



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

May 5, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

An extraordinary thing has happened to Odd Fellowship in California! I am excited to share it with you.

First the background to this "extraordinary thing."

As you know, for the past 10 years I have been beating the drum to draw attention to what I have described as the "elephant sitting in our Lodge room" - our rapidly declining membership. These declines have dramatically reduced our membership since World War II so that our membership is just a small fraction of what it was during the mid 1940's. And over the last few years - since 1999 - the decline has accelerated. In 1999, our records showed that we had 6,190 members on our books. At the start of 2013, the number had declined to 4,754 - that's a drop of about 25%. The decline since 1999 shows a drop of over 100 members per year - in other words, each and every year we lose over 100 more members (through death and withdrawal) than we bring in (through initiation). And if our books show 4,754 members at the start of 2013, we all know that really means about half that number - perhaps 2,400 - are "active" members; the rest rarely, if ever, come to meetings or participate - and are members on paper only. At the turn of the 21st Century we had 181 Odd Fellows Lodges in California; in 2013 we had only 122 Lodges - a rather dramatic and disconcerting drop where we lost about one-third of our Lodges in the span of just 13 years. Today, half our Lodges in California have less than 20 members on their books, and many of these small Lodges have aging memberships, rarely bringing in new members. We have Lodges where the youngest members are in their 70's. And when Lodges have less than 10 members who are active, they start having quorum problems, and lack the necessary checks and balances to ensure compliance with financial rules and procedures. Further, where Lodges are weak, necessarily we find Encampments and Cantons that are weak and diminishing. The challenges faced by Lodges are exacerbated in our Encampments and Cantons. The Rebekahs find themselves in a very similar - if not even worse - situation. Because of membership declines, the Rebekah Assembly has been dealing with budgets where expenditures exceed revenue - an intolerable situation - and curing it with dues increases is self-defeating.

Obviously, this steady decline is unsustainable. Unless it's stopped, and then reversed, the Order is in peril.

Now, the good news of this "extraordinary thing."

It has recently come to my attention that the membership statistics for the start of 2014 show that



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the Order in California has had a decline of only 3 members! What a remarkable turnaround! There are two caveats to this number: First, the numbers are preliminary and need to be confirmed, and second, there are still a handful of Lodges that have not yet (even at this late date) filed their annual reports and reported their numbers. But whether the final number turns out to be a net loss of 10, or a zero net loss-net gain, or a net gain of 10 - the point is that it appears we have finally put the brakes on the decline! That is step one. You have to hit bottom, before you can start climbing back up. You have to stop the free fall first, then reverse it and start the ascent - the slow gain of membership again. There is cause to believe that the steady decline we have seen over the last half-century may have hit bottom and we may be on cusp of an historic slow, but steady increase in our membership numbers.

Kudos to Grand Master Rick Boyles - who has made the membership issue into a central issue during his year. It is under the watch of Rick Boyles that we have seen the beginning of the halt to the decline. Kudos also to Membership Committee Chair Peter Sellars and the members of the Membership Committee. The programs that the Membership Committee launched - supported by the Grand Lodge Board of Directors - have certainly been a factor in the positive change. Kudos also to "Dedicated Members for Change." DMC's constant drumbeat (since 2010) on the issue of membership development, and the many suggestions, best practices, and helpful hints made by DMC to assist membership development have borne fruit. Ultimately, however, the halt of the decline and the movement to gain membership has to start with the members - the brothers and sisters - each of us. The Lodges play an important role, and Grand Lodge can help to a degree. I want to commend those members and those Lodges that have taken to heart the message that DMC has been sending out since 2010. Kudos to the brothers and the sisters and the Lodges that have gotten that elephant to stand up, and are guiding him out of our Lodge room.

I urge our incoming Grand Master Tim Brown to continue the focus on membership development, and continue the good works of the Membership Committee so that next year at this time we can truly say that under Brother Tim's watch we show a net gain in membership in our Order, and the elephant has left the Lodge room.

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Dave Rosenberg
Grand Warden