



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

June 17, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Some of you may remember Walt Kelly's famous comic strip character Pogo Possum (usually just called "Pogo"). That comic was very popular in the 1960's and 1970's and was the precursor to Doonesbury's political wit and wisdom. Well, Pogo uttered a famous line in that comic strip which is remembered to this day. Pogo said, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Brothers and Sisters, that line now applies to us, as well.

As you know, I carefully review the history and statistics of our Order from time to time, and write about my findings. The other day, during a routine review of statistics, I stumbled upon the primary reason this Order is declining in membership. I was surprised to find this statistic, and I am sure that you will be just as surprised to hear it.

We have 122 Odd Fellows Lodges in California today. In reviewing the membership summary, taken from the annual reports from our Lodges for the year ending on December 31, 2013, I have found the following remarkable facts:

Fully 40 of our Lodges brought in ZERO new members into their respective Lodges during 2013. That's zero, none, nothing, nada. At the same time, those 40 Lodges lost 99 members in 2013.

And another 22 of our Lodges brought in only one new member into their respective Lodges for all of 2013. At the same time, those 22 Lodges lost 41 members in 2013.

In summary, those 62 Lodges (that's half the Lodges in this jurisdiction) had a net loss of 118 members for 2013.

During that same year of 2013, the 4 largest Lodges in California brought in 82 new members and lost just 25, for a net gain of 57.

One could say that the most revealing statistic above is that the small are getting smaller and the big are getting bigger. But that would be too simplistic. The most revealing statistic, in my mind, is that fully 40 of our Lodges (that is one-third of the Lodges in the jurisdiction of California) DID NOT BRING IN EVEN ONE NEW MEMBER. Not one. Not a son, daughter, brother, sister, niece, nephew, cousin, friend, co-worker. No one. These Lodges went all year long – 12 full months - without recruiting even ONE new member.

And keep in mind, these Lodges were not remaining static. While they were not bringing in new members, they were losing members due to death or withdrawal.



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Frankly, it is inexplicable to me how a Lodge can allow this to happen. A fraternal order is never static, just like life isn't static. Members will pass away, and move out of town, will withdraw. It's just the natural progression of things. A fraternal order must take that into consideration and must add members every year. Obviously, 40 Lodges failed to deal with this reality of life. They added ZERO new members, while watching 99 existing members pass away or withdraw. That's just unacceptable.

As noted, at the end of 2014 (and the start of 2014) we had 122 Lodges in California, totaling 4,727 members (actually, only 4,372 dues-paying members). It is noteworthy that in 1947, we had 30,739 members. Every year from 1947 to the present (with the exception of the year 2002 when we had a net gain of 34 members), this Order in California has shown a net loss of members, averaging a decline of over 380 members per year. That decline has, thankfully, slowed down in the last two years. In 2012, we had a net loss of only 13 members and in 2013 our net loss was only 3 members. These are good signs, showing that our efforts to focus on membership may have put the brakes on our net losses and declines. We may very well be on the cusp of showing some net gains in the near future. Let us hope.

But, we have met the enemy and he is us. Until EACH member of this Order, and EACH Lodge of this Order gets serious about bringing in new members, we will continue to diminish. So long as fully one-third of our Lodges go an entire year without bringing in one new member, we have a serious problem. We can't just rely on the "other Lodge" or "the other guy" to grow this Order. It is the responsibility of each of our Lodges and each of us.

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Dave Rosenberg

Deputy Grand Master