



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

April 3, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

From its inception in 2010, I have always thought of DMC as a "think tank" of ideas on behalf of this Order. Dozens and dozens of ideas have floated through our newsletters - all focused on how we can revitalize our great and ancient fraternity. Or, put more bluntly, on how we can bring in new members to avoid Odd Fellowship devolving into an historical footnote. Let's not forget that there were once hundreds of fraternal orders in the United States which were born, grew, thrived, withered, and then died. It is our goal to reverse the trend of falling membership and start to grow this fraternity once again.

In this regard, I have just received a very informative article from Gary Charpentier of Los Angeles - Golden Rule #35. Gary is Vice Grand of his Lodge, and has served as Noble Grand and District Deputy Grand

Master in the past. His article - attached hereto - is quite thought-provoking. Please read it - perhaps have a discussion about it at an upcoming Lodge meeting. Let's get those creative juices flowing!

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Dave Rosenberg

Grand Warden

Sometimes there is serendipity in the world. At a restaurant for dinner tonight I got seated next to a booth where two church leaders were discussing the future of their church with a consultant reverend. They were facing the very same issue we as Odd Fellows are, declining membership, infighting and issues related to aging buildings. As I was eating my dinner and just listening I was amazed at the parallels between the decline and even the reasons for it being identical.

The consultant had obviously been through the issues before. He talked about a couple of other neighborhood churches he helped to resurrect. As I listened, I realized his proven methods were nearly identical to what the DMC has been telling the brothers and sisters.

As this was a neighborhood church he talked about the need to realize that a 1 to 5 mile radius from the church is where the growth in congregation can come from. This church is in a big city urban area; obviously that radius would change in a rural area. The demographics of that area



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are the key. This church was lucky in that the area they are in was being revitalized by the city, bringing in families with children. He knew if they could tap this, the church would grow.

For a minute they talked about the pros and cons of selling their building as it was now far too large for their congregation. It was noted that back in the day the buildings were made as grand statements. He suggested using a smaller chapel for services or interior partitioning to make a smaller and more inviting area. Having an empty church is depressing.

He talked about how they needed to change the church services to have something to offer to that 1 to 5 mile radius demographic. They touched on the need for the Spanish language. An obvious requirement as California becomes more Hispanic.

They talked about bringing in a guest priest, someone who is dynamic and engaging. Good engaging sermons and ideas for growth. How the services need to be full of positive energy and joy or they are just a drag, another duty that can be skipped.

He talked about how the church needed to change to match the culture of today. The consultant said that if the leadership of the church stops listening to the congregation it is as good as dead. There was talk of the old guard and how they were too set in their ways. How that would prevent new blood from joining. How they would already be members if they wanted the old way.

The 1 to 5 mile radius came up again in relation to millennials as the consultant pointed out they would much rather walk, bike or use public transit to get somewhere than they would to get into a car.

The importance of social media also came up. How at their church they have a newsletter but they don't have a website or any social media presence and the newsletter editor is not savvy about such things, and the board would not oust them.

On the building side, they talked about the condition of an area in their church that is used for weddings. How a wedding consultant said what a beautiful building they have, except for ..., in their case paint color. Because of that they were losing a lot of business, which is the income they need with their shrinking congregation.

There was a lot more, and frankly I wished I had a tape recorder.

How do we as Odd Fellows translate these ideas into our Lodges? To begin with we realize we aren't that much different than this church. We bring the brothers and sisters together to elevate the character of mankind. These lessons are directly applicable to us.



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For the location of our halls, as Odd Fellows we need to work with city government planning departments to bring in growth around our lodge halls. This isn't hard to do as every planning department wants to hear ideas from the public and land owners. Make some contacts and find out what can be done. Study who lives and works near your hall. They are your new members. But you need a good neighbor too. No overgrown bushes, no fading peeling paint, no brown grass, no broken windows, no piles of trash, don't attract the wrong element because there isn't any eyeballs between meetings.

Spanish and the Hispanic culture is another factor in the changing demography of California which we Odd Fellows need to exploit. If that requires lodge meetings in the Spanish language, like Franco-American does in French, or if it is mixed language with some charges read in English and some in Spanish. We should look at this as elevating the culture of man by using this to teach English and a bit of our culture while we learn a bit of Spanish and about their culture, the culture of old California.

We need to realize a typical meeting of a typical dying lodge is the pinnacle of boring to an outsider. We need to realize an engaging meeting means much more than a perfect reading of the ritual from memory. The engaging part of the meeting is the good of the order. Having a program for the meeting: A guest speaker on a topic; a brother speaking about what Odd Fellows means; a lesson on the Odd Fellows; A talk about our rich history; some program in addition to the ritual and voting to pay the utility bills.

They did not talk about the services the church provides. That is so much a part of a church's DNA it wasn't necessary. We as Odd Fellows have forgotten we need to provide services to our community. If we don't then why would the community care about us? Every lodge needs to have some service involvement with its local community.

As to the old guard, unfortunately we see that in our lodges and Grand Lodges. Old guard who scream, we did that before, it didn't work. Old guard who say, "I'll vote for it, just don't expect me to lift a finger to help." Old brothers who hit the new members over the head with the code book screaming **NO!** A good brother would say, as you proposed it, the code doesn't allow it, but let's see how we can change it to make it possible. A hand of a brother is always open to another. Do we forget the meaning of our own symbols?!

The millennials are the children of the baby boomers, our target audience. As Odd Fellows we already have our building, but we can have our meetings at times when they are available. As they work, obviously you can not have meetings during work hours. A lodge that does so is a lodge asking to have its charter picked up, it has already given up!



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On social media, I worry how many lodges do not even have a newsletter, never mind web or social media. Is it because they have nothing to report? No projects? No plans? No future?!

As to buildings, in the Odd Fellows case it likely would be water stains on the ceiling, peeling paint and an inch thick coat of dust. If all the members of your lodge are too infirm, ask your district deputy to get some brothers from nearby lodges to help at least clean the dust off. A nice feel good project to help a brother. Doing something gives an amazing feeling.

They did not talk about bonding; again because that is so much a part of a church's DNA it was unnecessary. I'll only say we are a fraternity, this must also be part of our DNA. Have fun activities for the members!

This brings me to a project the DMC can, should, and must take on. A roundtable panel discussion with some consultant types on the subject of how to breathe life back into the Odd Fellows. We are enough like churches that are shrinking to easily change what works for them into what will work for us. Do this where it can be professionally video recorded with a good moderator. I know money! Two suggestions. I'm sure this would qualify for a membership growth grant under the Grand Lodge program. Save a bunch, and have it used as a classroom exercise for a radio/TV broadcast school. I'm sure they get bored shooting tape of each other!