



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

May 31, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

On May 29, we published a DMC Newsletter featuring a provocative article by Junior Past Grand Master Rick Boyles, who stressed the need to simplify and modernize our Order. The article certainly generated interest and dialog, and that is precisely what we in DMC hope to do - we are, in fact, a "think tank" where evolution and change in our Order is discussed, dissected, and debated. This is all healthy. Business as usual just ain't cutting it. Evolution and change is required for this Order to re-charge and grow again.

Rick's article prompted Robin Oliver, a long-time and distinguished member of our fraternity, to pen the following thoughts. I think you will find Robin's article as provocative as Rick's article.

Enjoy!

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Dave Rosenberg  
Deputy Grand Master

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Yes, Rick, simplification is the answer...

What if the Order gathered up everything it has collected -- rules, codes, regalia, forms, records, branches, swords an' stuff, old photos, costumes, unwritten knowledge, secret gestures, passwords, protocols, potluck dinners and bingo boards... yes, everything -- and took it out to the dumpster for the next pick-up...?

Yes, what if we pitched it all...?

EXCEPT for the two universal principles and undertakings that are timeless and are at the very center of Odd Fellowship:

Friendship, Love, and Truth...

To improve and elevate the character of mankind by promoting the principles of friendship, love, truth, faith, hope, charity and universal justice...



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Would the Order be lost if only these two things remained...? What would an Odd Fellow do...? Would we all give up...? Where would we go...? Would this be any different if our house burned to the ground or was carried away by a flood...? Are these two ideas enough by which one could build a new Order...? Would we try to recreate what the Order was in its glorious past...? Some might champion that notion but the history of everything we know would counsel us against that attempt to recreate what the Order was (and can never be again, i.e., glorious in the way it was)...

Free of the burdens of its heritage, its obligations to the past, its mindless obsessions with its own traditions, the Order and its good people would be free to find purpose to do what is relevant for humankind in the 21st Century. It would become enabled to adopt the rules and the tools of the 21st Century to do its work... To promote the notion of good cooperative effort... To teach humankind about the real value of Friendship, Love, and Truth... To work to improve and elevate the character of mankind by promoting the principles of friendship, love, truth, faith, hope, charity and universal justice...

Granted, the "what if...?" scenario I suggest here may be unthinkable to many and for that I am certain to be branded an irreverent pariah. But my purpose is not to offend anyone. It is merely to point out that, yes, occasionally we have to clean out our closets, our basement, and our garage to bring some sense of order, clear purpose, and new perspective into our lives...

Odd Fellows can be their own worst enemies. We seek to invoke good behavior into the group. The outcomes of our efforts become favorable when we all cooperate, devise the best approach, and work together. For that to happen, we seek common understandings with our colleagues and we develop protocols and processes to do our work. We discover that some things work and some things do not work. And in the course of developing this catalog of our experience, we create guidelines which become rules and codes and by-laws...

Good people in the Order have spent years refining and redefining our canon of law. And now we find that we have created so much of it that no single one of us can recite it all, that it is inconsistent in so many places, that it now hobbles our imaginations by not only specifying what we will and will not do, but it also tells us how that will be done (barely noticing the technologies available to us). The development of these understandings was born and nurtured by good and intelligent men and women with good intentions... But the rules we hold in our hands have, in fact, become our straight-jacket. We struggle in that straight-jacket as the world -- a world far less beholden to its past than we are -- moves forward without us...

What we have created has become what fractures our sense of common purpose as we point to our scriptures for the authority of our arbitrary acts. What we have created has become more



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important than those two timeless universal values and principles to which we often now only give a nodding acknowledgement...

The purpose of the ritual is not very well-understood, I think, and so its value is diminished in the minds of so many who would not seriously examine that purpose. As you have no doubt discovered, Rick, an experience of leadership brings volumes of new insights and understandings. That experience enables you to assume leadership responsibilities now in so many other areas of your life. It allows you to influence others around you in the Order and beyond the Order. It allows you to give guidance and the benefit of your experience to others, just as others in the past have given such to you...

There are many people who never get that opportunity in life or in anything they do. Not everybody can be a Pooh bah. But these are good people. They see things around them that are right and that are wrong. They may become frustrated and angry, and they may rant. But they do not act nor do they regard themselves as activists. They do not motivate and organize or even get involved. It is not because they do not care. It is because they do not know where or how to begin. To be competent and confident in anything, we need to possess knowledge and skills. It is only for the lack of these skills that these good people do not realize that they can make a difference -- a good difference, a big difference -- to themselves, to their families, to their communities, to their nation, and to the world. This is what being an Odd Fellow is really all about...

The ritual is intended to promote that experience in each member of the assembly. It is intended to promote a sense of awareness in each participant. What are the roles and the responsibilities for each member...? What awareness should the group have about its work...? What are the priorities and the available resources and the threats to success...? What are the goals to be attained...? How do we move forward...? How do we get through this all together...?

Whether the times are sublime or we face a catastrophe, we can never have enough capable, well-intentioned people in our midst, devoted to a good outcome. Whether that is seen in the chaotic context of Baltimore in 1817 or San Francisco in 1849 or the next pancake breakfast, Odd Fellows have to meet, understand the needs of the moment, figure out what favorable outcome they want to produce, work out the roles and responsibilities, act and influence others to cooperate. And, yes, the bias to action gives much better odds to success but also does due consideration of all options and ideas. Ultimately, the Lodge decides what is right...

That is what the ritual is supposed to do... But what the Order uses now is not a ritual for the 21st Century...



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And -- simply stated -- it is not about what the Order has been or has ever done... It is about what the Order could become and could do... It is about now and the future... It is all about being relevant anytime and anywhere... We do not have to pitch it all into the dumpster but we should seriously consider keeping what will propel the Order into the future and letting go of what holds us back... Organizations that are relevant attract dedicated members for the long-term...

In Friendship, Love, and Truth...

Robin