



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

November 30, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

There is a nursery rhyme that goes something like this:

Five little people went out to play.

The first one said, "Do it my way!"

The Second one said, "That's not fair!"

The third one said, "I don't care!"

The fourth one said, "This isn't fun!"

The fifth one said, "Our game is done!"

So five little people all walked away

They never even got to play.

Some time ago that I visited a Lodge and, watching the proceedings at a meeting, was reminded of that little nursery rhyme. As I watched and listened, I saw the meeting dominated by just two or three members. The Noble Grand and one or two others ran the show their way. Those other members just sat by, generally as silent observers - although one of the younger members made some suggestions for a Lodge event he was hoping to organize. But, what's worse, the two who dominated the meeting were all about being negative. I heard no positive comments at all. One member in particular was critical of every new suggestion or proposal. "That's not how we've done it." "That's not going to work." "That's a violation of the Code."

That sort of negativity is the surest way to turn off and turn away newer members. How discouraging for a new member when his or her suggestions are shot down right out of the box. And how about a dose of reality: Just because we have done it in the past in a certain way, doesn't mean that way is written on a stone tablet. Frankly, the past ways aren't working for Odd Fellows, and haven't worked for the past 60 years. Our numbers have been and are declining, and we are rapidly diminishing as an Order. At the rate we are going downhill in membership, we are on track to virtually disappear in a decade.

What's the solution? Interestingly, the structure of Odd Fellowship has provided a potential solution - we need only avail ourselves of it. Well over a century ago, Odd Fellowship created Encampments and Cantons. I believe that one of the reasons we created these branches was to give leaders of Odd Fellows Lodges an opportunity to move on to leadership in a "higher" unit,



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

and allow newer and younger members to assume leadership roles in Odd Fellows Lodges. Regrettably, some long-time members have not moved on, and remain entrenched in Lodge leadership. One constraint, of course, is that our Encampment and Canton structure is weak. While in California we have about 120 active Lodges, we only have about 13 active Encampments and about 7 active Cantons. I've said before, and I will say again, when Lodges are strong then Encampments are strong, and when Encampments are strong then Cantons are strong. Of course, the opposite is true as well. When Lodges are weak then Encampments are weak, and when Encampments are weak then Cantons are weak. Regrettably, we are in latter scenario these days.

So, absent the ability for long-time Lodge leaders to move on to Encampments and Cantons, what is to be done? The only alternative solution is for long-time Lodge leaders to let go a bit on those reins of power. Each Lodge has 18 officer positions. So, for example, the Noble Grand doesn't need to be Noble Grand for life. That officer can seek another elective office, or an appointed office, or become a Trustee of the Lodge. It's all about letting go. None of us is indispensable, and at a certain point the best thing for us to do is to prepare a new generation of leaders for the Lodge and then make way for them to gracefully take over those positions of leadership. After all, we are a fraternal order - constantly evolving and adding new members - and the way we sustain ourselves is to add those new generations of leadership, and then, when the time comes, to let them lead.

F - L - T

Dave Rosenberg  
Deputy Grand Master