



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

November 21, 2012

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

The "Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of California - 160th Annual Session" reveals the raw numbers of our Order's membership in this jurisdiction. It's not a pretty picture.

On January 1, 2011, our Order had 141 Lodges, but on December 31, 2011, we had diminished to 131 Lodges, a drop of 10 Lodges. Not only is this the most precipitous decline in number of Lodges that we have seen in a very long time, but as the total number drops, the percentage impact is even greater. And the number of members has, again, declined. At the start of 2011 we had 4,994 members, but we ended the year with 4,782 members (and the number of dues-paying members is even less - 4,429. We all know, of course, that 4,429 does not represent the number of members who attend meetings and participate in Lodge activities - most organizations (and Odd Fellowship is no exception here) understand that only about 50% of the membership is truly "active". So, in reality, the number of "active" Odd Fellows in California is probably closer to 2,200, a razor-thin basis on which to sustain a great fraternity in a large jurisdiction like California.

But if we drill down on the numbers, we see the real challenge presented by declining membership in this state. Here are some statistics that should make us all sit up and take notice:

Of our 131 Lodges, there are 77 Lodges which have 25 or fewer members. Drilling down further, we see that there are 12 Lodges that show 10 or fewer members on their books

On the other side of the equation, California shows only 6 Lodges with 100 or more members. And the 10 largest Lodges in California now make up about 38% of the total membership of our Order in this state.

What do these numbers tell us?

First, it shows that there are 77 Lodges that are flashing a yellow alert signal. When a Lodge has 25 or fewer members on its books, it is quite possible that that Lodge is doing fine, the members are generally involved, and the Lodge is active and alive in the community. On the other hand, when a Lodge has 25 or fewer members on its books, it is also quite possible that that Lodge only has half (or fewer) that come to meetings and otherwise participate, that the Lodge has not



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

added new members to keep pace with declining membership, and that the Lodge is trouble. At some point, that Lodge reaches a tipping point where it becomes extremely difficult to reverse the trend of decline, simply because the membership is not there to bring in new blood, and because no one wants to join what has become the shell of an organization.

Second, it shows that there are 12 Lodges that are flashing a red alarm signal. When a Lodge has 10 or fewer members, it is almost inevitably in serious trouble. Understanding that only about half the members of any Lodge come to meetings or participate, it is simply not possible for a Lodge with 5 or 4 or 3 active members to function. Further, that Lodge has lost the normal checks and balances that exist in Odd Fellowship, and almost certainly has financial issues.

Third, the statistics and trends show that the vast majority of Lodges in this jurisdiction (around 110-120 of our Lodges) are historically either declining in membership or are simply treading water and maintaining, more or less, a constant membership number over the past 10 years. A small number of our Lodges (around 10-20) are historically growing, and have added membership in significant numbers over the past 10 years.

If these trends continue, then Odd Fellowship in California can expect the following future: (1) The number of Lodges in this state will continue to diminish as we lose 5-10 each year. (2) At the same time around 10-20 Lodges will continue to grow in this jurisdiction, and will year-after-year comprise an increasing percentage of the membership of this Order, until those 10-20 Lodges, over time, comprise more than 50% of the membership. In my opinion, this is not healthy for our Order. That's why we need to focus on providing tools for the majority of our Lodges to increase membership. And the single best way to attract new members is to be an active Lodge. When a Lodge is active in the community, and provides social activities for its members, it will attract new blood and it will grow. This has been proven by the few Lodges that are growing.

F - L - T

Dave Rosenberg