



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

December 21, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

By now, no one really disputes that Odd Fellowship is in trouble due to the three-generation decline in our membership. In California alone we have dropped from over 60,000 members and almost 500 Lodges three generations ago, to our present state of less than 4,000 members and less than 120 Lodges. And dozens of those remaining Lodges have less than 21 members on their books. Many Lodges have members almost all of whom are in their 60's, 70's, 80's and beyond. These facts are not in dispute.

There are some well-meaning and loyal members of this Order who sincerely believe that we can reverse this trend and grow our Order if only we would be more diligent to our ritual - in other words, spend more time memorizing the opening and closing ritual of our Lodges and holding more formal meetings with great attention to detail - what to say, when to say it, where to sit, how to stand, how to move, etc. With due respect, this is not the answer to our declining membership - and hasn't been for the past 75 years. Why? Simple. We are a completely different world today than we were in the 1940's, or the 1920's, or the 1880's.

During the heyday of fraternal growth - 150 years ago - there was no television, no movies, nor radio for that matter. The Internet was not even a subject of science fiction. People moved with horses and buggies, not automobiles or airplanes, jets or rockets. In those days, if one wanted to socialize, all that was available was church or a fraternal order. And indeed, hundreds of thousands of Americans flocked to fraternities, including the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. There was also very little governmental support for people who were sick or in distress or challenged in other ways. There was no social security, or welfare, or employment development departments, or housing departments, or mental health services, or drug services, or Obamacare. Odd Fellowship flourished because it provided hospitals, and orphanages, and retirement homes, and cemeteries, and other amenities and necessities of life. Many Odd Fellows simply could not read, so memorization of the "unwritten work" was mandatory. The differences between the world several generations ago, and today, are manifest and many. And changes in the world are happening faster and exponentially. News, for example, is instant today. Events happen in Pakistan, and Iraq, and Japan, and Russia, and around this nation - and we hear and see them in a split second on radio news, television and the Internet. Even socialization has changed as many young people today get their social interaction through texting, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. iPhones even talk to us, answer our questions, suggest restaurants, tell us how to get places, and order things for us.



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How can one seriously argue that the young people of 2014 (the folks in the 16 through 29 age group) would be attracted to join a Lodge of older men and women who do little more than hold formal, closed meetings with full ritual and regalia?

Am I contending that Odd Fellowship should do away with our ritual and regalia? No. Not for a moment would I contend this. It is our history, ritual and regalia that make us uniquely Odd Fellows, and these must be preserved and continued. But, what I am contending is that the world has changed and we must change and adapt as well. We are not lesser human beings because we buy our food at the supermarket rather than hunting that food with a spear or rifle. Similarly, we are not lesser Odd Fellows because we use a computer Excel program to keep track of our members rather than writing names and phone numbers by hand in a ledger book. The same is true of the operations of a Lodge. Modern adjustments make us no less Odd Fellows. We are simply modern Odd Fellows.

And we have to be modern Odd Fellows to bring in the young men and women of today. The young people of this Century are not interested in joining boring and stodgy Lodges where the members don't do much more than sit around in meetings, hold a monthly potluck, and write a check or two to a charity.

We can no longer be one-dimensional in our Lodges, if we hope to survive as an Order. We must supplement our rich history with other elements that reflect a 21st Century world. So, for example, Lodges must open up to the community and engage in good works in the community (e.g. environmental clean-up, planting trees, working with frail senior citizens, hosting music events at the Lodge for the community, supporting local food banks, etc., etc.), and remembering to have fun in the Lodge as a social group (e.g. hosting an OddtoberFest, wine tasting, card night at the Lodge, taking hikes, etc., etc.). The list of good community works and fun social activities is virtually endless, and is limited only to the spirit and imagination of Lodge members.

Does it work? You bet it does. My own Lodge in Davis has become a three-dimensional Lodge and we have found that the members enjoy a fuller fraternal experience, we do good things for our community, we raise the visibility of our Order and Lodge, and significantly, we have no problem bringing in new members. In fact, my Davis Lodge does not recruit for new members anymore, and hasn't done so for years. Potential applicants now come to us and ask to join. I imagine that this is how the fraternal world looking the 19th Century. The Davis Lodge has become a desirable place to be, and folks seek us out. They hear about us because we are in the local newspaper almost every week. Our Lodge is open to the community and hundreds of community members come through the Lodge during events. When our Lodge puts on an event for the community - for example, Breakfast with Santa - we typically have folks inquire about



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the Lodge and we often receive applications.

The future of Odd Fellowship will belong to the Lodges that are inviting to 21st Century men and women.

(Here's wishing one and all a happy holiday season.)

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Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master