



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

July 19, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

There was a time when the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was the largest fraternal order in the United States. Yes, it's true. Odd Fellows had more members than all other fraternal orders, including Masons. In those years, about a century ago, America had a multitude of fraternities. It was an age when hundreds of fraternal orders formed and flourished. It was the goal of many Americans - in the time before television and movies - to be part of a fraternity, and fraternities had a friendly competition with one another for members and for prominence. In those days, Grand Lodge sessions drew literally thousands of participants. Patriarchs Militant marched through the streets in parades, numbering hundreds, complete with uniformed marching bands.

Well, we've traveled down a long road since those days. I recently saw some statistics about fraternal numbers today. These statistics are revealing. Comparing Odd Fellows to two other fraternal orders today we see the following: Masons show 5,000,000 members in 30,000 Lodges in over 100 countries. Elks show 800,000 members in 2,000 Lodges in 5 countries. Odd Fellows show 190,000 members in 10,000 Lodges in 28 countries. What do these numbers tell us? Primarily, of course, they show that Odd Fellowship has fallen, rather dramatically, from its prominence as the largest fraternity in the United States. Those halcyon days are long gone. Today, our Odd Fellows Order is a mile wide and an inch deep; we have a lot of Lodges, but relatively few members in each Lodge. The numbers show that entities such as the Masons average 166 members per Lodge. Odd Fellows average 18 members per Lodge. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that an 18-member Lodge is "challenged". We all know that, in a typical Lodge, the number of members "on the books" don't reflect the number of active members - a Lodge with 18 members on the books, might have in reality only 9 or 10 members who participate as active members, and the rest are members on paper. And if 18 is the "average", then we know that a number of Lodges will be above that number and a number of Lodges will be below that number.

California Odd Fellows' numbers appear to be a tad better than the international numbers. In California we have 120 Lodges and we have about 4,700 members. That translates to 39 members per Lodge, on average. But even that average number is misleading. California has two Lodges with 300 or more members, two Lodges with 200 or more members, and two Lodges with 100 or more members. The other 114 Lodges have 99 or fewer members. Taking out the numbers for those six largest Lodges, we are left with an average of only 29 members for the remaining 114 Lodges. If we assume only half the members are "active" and the rest are essentially "paper" members, those 114 Lodges average about 14 or 15 "active" members.

Worse, again, we are talking about "average". We know that there are many Lodges above, and



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many Lodges below the average. And we know that there are a significant number of California Lodges with 10 or fewer “active” members.

The warning light has been blinking “yellow” for Odd Fellowship for the last 50 years. The light is now blinking “red”.

What's the solution?

The solution is not words, slogans or platitudes. We can't "wish" the problem away. We don't solve the problem of membership decline by catchy slogans, or mottoes, or choosing flowers, or colors, or songs as part of our annual program. The solution is action. And that action must be local and must be focused. Some have suggested that we spend a lot of money on television advertising to bring members into our Order. That would be a mistake (and a pretty darn expensive one), because it's not national or regional television ads that will revive our Order. Odd Fellowship can be saved by one thing, and one thing alone: Current members of this Order must bring new members into our Lodges. That is a responsibility for each of us who profess to be "true" Odd Fellows. It's not the job of "the other guy". It's our job, you and I. And our job of bringing in members is made infinitely easier if our respective Lodges offer a full plate of fun activities for the members and good works for the community. It's hard enough to bring in new members. It's even harder – nearly impossible – to attract new members to a Lodge that does little more than have meetings and an occasional potluck.

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Dave Rosenberg

Deputy Grand Master