



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

September 29, 2012

Time to Go External

The other day I was happily watching a San Francisco Giants baseball game and I was surprised to see the Masons of California with a presentation being made on television at the ballgame. Their presentation was “Masons4Mitts”. It was an eye opener to me when someone else mentioned, why don’t the Odd Fellows do that? I did not have an answer for them. More and more I am seeing that we must do something in the public arena in order to make any progress towards our primary goal of invigorating membership.

I often attend lodges that meet with locked doors. Many of them have had the same members in attendance for many years. Most of these are declining in membership, and some have not gotten a new member in a long time. Yet, we seem to have this ongoing debate within our order regarding whether or not change is needed. Many of us are complacent in everything we do. We act like performing the ritual as precisely as possible somehow conjures up new members. It’s almost as if we don’t want new members, that we fear anything new or different. And yet, we all talk about the problem, the elephant in the room. No one debates the core issue, because numbers don’t lie. The decline of membership is indisputable. The only debate remaining is what are we going to do about it?

We can do nothing, which is pretty much what many of us do, or we can attempt to head outside and show the world that somehow we still have relevance. This is the core issue. Let’s face facts. Many of us don’t know how to describe our order to an interested outsider and we have little or nothing with which to hold their interest. The ritual, while it is our mapping of a meeting, is only the skeletal format, not the meat itself. I am just as remiss as most. I find it difficult to describe our order as well. Several members have mentioned to me that we must form a modern mission statement, a call to order, if you will, in which any or all of us can tell a prospective member what it is we do, keeping it relevant to today’s world. Certainly, a search of our proud history would show that such statements have existed (do we still “educate the orphan”?), but what worked in 1850, may not be adaptable to today’s more diverse and modern culture. In watching the Masons presentation at A.T. & T. Park, they were presenting funds and/or equipment for poor children who wanted to play little league. In my view, it was not the



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amount of money they raised it was the image that they cared enough to do it. We do charitable drives, but somehow what we do seems pale by comparison. Is it because our membership is smaller? Certainly not, as how would anyone know the amount of our membership? No, it's the image we present as being somehow removed from the problem, oblivious to the pain and suffering of others. No one among us can present an image to the world that drives membership we have to do it as a unit. A charity does not by itself grow membership, but it does show that we care about more than ourselves. Helping our members is a wonderful gesture, but somehow we should do our best to help our world, and that is when we may experience growth both in our own hearts and in new members.

We have some members who seek to debate or dismiss everything as useless or outside the Odd Fellow universe, but this must stop. Debate is unnecessary, since your own lodge is the proper vehicle for your own answers to dwindling membership, which naturally begs the question that if within your own lodge your membership is dwindling, what idea have you thought of to encourage membership that does not even translate to your own lodge? Our membership numbers are quickly spiraling downward. If we are not going to do anything to attract new members, then we have to begin to wonder if it may be because we fail to have any relevance to the outside world.

In Friendship, Love and Truth, Rick Boyles