



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

September 2, 2012

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

On the front page of one of my morning papers this morning - the Sacramento Bee - is an article entitled, "Band of brothers is fading with age." I'm an active-duty US Army veteran myself, so it caught my interest. The gist of the article is that the established veterans organizations in America are losing membership because younger veterans just aren't joining. These groups reached their peaks at the end of World War II and since then have found their numbers diminishing. Respected groups like the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars are rapidly dropping in their membership counts. Here's a quote from a veteran in the article: "Younger veterans don't want to join an organization with a bunch of older guys."

Sound familiar?

What's happening to the veterans' organizations is the same phenomenon that is happening to fraternal orders - including the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

The generations born in the 1960's, 1970's, 1980's and 1990's have different interests and different perspectives that the prior generations. Here's another quote from the article: "Rather than hanging out . . . with their buddies and reminisce, younger veterans prefer family-friendly amenities, an emphasis on community service . . . free Wi-Fi at the halls might help, too." In fact, it struck me that as I am reading this article in the newspaper, the folks in their 20's and 30's and 40's are probably reading the same article on line, and probably on their smart phones.

It's just different now.

For example, ancient Odd Fellows admonitions from the 1700's and 1800's like "educate the orphan" and "bury the dead" have great significance in the history of Odd Fellowship, and historically were remarkable achievements in past ages when society had many orphans and many folks who died who had no way to be respectfully buried. But let's face it. Today there are very, very few orphans in America, and virtually every county has a public guardian who provides for indigent burials. We need to "evolve" these ancient admonitions to the present age - for example, society is filled with foster children (and young adults who have recently "graduated" from the foster system) - we can "evolve" the concept of "educate the orphan" to "help foster children and children in need." This is just one example (of many) of the modernization in which our Order must engage. If we have the courage to talk about it and



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actually deal with it.

The great teachings of our Order - exemplified in our degrees - are timeless. But beyond that, I submit that very, very few new members join this Order because they want to wear regalia or learn the secret grip and passwords. The vast majority of new members (and potential new members) want to join because this Order is a fraternity that offers social contact and friendships, and because our Lodges can do good works in our society and in our communities. Accordingly, those Lodges that actively develop social activities and functions for the membership, and those Lodges that are active in helping local charities and community groups (as well as Odd Fellows' charities) will attract the young blood we need and will flourish and grow. Those Lodges that continue to sit behind closed doors and do little more than conduct formal meetings (with an occasional potluck) will continue to diminish as members pass on. Quoting another veteran from the article this morning: "We don't have time to sit in three meetings every month."

Food for thought.

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