



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

November 20, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Junior Past Grand Master Rick Boyles, one of the founders of DMC, has written another article with the intriguing title of "An Onion to a Beggar." And as the title indicates, the article presents "food" for thought.

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Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master

An Onion to a Beggar

A favorite book of mine when I was a teenager was "The Brothers Karamazov" by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Like most if not all Russian authors, Dostoevsky encountered Russian persecution and constant political debate over his books, but his image of charitable giving and our ability to react to another person's suffering has transcended all debate and their tired ideological prison. Specifically, there is an old woman in his classic novel evil enough to be prepared to spend her next life in hell but her guardian angel said she had once done one thing of a charitable nature, which was to give "an onion to a beggar". That one good deed, so the tale goes, nearly saved her from eternal hell. So it goes that for all our personal misdeeds, we must make at least one gesture of charity, preferably many, otherwise we are all destined either for an ideological hell of our own creating or a realistic hell of our fractured beliefs.

Which brings me to examine the historical nature of our charitable past: not so long ago, in fact, the Odd Fellows were known to do the following things - bury the dead, educate the orphan, and other fine gestures. This is a discussion I often am part of within different lodges. Clearly, we can no longer afford to do many of the things we were originally known for, but that does not preclude us from doing other things of a charitable nature. In order for us to retain relevance in this new age, we must do something to connect with the ordinary citizen who surrounds us. Obviously, as earlier mentioned in previous newsletters, our lodge halls are hidden in plain sight, surrounded by heavily populated areas and yet quickly dying out! Why is this? Simple, we are losing the relevance we once had. Yet, does this mean that citizens don't need us? Of course not, it means that citizens have no idea that we can help. What is even more frightening is the thought that perhaps they feel that we ignore the outside world altogether. Perhaps it is some of



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our own semantics that precludes us from the world. In our degree work it talks about our lodge walls as being a refuge from the outside world, but we have mistakenly taken this to mean that we must remain ignorant of the outside world. Rather, what it means is that we as a group act as a shelter for those lucky enough to be inside from the turbulence outside our walls.

We must come out of the shadows and revisit the public. If we really wish to survive, we must open our arms to the outside world. And, just like the old woman in "The Brothers Karamazov", I believe one of the basic reasons our order is failing is because we have not even given the present day equivalent of "an onion to a beggar". In other words, do our lodges do enough for the people around us? Clearly, we can send \$50 to the American Cancer Society, but does this even cause a ripple in the stream of universal need? No. There are many destitute within and outside our walls. If we really want to redeem ourselves, we need to do something substantial. We like to police our order as if saving our money alone will sprout new members. It will not. If anything, this type of organized belligerence chases new members away. New members come from an exhibition of the heart. Some high-ranking members in our order have mentioned that the order may fail in retaining members yet continue on a totally fiscally sound path. In sum, become only a shadow fraternal group. This is quickly becoming reality. We have states with only a couple hundred members with millions in the bank. Is this what we want? What is the point to this?

Of course in another famous literary reference, we are becoming lodges full of Ebenezer Scrooges, eating our dinners in front of roaring fires while friends and relatives go hungry and freeze outside. What does it really take to become beloved? Not so much, really. Scrooge in the end delivers a turkey to his nephew and his employee's family - how much did this cost in dollars? We have lodges holding upwards of a million dollars in grim saving accounts, yet we are busy denying our closest brethren "an onion to a beggar". Surely, someday it should dawn on us that the public no longer sees us as benevolent. Is it any mystery really why no one wants to join? It's time to discuss our order's basic premise for the future.

In Friendship, Love and Truth, Rick Boyles