

Just Checking In

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16a, ESV)

Just checking in. Perhaps you’ve heard in the past that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) prohibits its clergy and laity from being members of Masonic organizations. Yet, you may question why you never seem to hear freemasonry mentioned on a Sunday morning or even in a Bible class. Well, most likely you have heard me talk about it if you have ever taken catechism class with me to become a confirmed member of the church. Nevertheless, many may still be wondering if the LCMS continues to hold this same position when it comes to lodge membership. The answer is that our church body certainly does.

In case you are unfamiliar with freemasonry and its various orders, the Masonic Lodge is not a club for construction workers or a labor union of stonemasons. The order of Free and Accepted Masons is a fraternal lodge and it exists in many countries throughout the world – and you certainly don’t have to be a tradesman or even work with concrete to join. Freemasonry has existed in the US since the beginning of our republic, with numerous prominent Americans, even presidents of our country (including our first president, George Washington) being lodge members. The Shriners are part of freemasonry. The Order of the Eastern Star is also associated with freemasonry. And DeMolay International, Job’s Daughters, and the International Order of the Rainbow for Girls are Masonic groups for young people. Groups that are not officially part of freemasonry yet share some of the same theological concerns that exist within secret societies and fraternal lodges include organizations like the Odd Fellows as well as a number of the “animal” lodges – including the Fraternal Order of Eagles, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, and the Loyal Order of Moose. The Lions Club, though, is *not* like these other “animal” lodges that declare false theological concepts (therefore, belonging to the Lions Club is not prohibited by the LCMS).

Freemasonry is centuries old, and as you can see from the number of organizations associated with it, consists of quite a web of related groups. So, what is the LCMS’s problem with freemasonry in particular and with similar fraternal lodges in general? Well, organizations that tend to shroud their beliefs and activities (as some fraternal lodges do) should automatically raise a red flag for Christians – especially in light of Jesus’ words regarding transparency when it comes to our beliefs and practices. For Jesus said: ***“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16, ESV).*** And Jesus also said to His disciples: ***“What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear***

whispered, proclaim on the housetops” (Matthew 10:27, ESV). See, Christianity doesn’t advocate occultic (hidden) religious practices and teachings.

Yet, the LCMS’s objections to freemasonry run deeper than that they like to operate in a clandestine way and use all sorts of secret oaths, teachings, signs, and even handshakes. Freemasonry requires its members to believe in a Supreme Being, yet they let each member decide for himself the identity of that deity. So, the Masons, who pray together and use the Almighty’s name in their oaths, call upon a generic god. And sometimes they’ll even assign idolatrous names to the Almighty like “Jah-Bul-On.” But the Christian is to pay heed to the First Table of the Law: ***“You shall have no other gods before Me.... You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not exonerate anyone who takes His name in vain. Keep the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, just as the Lord your God has commanded you” (Deuteronomy 5:7, 11-12, Modern English Version).***

Therefore, having a generic god, freemasonry does not confess Jesus to be the Lord. And while it’s true that the Masons do not denounce Jesus or prohibit His name from ever being mentioned, yet they also don’t confess Him as the only God and Savior. Does this mean that a Christian cannot belong to an organization if that group and its members do not talk about Jesus and do not worship Him alone? Not necessarily. But freemasonry is not an atheistic or even a strictly secular organization. It engages spirituality by calling upon “The Great Architect of the Universe” and employing prayer. Even though freemasonry will tell you that it isn’t a religion, yet its ceremonies certainly are religious in nature. And that’s the difference between being a Mason versus belonging to a non-religious bowling league or a neighborhood sewing club. For freemasonry engages in prayer but Jesus is not the center of those prayers and is rarely, if ever, mentioned in those prayers. And Christianity teaches that invoking and worshipping the Divine without Jesus doesn’t bring glory to God. For Jesus not only directed His followers to pray in His name (John 14:13-14, 15:16), but He also said: ***“No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6b, Modern English Version).***

Freemasonry also doesn’t view human nature as being totally corrupt – which contradicts what the Bible teaches about sin (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10-18). Their literature even suggests the concept of works-righteousness. And this of course denies the Biblical teaching that salvation is only by grace through faith (Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9).

My friends, what I have just written only scratches the surface. More reasons could be given for why Christians ought not be involved in freemasonry. And while some of the more outlandish and conspiratorial things that are sometimes ascribed to the Masons may not have any factual basis, yet plenty of what we clearly do know about them reveals that the prayers and rites associated with this group pose a serious threat to the Christian’s faith. That is why our church body prohibits

members of the LCMS from joining or belonging to freemasonry or any similar fraternal lodges. And based upon what is known about freemasonry and similar fraternal lodges, why would the Christian really want to take part in them anyway? As the Apostle Paul rightly (and rhetorically) asks: ***“For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?”***

A more detailed LCMS analysis of freemasonry and some of the other fraternal organizations that I’ve mentioned above can be found on the Internet by going to: <https://www.lcms.org/about/leadership/commission-on-theology-and-church-relations/documents/religious-organizations-and-movements>

If you don’t have access to the Internet, just ask me and I can make this information available to you via paper copies. Below in italics I’ve included a brief snippet of what our church body contends about membership in fraternal lodges. It’s taken from the Q&A section on the LCMS website.

QUESTION: What is The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s stance on membership in lodges, fraternal organizations, and fraternities?

ANSWER: It has consistently been the position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod throughout its history that membership in fraternal lodges is incompatible with membership in a synodical congregation.

Bylaw 3.925 of the Synod’s Handbook summarizes the rationale for the Synod’s longstanding position on the lodges: “Pastors and laypeople must avoid membership or participation in any organization that in its objectives, ceremonies, or practices is inimical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the faith and life of the Christian church.”

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations has prepared detailed discussions of the reasons for the Synod’s opposition to membership in various lodges. They may be found online at [lcms.org/ctcr](https://www.lcms.org/ctcr).

There are fraternal organizations (e.g., Kiwanis, Lions Club) or community clubs that do not have the objectionable features of the lodges in their rites, ceremonials, and membership requirements. There are generally no objections to membership in such organizations.

Since there are so many college fraternities, and since their membership requirements vary, the Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations has advised that judgments must be left to individuals based on the particular case.

Just checking in. I wish you a most blessed August. See you at worship.

Pastor