



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

November 6, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

A few weeks ago, a long-time, quite traditional member of our Order told me, "I like new ideas." I think it was his way of saying that he is open to suggestions made by me and DMC which, to many, are perceived as "new ideas".

I took it as a compliment. But, frankly, I must say that the "new ideas" espoused by DMC are really "old ideas".

DMC is, as you know, all about increasing membership in this Order. We simply can't continue to lose members at the rate we've been declining for the past 60-plus years. But DMC wants this Order to move into the future with a clear understanding and appreciation of our past. The "new ideas" are no more, nor less, than a re-dedication to what made Odd Fellowship the premier organization in the United States over a Century ago.

Let me explain what I mean.

There was a time in America when Odd Fellowship was the largest and most vibrant fraternal Order in the country. We had one million members. In towns all across the USA, the Odd Fellows Lodge Hall was the center of the community, both in location and in activity. The Odd Fellows Lodge was the place to be. Everybody who was anybody wanted to join this fraternal order. Lodges typically had rosters in the hundreds of members, and scores of new members applied every year. No one had to really seek out and recruit new members - those potential new members coveted joining the Lodge and there was never a dearth of applicants. Memberships included the prominent citizens of the community: police chiefs, physicians, lawyers, university professors, bank presidents, ranchers, mayors, county supervisor, judges, senators - even Presidents of the United States. Odd Fellows marched through the streets in parades on holidays. Odd Fellows ran cemeteries, retirement communities, orphanages, and hospitals. Members of the Order were visible in the community, and Lodges actively supported community projects. Newspaper articles touted the good works of IOOF, and recognized members who were leaders in their towns.

Odd Fellowship was remarkably successful a Century ago because Lodges reached out into their communities and Odd Fellows were very visible in those communities.

But then Odd Fellowship turned inward. Lodges focused more on secret ritual, fancy regalia, grips, signs and passwords - and focused less on the outside world. Odd Fellows spent their time



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and energy memorizing the unwritten works, and meetings focused primarily on reciting memorized scripts. Odd Fellowship became all about "secrets" and less about "community." Ultimately, this inward focus may have pleased some of the members, but it was the beginning of a death spiral for the Order as it tended to create an exclusive "club." It certainly excluded the public and thereby diminish applications for membership from the world outside. Odd Fellowship, in many communities, became a true "secret society." In some communities, Odd Fellowship became invisible.

And so, when DMC talks about "new ideas", we are really talking about the "old ideas." We are talking about being active in our communities, reaching out to our towns, and engaging in good community projects and good community works. We are talking about getting outside of the four walls of our Lodges. We are talking about opening the windows and doors of Odd Fellowship to the outside world, and being part of the world - not just fixtures in a Lodge Hall.

When we engage with the public, the public will engage with us.

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Dave Rosenberg  
Grand Warden