



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

November 03, 2012

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

I'm delighted to send along to you an important essay on the future of this Order, penned by California Deputy Grand Master Rick Boyles. As with all essays in this newsletter, please feel free to pass it along to the members of your Lodge, and Brothers and Sisters of other Lodges. This discussion is important for the future of Odd Fellowship.

F - L - T

Dave Rosenberg

Where Do We Go From Here?

I've been doing an informal study of benevolent and fraternal groups, and perhaps not surprisingly I have found that our Order - Odd Fellows - is one of the weakest groups still going.

We like to talk about our diminishing size as similar to other groups, but that's just not accurate. The other groups tend to be much larger than we are. The Masons, the Elks, Moose, even the Clampers, and many other groups whom we think of as failing along with us are, actually, much larger than Odd Fellows. In point of fact, one would be hard pressed to find a group still functioning which is any smaller than our own Odd Fellows. So, it should be obvious that 50 members lost is a much more significant loss when you have 5,000 members as opposed to when you have 50,000 members. Of course, illustrating the problem is much simpler than solving it, but there are many of us who still don't see, or worse ignore, the impending nature of our own demise. Unifying all of our individual groups of Odd Fellows is certainly emphasizing the downturn, and is quickly going to become reality. Sovereign Grand Lodge is already putting the mechanics of unification in motion. I have had the honor of speaking to the current Sovereign Grand Master and he says that it will become policy within a few short years. I think that this may be a good move but it won't, by itself, solve the bases of our decline. So then, we arrive at the core issue specifically: How do we grow our Order?

As an aside, I like to be as even-handed as possible and a friend of mine who opposes the DMC says that our group is good at pointing out the issue (of our decline) but not at solving the problem. That's not exactly accurate. DMC, through this newsletter, has relentlessly pointed out



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the 66 year drop in membership in the California Odd Fellows (we now have just a bit over 4,000 members, a decline of over 90% from where we stood after World War II). And DMC, through this newsletter, has offered numerous, proven suggestions to help individual members and individual Lodges grow (for example, Dave Rosenberg in recent newsletters has suggested 10 ways for members and Lodges to attract applicants). In addition, DMC members have submitted resolutions to Grand Lodge aimed at increasing membership, and these resolutions have been adopted (for example, resolutions dealing with open meetings of Lodges, increasing our community involvement and visibility, improving our good fellowship and social activities for our members, the Membership Challenge Grant Program, etc.) Clearly, DMC has not been silent on the need for new members, and on ways to get there.

We now have about 130 Odd Fellow Lodges within the State of California (where once we had hundreds of Lodges) and in order for us to solve another Lodge's declining membership, we would need to examine it closely and make the corresponding adjustments. Every Lodge is unique. What we can do in the DMC and throughout the order is to find attributes of successful Lodges and show how those attributes may work in our other Lodges - best practices, if you will. What gives me hope for the future is that we DO have a few successful - in fact, very successful - Lodges that are growing and thriving. We have Lodges in excess of 100 members that keep expanding. So, clearly, they show a path to the future which is a path of growth and opportunity, not a path of stagnation and decline. Unfortunately, the vast majority of our remaining 130 Lodges are declining in membership, and many are simply failing at a greatly accelerated rate. We are now losing Lodges at the rate of at least 10-12 yearly. It does not require a MENSA candidate to see that at that rate, only two possible futures remain for Odd Fellowship in California in our generation: either we will completely disappear as a fraternal order, or we will survive through just a few (perhaps 10-15) successful Lodges operating independently here and there in California. A refusal to recognize the issue will not make it any less severe, and there will quickly come a time when the decline is too rapid to stop or to cause it to reverse itself. We have to quit debating the issue and band together to survive as a viable Grand Lodge of California.

The complexity of the issue is best solved at its basic level, which is, of course, your own Lodge and you. The DMC committee can point out ways in which Lodges have grown but they can't externally grow your Lodge. Your Lodge has to do its own heavy lifting. And the heavy lifting starts with each of us, as Odd Fellows. We, as individual members, can't sit back and wait for the other guy to solve the problem. We, and each of us, has to take custody of the issue. So, when someone who opposes say, Davis Lodge, San Francisco, or one of the other lodges where they are experiencing growth, I feel the need to tell them that this opposition is not only counter-productive, but more importantly, it is misdirected. So, an argument one might put forward is why does the DMC exist if it can't solve the problem of declining membership directly. What



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we can do is to illustrate the problem, which we have done, and draw comparisons with and best practices from Lodges experiencing growth. The rest is up to YOU.

Finally, we as an Order like to demean lodges of some success with the label "club" but let's face it, that's what successful lodges eventually become. Perhaps not an individual club, but a sheltering home for many clubs. This is not to diminish the ritual and regalia of our Order. The history and tradition of Odd Fellowship must and will ever remain, as that is what makes us a unique fraternity. The teachings are timeless. Yet, even reading our ritual you see that Lodges were meant to shelter clubs, or "committees" as the ritual calls it. A successful Lodge tends to be active, and to have multiple committees, handling multiple tasks. An unsuccessful Lodge often meets in silence and has no real theory of why it exists beyond tradition. This is what we have found to be the most basic trait of a successful Lodge, the ability to sustain a club-like atmosphere, and even more basic, the ability to sustain a congenial atmosphere not only within the Lodge walls but beyond the doors. We need to emphasize the need for growth by showing it in our voices, hearts, and actions. If all these things are done sincerely, we should manage to survive into a brighter future.

In F., L., & T., Rick Boyles, Deputy Grand Master