



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

April 24, 2012

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Here is an important article written by Grand Lodge Board of Directors Member, author of excellent books on Odd Fellowship, and DMC Member Peter Sellars.

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Dave Rosenberg

A CHANGE IN THOUGHT ON MEMBERSHIP

Peter V. Sellars

Simply stated Membership has been a continued message by Grand Masters for over a hundred years. You can go back and read the reports by Grand Masters in the 1800's of their concerns of membership growth or decline.

Today, it is still an issue. It is an important issue that now threatens to wipe this Order completely away. We hear and read the messages being posted and discussed on this current decline. We have only had one year of growth since the 1940's and that came in 2002 as a result of a handful of purposeful events.

The first event was the inclusion of women in the Odd Fellows lodge, which was a positive and progressive move. The second was a result of the original Noble Grand/Vice Grand Educational Seminar. It was this seminar that welded the average member to the Odd Fellows, which I will come back to in a moment.

I used to believe that such increases in membership could be initiated by our Grand Lodge by thinking there was more going on at that level helping membership along.

Since my years, of having served on the Grand Lodge Board of Directors, nearly two full terms, plus a few months, I have come to discover there is little that the Grand Lodge can do to change our direction and that growth is the responsibility of the individual lodge.



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Your Grand Lodge can provide your lodge with brochures, literature, books, paraphernalia, banners, pins, and other desired items helpful to your lodge's presentation in the community. In addition, the Grand Lodge appoints a Membership Committee, which I am its chair. What we provide the lodges with are methods of growth and ideas for growth that come directly from successful lodges. These are published in the California Odd Fellows and Rebekahs magazine. This is what your Grand Lodge can provide. There is no magic being disseminated from the top down.

Perhaps on the Grand Lodge level, which works too, few Grand Masters have had the wisdom to provide encouragement to the lodges visited during their years. Some provide encouragement by listening and making positive and progressive suggestions.

My thoughts used to be that I thought more things would come from Grand Lodge to the lodges, but that will not happen - ever. But, that is not discouraging. Keep in mind the things we really need to happen must occur at the Sovereign Grand Lodge level. One of those "things" did occur in our last SGL magazine. Did you read the page by the Membership committee, which advised our lodges to get involved with the community and to support a local entity like the Boy Scouts or other community group? My brothers and sisters, that is the most important suggestion I have ever seen from the SGL! That was the door being opened for us. Our Grand Lodge could not have given us such leeway because it does not possess that authority. But, SGL did open the door.

The matter that SGL has not addressed for us yet, is the consolidation of what it is we should be supporting - what program best defines us as an Order. We cannot support a Visual Research Program, an Arthritis Association, Homes for the Aged, Cambodian Village, United Pilgrimage for Youth, and so on. We need a clear and defined program - a single program which defines us and a place where we can support. Putting dollars into several well-intended programs is honorable, but putting dollars into one charity gives us the effectiveness we need. It gives us a defined purpose. It gives us the biggest and most important tool when telling someone what it is we do as an Order.

Going back to what I started with, the year we saw an increase was primarily due to the Noble Grand/Vice Grand Seminar, which had evolved into the Educational Seminar before ending this past year. This program was primarily started by PGM Don Lang. He deserves a great deal of credit for what he did for this jurisdiction, but was never fully recognized. I realize now, that a Membership Committee is only good for what I mentioned earlier and an Educational Seminar is what is most effective. It takes more work, but it is what brought newer members together and brought socialization of different lodges. It brought ideas and encouragement to members - our future leaders.



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I intend on bringing something like this program back. I will ask brother Don for his assistance. Although I chaired this event for a while, it is not a one-man show. I like to see members like Ron Carrey and his brother Dennis lend a hand. I would like to see some of our newer members get on board too. Membership has its role and limitations, but "Educational Seminars" have more of an impact and influence on membership growth.