



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

May 29, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Here is an article which should engender some thought and discussion. I urge you to share it with your Lodge mates because it is worthy of some dialog within your Lodge. As the Deputy Sovereign Grand Master mention during a recent visit to California, there are 22 jurisdictions (e.g. states) where the entire membership of this Order is under 200. Imagine that. There are entire states where the entire membership has fallen to below 200 - and we all know that (at best) only 50% of the membership actively participate. In our own state we now have only 14 Encampments and only 7 Cantons.

And yet, we operate as if we were in the 1900's when membership in IOOF topped 1 million, thousands participated in Grand Lodge Sessions, Grand Encampments and the like, and hundreds of uniformed Patriarchs Militant (complete with bands) marched through the streets in parades. Today, the numbers have dwindled to mere fractions, and yet we continue the same trappings as if we were in the thousands.

We simply have to modernize and simplify. We have to get lean and smart and we have to reorganize to attend to the realities of this Century. For example, why in the world do we continue to have "separate but equal" units for Patriarchs Militant (PM) and Ladies Auxiliary Patriarchs Militant (LAPM) in this day and age?

Here are some thoughts on the subject by Junior Past Grand Master Rick Boyles.

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Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master

Simplify

If we are to survive, we will have to find a way to simplify our order. Many discussions have been made along these lines, but the time for discussion is over. It's time to do it and stop talking about it. Often times in meetings, we talk about change or mobilizing in one way or another and then we talk about setting up committees. It's time to do it really and stop talking about it. Last year, I was chastised for stating that different avenues of our order are failing. Is this really a point of conjecture? At what point do we begin to realize that branches are indeed failing and



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stop looking at the issue as if it is an area "to study". It does not make us stronger by ignoring the situation. If our house is on fire, is it better to move to another room and expect the fire to go out by itself? It's time to recognize the issue and stop smiling through our agonies. The order is failing, and ignoring the situation is futile and if anything more hurtful than any other approach.

Sovereign Grand Lodge for a number of years has recognized the need for change and streamlining operations. Their intent, from my discussions with visiting dignitaries, is to make the IOOF more along the lines of other fraternal groups as levels rather than distinct groups, but of course, most opposition to this comes not from the Odd Fellows end but from the other dying groups. I have heard the frustration in their voices when they talk about Sovereign Grand Lodge Sessions almost being exercises in futility where the old lines attempt to block anything new. Why do the old lines do this? It's simple - if we don't something soon, this debate will be over, because these ancillary units will be gone. In fact, in many states one or more of these ancillary units is already gone. We have to stop trying to preserve a way of existence that has already for the most part faded away. This is generally a Sovereign Grand Lodge issue, but there are ways in which all of us may assist.

Simplification can come in different guises but it must come before we are to grow. Take our codes, for instance, why have more than one code, and which code takes precedence? We have our ritual, the Sovereign Grand Lodge Code of General Laws, and the Roberts' Code. We also have lodge by-laws, and other areas which guide us. How many rule books do we need? My vision of the future would be that all codes would be simplified into one set of rules which would be given to each member within his ritual book. Our own state has often voted to simplify our own code, but it would be a simple enough task to remove parts of the Roberts Code that only mimic the Sovereign Grand Lodge Code. Similarly, your lodge by-laws could also be incorporated into the ritual book. And, in the future, these will be available as a single downloadable version for each member to have and review at their leisure either on a flash drive or DVD. Other areas, such as the unwritten work, may become relics of the past. How many, for example, really have committed the unwritten work to memory as the code seems to imply we all must?

Most legislation now being written is to correct or edit earlier legislation, so it would be a natural step to simply edit it down to basic phrases and modes of behavior. Is there any more clear and concise phrase than "Conduct Unbecoming an Odd Fellow"? Yet we attempt to define that. We should all operate within certain parameters of conduct. We fail as an order when we attempt to tell a lodge where and when they can decide the punishments for misconduct. The order is best served when it is based upon democratic behavior, i.e. the vote of the lodge. No visiting dignitary, no matter how well meaning, should attempt to overturn the vote of the lodge. Our order, in order to grow, should realize that lodges are in their own way, microcosms of the order in general. Just as we vote in Grand Lodge and Sovereign Grand Lodge, why do we not honor



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the vote of a lodge? We should. In fact, every implication from our codes and our ritual is that the lodge itself is sacrosanct. Not a miniature version of somewhere else.

The lodge meeting agenda as printed within the ritual is another cumbersome mess, which can be streamlined. Why must we continuously chant individual sections which simply do not apply? Answer, there is really no need to do it that way, and we only do it that way because it is so written. Why even bring them up?

There are many other ways in which we can simplify the order. This is just my first installment on simplification. All of us together may think of ways in which we can simplify. I believe it should be a goal of us all to find ways in which to modernize and streamline the way in which we move forward. That is, if we truly want to move forward. Otherwise, ask yourselves if you really find yourself ready to recite the unwritten work, educate the orphan, and other platitudes that we chant but no longer do. Wouldn't it be better, and more inviting, to speak to the public in a modern tongue?

In Friendship, Love and Truth, Rick Boyles