



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

May 4, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

This is the third and final in a series of articles from some of the leaders of this Order, responding to three questions that I posed about the present state and future of Odd Fellowship in California. The first article was from Chair of the Grand Lodge Board of Directors John Morgan, the second from Grand Instructor and Membership Chair Peter Sellars, and today's article is from Grand Master Rick Boyles. Rick is completing his year as Grand Master so his insights, after a year at the helm and after traveling throughout the state, are of particular interest.

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Dave Rosenberg
Grand Warden

1. Now that your year as Grand Master draws to a close, what do you recall as the highlights and positive experiences of your year?

Answer - there have been a number of highlights and positives in my year. First, a number of lodges are growing and learning to accept people of all walks of life. The lodges that are failing are too exclusive and would not welcome most of the members in their own communities. Of course, this is a recipe for disaster. It should be required that all of us who are concerned about growth take a look at our own communities and realize that one of the secrets to growth is diversification.

I visited a number of growing lodges: Davis, Apollo, Yerba Buena, Saratoga, Sycamore, Point Arena, Bay Rock, Santa Rosa and several others. In each and every case they have a diverse membership base, therefore they are able to draw from more than a tired fraction of their own populace. This is not to say that these growing lodges have no difficulties but rather they seek to rise above them by getting more and more members not less.

2. What gives you hope about the future of Odd Fellowship in California?



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Answer - the most encouraging thing I see is that the future is bright at the active lodges while certainly dimming at the inactive lodges. The closure of inactive lodges has to be done, albeit sadly, because we have to learn to devote our energies to our successes. Certainly, lodges can be resurrected such as Sycamore Lodge (Hayward) but we need to realize that hoping for change is not as successful as working for change. To a person who sits in a lodge with a sufficient number of members, change seems unnecessary, but to someone who sits alone in a lodge near or at closure, change becomes vital, however by that time, it is often too late. If we begin to realize that a quorum of five members in attendance may by code be sufficient yet really skirting reality, and work towards getting a healthier total in attendance, we may see change. To be realistic, our average age being in the seventies, growth at that age is certainly short-sighted, so we need to encourage the middle-aged and the young to join. This only happens when we offer something that interests them.

3. What do you see as the three greatest challenges facing Odd Fellowship in this state?

Answer - We are presently arguing over what seems trivial except to those arguing it. The point is that it is hard to attract new members in a rancorous atmosphere. No one wants to join a group embroiled in turmoil. We need to live and let live. While membership should be first on our list of goals; we need to take a look internally first. Is your lodge a welcoming place? Do you smile at newcomers or dread them? Does your lodge offer something to newcomers? Successful lodges tend to have successful membership routines. So here are my three answers, which must be conquered together to realize serious sustained growth:

a) Make your lodge a welcoming place. Accept people of all walks of life. Don't be exclusionary. There is a vast amount of various prejudices rampant throughout order. I have encountered many of them: race prejudice, age prejudice, sex prejudice, religious prejudice, political diatribes. I get emails daily expressing prejudice and thinking somehow I will agree with them. Try to come to grips with today's world. We still have events and dress codes mired in the past. While it may seem fun to the few who now attend the various events, we should also recognize that attendance at these events is slipping quickly. Could it be we are becoming painfully out of step? Many think so, while some persist in this backward thinking. Will society in general move back in time to meet us? It's doubtful. Also, look at the connected world: if you are not online you are offline. Facebook just announced that they have 1.5 billion members. Yet, we have some in our order that think the internet is not useful. Who are they kidding? Mainly themselves.

b) Reduce turmoil. Learn to live and let live. No one is wrong and everyone is right. What do I mean by that? Better to ask what makes anyone think their way is the only way? We have issues



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with a fair amount of members thinking that it's right or acceptable to bully others. This is not acceptable and must stop. No one should bully anyone else, no matter what their title. In fact, it was by the original design that the order gave different titles to active members, so that their interest was piqued, not so it empowered a bully pulpit. The really ludicrous thing is that those who bully tend to exhibit their own ignorance more than anything else. Just like those who continually quote the code, many realize that those who quote the code don't even know the code. It would be preferable to know something before you quote it, wouldn't you think?

c) Help prospective members join. We have nothing to fear from new members if we realize that through growth we spread happiness. There really is no future to a lodge with a few remaining members unless we open our doors and welcome in the public.

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