



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

November 17, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

From the time DMC was founded in 2010, our focus as a "think tank" has been consistent. It's been all about "membership". We have highlighted the 70-year drop in membership in our Order, and we have suggested ways in which we can bring in new members and retain the members that we have.

One of the disturbing realities (and an impediment to growth and retention of members) are the members who use "the Code" as a weapon to beat back new ideas or even to bludgeon brothers and sisters in the Lodge who might disagree or have different opinions. Many of us have seen this behavior. There is nothing wrong, of course, with using the Code or correctly citing the Code. But there is something seriously wrong with misinterpreting the Code or using technical passages in the Code to block progressive suggestions or modern ideas. Remarkably, the problem is not a new one.

Brother Louie Sarmiento - a researcher with few peers - has discovered this telling comment (below) from J. Paul Kuhn, who served this Order as Sovereign Grand Sire (the former title for Sovereign Grand Master) in 1943-44. The insidious problem within the Order that Brother Kuhn highlighted in 1944 is still with us today. Here, 70 years later, is the quote from Brother Kuhn - as applicable today as it was in 1944.

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Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master

"The Code Fellows"

By J. Paul Kuhn, Grand Sire (1943-1944)

(An excerpt from his speech during the 1944 S.G.L Sessions)



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From my experience as Grand Sire, I have concluded that entirely too much dissension, discord and discouragement comes from the activities of the "lodge lawyers". I refer to the type of member who devotes so much time and energy in search for the Code and decisions in an effort to find some technical reason why any progressive program which may have otherwise met an enthusiastic response of the members, cannot be put in effect or carried through. I am firmly of the opinion that one way to materially increase our number of Odd Fellows is to first reduce the number of "Code Fellows".

It is my opinion that the laws of the Order should be established by broad legislative enactment, and that few laws should result from judicial interpretation, where too often all of the details which would have an important bearing upon the interpretation are not known to the Grand Sire. Again, after the decision has been given, an effort is made to apply it to a statement of facts of conditions in other jurisdictions where again some important fact is different than the one which existed under circumstances for which the decision was given. All of this creates difficulty and discord, and impedes practical progress.

In certain Grand Jurisdictions there is found to exist other disturbing circumstances and discord, based upon the desire and determination of certain members of the Order to have complete control of the investment of large funds accumulated for various purposes, and whose fraternal interest is apparently limited to that determination. I do not believe it will be helpful to the Order, in general, to here deal with specific cases of this character which have arisen this year, for those who have threatened to do the greatest injury have been largely disposed of.

In this report I want it to be known that I can see approaching in the near future, other similar difficulties, and believe that by giving early attention to them they can be prevented from blossoming into more serious problems in those jurisdictions.