

Independent Order of Odd Fellows Dedicated Members for Change

August 3, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Below you will find another article by Rick Boyles, Junior Past Grand Master, which I am sure you will find interesting. Rick has put on his philosopher's hat in coming to grips with who we are as Odd Fellows. Why? Because, unless we understand who we are, it's hard to convince prospective new members to apply to join our Order.

F - L - T

Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master

Searching for Common Denominators

Over the last few years, the State of California's Odd Fellows have shown some encouraging signs. The level of descent of members has slowed to an almost negligible rate. I believe the net total for last year was anywhere between no net loss or negative 3 members lost in our state which means at that rate we could last at least 1400 years without winking out completely. What may we attribute this leveling off to? In a search for common denominators lending itself to the slowing of membership loss over the last 4 years what do we see? Simply put the advent of the rise of a cohesive membership push - specifically the Dedicated Members for Change. Everything else has pretty much been business as usual; many lodges are still in descent, but other lodges have opened up their doors and realized that either we begin to appeal to the public or we may as well shut up shop now. Still, there are some stubborn individuals among us who think vestiges of hatred, sexism, racism, religious bias are somehow admirable. Of course, hatred, as most of we learned as early as kindergarten, is not admirable, and it is a wonderful sign of our modern world that the public realizes this as well. The outside public is comprised of more than Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and quite naturally they seek to join a grouping that reflects this. That old Groucho Marx joke that goes "I would not join a group that would accept someone like me as a member" is stretched to its limit now. We should learn to accept all souls regardless of their heritage, skin color, sexual orientation, beliefs, station in life, or demeanor. As long as we recognize a person of good moral character, what does the rest matter?

In college, I majored in Literature and minored in Philosophy. There are many different philosophical points of view: there are the religious based philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard, C.S. Lewis, John Locke, atheist philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel



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Foucault, Ayn Rand, and also agnostic philosophers such as Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus and the author of my beloved character Sherlock Holmes Arthur Conan Doyle. Yet in all these divergent philosophies, the common denominator is thought not a particular hatred towards a race, a sex, a culture, a political point of view, or a religious sect. Of course, there are such people who think of themselves as enlightened yet bear philosophies of hatred, but the ones whom are guided by hatred are generally now accepted as buffoons. Hatred is not a philosophy it is a mark of fear. Philosophers tend to see the world as a wondrous place, full of curiosity not hampered by hate like so many others. Of course, there were exceptions: Leland Stanford, for example (one of the namesakes along with Jane Stanford of Stanford University) had extremely isolationist views yet was widely admired. There are many other views as well, but it could be suggested that racism and directed hatred was more a product of the times than of the individual. Fellow members, were you aware that the largest fraternal group, according to Wikipedia, in 1920, was the Ku Klux Klan? Talk about a downward spiral - they are now almost extinct. There have been lots of jokes told about different theories such as Nietzsche's theory about eternal recurrence saying that we are all destined to live things repeatedly (Woody Allen said "Great, now I will have to sit through the Ice Capades again!"). Or, Ayn Rand's fatalistic question "Who is John Galt?" - meaning "why bother?". The point is that philosophy concerns itself with the mind, and the soul, not spending time trivializing the human being with the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, their religious beliefs or any of the other personality traits some of us seem to feel are important. Even more so, some seem to think that their own specific station gives them a divine right to hatred. Well, obviously, this is not true, and it's clear that most wars are caused by religious belligerence, by one or both sides of the warring factions.

Hatred does not fit anywhere into F., L., & T., does it? If it does, tell me where, because this is just one of many areas where we are failing to communicate to prospective members. Besides all of this, hatred must be mentally and morally taxing to those who promote it. At the sake of appearing morbid, will hatred at the point of our own passing still seem important, or will it finally strike us that hatred is a silly misuse of a life? Why all this talk of philosophy? Merely to prove that there are a myriad of philosophies and philosophers out there and not one has the exclusivity on truth. A prime example would be Ayn Rand, whose political philosophy is purported to be the darling of the Republican Party, yet, she was an avowed atheist so that would seem to conflict with the Republican Religious Right. Yet, in many ways her beliefs are the underpinning of the religious right. So then it's apparent that a philosopher's beliefs can be accepted partially as well as in their entirety.

Philosophy notwithstanding, ask yourselves what does your lodge have to offer to a prospective member? The common denominator to successful lodges is that they offer something of substance. If your lodge has funds and the ability to do so, consider at least occasionally, perhaps even monthly, serving a dinner free of charge to prospective members, and of course, your long-



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suffering regular members. Don't try to turn a profit while begging people to join your lodge. What good does it do to have half a million dollars in the bank if your membership totals are about to fall to zero? Who said - "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven". If you guessed Jesus Christ you are correct. We don't want to give away the farm but we need to show prospective members some advantage to joining beyond just quoting F., L., & T. We have to walk the walk not just talk the talk.

And when you speak of benefits to a prospective member, do you mention Rebekah Children's Services or our retirement homes? These are wonderful institutions within our order, but to be frank, do not attract new members to one lodge in particular. No, in order to attract members to your lodge, you have to consider what your own lodge offers new members. If you suddenly draw a blank, don't worry, you're not alone. Many, if not most, lodges offer little or nothing to prospective members. Successful lodges do offer something, so when they address a prospective member they often talk about statewide benefits as an aside and spend more time talking about their own lodges and their own pride of membership. So, some of the common denominators discussed herein are these: a push for membership (i.e. The Dedicated Members for Change); a need for the loss of hatred, religious bias, prejudice of all types and the acceptance of all divergent philosophies; and an explanation to prospective members of benefits to joining your own particular lodge. If you simply wish to watch your own lodge slip down to zero, alongside your tradition and heritage, there is nothing whatsoever required.

In Friendship, Love & Truth, Rick Boyles