



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

January 26, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

I have just returned from the annual IOOF Members' Educational Seminar held yesterday and today in Santa Nella. (Believe me, there is nothing to do in Santa Nella except attend the seminar or eat Andersen's pea soup at the local restaurant - so we were all focused on the seminar!) We had 75 participants from 26 Lodges, ranging in age from their 20's to their 80's. Instructors were Peter Sellars, Don Lang and Ron Carrey - who all did a fine job. Grand Master Rick Boyles attended the entire time (as did I) and the GM's presence definitely elevated the discussion. We covered a wide range of topics including (but not limited to) laws and rules laid out in the Codes, how to escort visiting dignitaries, parliamentary procedure, and membership development. Overall, I found it to be a valuable exercise, in particular the sharing of information between members and Lodges. I certainly encourage recipients of this newsletter to attend such a seminar in the future.

While the seminar was useful, it was also a reminder of how far we still need to go as an Order to CHANGE so that we can finally stop the decline of membership and GROW.

What do I mean by this? Let me explain.

I talked to a number of new members of the Order who attended the seminar. These are members who joined only one or two years ago. Some of them were very young - in their 20's and 30's - and their frustration was palpable. These new members want to make their Lodges more visible in their communities and desperately want to bring in potential new members. But, they find themselves stymied at every turn by the long-time members who find reason after reason and excuse after excuse to say "no" to the new member's suggestions. Here are just some of the stories I heard from these new (frustrated) members:

One new member was very proud of his new Lodge and wanted to open it and expose it to the community. At a meeting, he suggested working with local community artists and having the Lodge host an art show for the public. He thought this would be good for the art community, would expose the Lodge to the community, and could bring in some new applicants. But he was cut off by the long-time members with the following admonition: "We can't do that - it might damage our wood floor."

Another new member proposed that his Lodge develop a website which might be of interest to the younger members of the community. The long-time members of his Lodge flatly turned him down and said "no", they were not interested in being on-line.

A third new member was completely taken aback when the long-time members of his Lodge proposed to remove the phone from the Lodge Hall. The reason they gave for this is "none of us want to take messages." The younger challenged the proposal but was voted down.



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This is just a sampling of the strange stories I heard.

I encouraged these new members to stay the course, keep at it, and work to bring in younger friends. In time, attitudes may change as the membership changes. (Although the new members noted that it was very hard to bring in new members to a Lodge that offers very little.)

But these stories encapsulate the seminal problem in this Order. We have long-time members who, at bottom, understand that their Lodge and this Order are shrinking and is slowly dying as members pass away. But they are unwilling to change the status quo. Keeping things pretty much the same as they have always been is - for them - comfortable, acceptable, and preferred. They don't really care that their legacy to the future is a failed Lodge or a failed Order. It's really quite selfish, when you think about it. They just want to keep it going in the same way as they have always known it - I suppose, till the day they die.

My hope for the future is these new young members and the few long-time members who have the courage to work with the new members to try new things. Honestly, what have we got to lose? The old ways are simply not working - they haven't been working for the last 70 years. So, let's try a different approach.

If we learn to say "yes, let's try it" as opposed to "no, that won't work" - we might just have a chance to turn it around.

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Dave Rosenberg
Grand Warden