



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

November 8, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

I became an Odd Fellow in 2004, and within a year I had realized that our Order is declining in membership at an alarming rate. This steady decline is a drum I have been beating ever since. In fact, that is the impetus to the formation of DMC. We are all about bringing attention to the decline, identifying reasons for it, and suggesting methods to reverse it.

At one time, Odd Fellowship was the largest fraternal order in the USA with over one million members. Since the end of World War II, our membership has declined year after year at an alarming rate - during that time, our membership has declined by over 90%. We lose Lodges every year - on average about four Lodges lose their charters every year. At present, we have less than 4,500 Odd Fellows in California, and if the rate of decline continues at the same pace, our Order will have less than 2,500 members within the decade (and, as you know, 2,500 members on the books, in reality, means about 1,000 "active" members). It is unsustainable.

But that is only part of the problem of declining membership.

Equally distressing is what occurs during the journey of decline. Lodges that lose members also lose the normal checks and balances that are required for a Lodge to be fiscally and legally solvent. For example, a Lodge with less than 20 members on the books probably reflects a Lodge that has only nine or ten members who are active. What sorts of problems will such a Lodge experience? For one thing, this Lodge will have difficulty making a quorum, and so meetings may be infrequent, or even non-existent. Another problem such a Lodge will experience is that there are simply not sufficient members to fill elected or appointed offices. And so, this Lodge may see the same people in the same offices year after year, or alternatively, may see a small cadre of members playing musical chairs with the offices.

But the biggest single problem with a small and declining membership is that the Lodge will lack the normal checks and balances that a Lodge must have. Increasingly, such a small Lodge will fall under the thrall of one or two members. There may be no checks and balances as between the Secretary, Treasurer and Financial Secretary. There may only be a Finance Committee on paper, not in reality. And where are the Trustees who should control and manage the assets of the Lodge? When one or two members take over, those members know where all the records are kept and are the only ones with keys to all the doors and closets. Those one or two members might wind up paying themselves a "salary" or a "stipend" and may feel entitled to do so, with no control over the reason the money is paid or how much is paid. The Lodge can become their own private fiefdom, and they may justify their actions because they are "preserving" and



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"maintaining" the Lodge for the present and future. And who in the shrinking and dependent membership is left to say, "stop - you can't do that"?

No one.

So, it is important that Lodges approaching (or below) the 20-member mark make renewed efforts to bring in new members - this new blood will eventually lead to a robust membership of the many, not the control of the few (or the one). It won't be rectified overnight, but two or three new members in a small Lodge will make a huge difference over time. Simply put, we need to restore our system of Odd Fellows' checks and balances in all our Lodges. And in order to do that, we need to grow.

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Dave Rosenberg  
Grand Warden