



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

November 16, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

We have a Grand Master in Rick Boyles who is hard-working, dedicated, honorable and passionate about this Order of ours. He has worked his way up the ranks from service as Noble Grand of his Lodge, to the Grand Lodge Degree, to Grand Warden, Deputy Grand Master, and now Grand Master. He has visited many Lodges over the years of his service. And he has seen (as I have seen), essentially, a "tale of two cities" when it comes to Lodges. We have seen some Lodges that are vibrant, active, full of energy - where the meetings are lively and interesting, where the Lodge members really enjoy each others' company, where members are cordial to each other, and the Lodge members engage in social functions and community projects. But we have also seen Lodges where the meetings last 20 minutes, there are no committee reports and no new business. Where members show signs of not getting along, or even, in some cases, are openly hostile to each other. Where the only thing done is a to conduct a formal ritual meeting and plan for an occasional potluck.

Our Grand Master has recognized that Lodges in this 21st Century will not grow and will not attract new members without changing the way we function. Change is not only important, it is absolutely necessary to the future survival of Odd Fellowship. Simply put: The old way isn't working - and hasn't worked for the last 60-plus years. Over that time we have declined in membership and in Lodges - and we keep declining even today. We won't attract new members by simply memorizing and reciting parts of the ritual. On the other hand, those Lodges than have opened their doors to the community and that emphasize social events for members (in addition to ritual) are prospering.

Please read the latest thoughts on the subject of change and growth by Grand Master Rick Boyles, attached to this newsletter.

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Dave Rosenberg
Grand Warden

What's Going On? Shake it up!

Everyone says they want new members, but do they really? Do we really see the forest for the trees? I believe there are those among us who fear new members, even dread new members. We have some who speak as if they have all the answers and yet they seem to want to avoid anything



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new. Others act as if somehow our glory days were the 1850's and seem to think they will return. It is time to wake up. Time to stop talking as if everything will transform if only we could just say the ritual smoothly enough prospective members will beat down our doors. It doesn't work that way. Some old timers act as if new members are sacrilegious. What in the world are they thinking and talking about? Our future depends on both retention of old members and the gaining of new ones. We don't want to forsake old members for new ones, nor do we want to do the opposite. We need to take the blinders off, open up our doors, and welcome the world into our lodges.

The ceremonies we have are wonderful, the rituals are wonderful, but they are not meant to be restraining or confining. We are using these activities to squeeze the life's blood out of our members. If your lodge wants to try new approaches or do things in an unorthodox manner, it will probably be acceptable to this Grand Master, so long as it does not hurt or shun anyone. I can't speak for future Grand Masters, but like it or not, the future is coming, and change is already and always upon us. It's time to learn to roll with the punches. We really don't win by acting as if everything new is bad. Some of us seem to think that all change is bad, and yet if you take a look at the lodges that are growing, these are the lodges that are open to change. Change is going to come whether you accept it or not. Maybe the political climate will change, one Grand Master will replace another, but this is irrelevant. Change is coming, whatever your view of the order or the world. Sovereign Grand Lodge is planning changes over and above whatever we do in our own state. There are some of us who think if we speak loudly or defiantly, we can stop change, but change does not follow one man's logic. Change is a motivating part of reality; in fact, life would be pretty darn boring if there were no change at all. One of the prevalent reasons lodges are failing is that they reel off the same ponderous spiel day after day, year after year, decade after decade. Is it really that hard to figure out? Some may find a monotone meeting comforting, but evidently by looking at our dwindling membership, most find it a tiresome bore. I have sat in many lodges and have to fight the urge to fall asleep and I always notice that I am not alone. Time to shake it up!

Now, let's address some of the concretes: remember to have social events, invite your members to dinners, and share some conversation outside the somber nature of the ritual. Find interests that you all may share. Laugh with one another, tell jokes, smile, for goodness sake. Life is supposed to include some fun! I asked a friend of mine why another fraternal group is growing and he said the most logical thing, "Because they have fun"! Time to have a good time! Stop acting like how you say the ritual is the definition of our existence. Everything we do in our lodge is nothing in comparison to how we lead our lives. If we recite the ritual verbatim how hypocritical is that if we practice hatred the rest of the time? A member I know pretty well told me the answer to the future is that we just have to return to our Christian roots and act more devout. Of course, that sort of attitude cuts out a lot of members who have joined since we have



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decided to take a more welcoming stance. Divinity is fine with me but can't we have a good time while we are doing it? Or is religious prejudice a way to couch hatred for anyone who is not exactly just like you? My cousin is a minister and he has more fun than many of the somber members we have. Just because you are a long time member does not mean you have to look like you are sitting at a funeral. Have fun and perhaps someone new will think, gee maybe I will join this fun environment! Give me a break! Is it really that tough to figure out? Boring stuff bores people to death! Interesting stuff attracts people. Get over yourselves! It sounds ludicrous, perhaps, but our lodges are what we make them. We are either torn apart by stress, turmoil, and ponderous procedures or we are bonded by friendship, love and truth. Which is it going to be?

Shake it up! Live a little! If you think something in the code is ludicrous, let's talk about it and make a change for the better. Let's remember that we should be all about growth, all about happiness, and all about good fellowship. If we really want to be Odd Fellows, let's check our hatred, our indifference, our cynicism at the door, and learn to smile, sing, dance, and walk hand-in-hand into a happier future.

In Friendship, Love, and Truth, Rick Boyles, Grand Master