



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

December 18, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

The following letter has recently come to my attention. To preserve confidentiality, I have deleted the name of the Lodge and the names of Lodge members. The letter stated the following:

Dear Brother -----,

This letter is to inform you of the financial condition of ----- Lodge #---. Our membership has dwindled to 10 with only 4 that are current with their dues. We have had no members show up for regular meetings in the last 6 months. The age of our members are all over 60 except 1, most over 70 yrs. of age. We cannot pay the insurance on the building nor do we have the funds available for our per capita dues that will soon be due. The property tax for the 1st half has been paid and we may have enough funds to pay utilities for 2 to 4 months, then nothing. We cannot have any fund raiser because no one can do any work. It is our opinion that it is time for ----- Lodge #--- to disband.

Sincerely yours in FLT

-----, Noble Grand

-----, Treasurer

This is an actual letter, and it is distressing at five different levels.

First, it shows a Lodge that is going to give up its charter. That, in and of itself, is distressing. Every year - year after year - we see Lodges giving up their charters, or having their charters taken, or consolidating. That, of course, is completely unsustainable over time. Once, in California, Odd Fellows proudly had about 500 Lodges. Today, we are at less than 120 Lodges. In the case, above, we have a Lodge that was founded over a Century ago. And now it is going to become an historical memory.

Second, the fact that this Lodge has only elderly members tells us that the Lodge failed to perform its most basic function: To bring in new members to keep the Lodge vibrant and energetic. Lodges that fail to bring in new - hopefully younger - members every year are eventually doomed. This, however, sounds like a Lodge that hasn't added a new member in



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many years. And if the Lodge added a new member, it is likely that the newcomer was already in his 60's or 70's. It is too late to save a Lodge that has ignored its membership responsibilities for decades. Who wants to join a Lodge of gray-haired men who sit around and don't really do anything?

Third, this should have been attended to at least a decade earlier in time. Shame on the leadership of this Lodge and shame on the leadership of the District Deputy and the Grand Lodge. It is clear that leadership was asleep at the switch over the past decade or two. This Lodge's issues should have been addressed and attended to 20 years ago, or at least 10 years ago. The problems faced by this Lodge are not new - they go back many, many years.

Fourth, this is the sorry condition of many of our Lodges. Sad to say, but there are dozens of Lodges in California and hundreds around the country that are at the brink. In my opinion, when the membership of a Lodge falls below 21, that Lodge is "Condition Yellow" and needs a careful examination. We all know that 20 members on the books really means half that number are active - and when a Lodge has only 10 active members, it is susceptible - that Lodge may not have sufficient officers to impose the necessary checks and balances, and may not even have quorums for meetings. Further, that Lodge may not be bringing in those new members that will sustain it two years, five years and ten years down the line. And when a Lodge membership falls 10 or less, that Lodge is clearly in "Condition Red". Unfortunately, we have a number of Lodges in California and in the USA who show 10 or fewer members on their books. Those Lodges need immediate assistance from the District Deputy and the Grand Lodge if they are to have any hope of survival.

Fifth, over the last few years, as this Lodge above diminished in membership, it ran the risk of financial mistakes, self-dealing and ruin. As membership of this Lodge dropped below 12, we know that actual active membership would have been only half that amount. The level of competence and knowledge in the remaining members would have been seriously eroded. Who would remain competent to be Noble Grand, Treasurer, Secretary, Financial Secretary, Trustee of this Lodge? Without the necessary level of competence, the Lodge would lose its controls and checks and balances. Funds and property of the Lodge would be at risk.

In summary, we must remember that we are a fraternal order. The most basic fundamental responsibility of the leadership and members of a fraternal order is to sustain that order with new members. This is a job for each and every one of us. We can't rely on "the other guy" to bring in new members. A fraternal order naturally loses members every year through death, withdrawal and otherwise; and the Lodge ages year after year. It is incumbent on the Lodge members to bring in new members every year - and to ensure that those new members bring quality,



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competence and leadership to the Lodge. Every new member must bring in skills for the future - be it the skill to bring in other new members, financial skills, leadership skills, organizational skills and the like. In this fashion we can sustain not only the numbers, but the quality of our Order. And if we, at the Lodge level, fail to do so - and skip a year or two or more in this responsibility - we will see more and more Lodges writing the letter, above.

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Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master