

Shriners International

An Evaluation from the Theological Perspective
of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
February 2022

History, Beliefs, Practices

Identity:

According to the Shriners International website, “Shriners are a brotherhood of men committed to family, engaged in ongoing personal growth and dedicated to providing care for children and families in need.”¹

Founder(s):

Walter M. Fleming (1838-1913) and William J. “Billy” Florence (1831-1891)

Statistics:

There are over 300,000 Shrine members in nearly 200 Shrine temples (local meeting places) in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Panama, the Philippines, Germany and Australia.² The Shriners support 22 hospitals in the United States, Canada and Mexico, providing care for children with orthopedic conditions, burns, spinal cord injuries and cleft lips and palates. Hospitals are financed through gifts, endowments, fund-raising events and annual membership dues paid by Shriners.³

History:

In 1870, a group of Masons in New York City, including Walter Fleming and William Florence, started a new brotherhood for Masons centered on fun and fellowship rather than ritual. Florence, an actor, had attended a party hosted by an Arabian diplomat in France. That Arabian-themed party provided the framework for the new fraternity, which was called the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. The first meeting of the Mecca Shriners, the first temple in the United States, was held on September 26, 1872.⁴

In the 1800s, Shrine temples provided aid during epidemics, floods and other disasters. After visiting a hospital for crippled children in Atlanta in 1919, Imperial Potentate (chief executive

¹ <https://www.shrinersinternational.org/Shriners/Values/Brotherhood>, accessed August 12, 2021.

² <https://www.shrinersinternational.org/>; April Wooster, “From Fezzes to Secret Rituals: A Field Guide to Shriners,” *The Journal*, June 30, 2003, at <https://www.journalmpls.com/news/2003/06/from-fezzes-to-secret-rituals-a-field-guide-to-shriners/>, accessed August 17, 2021.

³ <https://www.shrinershospitalsforchildren.org/shc>.

⁴ <https://www.shrinersinternational.org/Shriners/History/Beginnings>, accessed September 2, 2021. The initials of the order’s official name, A. A. O. N. M. S., can be rearranged to spell “A MASON.”

officer) Freeland Kendrick encouraged the adoption of an official Shriner philanthropy to help children in need. The first Shriners Hospital for Children was established in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1922.⁵

Shrine members wear the fez, a red hat with a black tassel. The Shrine emblem displays a crescent (the curved halves are described as Bengal Tiger claws), a star, a scimitar (curved sword) and the head of a sphinx. The emblem may include the words *Robur et Furor*, which means “Strength and Fury.”⁶

Texts:

None

Beliefs and Practices

The Shriner motto is “Pleasure without intemperance, hospitality without rudeness and jollity without coarseness.”⁷ “Shriners must profess a belief in God—the Jewish, Christian or Muslim God. They claim to affirm religious tolerance, patriotism, freedom, charity and integrity.”⁸ Shriners provide fun and fellowship for members, as well as support the Shriners Hospitals. The hospitals do not charge patients or families for the care they receive. Shrine temples hold events such as fish fries, concerts and car shows to support the hospitals. Hospitals are also supported by donations from the general public.⁹

The Shriners established their organization on the principles of Freemasonry, adding elements of fun and philanthropy. All Shriners are Masons but not all Masons are Shriners; a Third Degree Master Mason is eligible to become a Shriner. The Shriners International governing body, a board of directors with 12 officers, is called the Imperial Divan. The highest leader, serving as president and chief executive officer, is the Imperial Potentate, elected for a one-year term.¹⁰

Women may not join the Shriners, but women related to Shrine members may join the Daughters of the Nile, the Ladies Oriental Shrine of North America, the Shrine Guilds of America or the Order of the Eastern Star. Younger women (ages 10 to 20) may join Job’s Daughters International or the International Order of the Rainbow. Young men (ages 12 to 21) may join DeMolay International.¹¹

⁵ <https://www.shrinersinternational.org/Shriners/Philanthropy/Origins>, accessed September 2, 2021; <https://lovetotherescue.org/the-story-of-shriners/>, accessed September 3, 2021.

⁶ <https://www.shrinersinternational.org/Shriners/History/Emblem>, accessed September 2, 2021.

⁷ <https://www.compellingtruth.org/Shriners.html>

⁸ April Wooster, at <https://www.journalmpls.com/news/2003/06/from-fezzes-to-secret-rituals-a-field-guide-to-shriners/>, accessed August 17, 2021.

⁹ <https://www.shrinersinternational.org/Shriners/Philanthropy/Origins>, accessed September 2, 2021

¹⁰ Wooster, at <https://www.journalmpls.com/news/2003/06/from-fezzes-to-secret-rituals-a-field-guide-to-shriners/>, accessed August 17, 2021; <https://www.shrinersinternational.org/Shriners/Organization/Overview>, accessed September 2, 2021.

¹¹ <https://beashrinernow.com/faqs/>, accessed September 2, 2021.

During the initiation ceremony, the candidate for Shrine membership is called a Son of the Desert who seeks admission to the Mystic Shrine.¹² The candidate must have “a belief in the existence of a Deity, future rewards and punishments.”¹³ In the membership ritual, sprinkled water and the sound of a barking dog lead the candidate to think that a dog has urinated in his face. The new member watches a mock drama that represents the hanging of a spy caught in the temple, the cutting of a crescent on the breast of a female spy and the beheading of a traitor to the order, with all roles played by Shrine members.¹⁴

The Shriner candidate is told: “By the existence of Allah and the creed of Mohammed; by the legendary sanctity of our Tabernacle at Mecca, we greet you in commemoration of the Arab’s faith in purity and innocence, we accept your answers as sincere, and you will now be permitted to proceed in the rites and ceremonies of the Mystic Shrine.”¹⁵ The candidate asks that “Allah, the God of Arab, Moslem and Mohammedan, the god of our fathers” would support him in fulfilling his duties as a Shriner.¹⁶

A Lutheran Response

The Shriners’ charitable work with children’s hospitals is commendable, but the Shriners’ organization has adopted spiritual assertions of Masonic practice that are contrary to Christian teachings. All Shriners are Masons, and “the Supreme Being of Freemasonry is officially a generic god designed by intent to be universally acceptable to all who would seek admittance to the Masonic lodge. This god is a unitarian, not trinitarian, Supreme Being.”¹⁷ Masons do not openly deny Jesus Christ, but the Savior’s name is absent from Masonic rituals. “All official prayers in Masonic lodge meetings are directed to the Grand Architect of the Universe apart from any reference to Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

The Shriners’ initiation ceremonies promote a false god. Membership candidates are greeted in the name of Allah and “the creed of Mohammed,” which states that there is no god but Allah. The candidate asks that Allah, the god of Muslims, would support him. Muslims reject the Triune God: “They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three In a Trinity: for there is No god

¹² Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine: An Evaluation from the Theological Perspective of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod), 2.

¹³ Quoted in *Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine*, 3.

¹⁵ Quoted in *Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine*, 2.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine*, 2.

¹⁷ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Lodge: An Evaluation from a Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2005), 2, at

<https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=zxodAMUgikNVPE0XdNxxZuLLoZvFGI8Z>, accessed September 9, 2021.

¹⁸ CTCR, *The Lodge*, 2, at <https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=zxodAMUgikNVPE0XdNxxZuLLoZvFGI8Z>, accessed September 9, 2021.

except One God’ (Surah 5:73).”¹⁹ In obedience to the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3), Christians worship the only true God, the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; John 17:3). Islam also denies the deity of Christ: “They do blaspheme who say: ‘Allah is Christ the son Of Mary.’ But said Christ: ‘O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord And your Lord’” (Surah 5:72).²⁰ In the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians believe and confess that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16) and “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.”²¹

The Shriner motto calls for “jollity without coarseness,” but their membership initiation rite, with its mock violence and executions, can be described as coarse and offensive. In contrast to the behavior involved in the Shriner ceremony, Christians are called to display in their lives the fruit of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). The Word of God instructs us, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

Since the LCMS believes membership in lodges or participation in their rites are expressions of unionism and syncretism, and since unionism and syncretism in any form are prohibited by the Constitution and Bylaws of Synod, all members of Synod and parishioners of member congregations should abstain from Shriner membership or participation. That said, it is entirely within the realm of conscience as to whether one or one’s loved one receives treatment at a Shriner’s hospital or whether Lutherans choose to contribute to such a hospital for the purpose of supporting its medical work.

Links and Websites

Shriners International

<https://shrinersinternational.org>

The Lodge: An Evaluation from a Lutheran Perspective (2005)

<https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=zxodAMUgikNVPE0XdNxxZuLLoZvFGI8Z>

The Abrahamic Religions: An Evaluation from a Lutheran Perspective (2014)

<https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=X5OivssjiAyi2z9fuPsuqVc3B4flnC7l>

Islam: An Evaluation from a Lutheran Perspective (2007)

<https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=hToraZsNucbEtn02T6jMQbnHMLmQokMN>

¹⁹ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Islam: An Evaluation from a Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2007), at <https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=hToraZsNucbEtn02T6jMQbnHMLmQokMN>, accessed September 17, 2021. A surah is a chapter in the Koran, or Qur’an, the sacred writings of Islam.

²⁰ CTCR, *Islam*, at <https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=hToraZsNucbEtn02T6jMQbnHMLmQokMN>, accessed September 17, 2021.

²¹ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 174.