



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

November 2, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

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Well, it's time to reach into the "mailbag" and pull out a few e-mails from Brothers and Sisters addressing the topic of the week - that is Odd Fellowship and religion. There has been considerable buzz on this topic on Facebook. And, needless to say, I've gotten a fair number of responses from members (from throughout the United States and beyond), and I would like to share some of them with you. I am not listing names or Lodges to protect the free flow of discussion and to preserve confidentiality. Enjoy the dialogue!

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Dave Rosenberg  
Deputy Grand Master

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We have a member who will not come to lodge meetings because there is a Bible in the lodge room (she is Jewish). She joined because she wants to support us and because her father was an Odd Fellow. I believe the religious aspects of the order turn off many younger people. There is a way to include spiritual beliefs without being so Christian-focused - for example, simply require that applicants "have a spiritual or religious practice" rather than "believe in a Supreme Being." Or perhaps we need to let people have their own spiritual beliefs and remove that aspect, i.e. return to the approach that Odd Fellows used prior to 1900.

Of course, more than the religious aspects need to be addressed. We recently had a prospective person join us for dinner and lodge meeting, and a few days later she asked to be removed from our mailing list. We had all enjoyed meeting her and talking to her. When I asked for feedback about why she was no longer interested, she said, "I felt for \$65 a year, I would not get enough bang for my buck and it felt like a dying service that was stuck in a time warp! The meeting I attended lacked organization and meaning. I am not trying to be rude, I just couldn't see myself trying to be active in your group."



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Hooray for you, Dave! Thank you for your loyal service to IOOF and all the amazing work you are doing to get movement in Odd Fellows before it croaks.

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Am I reading this correctly? Are you suggesting we take the Christian basis o-out of Odd Fellowship? This is my main selling point to my friends, that the order has a Biblical basis. Without that, I would not participate with the Buddha, Hindu, etc. Sorry.

I guess I personally will have a huge problem with this. The churches are already bending before social pressure and not staying true to the Bible. IN our Bible study we find we learn and follow more and more what the scriptures say. I will not weaken nor depart from my faith.

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In many other countries where we have Odd Fellows Lodges, there is no chaplain as an officer in the Lodge room. This is for the benefit of people from other religious backgrounds. One member shared, if we are really non-sectarian, why do we recite prayers in the lodge room and why do we even question people if they believe in a supreme being or not? All these prayers and all makes the Odd Fellows quasi-sectarian or even look religious or "churchy" to people.

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Thank you, Dave! It's about time someone had the courage to put these issues on the table for discussion. We can't afford to just keep doing everything the way we did it ten years ago or fifty years ago. The religion thing is a big deal to a lot of people. How can we say we are non-sectarian when we have the Christian Bible in the Lodge room and recite prayers from the New Testament? Isn't Truth the Third Degree? We are not being truthful to ourselves or to others. I know many members who are absolutely uncomfortable in the Lodge room because of the Christian

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Dave, it's always interesting and thought-provoking to read these. I also agree that it is good to examine all the Odd Fellowship beliefs and practices, but would like to offer a minority opinion. I believe that those advocating removing Christian Judaic moral examples are missing the point . . . .

1. Supreme Being issue. I offer the following perspective. The definition of Supreme Being seeming being used in these mailings seems to be one of a divine being or god. I contend that is not necessarily the case. A SB can be someone or something which idealizes a concept or



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principle of a group. It can be argued that both the "religions" you are using as examples have a Supreme Being although not necessarily a divine or theistic one. Buddhism points to Siddhartha Gautama a.k.a. Buddha as their "Enlightened or Awakened One" and states that all should strive to be like him. Ergo a "Supreme Being". Likewise Hinduism while having three branches of thought, one branch at least states that - there is one one god although sages may give him different names. The American Indian culture also believed in a Great Spirit. Even Hitler was thought of by some as a Supreme Being. Requiring Odd Fellows to believe in a Supreme Being is hardly a limiting factor preventing anyone from joining and is only clouding the reason IOOF is loosing members which I shall discuss later.

2. Religious artifacts in the lodge. Once again, focus on these items only is a distraction from the real issue of IOOF membership growth. While it was pointed out by Brother Louie that the Chaplin and Bible are relative new additions to the Lodge, the real question (unanswered) is "Why did the leaders decide to do that"? While I haven't researched it, I am sure it was because religion was on the rise during that time due to world influences, i.e. war, plague, etc. Religion is still on the rise today by 1.41% worldwide per Britannia Encyclopedia. In fact, the more fundamental religions are growing the most. Again, since both sides of any argument should be examined, perhaps instead of removing traces of Christianity religion from the lodges we should be including faith healing and speaking in tongues. :)

3. The real issue from what I have observed causing the decline in members is that Odd Fellowship no longer offers the tangible benefits to people it once did. While visiting relatives and friends in Phoenix recently, I asked several young professionals if they had heard of IOOF and if they would consider joining. The common response was, "Why should I?" and "What does it provide beyond what I am currently getting in...(church and professional networks)". As pointed out in several articles, IOOF was formed for trade networking, offered limited health benefits, burial options, and support for the widow and orphan. In addition, it offered fellowship and entertainment. All these were clear incentives for a person to join. All of which have diminished for various reasons which we need not recap here. In the 1800 - 1900 IOOF had a clear Charter and Mission. It doesn't seem to today and that is the main reason for the decreasing membership. That being said, it is true that some Lodges are offering Odd Fellowship, entertainment, dinners music etc. and I applaud them for recapturing the fellowship. But those lodges are the exception and are the ones which are fortunate enough to have the funds available from rental properties and other resources. Most lodges can not offer free monthly dinners, renovated facilities with wide screen HD TV etc. Let's briefly turn our focus to other fraternal organizations. Most are also decreasing in size due to the same external influences, readily available entertainment, government programs which have replaced what IOOF once offered, etc. Those that are not declining seem to have a clear Mission. The Masons have Children's



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Hospitals, Rotary has many missions, but seems to focus on overseas medical assistance among others. I would like to advocate that Odd Fellows capture a new or revitalized mission to attract members and to define what we offer. I also believe we have that Mission currently in our oath ..."educate the orphan" . We need to utilize and supplement the existing Children's home and the Camp and use those facilities as our "Brand" to attract members. The camp for example could host 2-3 one week music lessons focused camps for children. Instructors could come from current IOOF volunteers. Other focus camps could be added until that camp is utilized every week. That would in turn attract numerous new members from the parents of those children. I'm sure much discussion is needed to realize something along these lines but we need a immediate committee to start exploring this.

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It appears that some people are missing the point. This is not about anyone's belief in God. Everyone is and should be free to believe in whatever Supreme Being, God, gods, spirit, or higher power they wish to. That's freedom of religion. This is about being truthful and honest as Odd Fellows. We do say we believe in Truth, don't we? We can't be hypocrites in Odd Fellowship by saying on the one hand that we are non-sectarian while on the other hand quoting Christian scripture in our ritual. It's also about our membership. We are losing members and are a dying order. Why should we put up barriers to membership to non-Christians?