



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

September 5, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change.

What's in a name?

Sometimes, a name can be very revealing - particularly of an organization. Let's take just a moment to look at the name of our fraternity: Independent Order of Odd Fellows. What does it tell us? Well, perhaps it tells us quite a bit - if we take the time to slice and dice and actually analyze the five words.

INDEPENDENT. Our predecessors had many word choices available to them for the first word in our fraternal name. They could have chosen "Mystic", or "Benevolent", or "Secret", or "Loyal", or "Ancient", or "Knights" or "Improved", or even "Hermetic" - as did some other fraternal orders. But they chose "Independent". This is a strong word, meant to convey a strong message. The message says that we are not beholden to any other entity. We are free to make our own way and create our own rules. And, indeed, the history of Odd Fellowship is a history of evolution and change, in fact, outright "rebellion" at times, as groups of Lodges went their own way, or even "self-instituted".

ORDER. The second word of our name is equally interesting. Our predecessors had fewer choices for that second descriptive word. They could have opted for "Society", or "Fraternity", but they settled on "Order". I have to believe that they chose "Order" because the name implies a social system with a hierarchy and rules. Indeed, that is appropriate to us. We have degrees, and Lodges, and ritual, and regalia, and Grand Lodges, and a Sovereign Grand Lodge. Certainly, we are an Order.

OF. Often overlooked, because it's just a short connecting word, but let's not forget the third word of our name. Our founders did not choose "for" as the connector. They specifically chose "of". There is, indeed, a difference. We are not just "for" ourselves. We are a group "of" Odd Fellows, but we can be (and we historically have been) a group of brothers and sisters who help others.

ODD FELLOWS. It is appropriate to consider the fourth and the fifth words together. This is because our name, in England where we originated, was combined as "Oddfellows". In this country, the words were separated. But what is the origin of this unique name? What do the words "Odd Fellows" really mean? We know that there are many theories regarding the origin of "Oddfellows" - I've heard at least a half dozen of those theories - some mundane and some rather interesting. But that's all that they are: theories. The truth has been lost in the fog of



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time. No one alive today can say with certainty what the origins are of the name. Nevertheless, two things are apparent. For one, the name is unique. For another, the name has a certain fun, whimsical quality to it.

And so I suggest that we should enjoy our "Odd-ness" and our "Odd-Fellowship". Why not? It's part of our persona and uniqueness. The name alone causes people to pay attention. (And isn't that step one in bringing new members to a Lodge?) Personally, I think the social time Lodge members spend together is quality time. It harkens back to the earliest days of our fraternity, when the members would gather in pubs to drink, eat, tell tales, sing songs and just have a good time. Let's not ever lose that quality. Let's not get so serious, so dour, and so straight-laced that we forget to just have fun with our Lodge mates.

So, what have we learned?

Well, we've learned that our name actually tells us quite a bit about who we are. We are Independent. We are an Order. We are "of" Odd Fellowship, not just "for" Odd Fellows. And, ultimately, we are ODD FELLOWS. So, let's all remember to savor our Oddness. We are the Independent Order of Odd Fellows!

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