



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

October 16, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

What ultimately distinguishes a fraternal order (like Odd Fellows) from a club (like Rotary)?

Both fraternities and clubs have mottoes, slogans or watchwords - for example, "Friendship-Love-Truth" for the Odd Fellows and "Service Above Self" for Rotary. Both fraternities and clubs do community service, have social events, and have a certain format for the running of meetings. Both have symbols and emblems like the three links for our Order and the wheel for Rotary. So, what's the difference?

Generations ago, there was a substantial difference because fraternal orders (like Odd Fellows) provided beneficial support to its members (e.g. financial support, hospitals, orphanages, care for widows and orphans, retirement communities, etc.) while clubs generally did not. But in the modern era, with the advent and expansion of government-funded programs, fraternal orders have the means and the funds to provide only the most rudimentary levels of beneficial support to needy members.

At bottom, the difference between fraternal orders and clubs today boils down to one thing: the secret ritual of the fraternity. Clubs don't have that. All members of the Order are sworn to keep the ritual private and clandestine. We give a solemn oath to do so. And for a couple hundred years, the secret ritual of the Odd Fellows, Masons, Knights of Pythias, Moose, Elk, and other fraternities was, in fact, kept from public view. Unfortunately, in the age of the Internet, I must tell you that there are few, if any, secrets which remain. I was amazed the other day to go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and enter the words "secrets of the Odd Fellows". In words and in videos, accessed by hundreds if not thousands of folks on line, all the secrets of our Order are revealed. The same is true for the secrets of other fraternal orders.

But that's not all. There are books published and available to the general public, which reveal all. For example, Past Grand Master Rod Metoyer the other day gave me a book he had discovered entitled, "Revised Odd-Fellowship Illustrated: The Complete Revised Ritual of the Lodge, Encampment, Patriarch Militant, and the Rebekah Degrees." It is a reprint of a work published prior to 1923, but it is chock full of passwords, signs, grips, honors, seating arrangements, and scripts for the ritual of all degrees. Some of it, of course, is outmoded and superseded, but some of it is not.

I raise these points not to advocate for the abolition of our secrets - for I do not so advocate. I raise these points as a reality check for our members. In this age of the Internet and instant



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communications, the secrets of our Order are, brothers and sisters, not so secret anymore. So, for those Lodges that keep the doors and windows closed to the public in fear that members of the public will see the symbols of our Order, or the placement of chairs, or the regalia - no need. The public can see it all on line.

There is no reason why our Lodges must remain hidden. And every reason for our Lodges to reach out to, and welcome, the public. After all, it is from that public that we must draw our new members.

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Dave Rosenberg, Grand Warden