



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

March 24, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

We are pleased to send you the latest article from Grand Master Rick Boyles. It makes for good reading, and it makes a very important point!

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Dave Rosenberg
Grand Warden

Keeping Score....

When you hear the statement, and I hear it regularly, that all fraternal groups are losing members, there is still a bigger drain on our order than on most (if not all). What we need to do is find out why and not just fight amongst ourselves because that is only a losing battle. If you really need solid figures, here goes:

In the State of California, there are ... 85,000 Masons, 50,000 Clampers, and 4,500 Odd Fellows. Look around, you would be hard pressed to find an active, as opposed to defunct, fraternal group numbering fewer members than ours. Even more frightening is the fact that of the 4,500 Odd Fellows, about 1,000 of these members are on paper only, and not active, some belonging to camps, others retired or edging quickly towards the end of life. Just like looking at some feature of our own analytically, we need to examine our order and see that if we don't read the writing on the wall and react quickly, this order is in serious danger of failing completely. If you want an even grimmer view, you should know that our state is the most active state in the U.S. I have examined the populations for the order nationwide and there are some states that have less than a thousand members. Anyone who thinks things are fine or that we should keep this quiet is dangerously nave. You would not keep quiet about a house on fire, or a person drowning, nor should you keep quiet when lodges are closing one by one. There are solutions but we have to be big enough to face them and not hide our heads in the sand or act like the ritualistic behaviors in 1850 will somehow keep us safe. They will not. If the past were the answer, why have our numbers been decreasing steadily for almost a century?

Many have suggested that we need to have a definite purpose to define our order, and I agree, but because of our diminished size, this becomes problematical as well. Some lodges define themselves as being against some societal ill such as cancer, but to be frank specifying \$1,000 to fight cancer is a drop in a huge bucket and does not make a sufficient public impact. If we want



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to do something universally in our order, we need to find something unique, and at the same time, manageable. Otherwise, we run the risk of self-caricature.

Before I became Grand Master, I swore that I would never close a lodge. However, I have since found that I was naïve. A lodge when it goes below a consistent quorum must close, or it fails to be a real lodge. When a lodge runs out of its own funds, it must close. The state can't carry every failing lodge. We can't assign the few remaining loyal Odd Fellows to watch every failing lodge or carry keys for vacant buildings just in the hopes that Odd Fellows will spring up to resurrect them from the ashes of their own decay. We have to react before utter dissolution. Before we even look towards projects, we have to make sure our lodges are safe and functioning lodges. Make sure that our members, all of them, are happy and satisfied within our environs. If someone within your walls is suffering, see if there is something your lodge can do for them. Don't just speak in tired platitudes. Don't use the code or codes as bludgeons. It's time to look at each other as human beings and friends, and not as competitors.

Hopefully, soon enough we can agree on a path to the future. Let's work together and stop arguing about membership or who likes who. Let's be friends and realize that if we want to grow, we need to go forward, lacking animosity and filled with sincerity. Friendship, Love and Truth is a shining emblem and our project can be our salvation if we chose to define it finely enough to carry it as a beacon into our future.

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