



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

October 19, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

I'm forwarding an article penned by Brother Jeff LeRoux of Berkeley Lodge #270. Jeff has served this Order in many capacities, most recently as Grand Chaplain for Junior Past Grand Master Rick Boyles. Many of us remember fondly the blessings and prayers he presented at Grand Lodge Sessions - they were certainly unique and informative because Jeff took these blessings and prayers from different religions - Christian, Jewish, Islam, Buddhist, Hindu, etc. - and gave us the opportunity to experience both the diversity and the commonality of the great religions of this earth

Jeff is a wise and thoughtful man, and I think you will find his article of great interest.

F - L - T

Dave Rosenberg

Deputy Grand Master

In the Odd Fellows Text Book by Paschal Donaldson and Samuel Gwinner published in 1878 the authors noted that there was a great debate in Sovereign Grand Lodge in 1851 over the creation of the Rebekah degree and Rebekah lodges in general. The authors report that "The new degree encountered on the floor of the Grand Lodge a warm but honest opposition. It was contended that there was no necessity for such an addition, - that it was a dangerous innovation, - and that the building of Odd Fellowship was already complete and finished, and the cap-stone laid. Some, also, desired that final decision be deferred."

It seems to me we are still in the same situation. We need great change and yet our reverence for our traditions keeps us from it. Sometimes we forget the old traditions weren't always there; they were considered "dangerous innovations" brought in by the innovators of the day. In defending our sacred tradition we often fail to notice the bad parts of some of our old traditions such as the racism that caused us to split from the English Odd Fellows in the 1840's and that this exclusion of people who were not of "full white blood" lasted until 1971 more than a hundred years after the Civil War.



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

My brothers and sisters our fellowship has declined in membership by 95%. We obviously need to make changes as drastic as the creation of the Rebekah Degree was in 1851. We need to acknowledge our love for our order not by holding to the forms and beliefs of the past but by holding to the spirit of benevolence and charity which led our forefathers to create these forms to which we have become accustomed and to create new forms and practices that honor the best intentions of our forefathers and carry them into a workable present. We need to do this now and no longer postpone it.

I visited a lodge last year in my capacity as Grand Chaplain and there was an interaction between a young, African-American woman who appeared to be in her late 20's and an older Caucasian man in his 80's. The older man said to the young woman "Did you ever imagine you'd be hanging out with a bunch of white guys like me?" She said "No, never." And he said "Me neither." A few years earlier the older man had confided in me about his prejudices. He told me he didn't like Afghans, black people, Asians or "Muslims and other terrorists" which included many nationalities. This was an honest man. He was looking into his heart and acknowledging the fear and anger he held towards groups of people. I don't know how he changed but it was this old man who had recruited this young black woman into that lodge.

We all need to look into our hearts and acknowledge the fears and anger that keep us from feeling warmth towards others beyond the beliefs we have developed in our childhood and over the course of years. We need to begin extending ourselves personally to those who seem to be "other" than us. If this old man had not developed a capacity to see humanity beyond his admitted prejudices and to extend a sense of benevolence and charity; this young woman would never have been interested in joining such a lodge as would have him as a member. Our first order of change as a fellowship is to look into our hearts as this old man did and become willing to extend ourselves individually in a spirit of benevolence to those who seem different than us.

There is no one way of believing others are different. I grew up as a military brat in a military that Harry Truman had ordered integrated and as a small child had little idea that many people held hatred for others on the basis of race. I did grow up in a very hierarchical society often wearing hand-me-down clothing and resenting the children of the high ranking officers who lived in big houses on the hill and had new bicycles. I still catch myself sometimes feeling resentful of people because they seem part of some exclusive in-group that looks down on others. Like the old man I mentioned above, we all can open our hearts even if we have to catch



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

ourselves in our own particular form of prejudice on a moment by moment basis and open our eyes to others humanity.

I have noticed that people tend to sit in the same groups and talk to the same people within lodges. This tends to breed a sense of otherness with some members of the lodge. It tends to lead to differences of opinion becoming a division in which there is an "us" and a "them" instead of members having different ideas. Try sitting beside someone different at the next meeting. Talk this over with the lodge members. Integrate within the lodge. When new or prospective members come into the lodge, go out of your way to introduce yourself and as welcome as you would a guest into your home. When I have visited as district deputy there have been markedly different reactions within different lodges. In some lodges people introduce themselves and are welcoming. In other lodges people go and sit in what appear to be their usual small groups and ignore visitors. I have noticed this happening during Grand Master visits as well. Visitors usually feel uncomfortable and appreciate hosts friendly gestures.

My brothers and sisters you can make a point of speaking to people different from you and your usual crowd in social situations. While they have their own prejudices and may think you are Odd that it is OK - after all we are Odd Fellows. Some will be interested enough to talk and you both can extend the feeling of brotherhood. Do it enough and you will discover potential new members and invite them into the lodge.

You may ask how we as an order rather than as just individuals open our hearts. The first is, as a lodge, discuss bringing new people in and how to do it. Then decide who may be odd enough to join and make contact with groups they may already be in. Invite leaders in churches, temples and synagogues to visit. Be actively friendly when they do visit. Make an effort to approach historical societies, civic organizations, interest groups, and teachers; visit them and learn a little more about them and their group. Busy as our lives are we can all do these things once in a while.

The most successful lodges lately have activities that interest people and bring them into the lodge as he Davis Lodge has done. Some lodges have grown by making personal contact and connections of friendship with individuals. This sense of connection is the essence of Odd Fellowship and there are many ways of doing it. Pick your own and invest an hour a month in it and I guarantee your lodge will grow. But do something.

Jeff LeRoux