great Constitutions are applied.

In 1945 the Grand Lodge of France (GLDF) is reconstituted.

In 1952 the Women's Grand Lodge of France (GLFF) was constituted. It was composed of various "Lodges of Adoption", bodies attached to a Symbolic Lodge which were open to female relatives of the members. A Lodge of Adoption is a cross between an appendant body like the Eastern Star, a Ladies Auxiliary like the Social Order of the Beausceant, and an actual Lodge with both men and women initiated as Masons. These Lodges of Adoption had existed since the 18th century in various forms, and over time moved toward becoming actual Lodges. In 1959 the GLFF abandoned the "rite of adoption" altogether and started using Scottish Rite ritual.

In 1958 the French National Grand Lodge - Opera splits from the GLNF. In 1982 to avoid confusion they were renamed the Grand Lodge Traditional and Symbolic Opera (GLTSO).

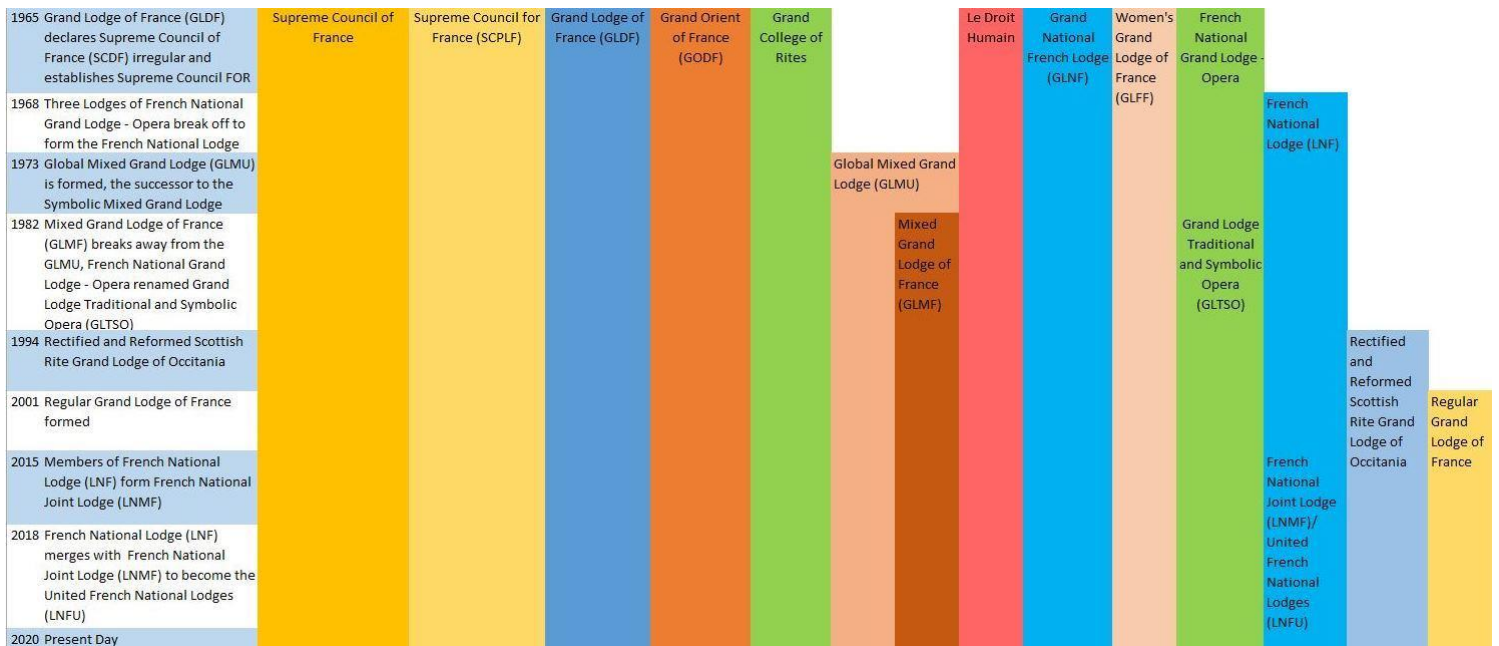
In 1964 the Grand Lodge of France (GLDF) signs a "Treaty of Fraternal Alliance" with the Grand Orient of France (GODF). This leads to over a thousand Masons leaving the GLDF and joining the Grand National French Lodge (GLNF).

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In 1965 the Supreme Council of France (SCDF) is declared irregular by the Grand Lodge of France (GLDF) and the territory of France is considered "unoccupied" as far as the Scottish Rite is concerned. Charles Riandey, Sovereign Grand Commander of the SCDF, resigns and is commissioned by the major Supreme Councils in the world to form a new Supreme Council FOR France (SCPLF). Both the SCPLF and the SCDF assert they are the rightful Supreme Council dating back to 1804. Both of their web sites, in fact, list their history as dating back to 1804, which made researching this paper difficult. The SCPLF strengthens its ties to the Grand National French Lodge (GLNF).

In 1968 three Lodges of the French National Grand Lodge - Opera break off to form the French National Lodge (LNF).

In 1973 the Global Mixed Grand Lodge (GLMU) is formed, the successor to the Symbolic Mixed Grand Lodge of sixty years earlier with the same goal of co-masonry. The GLMU adopts its Constitution in 1979 and is very similar to the Grand Orient of France (GODF).



**Timeline: 1965 - Present**

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In 1982 the Mixed Grand Lodge of France (GLMF) breaks away from the GLMU. It allows its Lodges to be all male, all female, or mixed. It also allows its Lodges to practice any of a half-dozen or more Rites.

In 1994 regular Masons of GLNF and GLTSO form the Rectified and Reformed Scottish Rite Grand Lodge of Occitania. This is made up of 3 independent bodies: A Grand Lodge, a Directory of Saint Andrew Lodges, and the Great Priory, which is somewhat similar to the Knights Templar here in the United States.

In 2001 the Regular Grand Lodge of France was formed, following the GLNF rules.

In 2015 members of the French National Lodge (LNF) formed the French National Joint Lodge (LNMF), which allowed women Masons. In 2018, they both merged to become the United French National Lodges (LNFU).

## Conclusion

What we see, in reviewing three hundred years of Masonry in a single country, is a landscape that is constantly changing. New Grand Lodges are formed or disbanded, sometimes at the whim of a single Grand Master, sometimes by the Lodges or the individual Masons, and sometimes Masons vote with their feet and move to another Grand Lodge. It appears they are constantly asking the question, "What is Masonry?" and find multiple answers to that question.

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But compare this to Masonry in the United States, where once a Grand Lodge is formed, it's structure changes little through two hundred years. Is France an example of a chaotic confusion, where nothing is ever good enough, or is it a vibrant, thriving organization that is constantly reexamining itself? Is our American system stable because it got it right the first time and has needed no course-corrections, or are we a stagnant pond, so resistant to change that we do nothing when the opportunity for improving presents itself?

A constant complaint among Masons is that we can't keep our members, that we are not offering what the new or even the older members want, and they are leaving us. Are we so resistant to change that we are unable to fix that which is wrong, to preserve our beloved fraternity? Each of you should ask yourself these questions.