



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

August 16, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Here is another rendering from Junior Past Grand Master Rick Boyles - who is an historian and an antiquarian at heart. It addresses the question of "who are we?" Because understanding who we are has everything to do with how we grow and how we increase our membership.

Unless we move forward, we are standing still or moving backwards.

F - L - T

Dave Rosenberg  
Deputy Grand Master

---

Outside These Walls - Who are We?

It's a big, beautiful world out there. Sometimes a bit scary, but it's big and beautiful as well. A friend of mine whom I used to work with liked to chant "What can one man do?" but generally it's found that most movements and ideas are started by one man (or woman). It's not required that any one of us carries the load, but the worst thing we can do is to discourage the load carriers. Bonnie Sellars, for example, has done many unsung things for our order, and yet she rarely gets any notice whatsoever. Did you realize that in July of this year, she enrolled our flag in the Sister Cities International Program and that people worldwide will in the future be assigned to carry our flag proudly and while it may seem like a little gesture, it could generate interest at no cost to us. I joined her at the San Jose event and there were perhaps a thousand people in attendance from countries throughout the world. Every little bit helps. The point is that we need to be accepting of all gestures even if we feel they venture outside these walls, and yes, particularly, where there is little or no expense to us. As we have seen, it does not take exceptional effort by anyone in particular to break even in our struggle towards ending declining membership, so then it should follow that increasing membership may also not be that difficult. The important first step is not to lose anyone today.

The first rule when one becomes a sales person is to try to get those closest to you to become customers. This is sometimes difficult, as I personally can attest, but if each of us in our state just got one new member, we would double in size. Think about it, perhaps your spouse or significant other is not interested, but is there a friend or a neighbor who may be? Remember to



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

explain to the prospective member the benefits to joining. There should be some benefit to being a member. If you can't find one, ask yourself why you remain a member? And, also, ask yourself why your spouse or significant other chooses not to join - has that individual had a bad experience with the IOOF? There are bullies within our midst, those who feel they can decide policy and dictate to everyone else. This is one of the problems with all groups in general - bully personalities who assert their influence for their own benefit.

But that brings up a critical question - who are we? Outside these walls what do we represent? What do others see us as, or put in another way, are we an image reflected in today? I am a big fan of history, deal in antiquarian books and ephemera, but that does not mean I would want to live in another time. Just because a person reads about World War II, does not mean that he or she would want to relive it. There were some wonderful times all of us should want to view first hand, the roaring twenties, the gay nineties, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but would we want to also relive the Great Depression, the Black Plague, Hiroshima, the Holocaust, or any of the other tragic episodes in history?. Of course not, we can revisit history but we can't relive it, nor should we want to. Those who claim that our heritage or our traditions will somehow revive the order make no sense - history does not design the future, how could it? We should not ignore our history ("those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it"), but revisiting history should obviously not be a way to construct our future. If we all donned Revolutionary War costumes would it somehow transport us back to the Revolutionary War? - Only in our own vivid imaginations.

Outside these walls looking in provides a vivid picture indeed. If any of you historians have read *The Decline and Fall of the Holy Roman Empire* you would see a description of the fall of Ancient Greece, clearly one of the most enlightened times and could find parallels with the Odd Fellows of today - specifically, petty squabbling, a mad scramble for an illusion of power, fear of one another and dilution of the central core - all things clearly happening within our order. The only way to combat this is to realize that the Odd Fellows and the individual lodges are sacrosanct and we are not identical versions of each other. All people and all members are unique, and no one person is superior to any other. It is time to realize that we either move forward as a friendly welcoming association of independent souls or we will buckle beneath the weight of our cumbersome depressed whole. If you get a friend to join our group, don't be surprised if that friend is different from yourself. If we agree that this great country is based upon the ideals of democracy and individuality why do we persist in attempting to make us all robotic figures of flat ideals and vision? The glory of America and Americans is our individuality and our ability to co-exist. We must share this glory within these walls as well as outside of them. If those outside see us as a loving, cohesive, giving group of kind souls, we will survive and move forward. If all we do is find fault with each other and argue over inanities,



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

then we can just remain huddled in ever-darkening lodges, in ever diminishing amounts, chanting dated dirges until the lights of our order blink out forever. You make the call.

In F., L., & T., Rick Boyles