



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

December 4, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

There was a fraternal order founded in the United States in the Nineteenth Century, originally back East, but quickly spreading across the country to the West. The order spread across the globe, as well - to Canada, Europe, South America, Asia and elsewhere. It grew rapidly in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, becoming truly international in scope. There was a time, in the 1920's, when the fraternity had about 1 million members, and it was one of the very largest fraternal orders in the country.

Distinguished by a three-word motto, the order attracted leaders of the community - Senators, Governors, Judges, leading members of the business and professional world. The structure of the fraternity was three-tiered, with subordinate lodges at the local level, grand lodges at the state level, and ultimately a sovereign grand lodge at the national level. The fraternity had secrets and rituals, including signs, grips and passwords, and the doors to meetings were guarded both inside and outside by designated officers. The order had four degrees. Subordinate lodges were instituted and fancy charters, filled with inscriptions and symbols, were provided to be maintained in the lodges.

The fraternity was open to potential members who were in good health and who believed in a Supreme Being, and applicants were voted into membership through ball balloting. Eventually, the fraternal order created an auxiliary for women, and ultimately two youth organizations - one for the boys and one for girls - were also created. The order even developed a uniformed branch.

But, over time, the fraternal order was hesitant to evolve and change with the times, and today it finds itself with numbers much diminished.

Sound familiar?

Here's a hint. The fraternity described above is not the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The description above is of the Knights of Pythias. Once, the Knights of Pythias were the third largest fraternal order in the United States (close behind Odd Fellows and Masons) and the Knights had tens of thousands of members in California alone, with dozens and dozens of subordinate lodges. Today, the Knights have just six subordinate lodges in this state, and membership numbers only in the low hundreds.



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

Could this be the future of the Odd Fellows?

Most certainly it could be. But it doesn't have to be. Here's the point. Everything evolves and changes. It is the way of the environment and of nature, and it is the essence of the history of mankind, nations, and organizations. Think about it. Everything evolves. Retail sales today are quite different than they were 50 or 100 years ago. Football, baseball, and basketball are all different today than they were in the day. Cars are different. Entertainment is different. Food choices are different. The military today is quite different than the military was in the last century. Transportation. Clothing. Radio, television and movies. Banking. Computers and the Internet. The Penal system. Libraries. Telephones. The list could go on and on.

The bottom line: In a changing world, Odd Fellows must also change or we will not be relevant to the new generation of members we need to sustain us and to grow this Order. A majority of Odd Fellows Lodges continue to be one-dimensional - doing little more than holding monthly formal meetings. To survive, sustain and flourish in the 21st Century, Odd Fellows Lodges must become three-dimensional - respecting the history and ritual of our Order, but also having fun social events in and out of the Lodge, and reaching out into the community to do good works. The proof is right before our very eyes. Look around you - it is the three-dimensional Lodges that are increasing in membership. It is the one-dimensional Lodges that are treading water or actually losing membership.

If you don't believe me, just ask the Knights.

F - L - T

Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master