



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

June 11, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

From time to time I enjoy looking through old books or historical sketches on the Internet regarding the Odd Fellows, its origin and evolution. And I often chuckle to hear some members of this great Order disdain "change" and believe that the way we do things in this Order today must remain essentially inviolate from the way we have been doing it for the past 20, 30, 40 or 50 years. They view the word "change" as if it were profane and antithetical to Odd Fellowship. In fact, it's just the opposite. Change, brothers and sisters, is the historical norm for Odd Fellowship. This Order has evolved time and time again, to fit its times. And, now this Order - in 2013 - comes face-to-face with its own fraternal "mortality." As the membership numbers in lodges dwindle to historical lows, we must again evolve and change to fit our age and entice the new young members we require.

For those who continue to doubt that change is the custom and pattern of our Order, allow me to quote some excerpts from an Internet article I read only yesterday:

"The Odd Fellows or Odd Fellows are second only to the freemasons as a long-established and still reasonably healthy fraternal organization or secret society. They have, however, been subject to many schisms, and the number of members today is unclear. The date of foundation is likewise unclear, but it was presumably prior to 1745 when the first recorded Lodge of Odd Fellows met at various London taverns, including the Oakley Arms in Southwark; the Globe in Hatton Garden; and the Boar's Head in Smithfield. Dues were a penny a visit. The purpose is as obscure as the origin of the name, but the society seems to have combined the functions of a modern working men's club - that is, offering a place for reliable food and drink at a good price - with a degree of self-help. The members, who were mostly working men, would pass the hat to help a fellow in distress and would provide an out-of-work member with a card that entitled him to accommodation at other lodges until he found work. Most members were originally mechanics and artisans, though it seems that anyone who could afford a penny for the dues was admitted.

In the late 18th century, many individual lodges were prosecuted by the Crown on the grounds of potential sedition and were closed (this was the period of the French Revolution and the rebellion of the American colonies), but the order as a whole survived. Some Odd Fellows lodges seem to have arisen at around this time as a result of disaffected Freemasons seceding from their parent order; these coalesced into the Ancient and Honorable Loyal Order of Odd



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Fellows. At the same time, most other Odd Fellows' lodges amalgamated into the Patriotic Order of Odd Fellows, which later became known as the United or Union Order of Odd Fellows. London remained the seat of the order.

The first great schism came in 1813. Odd Fellows at that time were notoriously fond of a dram, and a group of unusually sober-minded northerners took exception to this bibulousness and formed the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Manchester Unity (or Union). This is the root order of most subsequent Odd Fellows foundations, including the American Independent Order of Odd Fellows."

This short vignette offers just a glimpse into the evolving nature of our Order. We started in the pubs of England as a group of members who enjoyed each others company and wanted the social fellowship that a fraternal order offered, complete with good food and good drink. And we evolved into a society that provided help and assistance to members who were sick or in distress or out of work. And because Odd Fellows evolved into such a support function, it was imperative that we developed secret signs and passwords and cards so that only Odd Fellows could enjoy the benefits of membership and frauds could not take advantage of the member's largesse. The evolution continued when Odd Fellowship essentially was split by a group who disdained alcohol.

When Odd Fellowship came to the United States the evolution continued. We have seen over the past 200 years major welcomed changes in the Odd Fellows including the inclusion of people of color, of women, of members as young as 16. We have seen the number and scope of the degrees changing over time.

And now, as we move forward in the 21st Century, it is time - long overdue, in fact - for some serious evolution in our Order. This is not just a matter of semantics, this is a mater of survival. For many young men and women in 2013, Odd Fellows and Rebekahs appear as if they never left 1913. The basic teachings of Odd Fellowship are as true today as they were in 1745. But we can't get men and women of the 21st Century to join Lodges where the members are all in their 70's and 80's, and all that takes place are secret ritual meetings, an occasional potluck, and not much else. If you doubt this is true, just take a look at our membership statistics for the past 60+ years - almost without fail - we have lost members and Lodges year after year. That's over 3 generations of decline. Frankly, we keep doing the same things, in the same ways, over and over again - and somehow we expect that things will get better and this will grow our Order. But it has not.

This does not have to be our story going forward. We can evolve to meet the needs of today's



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men and women - the new members we need. Please go to www.caioof.org. On the home page, under the link "Grand Lodge" please click on "Message from Grand Warden". There you will see the three articles that I have written entitled: 10 Helpful Hints to Bring New Members into the Order, The Three-Legged Stool, and A Three-Year Plan to Grow Your Lodge. These three articles present a plan going forward that can transform this Order. It's time to make some changes. That would be the Odd Fellows way.

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