



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

November 15, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

At a time when Odd Fellowship had very large numbers of members - in the hundreds of thousands - our fraternal Order created Branches. We created the Encampments and Ladies Encampment Auxiliaries and Patriarchs Military and Ladies Auxiliaries Patriarchs Militant. These Branches once also had large numbers, sometimes in the thousands. We have all seen the old photographs, for example, showing hundreds of uniformed members of the P.M. marching in parades, complete with P.M. bands. We have seen the photographs of Grand Encampment gatherings with hundreds of delegates.

I imagine these Branches were created for a number of reasons. The Branches afforded opportunities for leaders of Odd Fellows and Rebekah Lodges to move on to leadership positions in the Branches, thus freeing up leadership positions in the Lodges for newer members. The Branches also afforded members of the Order to advance to "higher" degrees, and obtain the teachings of those degrees. Finally, the Branches offered members the opportunity to receive more degrees just like other fraternal orders.

This was all well and good in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries when Odd Fellowship numbers were very large. The way our system is structured, numbers do matter. For example, one cannot become a member of the Encampment until one has attained all degrees in an Odd Fellows Lodge. And one cannot become a member of the Patriarchs Militant until one has attained all the degrees in an Encampment. So, I have always said that you can't have a strong Encampment unless you have a strong Odd Fellows Lodge, and you can't have a strong Canton unless you have a strong Encampment. This concept is proven by my own experience in Davis. When I joined my Davis Odd Fellows Lodge 10 years ago, we had only about 25 members on our books, our Encampment was virtually non-functional, and we had no Canton. Today, my Davis Lodge has about 230 members, and we resurrected our Encampment about six years ago (when membership had dropped to 3), and now have 45 members in the Encampment, making us the largest in California. We mustered and instituted a Canton less than two years ago, and now have 24 members, making us the largest Canton in California. Accordingly, strong Lodge = strong Encampment and strong Encampment = strong Canton.

But this is an exception in California, and I suspect, throughout North America, because we have very few large strong Lodges. It is not that easy to obtain the numbers regarding the strength of our Branches, but I have gotten them. Here's what they show regarding the relative membership of our four Branches in California:



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Encampment: 194

LEA: 170

Patriarchs Militant: 74

LAPM: 60

These numbers are staggeringly low. And the situation is even more dire because the number of local units in these Branches is dropping dramatically. For example, there are only 7 Cantons in California and less than 15 Encampments. Similar situations exist for the LEA and LAPM. Most of the local units have fewer than 10 members, and several are on the brink. (Take away the Davis Encampment and Canton Davis and the numbers are revealing. Davis alone makes up almost 25% of the Encampment membership in California and almost 33% of the Patriarchs Militant membership in California.)

In fact, the continuation of these Branches in their current form makes no sense. For one thing, we all know that the number of members on the books does not reflect the true number of "active members". Typically, only have the members listed on the books are active. So, for example, with 74 Patriarchs Militant on the books, probably only 37 are "active" members. This is shown by participation at the Grand gatherings. For example, on October 14, 2013, at the grand gathering of the Military Council of Patriarchs Militant, only 17 members were eligible to vote. Similar numbers are presented by the other Branches. In fact, these grand gatherings aren't so grand anymore. Certainly, 75 or 100 years ago, the grand gatherings of these Branches were truly grand with hundreds, and perhaps thousands, in attendance. Yet today, with only 17, or 38, or 45 members in attendance, the Branches go through the same motions that they went through 75 or 100 years ago - with the same opening ceremonies, the same meetings, the dinners, and so one for four or five days. If truth be told (and we are fraternally obligated to be truthful) the gatherings are a mere shell of what they once were. They are, regrettably, a facade. (Merriam Webster defines "facade" as "a way of behaving or appearing that gives other people a false idea of one's true situation.")

What's the solution? In my mind, the only reasonable solution is to eliminate all the stand-alone Branches and instead convert them into Degrees in Odd Fellows and Rebekahs. So, an Odd Fellows Lodge would, with this change, now provide eight degrees to members: Initiatory, Degree of Friendship, Degree of Love, Degree of Truth, Degree of Faith, Degree of Hope, Degree of Charity, and Degree of Universal Justice. A similar arrangement would be designated for the Rebekahs. An added benefit of this approach is that it will encourage more Odd Fellows and Rebekahs to obtain the teachings of these advanced degrees.



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Now is the time to consolidate our Order, not diffuse it.

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Dave Rosenberg  
Deputy Grand Master