



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

July 3, 2014

## Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Peter Sellars, our newly elected Grand Warden, has penned an article which you will find as an attachment to this e-mail. I commend it to you. Peter has served this Order in many big and small ways - including service as Grand Patriarch of the Grand Encampment. As Chairman of the Grand Lodge Membership Committee, he developed the remarkably successful membership grant program. He is a leader in the San Francisco Lodges, and in the renovation of the historic San Francisco Lodge building. Peter is the driving force behind the wonderful San Francisco Odd Fellows Museum. He is quite the historian of our Order, having written books on the subject. And Peter is one of the very first Odd Fellows to support Dedicated Members for Change.

If you think that Odd Fellowship has been static since the 18th Century, think again. Odd Fellowship has a long history of evolution and change, as Peter's article indicates.

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Dave Rosenberg  
Deputy Grand Master

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### **GRAND WARDEN'S MESSAGE**

Thank you brothers and sisters for electing me as your Grand Warden this past May. Although this is a small, non-profit and voluntary organization where we can choose whether or not to participate, we should constantly recognize this and work toward the betterment of the Odd Fellows.

As members of this great old fraternity, (one of the best that has ever existed in this country), we seek to be part of the activities as well as improve our lodges and our Order.

In 2014, as it was in 2000, and in 1960, and 1920, and before, we have always made changes and have found each change difficult to accept. Our Order, like any organization, needs to constantly



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evolve. First, we learn the history and the customs of our Order and then we make adjustments to those things that need changing.

Make no mistake, changes must always be made or an organization folds up and goes away. Fraternal organizations used to number in the hundreds in America. So many of them have gone away or are close to going away.

We have heard the stubborn viewpoint that change should not occur and, “if you don’t like it, then get out.” I shall point out that some of this Order’s most respected members, like Donald R. Smith, Past Sovereign Grand Master and others have always sought to keep our Order persevering through positive change.

Some of us are ritualists and have learned our history as well, along with becoming familiar with our codes and laws so that we could effect positive change within the Order. We are not blind to the reluctance and resistance to change and must always be prepared to battle those who fail to see the necessity of change.

Have we changed? Of course, we have. The “Independent” in our Order’s name is because of change and disagreement with our own parent organization in the early 1840’s. Our Order became Independent because it did not want to admit blacks into its ranks.

In the 1850’s, we established the Rebekahs, as no other organization in America allowed wives and daughters in their realms. In the early 1900’s, we removed “white race” and “red race” from the Golden Rule degree. In the 1960’s we modified our language to what we consider “Caucasians” to be in relation to applicants. In the early 1970’s, we no longer required members to be of all or pure “white blood.”

In the 1920’s, on a national level, we removed the requirement for stipulated benefits. In the year 2001, women were allowed to join the Odd Fellows lodges.



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I cannot begin to tell you how we have changed passages in our degrees, as there have been so many. The idea here is that we do not grip onto our heritage and ritual so tightly that we cannot change. We must change. We have changed and we shall continue to change.

There is still language in our rituals, which must be modified and eliminated. We are working on changes as I sit here writing this. Sometimes change is not fast but it shall come with diligence and integrity by those committed to improve the Order.

All of this continued change leads to successful lodges. We have successful lodges. We have lodges that have grown and expanded in the past few years. We have lodges that, at the encouragement of the Sovereign Grand Lodge, have attached themselves to their communities. These are the lodges doing well.

These are the lodges that have embraced the less critical and stringent methods of conducting business meetings. Some lodges offer little in diverse ideas or language inside the lodge room. There is no longer room for this kind of behavior. There is no place for criticizing one another because signs or passwords are not presented correctly. These kinds of things encourage new members to leave, not thrive.

Instead of bringing complaints, or criticisms to the table, let's bring ideas and solutions! Let's weed out the bullies and the naysayers and those who wish to remain steadfast in their stubbornness and instead bring in positive men and women with a common goal. A goal to carry on this great Order in the honor and tradition it was founded upon, a foundation of Friendship, Truth and Love.

There are actually members in these failing lodges that criticize other members for not presenting the sign or the password just right. It does not take a Rhodes scholar to figure out why members would not remain in such a lodge. Sometimes, it is one or two older members who are so disruptive and complain about every little thing said or the process of the lodge who drive others away. These are the lodges with the bullies.



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As a member of the Dedicated Members for Change, at the behest of the late Donald R. Smith, I look forward to using this medium in the coming years to spread an active message of change and modernization. This is what our SGL was tasked to do in the 1970's with the release of the Daisy Report and it has failed to meet those expectations.

There are lodges unwilling to open their doors to ALL people who are otherwise qualified to join. It is those barriers that need tearing down. No one who is qualified to join our great Order should be turned away because of a few unenlightened members.

Ultimately, we need to look toward ourselves and focus on those principles of love and friendship and be fraternal. Our principles are our foundation and were commonly practiced in the early half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, especially in Thomas Wildey's lifetime, whom was beloved by all members. Fraternalism took on a whole different meaning where disagreements were resolved through friendship, love, and truth. We should be united and enjoy each other's company. Leave strife and anger at the door of an Odd Fellows Hall. Once we recognize each other as brothers and sisters, we shall shine.

We have a lot of good to offer our communities and to make our Order shine. It is time to get on board help make things right.

Fraternally yours,

Peter Sellars

Grand Warden