



WISCONSIN MASONIC HANDBOOK

CHAPTER 11

MASONRY AND RELIGION

A. INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial areas of concern for Freemasonry is its relationship with religious groups. It must be made very clear to all such groups that Freemasonry is not a religion. While the Craft does have an altar, engages in prayer, displays an open book of Holy Writings upon the altar, requires a belief in Deity and in the brotherhood of man and expresses the concept of immortality in its ritual, it does not have the central features of a religion which are theology, worship and evangelism.

The purpose of Freemasonry is to help make good men better by encouraging its members to follow the teachings of their own religious faith, to support in every way possible beneficial, civic and charitable causes, to be responsible for their own moral and ethical conduct, to be examples and teachers for their families and to treat all other persons regardless of race, religion or national heritage in a just and ethical manner.

This means then, that Freemasonry supports its members in the practice of their religious faith.

Some religions may claim that Freemasonry is a religion also but this is not true and neither is it a substitute for religion nor is it competitive with religion. It is necessary that Freemasonry provide opportunities for the various religious groups to understand that the Craft's only purpose is to help make good men better and that it supports its members in their religious faith. If this is done in an understanding, gentle and concerned way, the increased knowledge about Freemasonry will greatly improve the relationship between the various religions and the Craft.

An excellent method to address this crucial area is for a lodge or several lodges together to sponsor a Masonry and Religion night, or, as it is sometimes called, a Clergy and Craft night.

B. MASONRY AND RELIGION NIGHT/CLERGY AND CRAFT NIGHT

The purpose of such an event is to inform the clergy and spouses of all religious faiths as to what Freemasonry is all about.

A specific plan should be followed in arranging such an occasion. The following are some of the necessary elements of such a plan.

1. Invite all clergy and spouses in the area to a lodge for the evening. The best way to obtain their presence is through a personal invitation from a lodge member to his pastor, priest, rabbi or religious leader to attend the event. Other lodge members could be given names of religious leaders to invite who have no member of their faith as lodge members. A letter should follow the oral invitation to make it even more official and to provide a reminder of the time and place of the program.
2. Be sure that the sponsoring lodge or lodges' membership and spouses receive an invitation.
3. The plan should, if possible, include a dinner prior to the meeting and at which the clergy and spouses are the guests of the lodge or lodges.
4. Following the dinner, the group would assemble for a presentation by a panel of from two to four knowledgeable Masons.
5. Personnel for the panel should include such individuals as the Grand Master or other Grand Lodge officers, Grand Chaplain, Past Grand Master, District Chaplain or other Masonic leaders respected by the lodges.
6. Presentation should be made on such matters as Masonic history, Masonic charities, organization and purpose of Freemasonry, the relationship of Freemasonry to religion, or other related subjects.
7. Following the presentations, the meeting should be opened to questions directed to the panel.
8. This plan calls for the event to be scheduled and planned well in advance of the date of the event. The first item would be to confirm the date with the panel members in conjunction with the lodge schedule.

9. Publicity for the evening should be out long before the event so that the clergy and lodge members will have adequate time to include it in their calendars.
10. A definite time to begin and end the program should be set.
11. Make this occasion a relaxing, learning evening, free of apprehension.
12. If there is a desire for assistance in arranging or setting up such an important program, the Grand Chaplain and District Area Chaplains are always willing to help.

C. MASONIC MEMORIAL SERVICES

Information regarding Memorial Services are found on pages 12-16 in the Lodge Chaplains Handbook, available on the Grand Lodge Web site. There has been some concern on the part of various religious leaders relating to a lodge participation in a memorial service for a Masonic brother when conducted prior to or immediately following a religious service. In order to deal with this concern the following are recommended:

1. The brother in charge of the Masonic Memorial Service should consult with the clergy in charge of the religious service on Scripture choice and to be sure he understands that the lodge is cooperating with him. The clergy, as family pastor, is closer to them, has counseled them in their grief and recognizes their need more clearly so the Masonic leader support the pastor as he ministers to the family.
2. The Masonic Memorial Service should be kept as short as possible when held in conjunction with a religious service.
3. The memorial service is most effective when spoken with understanding and feeling by memory although it is better to read the service with feeling than to say it from memory with no feeling. Whichever way it is done it should be read or spoken with sincerity and compassion for the family and friends.
4. Any of the memorial services can be used or one can combine parts of two or more if desired. One can also put his memorial service together but be sure the essential elements are included. Some of the archaic language may be modernized.

5. Those lodge members attending the Masonic Memorial Service should return to their seats after placing the acacia instead of leaving. It is important for the lodge to remain for the religious service out of respect for the deceased brother and his family.
6. In the event of a cremation urn present at a Masonic Memorial Service, the apron and acacia may be laid on a small table in front of the urn. A small table may also be used if neither the casket or the urn is present.
7. In lodges where there is no one who is available to present a Masonic Memorial Service, the lodge may call either the District Chaplain or the Grand Chaplain.

D. LODGE CHAPLAINS' HANDBOOK

Note References on page 18. This information is helpful to lodge chaplains and elected officers.

E. CRITICISMS OF FREEMASONRY

In response to criticisms of Freemasonry, we should neither be defensive or antagonistic, nor should we enter into a debate with them.

For us to adequately meet criticisms, we must receive the proper education in Masonic purposes, concepts and charities. Freemasons must involve themselves in civic and community services for the beneficial welfare of those in need through financial and volunteer efforts. Our Masonic charities must receive the same enthusiastic support. Our lodge building should also be available to family and community needs and services in so far as possible. To help meet the criticisms, it is important for our communities to know what Freemasonry stands for so we can expand the publicizing of our charities and volunteering services.