

Independent Order of Odd Fellows Dedicated Members for Change

August 15, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Statistics show that we are slowly disappearing as an Order. This trend, however, can be reversed.

First, the statistics. I have reviewed the Grand Lodge Journals from the turn of the 21st Century to the present. In reviewing the statistics from 2000 to 2013, we find that in 2000 we had 181 Odd Fellows Lodges in California. Today, in 2013, we have 126 Odd Fellows Lodges. That, brothers and sisters, is a loss of 55 Lodges in 13 years, an average of 4 or 5 Lodges lost each year. Put another way, since 2000, we have lost 30% of our Lodges.

But the situation is more dire than that. We may have 126 Lodges on the books, but only 7 of these Lodges have 100 or more members. Of the 126 Lodges, fully 55 Lodges (almost half of all our Lodges) have 20 or fewer members on their books. In fact, 10 of our Lodges have 10 or fewer members on their books. If we assume that only about half the members listed on the books of the Lodge actually participate in meetings and Lodge events, we have to also assume that these Lodges - if they meet at all - are experiencing significant quorum problems. These Lodges are limping along with the illusion of stability.

And we also see tremendous disparities in sizes of our Lodges. The 10 largest Lodges in California now have more than one-third the total membership of our Order. That is, one out of every three Odd Fellows in California is a member of just these 10 Lodges. The trend over the years shows that the 10 largest Lodges will soon have 2 out of every 5 members, and eventually will have half the membership in this Order. So, the few largest Lodges are growing, while the remaining 116 of our Lodges (over 90%) are (with a few exceptions) generally shrinking. That is not a happy trend.

In terms of membership numbers over that same period, the Journals show that on January 1, 2000, total Odd Fellows Lodge membership was 6,074. (These membership numbers are total membership which includes dues paying regular members, associate members and non-contributing members - so they represent the best possible scenario of membership.) On January 1, 2013, the total membership number was only 4,755. That's a decline of 1,315 members in that 2000-2013 time period. Put another way, we have averaged a decline of over 100 members per year.

If we drill down the membership numbers, year after year, however, we see an ominous trend. Typically, only a small percentage of our Lodges have a net gain of membership in any given year. The large majority of our Lodges have a net loss, or at best, stay stagnant. There are a couple of handfuls of larger Lodges that gain members. Most of the smaller Lodges lose members. There are Lodges in California that have not added new members in years, while the



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existing membership ages, withdraws from membership, or passes away.

And what we see in the Odd Fellows Lodges, we see multiplied in the Rebekah Lodges, and multiplied again in the Branches. For example, there are less than 200 active members in all the Encampments in California, and less than 100 active members in all the Cantons in California. The Ladies Encampment Auxiliary and the Ladies Auxiliary Patriarchs Militant are in similar straits.

The statistics show that the present course is unsustainable.

But it is not inevitable.

There is a solution to this conundrum. The solution is obvious and simple: We need to bring more members into our Odd Fellows Lodges. If our Lodges are strong, our Branches will be strong, as well. Grand Lodge has offered incentives to help recruitment of new members. For example, the Membership Challenge Grant Program provided funds to Lodges for new members. And the new \$1,000 Membership Grant Program supports Lodges that develop membership programs. But ultimately, membership development is not the task of the Grand Lodge, or even of the Lodges. Membership development begins at the basic unit of Odd Fellowship: YOU.

If YOU don't bring in a new member to your Lodge, you are failing your Lodge and your Order. It is up to YOU and me and each Odd Fellow to reach out into the community to bring in the new blood our Order needs to reverse the decline. Too many of our members have become complacent and expect that someone else will bring in new members. But that "someone else" is actually YOU. Don't sit back and depend on the other guy or gal to get the job done.

But ultimately, and honestly, this will not work until YOU work with your Lodge to make the Lodge an interesting place. New members won't join (and certainly won't stay) if all your Lodge does is have boring meetings. YOU have to work within your Lodge to develop fun good fellowship activities for the members. And YOU have to work within your Lodge to develop good community projects that not only benefit your community, but also provide worthwhile charitable work that will satisfy your members' community spirit.

I have called this "The Three-Legged Stool" in the past. A stool needs three strong legs to work. If any leg is weak, the stool will eventually topple. Too many Lodges rely too heavily on just one leg - the rich history and ritual of our Order. To be sturdy, a Lodge needs to also develop and strengthen the two other legs: Good fellowship activities within the Lodge for the members, and good community works to benefit the town or area where the Lodge is located. All three are needed for a strong and growing Lodge.

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Dave Rosenberg, GW