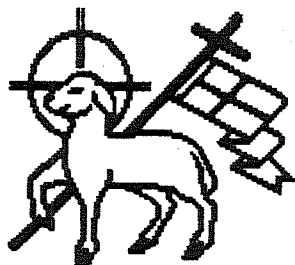


## WHY THE WISCONSIN SYNOD AND OUR CONGREGATION OBJECT TO LODGE MEMBERSHIP

The Constitution of St. John's Lutheran Church and the model church Constitution of the Wisconsin Synod object to lodge membership. Our congregation's Constitution states in Article IV, Section B, part 8: "As members of this congregation are to be considered all who do not, in addition to the worship established by our congregation, habitually attend and promote religious gatherings which are founded on erroneous teachings whether these be religious services of other church denominations or of lodges or similar associations." The Synod's model constitution says in Article V, Section 2: "Our God has implanted within us who are Christians the new man, who desires to live righteously (II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24). Consequently, members of His church will . . . 3) refuse to hold membership in any organization whose teachings and practices conflict with the Word of God (for example, lodges)."

These statements are certainly clear in warning against lodge membership, and yet they cannot be applied in a loveless way. They must be explained and presented in such a way that the individual church member understands why the Wisconsin Synod and our congregation objects to lodge membership. It is necessary for a congregation to convince her members and prospective members that it is sinful to belong to a lodge. One cannot ask church members to refrain from doing something unless they are convinced from the Word that what they are doing is wrong.

But how to convince a church member that belonging to a lodge is wrong? And how to convince a church member who may already belong to a lodge to give up such



membership? This is not an easy matter. And there are several reasons for this difficulty. Here are a few:

1) Other churches (even some other Lutheran synods) do little or nothing to warn against the false religious features of the lodge.

2) People in general tend to think that all religion (prayers, mention of a god, use of the Bible, emphasis on good works) is good. It is difficult even for Christians to distinguish between good religion and false religion.

3) Most people who join a lodge see nothing religious about this step but rather join for social, entertainment, insurance, or welfare reasons.

4) It is not easy to get exact information about the rituals and ceremonies of the lodge since lodges are officially "secret societies" and require members to take an oath that they will not reveal the secrets of the lodge.

5) There are differences in the various lodges as to how much emphasis is put on the religious aspect. Some lodges take more seriously the various rituals, prayers, and ceremonies. Some continue to retain the rituals but are much more social in nature.

6) There is no statement in the Bible which says in so many words: "Don't belong to a lodge." (There were no lodges when the Bible was written) Church members will have to do a certain amount of study to understand why the synod and individual congregations object to lodge membership.

7) Because the lodge is a secret society, a church

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**A Common Approach . . . to reach out to a lodge member in Christian love.**

**Question:** It is my understanding that the lodge prides itself in its educational and humanitarian programs.

**Answer:** Yes, we do require our members to know a few things.

**Question:** Would you share a little with me?

**Answer:** Well, I can't tell you much, but if you care to join you would learn it all.

**Question:** Is what you learn in the lodge important?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Well, then, it should be important to me also? Why must I join first in order to learn something that will help me? Shouldn't everyone be told?

**Question:** Is the lodge a religion to you?

**Answer:** Absolutely not!

**Question:** Do you pray in the lodge?

**Answer:** Yes, but only at our meetings.

**Question:** Do you pray to God?

**Answer:** Of course we do.

**Question:** Who does the lodge say God is?

**Answer:** We don't tell any member who God is, each person is free to think of god as he wants.

**Question:** Is that what the Bible teaches?

**Answer:** Not all members believe the way Christians do.

**Question:** If you were leading the lodge in prayer, would you use the name of the Triune God; ending it with "This we pray in Jesus name"?

**Answer:** Well, we are suppose to use the prayers in our book.

member may join a lodge without fully understanding what is involved in the initiation ritual and other ceremonies. But once having taken the oath, paid dues, and enjoyed the lodge atmosphere, the person may find it difficult to admit anything wrong. There may also be pressure from other lodge members not to resign.

Yet the Christian who confesses faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior from sin and who wishes to be guided by the Word and will of God must be ready to examine the reasons why the synod and our congregation warn against lodge membership. Hopefully this examination will lead to a heartfelt conviction that a Christian should not belong to a lodge.

The oldest lodge is the Masonic Order which goes back to England and the year 1717. This order is highly organized with various special lodges and rites. The Masonic lodge for women is called Eastern Star; for boys, Order of De Molay; for girls, Job's Daughters. All other lodges have some similarities with the Masons.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is one such lodge that derives many of its practices and rituals from the Masons. The B.P.O.E. (Elks) was formed in 1866 in New York in order to help members of the acting profession evade the strict Sunday liquor laws then in force. Originally the group of actors called themselves "The Jolly Corks", either in allusion to corks flying from the liquor bottles, or an allusion to the theatrical profession. Seeking a distinctly American name after they were organized, a name to reflect their growing interest in benevolence, they chose the name Elks, because the Elk is a purely American animal "fleet of foot, timorous of wrong, but ever ready to combat in defense of self or the female of the species." (James R. Nicholson, History of the Order of Elks, p.13, quoted in

LC-MS, "Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks" p.7.)

Membership in the Order is limited to male American citizens at least twenty-one years of age, who believe in the existence of God. There are no branches or degrees of membership and no auxiliary organizations, except for State Associations, Past Exalted Rulers Associations, and the Grand Lodge.

Three more prominent lodges are the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (1819 Baltimore), Moose (1888 Louisville), and the Eagles (1898 Seattle). These lodges do have rituals but at times they are not as elaborate as the Masons. They stress the social aspects of membership, eating and drinking.

No one can deny that lodges do have religious features. Prayers are addressed to a supreme being. Among the officers is often a chaplain. Funeral services are provided for lodge members who die. Encouragement is given to visit "brothers" who are sick. The Masonic lodge building is called a temple. Some lodges offer the reward of heaven ("the grand lodge above") to those members who faithfully fulfill their lodge obligations.

The Elks' literature says that heaven is a reward for the Elk member for virtuous life: ". . . it will be their deeds on earth which will aid them in partaking of the treasures of a better world . . . so direct us in observing and advancing the principles upon which our fraternity is founded that we may ever wear the badge of Thy fellowship and the crown of Thy approval. . . bless us in the benevolent and practical work of our order . . . that we may ever merit Thy blessings and approval. Amen."

Christ as "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God" as we Christians confess in the Nicene Creed in the Order of Holy Communion. It is to honor Christ as our divine Savior that the synod and our congregation object to lodge membership.

(If you have questions or wish to discuss or study this matter further, don't hesitate to speak to the pastor or elders.)

1) A Christian who belongs to the lodge might become confused in his or her own faith and think it is not so important to confess the Holy Trinity, Christ as the Son of God and only Savior, and salvation by faith alone and not by good works. The lodge believes falsely in these matters.

2) A Christian who belongs to the lodge and takes part in the rituals would be dishonoring Jesus Christ and worshipping a false god, an idol.

3) A Christian who belongs to the lodge would perhaps cause others in the church to join a lodge without realizing the false beliefs of the lodge.

4) A Christian who belongs to a lodge is supporting and promoting the rituals and teachings of the lodge and thereby is propagating false doctrine (II John 10,11).

In seeking to convince an individual that lodge membership is sinful, the church must depend upon the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and the working of the Holy Spirit. Convictions cannot be forced.

They are the result of honest and sincere study and prayer.

If an individual church member who might belong to a lodge becomes convinced that this is contrary to the true worship of God, then there is nothing to do but resign that membership. One should not sin against the Word of God and against one's conscience.

It is not popular to point out the false teaching of the lodge. But the honor of Jesus Christ and the integrity of the Word is at stake. The lodge simply does not honor Jesus

This is a religion basing salvation on works of law. St. Paul declares: "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" -- whether that be Jewish law or the precepts of the lodge.

Here is another example of a religious ritual, a quotation from the enrollment (initiation) ritual of the Elks:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in the presence of a Supreme Being, and the lodge of Elks, do solemnly promise and swear, that I will never reveal any of the secrets of this Order, which have been, or may hereafter be committed to my charge and keeping. . . . If I break this oath, may I wander through the world forsaken; may I be pointed out as a being bereft of decency and manhood, too loathsome to hold communion with true and upright men. And may a Supreme Power help me, and keep me steadfast in this my solemn and binding obligation in the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the United States of America. Amen."

There are two beliefs especially which make the lodge objectionable for the confessing Christian. These both concern the central person of our Christian faith, the keystone of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The lodge does not teach correctly concerning God. The lodge does not recognize the Lord Jesus as true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Therefore all talk concerning god, prayers addressed to god, is false for there is no confession of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures teach:

John 5:23: He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

John 14:6: Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Me."

John 2:23: No one who denies the Son has the

Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

The lodge speaks much of the Father and of God. But nowhere is there a confession of Jesus Christ as the one and only way to the Father.

2. The lodge does not teach correctly concerning the one way to salvation and a better life. The lodge does not recognize the saving work of Jesus Christ, who died that we might be forgiven. Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. The Scriptures teach that man is born sinful and must be converted (come to faith) by hearing of the Gospel. There is no salvation apart from Christ.

Romans 3:23: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 10:17: Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Acts 4:12: Salvation is found in no one else (except Jesus Christ), for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Galatians 2:16: A man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-10: For by grace you have been saved through faith--And this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The very heart and center of the Bible, our Lord Jesus Christ, is missing in the religion of the lodge. None of the official prayers in the ritual are addressed to God in the name of Christ. The Christless nature of the lodge is evident from the substitution made in one of the hymns which is sung at an Elk ritual. The Trinity is conspicuously absent from this doxology sung at an Elk memorial service.

Notice the rewording of the last two lines.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures, here below;  
Praise Him above for all that's good;  
Praise God for our true brotherhood.

The original version of this hymn as found in our Lutheran Hymnal (#644) is: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow / Praise Him, all creatures, here below / Praise Him above, ye heavenly host / Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

Here is a summary comparison of four teachings of the Bible and the lodge:

The Bible teaches:

1) The true God is the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2) Jesus Christ is true God.

3) Jesus Christ died to take away the sins of all people.

4) A person is saved by trusting the forgiving love of Jesus.

The lodge teaches:

1) There is some kind of god who is the supreme governor of the universe.

2) Jesus Christ was a very good man.

3) Jesus Christ lived to set all people a good example to follow.

4) A person who does gooddeeds will go to the grand lodge above.

It is the spiritual responsibility of the synod and the congregation to warn against lodge membership (Ezek. 33:5-9). The reasons are these: