The Future of Odd Fellowship

*Evolution and Change*

By Dave Rosenberg

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In 2012, I published a book entitled “The Future of Odd Fellowship – To Be or Not to Be”. That book contained a series of essays I had published from 2006 to 2012 - all about a progressive new vision for Odd Fellowship. From 2012 to 2014, I found myself writing quite a few more essays regarding my Fraternal Order, and I have compiled 110 of them in the book you are now about to read.

The premise for these essays is simple and straightforward. Odd Fellowship is a great and ancient Fraternal Order, with an important history and an even more important message touting friendship, love, truth, and universal justice. However, the message has lost much of its volume because of the precipitous drop in membership of the Order over the last 75 years. Accordingly, the gravamen of my vision is to reform, restructure and revitalize Odd Fellowship for the 21st Century. Odd Fellowship can only survive and prosper if we become relevant and important to 21st Century men and women – the lifeblood of our fraternity. We do our Order no service by retreating into our Lodge rooms to sit, age and die. Our Order must evolve and change. Our Lodges must become three-dimensional Lodges, emphasizing not only the rich culture and history of our fraternity, but also making sure we provide enjoyable social activities for our members, as well as making sure we reach out into our communities to do good works. We must open the doors and windows of our Lodges to the world. Only then can we attract the new members we need to thrive and grow in this new Century.

The essays in this book tell this story, and explain how this can be done.

My goal is nothing less than a Renaissance for Odd Fellowship.
I recently came into possession of a rare volume, entitled The Illustrated History of Odd Fellowship, written by Theodore A. Ross, who at the time of its publication had served as Grand Secretary of the Sovereign Grand Lodge for close to 20 years. It's quite a tome, numbering well over 600 pages. I'd like to quote a couple of passages from this book which you may find interesting:

"The Order of Odd Fellows originated in England in the Eighteenth Century. In the early part of that century the celebrated Daniel De Foe mentions the Society of Odd Fellows, and in the Gentleman’s Magazine for 1745, the Odd Fellows Lodge is mentioned as 'a place where very pleasant and recreative evenings are spent.' The poet James Montgomery, in 1788, wrote a song for a Body of Odd Fellows. The Odd Fellows’ Keepsake states that the early English Lodges were supported and their members relieved by each member and visitor paying a penny to the Secretary on entering the Lodge. These allusions are sufficient proof of the existence of the Order at the time, but they tell us nothing of its aims, objects and characteristics.

"From other sources it is known that the Lodges were originally formed by workingmen for social purposes, and for giving the brethren aid and assisting them to obtain employment when out of work. When a brother could not obtain work he was given a Card and funds enough to carry him to the next Lodge, and if unsuccessful there, that Lodge facilitated his farther progress in the same way.

"When he found employment, there he deposed his Card."
"At first there was little or no Ritual, and no formal method of conducting the business of the Lodge. These were matters of gradual and slow growth."

These excerpts reveal a great deal of the path taken by our Order. What do we learn from the passages?

Well, to begin with, we learn that Odd Fellows is an evolving and changing Order. In the beginning, it appears that Odd Fellows were akin to a club - a place to spend "very pleasant and recreative evenings". And we know that "Lodges were originally formed by workingmen for social purposes." We can just imagine the early brothers drinking ale, throwing darts, and having an all-around enjoyable evening together in the social atmosphere of the local pub. And it appears that early Lodges were open to not only members, but visitors. Those early Lodges provided a measure of support for needy members by collecting a small tithe - "a penny" - from members and visitors. (Although I hasten to add that a penny in Eighteenth Century England was the equivalent of a dollar today. For a penny one could purchase a cup of coffee or a pint of ale. A penny wasn't even the smallest denomination in Olde England - a penny could be divided in fourths called farthings or in half called ha-pennies.)

But early Odd Fellows Lodges kept evolving into places that supported members who had lost their jobs. Odd Fellowship became the social services provider. Remember, this was in a time well before governments provided any sort of social safety net. This was well before the time of government operated Employment Development Departments. When a member in Town A lost his job, he could depend on his Lodge to give him a Card, a little traveling money, and a good wish before his Lodge brothers sent him on his way to a Lodge in a neighboring town. Hopefully, at this new Lodge, a local Brother would help the traveling Brother find a job. If he did, the traveling Brother would deposit his card and stay.
Clearly, with Brothers traveling from town to town and Lodge to Lodge to find work, it was necessary to develop secret grips, passwords, and signs which would change from time to time. Only in this way could a traveling Brother be distinguished from a fraud or charlatan who just wanted money, or a place to sleep, or a job.

Indeed, Odd Fellowship evolved and changed from a social club, into a mutual benefit society, and ultimately into a true fraternal Order which admits men and women. And it is my belief that Odd Fellowship must continue to evolve today to meet the needs and attract new members. The world in the Twenty-First Century is quite a different world than the one that existed in the Eighteenth Century or even the Nineteenth or Twentieth Centuries. Yet we have today some members in our Order who view Odd Fellowship through lenses cut in prior centuries. But here’s the rub: unless we modernize and make our Order relevant to the men and women of the Twenty-First Century, we will continue the downward death spiral that we have seen take hold of our Order for the last sixty-plus years.

Dave Rosenberg
Back from a quick trip to Victoria, Canada.

Victoria is a small town on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, a fairly short jaunt from Seattle, Washington. My wife, Lea, and I took a short vacation to Victoria, and while walking the streets of town, spotted a building on Douglas Street with the three links displayed on the facade. Of course, we walked right over and sure enough, it was an Odd Fellows Lodge (although in British Columbia, they call it "Oddfellows" - in one word). We could peer into the glass on the old front door, and could also look through a window into a small adjacent room. Looking through the glass of the front door, we could see a very long stairway leading up to second floor landing. And behind the glass window, there was displayed some Odd Fellows memorabilia, including old photographs, lovely carved chairs, and a display cabinet filled with all things IOOF.

Next to the front door was a small sign which indicated that this building was home to two Odd Fellows Lodges, a Rebekah Lodge, an Encampment and a Canton. But it was early morning and there were no signs of life. Lea and I were about to depart when the front door suddenly opened and out emerged "Bill". Lea and I immediately informed Bill that we were delighted to see him because we were Odd Fellows! Bill seemed to be equally delighted and then asked if we would like a tour of the facility. Of course, we immediately said "yes" and thus proceeded a step back into another time.

Bill was Vice Grand of Victoria Lodge #1, one of the Lodges that occupy the facility. Bill also served as President of their equivalent of the Hall Association. His Lodge had about 45 members, but (as
is unfortunately typical of IOOF Lodges) less than 20 show up at meetings. The Victoria Lodge #1 was chartered in the late 19th Century and, along with the other Lodges in the structure, owns the entire building. The ground floor is rented out to tenants, supplying a steady income to the IOOF. As is typical of the old Lodge Halls, the Odd Fellows Lodges meet in the upper floor. That floor includes a billiard room with three tables, a dining room, large kitchen, a small museum and other amenities.

But the best part was the formal Lodge Room. Stepping through the anteroom with the traditional wickets, one emerges into the Lodge Room.

And that Lodge Room was, to me, the quintessential Odd Fellows Lodge Room. It was like stepping back in time to the 1800's. The room had a very high ceiling, probably 25 feet high or more, with ornate paintings. The "all-seeing eye" was up there. The furnishings were all from another century - high backed wooden chairs set up in the traditional way. The Lodge Room could easily hold over 100 members. The walls were festooned with IOOF works. The room was lit by chandeliers. I could envision a Century of formal meetings in this room, packed with members. And it was sad to think that this large room might now only see 15-20 members in attendance.

Bill was rightfully proud of this Lodge Room and the rest of the Lodge Hall. He was a man full of energy and happy to be an Odd Fellow. But at the end of our tour, Bill told us that he was not going to become NG of his Lodge, rather he had decided to leave his Lodge and join the other Lodge that occupied the space. Curious, I asked why and Bill told me that his Lodge was starting to admit women, and he felt more comfortable in an all-male Lodge.

So, here was, again, the juxtaposition of Odd Fellowship in the 21st Century. The old ways and the new ways meeting head on.

Dave Rosenberg
At the 2011 Grand Lodge Sessions, a number of important resolutions were passed, with hefty majorities, and adopted by the representatives of our Lodges, and became the policy of Odd Fellowship in California. Among the three resolutions were three that are vitally important to the future growth and evolution of our Order.

Has your Lodge implemented these three resolutions?

**Encouraging Community Works**
This resolution encouraged and emphasized community outreach, community visibility, and good community and charitable works by individual Lodges - in their own communities. Each Lodge in California was encouraged to undertake at least two Odd Fellows community and charitable projects per year in their local venues.

**Good Fellowship**
This resolution encouraged and emphasized good fellowship activities within each Lodge. Examples given include (but are not limited to) Lodge dinners, Lodge trips, game nights, movie nights, Lodge socials, etc. Individual Lodges were encouraged to undertake at least four such good fellowship activities each year for the fraternal and social benefit of members.

**Open Meetings**
This resolution encouraged and emphasized Lodge meetings open to family members, prospective Lodge members, and invited members of the public, to enable these guests to gain knowledge about the worthwhile programs and activities begin presented and sponsored by the Lodge (without revealing any of
the ritualistic, unwritten work and passwords of the Order). Lodges were encouraged to hold at least six such open meetings each year.

These three resolutions emphasize the new direction that Odd Fellowship must take in order to survive and even flourish in the 21st Century. This emphasis is encouraged by Sovereign Grand Lodge and by our own Grand Lodge. No longer should our Lodge members sit in Lodges closed off to the world. We must reach out to our communities in positive ways, and we must increase our visibility and relevance. When we do good works in our own community, when we undertake social events and programs for our members, and when we expose our Lodges to prospective members, we will grow.

Look, let's be frank. Since World War II, our Order's membership has declined - dropped like a stone, actually. In California, today, we have a paid membership in Odd Fellows of about 4,000 (and we all know that that means about 2,000 "active" members) - and we had about 50,000 in the 1940's. Year after year after year after year, our numbers drop. The decline has been a shocking 90% of our membership in the last 60-plus years. Yet in all that time, most of our Lodges have hardly changed the way they do business. Brothers and sisters - we can't keep doing what we've been doing for the past 60-plus years and expect a different result.

As some wags have said, the definition of "insanity" is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. It's time to stop the insanity. It's time to evolve. It's time to change.

By implementing the three resolutions in our Lodges, we will go a long way forward in that evolution.

Dave Rosenberg
Odd Fellowship, as you know, has been around for hundreds of years. Many books have been written about this history of this Order. Unfortunately, there are no books or manuscripts at the inception. There is no clear record of this origins of Odd Fellowship, and so we are left to speculate, to some extent, as to when, why and how Odd Fellowship came into being.

I recently came into possession of a worthy 896-page tome entitled Official History of Odd Fellowship - The Three-Link Fraternity which was written and published over a Century ago and which has some gravitas and credibility. The book truly is official in that it was declared the "official history of the Sovereign Grand Lodge" in 1897 and reaffirmed in 1899. The latest revised edition that I have was published in 1910.

One of the more interesting theories regarding the origin of Odd Fellowship is that we are the successor, if you will, of "The Ancient and Noble Order of the Bucks" - a society that dated their formation in 1723 in England. In the 1700's, Freemasonry was the largest Order in England, but the "Order of Bucks" ranked second in size. The presiding officer of the Bucks was called "Most Noble Grand". In the beginning, the Bucks also had a "Senior Vice Grand" and a "Junior Vice Grand" which eventually just evolved into a "Deputy Noble Grand". There was a Grand Lodge organization, as well, with a presiding officer called "Grand Master". The Grand Lodge was composed of "Noble Bucks" who were past grands or their deputies from each Lodge. The Bucks "were given to charitable work" - one Lodge contributing the sum of 70 pounds "toward clothing our brave troops abroad, and the relief of the widows and orphans of those who fell nobly in their country's and liberty’s
cause" - a large amount of money for the time. Prior to 1756, they adopted the Lodge system. Interestingly, "the objects of the order were declared to be 'innocent mirth and good fellowship' lodge meetings being held weekly - when the warden collected the dues - in club rooms or taverns, where 'candor, sociability, freeness, and honesty are celebrated' as the accomplishments of fraternity.” They wore regalia of different colors. Unanimity was taught by "the bundle of sticks". One of the principal symbols of the Bucks was, interestingly, three buck’s heads, with antlers entwined.

Are the "Order of Bucks" part of the family tree which evolved into Odd Fellowship? It is certainly possible.

Dave Rosenberg
I attended a local Rotary Club meeting the other morning, and the speaker, a Rotary District Governor, mentioned that Rotary has over 1.2 million members worldwide, in some 34,000 clubs, in over 200 countries. Rotary adds 100,000 members to its roster every year. The growth of Rotary is not so much in the USA, but rather in countries outside the United States, primarily in Asia. Clearly, Rotary International is the Big Kahuna of organizations. But then, the District Governor mentioned a statistic that truly got my attention: Rotary loses 112,000 members each year.

So, at bottom, while Rotary is huge, the numbers show a declining membership - more people leave the organization each year than join it.

Sound familiar? It should. A similar effect is happening in Odd Fellowship generally, and in our Order in California. Most recent statistics, from 2011, show that Odd Fellowship in California added 559 members in that year. That’s a good thing! However, in that same year of 2011, Odd Fellowship in California lost 771 members. The net result is that in January 2011 we had 4,994 members in this State, but in December 2011 we had declined to 4,782 members. Additionally, and ominously, our Lodges in 2011 declined from 141 to 131. Interestingly, in 2011 the number of women who joined Odd Fellows Lodges exceeded the number of women who left those Lodges. It was in the population of male members that we saw our decline.

So, it would seem to me that our focus should not only be on bringing in new members, but also on retaining our existing
members. Now, obviously, some loss of members - through death or serious illness - is involuntary. But other losses of membership are voluntary. Why do members of our Order not renew their membership. Is it because the financial burden? Is it the result of a personal, family situation? Did they just get too busy with family or work? Did they move out of the area? Is it because they have become disaffected with the Order? Is it because of personality conflicts with members of the Lodge?

We should know this information. Each Lodge should make an effort to survey its membership and determine the level of satisfaction. Even more importantly, each Lodge should make efforts to survey those members who leave voluntarily and try to figure out why they left? With our numbers (currently 4,429 dues-paying members) approaching a point where we will soon drop to under 4,000, every member is precious.

Dave Rosenberg

Davis Lodge members are history buffs. Here members of the Davis Lodge join Grand Master Tim Brown and Deputy Grand Master Dave Rosenberg in a visit to the Historic Volcano Lodge.
The "Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of California - 160th Annual Session" reveals the raw numbers of our Order's membership in this jurisdiction. It's not a pretty picture.

On January 1, 2011, our Order had 141 Lodges, but on December 31, 2011, we had diminished to 131 Lodges, a drop of 10 Lodges. Not only is this this the most precipitous decline in number of Lodges that we have seen in a very long time, but as the total number drops, the percentage impact is even greater. And the number of members has, again, declined. At the start of 2011 we had 4,994 members, but we ended the year with 4,782 members (and the number of dues-paying members is even less - 4,429. We all know, of course, that 4,429 does not represent the number of members who attend meetings and participate in Lodge activities - most organizations (and Odd Fellowship is no exception here) understand that only about 50% of the membership is truly "active". So, in reality, the number of "active" Odd Fellows in California is probably closer to 2,200, a razor-thin basis on which to sustain a great fraternity in a large jurisdiction like California.

But if we drill down on the numbers, we see the real challenge presented by declining membership in this state. Here are some statistics that should make us all sit up and take notice:

Of our 131 Lodges, there are 77 Lodges which have 25 or fewer members. Drilling down further, we see that there are 12 Lodges that show 10 or fewer members on their books.

On the other side of the equation, California shows only 6 Lodges
with 100 or more members. And the 10 largest Lodges in California now make up about 38% of the total membership of our Order in this state.

What do these numbers tell us?

First, it shows that there are 77 Lodges that are flashing a yellow alert signal. When a Lodge has 25 or fewer members on its books, it is quite possible that that Lodge is doing fine, the members are generally involved, and the Lodge is active and alive in the community. On the other hand, when a Lodge has 25 or fewer members on its books, it is also quite possible that that Lodge only has half (or fewer) that come to meetings and otherwise participate, that the Lodge has not added new members to keep pace with declining membership, and that the Lodge is trouble. At some point, that Lodge reaches a tipping point where it becomes extremely difficult to reverse the trend of decline, simply because the membership is not there to bring in new blood, and because no one wants to join what has become the shell of an organization.

Second, it shows that there are 12 Lodges that are flashing a red alarm signal. When a Lodge has 10 or fewer members, it is almost inevitably in serious trouble. Understanding that only about half the members of any Lodge come to meetings or participate, it is simply not possible for a Lodge with 5 or 4 or 3 active members to function. Further, that Lodge has lost the normal checks and balances that exist in Odd Fellowship, and almost certainly has financial issues.

Third, the statistics and trends show that the vast majority of Lodges in this jurisdiction (around 110-120 of our Lodges) are historically either declining in membership or are simply treading water and maintaining, more or less, a constant membership number over the past 10 years. A small number of our Lodges (around 10-20) are historically growing, and have added membership in significant numbers over the past 10 years.
If these trends continue, then Odd Fellowship in California can expect the following future: (1) The number of Lodges in this state will continue to diminish as we lose 5-10 each year. (2) At the same time around 10-20 Lodges will continue to grow in this jurisdiction, and will year-after-year comprise an increasing percentage of the membership of this Order, until those 10-20 Lodges, over time, comprise more than 50% of the membership. In my opinion, this is not healthy for our Order. That’s why we need to focus on providing tools for the majority of our Lodges to increase membership. And the single best way to attract new members is to be an active Lodge. When a Lodge is active in the community, and provides social activities for its members, it will attract new blood and it will grow. This has been proven by the few Lodges that are growing.

Dave Rosenberg
A Three-Year Plan to Grow Your Lodge

January 19, 2013

While a handful of Odd Fellows Lodges in California are growing, and another handful are maintaining a static membership, the vast majority of Lodges in this State are shrinking. The math is not complicated. Members move away, depart, stop coming to meetings, lose interest or pass away - and at the same time, the Lodge doesn't add new members or, perhaps, adds one or two new members who might be close friends or relatives of existing members. And too, often, the new members added are of the same age as existing members. The result is inevitable: Lose three members and add one member and you have a Lodge in trouble. Clearly, we must do something to change this equation.

I am often asked: What can we do to grow our Lodge?

Well, talk is cheap. Action is required. So, here, for those who are truly interested, is a three-year plan to re-charge, re-invigorate, and re-new your Lodge. (For those members of the Order who are satisfied with the status quo of your Lodge, and who are happy to maintain your Lodge just the way it is for the balance of your life, you can stop reading here.) For those members who wish to build for the future of your Lodge, and guarantee that the tenets and ideals of this great fraternity live on and flourish, please read on. The secret of success is not just to open our Lodges up, to increase our internal good fellowship activities and to increase our involvement and exposure in the community.

Year One

1. Open your Lodge to the public (and to potential members) by having open, social meetings - at least one such social meeting each month. Of course, no ritualistic work is conducted and no secrets are revealed at such meetings.
2. Bring in one or two major community leaders into membership in your Lodge. This can be a local elected official, a recognized business leader, a leader in his or her profession (like a lawyer), a Judge, the County Sheriff, etc. These people will raise the community profile of your Lodge and can become "rainmakers" in bringing in new members.

3. Plan and execute one major community event, to benefit a local charitable or community group, and make sure it is publicized.

4. Plan for and put on one social event each month for the Lodge members and their guests. This can include themed potlucks (for example, Italian potluck), "Bunko" Night at the Lodge, Trivia Night, a talk and demonstration on beer brewing, etc.

5. Target husbands and wives, both, to consider membership in your Lodge.

**Year Two**

1. Hold a "retreat" of your active members and lay out five goals for the year. These five goals should always include a goal identifying the number of Lodge applicants you intend to bring in during the year. Resolve at this retreat NOT to be negative. Positively listen to all ideas that are proposed and put on the table, and then decide which you will implement.

2. Continue each of the Year One activities into Year Two.

3. Develop a "signature event" that your Lodge will organize and put on for the community - which will become an annual event. For example: An "OddtoberFest", a wine tasting event at the Lodge, Pasta Feed, etc.

4. Organize a committee structure for the Lodge. These committees can include: A Good Fellowship Committee, a Community Support Committee, a Music Committee, a Photography
Committee, etc. Give each committee an assignment and let them do their work.

5. Target young potential members for your Lodge - from 30 to 40 years of age.

**Year Three**

1. Continue each of the Year One and Year Two activities into Year Three.

2. Find out what member's are interested in doing, and do it. If members wish to take a wine country trip, figure out a way to do it. If members want to put on a Bingo night for the community, find ways to do it. If members wish to go on a hike, let them organize to do it. Etc.

3. Contact, personally, each of your "inactive" members and let them know about Lodge activities - see if you can bring them back into active membership in your Lodge.

4. Connect with your members. Ideally, have all members connected through e-mail so that everyone can be kept posted and informed. For those who don't have e-mail, set up a phone tree.

5. Target even younger potential members for your Lodge - from 16-29 years of age.

This Plan of Action can work for your Lodge! It does not diminish, in any way, the principles of our Order. It seeks only to increase your membership, and in this way will benefit your Lodge as well as the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

Dave Rosenberg
Many of you may have heard the story of the "canary in the coal mine." It's actually a true story. And it's worth repeating. Early coal mines had no ventilation systems, and coal miners, among other hazards, had to be concerned with methane and carbon monoxide escaping from fissures into the mine shafts. Well, in those early days, the miners would bring canaries in cages into the mines with them. Turns out that canaries are highly sensitive to these gasses which made them invaluable as early warning systems for the miners. The gasses were toxic to the miners. As long as the canaries were chirping and singing, all was OK in the mines. But if the canaries stopped their tunes, or worse, keeled over dead in their cages, the miners were warned and could take appropriate action. This ancient coal mining lore has left an expression to us to this day: "a canary in a coal mine" which means to serve as a warning to others.

I recently received a letter, dated March 18, from the Grand Patriarch of California - a good, hard-working man whom I greatly respect - directed to Encampments in California. His letter reminded me of the canary in a coal mine. Here's what he said, in part: "Patriarchs, we are down to a handful of encampments in this state. Most of our encampments do not have quorums, nor have many held meetings for quite a while. I have not picked up any charters, as I feel this is extremely important that I include all of you in this decision. I am afraid that should I chose to pick up these charters, we will have only 4 encampments. This would effectively and immediately dissolve our Grand Encampment. My report would be forwarded to the Sovereign Grand Lodge. Patriarchs, I am asking you to assist me in this decision process. If we no longer have encampments because Patriarchs will not attend their encampment meetings, then how will this affect the Patriarch’s Militant Branch?"
What does the Grand Patriarchs letter tell us? Well it tells us a shocking story. In the Jurisdiction of California, we appear to have only four Encampments that are still functional. And in the Jurisdiction encompassing California and Nevada, we may have only five, or at most, six functional Cantons. These Encampments and Cantons are the canaries in the coal mine. They are on the brink. And they serve as an early warning to Rebekah Lodges and Odd Fellows Lodges. What is happening to the Encampments and Cantons will happen to the Lodges. It is only a matter of time.

Should we ignore this early warning? Sadly, some in this Order would do just that. But that would be wrong, and would risk the demise of an Order that tens of thousands of brothers and sisters built up over centuries. I, for one, am not willing to watch the slow death of this great Order.

Does it have to be this way? Absolutely not. My own Davis Odd Fellows Lodge and my own Davis Rebekah Lodge are growing and healthy, in members, activities and funds. Three years ago my Davis Encampment was down to less than five members and was, essentially, defunct. I, and a number of Odd Fellows, joined that Encampment, I became the Chief Patriarch, and the new Patriarchs and Matriarchs reinvented and recharged it. Now, the Davis Encampment has 35 members and is the largest in this Jurisdiction. In fact, 14 of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs asked to form a Canton, and a few days ago we were given authorization to do so - Canton Davis #7. We are growing this Order. It can be done.

The secret of success is centered around being active in our communities. Successful Encampments and Cantons determine missions and causes which are relevant to the members and their respective communities. We can’t sit behind our doors and windows and expect to thrive. We need air and sunlight.

Dave Rosenberg
There was a time in America when being a member of a fraternal order was the norm. At the turn of the prior century (around 1900) almost 5 million Americans belonged to a fraternal order - and there were over 300 such orders in this country. In fact, the attached chart shows that the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was once the largest fraternal order in the United states, boasting 939,307 members. Today, however, Odd Fellowship in the United States totals 40,889 (as of December 31, 2011). Of that total, 4,782 are in California.

But the precipitous drop in our membership, although distressing, is not actually the most distressing fact that faces the Order. What is even more disturbing is to look at the list (below) and realize that the vast majority of fraternal orders identified on the list are gone now - historical relics and footnotes. Even the mighty Knights of Pythias (once the third largest order in the USA) is today a mere shadow of itself, having less than five Lodges in the entire nation. And the Improved Order of Red Men is similarly situated, with a handful of small Lodge scattered about the west. And most of the other fraternal orders on the list are completely defunct today - having faded into history generations ago.

What does this foretell of the IOOF? Simple. If we continue down our present path, we will devolve like the Knights of Pythias and the Improved Order of Red Men - at the rate of decline we have seen, within a decade, only a few Lodge will survive. Alternatively, if we are ready to evolve into a modern fraternal order that attracts new and younger members, we can turn the tide and actually institute a resurgence in the fraternal movement. It is for our generation to make this change. At the rate our Order
is declining in membership, we simply cannot wait for the next generation to "save" us. The task is ours.

The Fraternity Movement in America
By 1900 the United States had in excess of 300 different fraternal organizations. The following numbers, were taken from the World Almanac of 1896. It shows the membership in the major fraternal orders of that time, and where the total fraternal membership totaled 4,764,098.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fraternal Order</th>
<th>Membership</th>
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<tr>
<td>Odd Fellows</td>
<td>939,307</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freemasons</td>
<td>920,459</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knights of Pythias</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order of Chosen Friends</td>
<td>38,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Mutual Benefit Association</td>
<td>38,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Order of Foresters</td>
<td>36,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equitable Aid Union</td>
<td>35,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Order of B’Nai B’rith</td>
<td>30,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks</td>
<td>27,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Catholic Knights of America ..................... 24,000
Improved Order of Heptasophs .................. 23,905
Order of the Golden Cross ...................... 20,257
Royal Templars of Temperance .................. 19,210
New England Order of Protection ............... 18,429
United Order of Pilgrim Fathers ............... 18,100
Order of United Friends ....................... 17,000
Irish Catholic Benevolent Union ............... 15,000
United Ancient Order of Druids ............... 14,600
Royal Society of Good Fellows ................. 12,870
Smaller orders combined total was ........... 73,209

Dave Rosenberg

Dave and Lea Rosenberg. Both have served as Noble Grand of their Lodge - Davis Odd Fellows Lodge #169.
Dedicated Members for Change (DMC) Points the Way to the Future of Odd Fellowship

April 10, 2013

Dedicated Members for Change was the brainchild of three Odd Fellows - Don Smith, Rick Boyles and Dave Rosenberg - and was officially "launched" on December 13, 2010. Since that time, DMC's e-mail matrix has grown exponentially with DMC members throughout California and North America. DMC was created as a vehicle to discuss the single greatest problem facing the Order today: Continued decline in membership. More importantly, it was further created to allow DMC members to openly communicate and exchange ideas and best practices to reverse the tide of declining membership and actually grow this Order. DMC recognized early on that the status quo meant slow disintegration of this Order, and that change was needed to make this great and ancient fraternity relevant to the new 21st Century members that we need to attract. And in newsletter after newsletter, DMC has proposed practical suggestions to increase membership and grow Lodges. These suggestions have been implemented in Lodges, and have been shown to work.

Now, some in IOOF may still believe that DMC is some sort of radical, fringe, or even subversive organization with all this talk about "evolution" and "change". Nothing could be further from the truth, Brothers and Sisters. In fact, DMC is completely "mainstream" now. One need only look at the latest edition (March-April 2013) of "I.O.O.F. News", published by the Sovereign Grand Lodge, to see how mainstream we have become.

Laura Argue, President of the International Association of Rebekah Assemblies has written the following in her column:
"I have been attempting to attach some significant meaning to the letters of the word CHANGE, for we all must be open to accept change within our Order to be progressive and to be here as an organization in the future . . . . " How much more mainstream can you get than the President of the IARA, President Argue recognizes that this Order much change to survive into the future.

And we are not talking about radical change that diminishes the precepts, admonitions and concepts that are as important today as they were in the 1700's. We are talking about ways to open our Lodges to society and to make our Lodges more relevant to the current generation. These young people will join our Lodges if we are active in the community and do good community works. These young people will also join our Lodges if we provide good fellowship activities that they enjoy and provide the social connection that they desire. Lodges that shut themselves off from the world and meet in secret, where all members are in their 70's and 80's, are simply doomed to fail. They will not and cannot attract the new vital blood that they need to survive.

Dave Rosenberg
I have been a member of this great Order since 2004, and since that time have been highlighting the precipitous drop in membership nationally and in California. I have suggested a number of techniques to stem and then reverse that tide, and I have tried to use my own Lodge as a laboratory model for these techniques. I have pointed out that our Order, in the jurisdiction of California, has shrunk more than 90% since World War II - a trend that is ominous for our future.

**So, how are we doing these days?**

Well, the latest numbers for the past five years show the following:

On December 31, 2012, the total membership of Odd Fellows in California was 4,770 (including 3,702 Brothers and 1,068 Sisters). And our Lodges numbered 126.

On December 31, 2011, the total membership of Odd Fellows in California was 4,782 (including 3,767 Brothers and 1,015 Sisters). And our Lodges numbered 131.

On December 31, 2010, the total membership of Odd Fellows in California was 4,994 (including 3,989 Brothers and 1,005 Sisters). And our Lodges numbered 141.

On December 31, 2009, the total membership of Odd Fellows in California was 5,108 (including 4,191 Brothers and 917 Sisters). And our Lodges numbered 145.

On December 31, 2008, the total membership of Odd Fellows in California was 5,303 (including 4,431 Brothers and 872 Sisters). And our Lodges numbered 149.
What do these numbers show us?

Regrettably, they show us that the diminution of our Order in California continues. Over the last five years we have not grown in membership - we have declined in membership by 533 members - that is another devolution of 10%. The number of our chartered Lodges has shrunk, as well - during that five-year period, we have diminished by 23 Lodges. If that trend continues, Odd Fellowship in California will have less than 3,000 members and fewer than 100 Lodges within the decade.

Are there any glimmers of hope shown by these numbers? Yes, some. The loss of members from 2011 to 2012 is very small - much smaller than prior years when losses numbered in the hundreds - and may indicate that we are finally stemming the tide. There is much more awareness of the problem, much more emphasis on community involvement and open Lodges than in the past, and we have instituted new programs (like the Membership Challenge Grant Program) which have helped. Stemming the tide of losses is the step needed just before we reverse the tide and start growing as an Order. Also, it is noteworthy that the number of women in Odd Fellowship continues to grow in a slow but steady way. That is a very positive trend for our future.

Dave Rosenberg
The Three-Legged Stool
April 19, 2013

I served as Noble Grand of my Lodge from 2005-2009. Early in my tenure I wrote an article I entitled "The Three-Legged Stool", which laid out my philosophy for the future of Odd Fellowship in the 21st Century. Since that time, I have had numerous requests for this article, so I have updated it and attach it here for your information. It's a short article - just two pages. But it lays out the general parameters to re-charge Odd Fellowship and make it relevant to the the new 21st Century members we need to attract to survive and to grow. It requires a change in attitude and approach. But it will work - it has certainly worked in my own Lodge.

Please take a moment to read it. And share it with members of your own Lodge. It might be worth discussing at a future Lodge meeting. What do you have to lose?

The Three-Legged Stool
By Dave Rosenberg, PG
Davis Lodge # 169
(Article updated April 19, 2013)

Fraternity
We begin with the great fraternal history and substantial assets of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. We have, indeed, a distinguished past on which we can build. We have fine and dedicated members. We have Lodge Halls which stand in the heart of many communities. We have a tradition and rituals which (while needing modernization and revision in some instances) have served us well for over two hundred years.
This leg is quite strong throughout the Order. The other two legs, however, are in need of strengthening in virtually every Lodge.

Community
We have to re-connect with our communities. Once, long ago, the IOOF Lodge was the very center of the town. It can be again. But too many of our Lodges have withdrawn into their four walls and have become virtually invisible in their towns. That has to change. Lodges need to open themselves up to the community. This can be done in many ways. Lodges should have open meetings from time to time – a great way to invite prospective members to see what the Lodge does as well as get to know the Lodge members, and for Lodge members to get to know prospective members. Lodges should sponsor events on behalf of charitable and community groups. Two or three such annual events can go a long way to establish a Lodge’s reputation as a leading community organization. Those Lodges that own Lodge Halls should make those Halls available for the community for appropriate events.

Fellowship
We are members of a fraternal order and that involves much more than passwords, signs and grips. A fraternal order is a fellowship. And that means that the Lodge must foster events and functions that bring members together to enjoy each other’s company and socially interact: breakfasts, lunches, dinners, hikes, trips, movie nights, game or card nights, wine tasting, beer brewing, dances, whatever the members feel will encourage good fellowship.

Ultimately, we have to ask ourselves: Why does anyone wish to become an Odd Fellow in the 21st Century? If we are brutally honest with ourselves, we would have to conclude that very few people join because of the ritual. Realistically, people join because of two reasons: (1) IOOF does good works in the community, and (2) IOOF provides a social network where members can enjoy each other’s company and have a little fun.
In my Davis Lodge we have not just talked the talk, but we have walked the walk. So I know it can be done. When I first joined the Davis Lodge in 2004, our membership was under 40, and we could barely scrape together 12 members for a meeting – a situation in which many Lodges currently find themselves. So, as the incoming Noble Grand of my Lodge in 2005, I instituted my “three-legged stool” approach. This simple change in attitude made a huge difference. We have had so many applicants in the past few years that we have had to schedule two initiations each year. In 2013, the Davis Lodge has 192 members, 25 applicants for membership for our Fall Initiation, and 12 others who have already applied for membership in the Spring Initiation. In just the last 8 years, we have increased our Lodge membership by over 500%. Our Lodge, currently, has an almost equal number of men and women. And we continue to grow, attracting new members of all ages. What is especially gratifying is that many of our new members are in the age-range of 16-36.

How is this possible? It’s possible because we have focused on all three legs of the stool: fraternity, community and fellowship. We can stop the slow diminution of our membership. We can grow this Order. I know, from personal experience, that it can be done.

Since the end of World War II in 1945, this great Order of Odd Fellows has lost 90% of its membership. If you aren’t shocked by that fact, let me put it another way: For the past 65 years, the Order has without fail, lost members, year after year. The California jurisdiction had 50,000 members in 1946 – it now has less than 5,000 members. And, as we all know, 5,000 members really means (at best) 2,500 “active” members. Further, many of our Lodges can barely muster a quorum, and some Lodges have members no younger than their 60’s, having effectively skipped a generation or two of new members.
Anyone who doesn’t believe that Odd Fellowship is at the very brink today ignores history and is doomed to watch the continuation of that decline. This Order will not long survive, I’m afraid, without some fundamental revitalization and change. The irony of all this is that we don’t have to do anything radical to save this Order. Instead, we only have to look at our own history and revisit the things that once made this Order great in the 1800’s and 1900’s. In those days, people sought out membership in the Odd Fellows. It was the place to be in the community.

Why is that?

Odd Fellowship was strong (and can be strong again) by viewing the fraternity as having three great pillars of support, or to put it in more mundane terms, as a three-legged stool. If all legs are strong, the stool will support the body. If one of the legs is weak, the stool will totter and fall. If two legs are weak, the stool will certainly collapse. Odd Fellowship was strong in the past because Lodges were supported by three strong legs of the stool. Odd Fellowship is weak today because most Lodges simply rely on one leg and have de-emphasized, ignored or forgotten the other two legs of the stool. So, what are these three legs which should support and can transform our Order?
Like many of you, I am not only a member of my Odd Fellows Lodge - I am also a member of my Rebekah Lodge. In fact, I serve as Secretary of my Rebekah Lodge and so I get all sorts of interesting mailings and communications. Last week I received a letter from the Finance Committee of the Rebekah Assembly, which also included a proposed budget for the RA. The information contained therein is very revealing. Allow me to share some of the facts contained in this communication:

- The 2013-14 RA Budget is based on 1,700 "contributing members" (that's dues-paying members).

- The statewide Rebekah membership continues to decline - last year it was 1,900 contributing members. They project a continued decline.

- Actual figures for 2012 reflect that income was slightly more than expenses - but this was only due to the fact that "several lodges" surrendered their charters. And when a lodge surrenders its charter much of its money goes into the RA General Fund and is, apparently, treated as "income".

- Because of the serious decline in membership (affecting dues) at the last Rebekah Assembly session, dues were to be increased by $5 per member this year.

- The proposed 2013-14 RA Budget shows an unbalanced budget with expenses exceeding income by a substantial amount - leading to a deficit of over $10,000.
The facts are shocking, but they don't surprise me.

Years ago, I predicted that our Branches would slowly wither unless we changed the course of this great ship we call "Odd Fellowship." And we are certainly seeing that in our Cantons and Encampments throughout the State. We are now beginning to see it in our Rebekah Assembly. Clearly, losing 200-400 Rebekahs each year is not sustainable. Clearly, running deficits in the RA Budget is not sustainable. Clearly, having lodges surrender their charters as a way to increase income is not sustainable. And the coup de grace is the notion that balancing the budget can be accomplished by actually RAISING dues by $5 per person.

THE PROBLEM IS OBVIOUS. The Rebekah Lodges are losing far more members than they are adding. That is, of course, not sustainable.

We have actually hit the wall, brothers and sisters. We are showing expenses exceeding income. That is a death rattle for an organization.

And the distressing fact is that there are only 1,700 dues paying members in California. And we all know what that means - just because someone pays dues doesn't mean they attend meetings or participate in lodge activities. So, with 1,700 dues-paying members, we are probably talking about 800-900 who are "active" members.

The solution devised by the RA? Well, let's raise dues. That is not a solution. Frankly, it just adds to the problem. Raising dues will do nothing to add members - in fact, if anything, it will discourage memberships. The only thing that will save a Rebekah Lodge is to add new members and new blood. And we can't add new members if the only thing that a lodge offers is an opportunity to sit in a formal meeting once or twice a month. Prospective members in the 21st Century want to be involved in their
communities and want to engage in social and fraternal activities within the lodge. Those Rebekah Lodges that expand their horizons into the community and into social activities will thrive.

Dave Rosenberg
A Progressive Grand Warden Is Elected
May 19, 2013

I am delighted to report to you that I was elected Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of California, at last week’s Grand Lodge sessions. One of my Davis Lodge Brothers, in congratulating me, reminded me of Mahatma Gandhi’s famous quote: "First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, then you win." Well, one of my goals is to eliminate the "you" and "them" discussion, and move this Order to "us". It’s really important that the more "progressive" members of our Order and the more "traditional" members of our Order find common ground, and develop ways to work together. We’ve gotten too small to be spending any more time in in-fighting, rumors, innuendos and accusations. **Our focus must be to work together to increase our membership.**

I pledge myself, as your new Grand Warden, to focus my energy on two things: (1) Bringing us together; and (2) Working with Lodges to help us grow this Order.

I offer my congratulations to new Grand Master Rick Boyles, new Deputy Grand Master Tim Brown, the newly elected members of our Grand Lodge Board of Directors, and the elected Trustees and Directors of our Boards and Committees. We have a good and solid team going forward. Let's find ways to agree, but let's feel free to disagree without being disagreeable.

More to come in the coming weeks and months. But I am also pleased to say that Dedicated Members for Change - with our laser-focus on increasing membership - is now a recognized committee of the Grand Lodge. We had a great time (and a great annual dinner meeting) at Grand Lodge Sessions, and we added MANY new members to our e-mail matrix.

Dave Rosenberg
As a result of our recent Grand Lodge sessions earlier this month, we have added quite a few new "dedicated members" to this e-mail matrix. Welcome aboard! By way of a little history, Dedicated Members for Change (or DMC as we often call it) was the brainchild of Don Smith (PGM of California and PSGM), Rick Boyles (the current Grand Master of California), and me (the current Grand Warden of California). It was launched on December 13, 2010, and was aimed at one and only one goal: Focusing this Order on the need to add new members and suggesting ways and methods to do so. No more, and no less.

Three generations of steady declines in our membership are unacceptable, and must be reversed. And I predict that within the next 2 or 3 years, our Order in California will actually show a net gain, not a loss, in members. We have already had some small impact because in 2012, our loss of members number was smaller than in prior years. And we actually showed a gain in the number of women in Odd Fellows in California (this was more than offset, however, in our loss of men). Our numbers in California have now fallen to under 4,500 dues-paying members. We can't stand these steady, yearly losses of our members (and Lodges) much longer.

I am delighted to see our DMC ranks grow, and I am delighted to welcome the new additions to our e-mail list. If you know of any brothers and sisters who share our goal and who would like to be added to our e-mail list, please send me their names and e-mail addresses and we will be pleased to add them.
At the Grand Lodge sessions, that ended earlier this month, voting representatives overwhelmingly passed a resolution submitted by Brother Randy Krassow (that he was kind enough to run by me prior to submission) that will be an important step forward in achieving our goal. This resolution sets aside $50,000 per year (for three consecutive years) which will be made available to Lodges for membership development. Application forms will soon be available and Lodges can submit applications (and plans) to receive up to $1,000 per Lodge. The applications will be reviewed by our Grand Lodge membership committees (both the Grand Master and the Grand Lodge Board of Directors have membership committees). So, stay tuned to this important development. This new program is in addition to the "Membership Challenge Grant Program" which I submitted a couple of years ago, and which was approved at a prior Grand Lodge session. The Membership Challenge Grant Program will provide a Lodge up to $50 for each new member it brings in, and an additional $50 for each such new member who attains his/her three degrees.

Ultimately, bringing in new members is a job for each of us, individually, assisted by our Lodge mates. We can't rely on "the other guy or gal" to do it. WE have to do it.

But here's the rub. NO ONE wants to join a Lodge where the members only sit around in formal meetings once or twice a month, maybe put on an occasional potluck and really don't do much else. Men and women of the 21st Century will join Lodges where the focus is not just on ritual, but also on having a good social network within the Lodge (fun activities for the members) and active community involvement (good works within the town). If you visit www.davislodge.org, you will find two articles I have written on the subject. They are under the heading "About the Odd Fellows" - one article offers 10 helpful hints to bring in new members, and the other suggests a 3-year plan to grow a Lodge.

Dave Rosenberg
The Advanced Proceedings for the 2013 Grand Lodge Sessions reveals some interesting preliminary statistics regarding the state of the Order in California. I provide you information from the Advanced Proceedings with a caveat. The information is preliminary and not final. The membership and Lodge information is based on Annual Reports that were received at Grand Lodge as of March 31, 2013, and reflects information as of December 31, 2012. Further, fully THIRTEEN Lodges had not provided their annual reports as of March 31. That fully 13 Lodges had not turned in their annual reports by March 31 is, in and of itself, a sad statistic.

So what do the preliminary statistics reveal as of December 31, 2012? Lots.

First, there are 126 Odd Fellows Lodges in California at the end of 2012, down from 131 at the start of the year. This is the result of 3 Lodge consolidations, 1 charter surrender and 1 charter suspension.

Second, membership in the Order dropped to 4,404 dues paying members at the end of the year, from the start of 4,783 at the beginning of the year. On the plus side, there was actually a small gain in female members, offset unfortunately by a bigger loss in male members.

Third, the 10 largest Lodges in California have 1,734 members which means that 40% of all Odd Fellows in California (4 out of
every 10) belong to just those 10 Lodges. Even more startling, the 5 largest Lodges in California (California #1, Apollo #123, Yerba Buena #15, Davis #169 and Golden West #322) have 1,236 members, which means that just those 5 Lodges make up 28% of the total IOOF membership in California. In other words, more than 1 out of every 4 Odd Fellows belong to just one of those 5 Lodges. In terms of net gains of members, only 9 Lodges showed double digit gains (gains of 10 of more members) for the year.

I won't have the final statistics until the final Proceedings of the Grand Lodge are published. But if the stats continue what I saw last year, we will see that fully half of our California Lodges show less than 20 dues-paying members on their books. Typically, as we all know, not all dues-paying members participate actively in their Lodges. So, for example, a Lodge with 18 members might have only 8 or 9 active participants - such a Lodge doesn't even have enough members to fill all officer positions, and such a Lodge runs dangerously close to having quorum problems.

So, we see a continuation of the membership and Lodge decline. And we also see the phenomenon of a few of our Lodges getting bigger and bigger, while the majority of Lodges struggle with static or declining numbers.

These statistics are not sustainable for a healthy, statewide Order.

Dave Rosenberg
We Are a Mile Wide and an Inch Deep

June 2, 2013

In 2013, Odd Fellows in California have become an Order of many small Lodges with a couple of handfuls of larger Lodges thrown in the mix. It's certainly not like it used to be. There was a time in the 1920's and 1930's when close to 60,000 Californians were Odd Fellows, there were 400 or 500 Lodges in every corner of the State, and some of our Lodges had memberships over 500.

Today, we have shrunk to 126 Lodges with a total dues-paying membership of about 4,400, statewide.

But when you drill down into the statistics, the picture becomes even bleaker. Here are some stats that should give us all pause. As noted, we have 126 Lodges on the books. Of those, fully 87 have 30 or fewer members. Certainly, we have become an Order of small Lodges because as I have noted many times, we all know that only about half of the members of any Lodge are "active", so a Lodge with, say, 28 members, really means a Lodge with 14 active members - barely enough to even assume all the elected and appointed officer positions.

And let's drill down even further. Of our 126 Lodges, we have 56 Lodges (almost half) where the membership on the books is 20 or less. And a further drill shows that 11 of our Lodges have 10 members or less on their books. How can those Lodges function, find a quorum, meet, have activities and bring in new members? That will be our challenge going forward.

One more statistic: Of our 126 Lodges, 53 actually had a net LOSS in members for 2012. A Lodge with just 20 members, or 15 members, cannot afford net losses for very long. Also of interest,
34 Lodges were static - that is, their membership remained the same for the year. Only 39 Lodges showed a net gain of members. And even the "net gain" number may be deceiving. Of the 39 showing a net gain, 16 had a net gain of just 1 or 2 members. And only 9 Lodges showed net gains in the double digits (10 or more).

Where once we had dozens and dozens of Lodges in California with 100 or more members (in fact, we used to have many Lodges with 500+ members) we now have only 7 Lodges showing membership rolls of 100 or more.

Indeed, we are now an Order of many small Lodges with a couple of handfuls of larger Lodges in the mix.

Our focus, going forward, must be membership, membership, membership. We will need to pursue methods to help each other bring in new members. And that is what we will do. But ultimately, while Grand Lodge can help, the effort to bring in new members must start and finish with YOU and ME. Each of us, working with our Lodges, must be the prime movers in bringing new members into our Order. But that effort will ultimately fail unless and until our LODGES offer those new members a reason to join, and a reason to stay. In that regard, our Lodges must be involved and active in their communities - doing good public works. And our Lodges must provide an active and fun social network for members - good fellowship activities within the Lodge. When those things happen, Lodges will grow, and the growth can be sustained.

Dave Rosenberg
The Negativity Must Stop Before It Destroys the Order

June 6, 2013

When I ran for Grand Warden of California, I presented a platform of two issues. First, I said that my focus would be to take head-on the challenge of declining membership in our Order. And that, of course, is the focus and purpose of DMC: we were formed to keep the spotlight on the most critical issue facing our Order - our steady decline in membership - and on developing ways to help members and Lodge reverse that trend, and start growing. Second, I said that it was time to leave the negativity, the past perceived slights, the feuds and disputes behind us. We need to start working together, hand-in-hand, as brothers and sisters to tackle the elephant in the room - the decline in our membership.

I am reminded from time to time of how hard this second goal will be to achieve.

We have, regrettably, all seen this negativity in the Order. We have seen it in our Lodges. A new member might screw up their courage and suggest a new idea or program for the Lodge. And a long-time member might immediately say, "we can't do that," or they might say "we've tried that, and it doesn't work," or worse, "that's a stupid idea." Is this a way to welcome and include the new members we so desperately hope to encourage to join our Lodges, and to stay as members over the long term? Of course not. This sort of negativity is poison to our Order.

We are, after all, supposed to practice "toleration" - or so our ritual says. We are supposed to be governed by the precepts of "Friendship, Love, and Truth." And yet, there are members of our Order who are negative, hurtful and rude to other members. Such
bullying tactics make our Order and our Lodges uncomfortable for others. Our Order and our Lodges must be places of comfort where the discord of the outside world is shut out - where members can enjoy each others' company in an atmosphere of friendship.

The negativity must stop.

Let me give you a recent example of this negativity. A few days ago, a member in a Lodge asked me to come to their meeting in Southern California and make a presentation on membership and methods to increase membership. I was delighted to do so, but had difficulty traveling there in the near future. I suggested that I could appear at their meeting through the use of Skype. Now, Skype is not complicated - it just requires a computer (or laptop) and, preferably, a television monitor. The member was delighted and said he would go about the task of setting it up. Because I thought this might be a good, easy, convenient and inexpensive way to meet with Lodges using 21st Century technology, I had the Grand Lodge Office send an e-mail to all Lodges suggesting that I could "meet" with interested Lodges via Skype to talk about membership development techniques and methods - I asked Lodges to contact me directly if interested and we would set up a convenient date and time to meet. In response to this e-mail, one member of our Order wrote, in part, the following to me: "The Judge and his 'followers', or should I say his 'flock of sheep', think they're going to 'gain' membership in this manner, and maybe that is so, but those of us who have been 'loyal' to this Order for 30-40-50-60+ years will be by the wayside, is that his and his flock's goal?!" And later in the e-mail from this member, I was called, with obvious sarcasm, "the almighty and wonderful judge."

More examples? A respected member of the Rebekahs told me a couple of weeks ago that one of the past leaders of the Rebekah Assembly was calling our DMC "a cult". And when two of the
younger and newer members of the DMC were at the DoubleTree Hotel in Sacramento during sessions, looking for the DMC dinner, two members of our Order who overheard them looking for the dinner location said, in voices loud enough for them to hear: "Oh, you're looking for that bullshit dinner."

These sorts of comments - meant to hurt, ridicule or demean - have no place in our Order. I hope you will join me in speaking up, and speaking out, in the future when you see a brother or sister engage in comments that aim low. We need to gently remind that brother or sister of the precepts of this Order. We were founded, in Great Britain, a couple of centuries ago as a "Friendly Society." Let's not forget the "friendly" part.

Dave Rosenberg

Davis Encampment #21 went from 3 members to over 40 members in the span of just four years. Why? Because the Davis Encampment stays busy working for the community and with community projects to benefit children.
Evolution and Change is the Norm in the History of Odd Fellowship

June 11, 2013

From time to time I enjoy looking through old books or historical sketches on the Internet regarding the Odd Fellows, its origin and evolution. And I often chuckle to hear some members of this great Order disdain "change" and believe that the way we do things in this Order today must remain essentially inviolate from the way we have been doing it for the past 20, 30, 40 or 50 years. They view the word "change" as if it were profane and antithetical to Odd Fellowship. In fact, it's just the opposite. Change, brothers and sisters, is the historical norm for Odd Fellowship. This Order has evolved time and time again, to fit its times. And, now this Order - in 2013 - comes face-to-face with its own fraternal "mortality."

As the membership numbers in lodges dwindle to historical lows, we must again evolve and change to fit our age and entice the new young members we require.

For those who continue to doubt that change is the custom and pattern of our Order, allow me to quote some excerpts from an Internet article I read only yesterday:

"The Odd Fellows or Oddfellows are second only to the freemasons as a long-established and still reasonably healthy fraternal organization or secret society. They have, however, been subject to many schisms, and the number of members today is unclear. The date of foundation is likewise unclear, but it was presumably prior to 1745 when the first recorded Lodge of Odd Fellows met at various London taverns, including the Oakley Arms in Southwark; the Globe in Hatton Garden; and the Boar's Head in Smithfield. Dues were a penny a visit. The purpose is as obscure as the origin of the name, but the society seems to have combined the functions of a modern working
men's club - that is, offering a place for reliable food and drink at a good price - with a degree of self-help. The members, who were mostly working men, would pass the hat to help a fellow in distress and would provide an out-of-work member with a card that entitled him to accommodation at other lodges until he found work. Most members were originally mechanics and artisans, though it seems that anyone who could afford a penny for the dues was admitted.

In the late 18th century, many individual lodges were prosecuted by the Crown on the grounds of potential sedition and were closed (this was the period of the French Revolution and the rebellion of the American colonies), but the order as a whole survived. Some Odd Fellows lodges seem to have arisen at around this time as a result of disaffected Freemasons seceding from their parent order; these coalesced into the Ancient and Honorable Loyal Order of Odd Fellows. At the same time, most other Odd Fellows' lodges amalgamated into the Patriotic Order of Odd Fellows, which later became known as the United or Union Order of Odd Fellows. London remained the seat of the order.

The first great schism came in 1813. Odd Fellows at that time were notoriously fond of a dram, and a group of unusually sober-minded northerners took exception to this bibulousness and formed the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Manchester Unity (or Union). This is the root order of most subsequent Odd Fellows foundations, including the American Independent Order of Odd Fellows.”

This short vignette offers just a glimpse into the evolving nature of our Order. We started in the pubs of England as a group of members who enjoyed each others company and wanted the social fellowship that a fraternal order offered, complete with good food and good drink. And we evolved into a society that provided help and assistance to members who were sick or in distress or out of work. And because Odd Fellows evolved into such a support function, it was imperative that we developed secret signs and passwords and cards so that only Odd Fellows
could enjoy the benefits of membership and frauds could not take advantage of the member's largesse. The evolution continued when Odd Fellowship essentially was split by a group who disdained alcohol.

When Odd Fellowship came to the United States the evolution continued. We have seen over the past 200 years major welcomed changes in the Odd Fellows including the inclusion of people of color, of women, of members as young as 16. We have seen the number and scope of the degrees changing over time.

And now, as we move forward in the 21st Century, it is time - long overdue, in fact - for some serious evolution in our Order. This is not just a matter of semantics, this is a mater of survival. For many young men and women in 2013, Odd Fellows and Rebekahs appear as if they never left 1913. The basic teachings of Odd Fellowship are as true today as they were in 1745. But we can't get men and women of the 21st Century to join Lodges where the members are all in their 70's and 80's, and all that takes place are secret ritual meetings, an occasional potluck, and not much else. If you doubt this is true, just take a look at our membership statistics for the past 60+ years - almost without fail - we have lost members and Lodges year after year. That's over three generations of decline. Frankly, we keep doing the same things, in the same ways, over and over again - and somehow we expect that things will get better and this will grow our Order. But it has not.

This does not have to be our story going forward. We can evolve to meet the needs of today's men and women - the new members we need. Please go to www.caioof.org. On the home page, under the link "Grand Lodge" please click on "Message from Grand Warden". There you will see the three articles that I have written entitled: 10 Helpful Hints to Bring New Members into the Order, The Three-Legged Stool, and A Three-Year Plan to Grow Your Lodge. These three articles present a plan going forward that can
transform this Order. It’s time to make some changes. That would be the Odd Fellows way.

Dave Rosenberg

As a treat to the community, the Davis Odd Fellows Lodge hosts “A Taste of Davis” featuring local restaurants, wineries and breweries, on both floors of the Lodge Hall. Some 500 local residents attend this community event to sample the wares. Opening the doors and windows of the Lodge to the community has resulted in one of the fastest growing Odd Fellows Lodges on the continent.
Bringing in New Members is the Responsibility of Each of Us

July 4, 2013

First, let me wish each of you a happy and safe Fourth of July. As a person who served in the Armed Forces, I love this holiday, for all that it represents to our democracy and way of life. Plus it’s one of only two holidays (the other being Cinco de Mayo) where I can always remember the date. :-)

Turning our attention to the seminal subject of DMC - membership - I have often said that growing membership in this Order is a task for each of us. Sovereign Grand Lodge and Grand Lodge can talk about it, they can develop programs to foster it, they can provide money to fund it, but ultimately, the task of membership development is a job for you and for me. Wars and battles are not won by Generals and Colonels. Rather, they are won by soldiers. And as soldiers in the battle to recruit and retain members in our Lodges, we can’t just depend on "the other guy or gal" to do it. Each of us has to do our part in recruiting and retaining members.

The job of recruitment, in particular, requires two key ingredients:

First, you have to be constantly aware of the opportunity to recruit a potential new member. Let me give you an example. The other day I was at the barbershop and I got to chatting with the very nice young woman (who, by the way, was a member of an ethnic minority group) who was giving me a haircut. We were talking as is often the case at a barbershop or hairdresser, and I started telling her about my Davis Odd Fellows Lodge. I often make take the opportunity to talk about the Order and my Lodge, to people that I meet. We discussed the history and goals of the Order, the social activities at my Lodge and the many community works in
which we are engaged. She was very interested and said that she was looking to be involved in just such an organization. I obtained her e-mail address and we have been corresponding ever since about her submission of an application and the process to become a member. Bottom line, each of us has to be aware of the potential for membership when we interact with others, and in particular, we should actively recruit women and minorities into this Order. Recently, I visited a Lodge where the membership was composed entirely of white men. Why should we exclude - by design or otherwise - women and ethnic minorities in our communities? By doing so, we ignore most of our population. That makes no sense, at any level.

Second, however, my conversations with this young woman would have been pointless if my Lodge had little to offer her. Let me tell you what I mean. I have visited Lodges where their meetings take 20 minutes and all they do is open the meeting, read the minutes and correspondence, pay a few bills, talk about members sick or in distress, do good of the order, and close the meeting. The don't have committee reports or new business. They essentially just have a meeting each month, and a potluck. A Lodge such as this would have almost nothing which would interest a man or women in their 20's, 30's or 40's certainly nothing that would appeal to my barber. But I was able to talk to the young barber about several community and charitable events my Lodge was planning and implementing (like helping frail seniors in their homes, supporting foster children who need clothes for school, working with mentally ill adults, providing volunteers for the food bank, and many more) and I was able to chat with her about social events we were planning and implementing (like our weekly social "club night" at the Lodge where we serve dinner and have some social time with our members and pledges, our OddtoberFest, a Halloween party, Odd Hikes we are planning, our wine club, and many more). Lodges that begin to get active in their communities and provide a social network for members provide a much more fertile environment for potential new members.
The proof? My Lodge has so many applicants that we actually have to put them on waiting lists, and the process to become a member of my Lodge takes a minimum of 6 months.

Dave Rosenberg

For the past eight years, the Davis Odd Fellows Lodge has run Bingo for the community, once a month on the Second Sunday. Typically, 50-80 members of the public attend to play Bingo, and all proceeds are donated to community and charitable groups. Over the past eight years, close to $70,000 has been donated to the community.
Can't We All Just Get Along

July 8, 2013

As you know, my first, second, third and last priority is to grow our membership. Most of what I've been talking about revolves around bringing in new members to our Order. But of equal concern is our ability to retain members. You know and I know that every Lodge has some members who are active, some members who only occasionally appear at Lodge meetings and functions, and some members who we rarely, if ever, see once they have been initiated. That's a real shame. As a small Order, we frankly need to encourage all our members to be involved in one way or another.

Of course, there are many reasons why some members only occasionally appear and others rarely, if ever, appear. These reasons include health and geography, as well as other life challenges and interests. I would certainly encourage - particularly the smaller Lodges - to reach out to every member on your books to see if they are sick, or in distress, or perhaps are ready to re-involve themselves in the Lodge to a greater or lesser degree.

There is, however, one reason that a member may distance him or herself from a Lodge that is particularly distressing - and it's a reason all of us should strive to address. And that reason is where a member has an issue with another member. Those sorts of issue should not be ignored, or swept under the rug, because they will only fester. Those issues need to be recognized and addressed. We are, after all, brothers and sisters in a fraternity, pledged to friendship, love and truth. No member should feel isolated or alone.
So, here's the deal. If you are a member who is feeling less interested in our Fraternal Order because of the comments or actions of another member that have distressed you, or insulted you, or disparaged you - here is the appropriate plan of action:

1. The first step is to recognize that you have begun to distance yourself from fraternal life because of the comments or actions of another member. Once you have come to this conclusion, you should determine in your own mind if you can put these comments or actions of the other member behind you and move on, or not. If you cannot, then you need to go to step 2.

2. The second step is to talk to the other member face to face and in private. These sorts of matters are best dealt with personally and in an up-front, honest way. Make sure that your discussion is carried on in a quiet, reserved and non-confrontational way. Put yourself into the shoes of the other member and ask that other member to put him or herself in your shoes, as well. That usually allows each of you to gain perspective on the issue.

3. If that doesn't work - and I suggest that it will work in the vast majority of cases - find a trusted and respected member of the same Lodge and bring the matter to that person's attention. Ask this third party if he or she will help you to mediate the problem.

4. If that doesn't work, you should bring the matter to the attention of your Lodge's Noble Grand for resolution.

As long as we ALL remember "friendship, love and truth" for and to each other, there should be no internal problem we can't solve.

Dave Rosenberg
In the 19th Century, Odd Fellowship became the first fraternal order to open up to women, when it created the Rebekah Degree. We should all be proud of that historical fact. Women could join the Rebekah Lodges, and men were permitted to join, as well. But only men were allowed to join Odd Fellows Lodges. And so, for many years after that, Odd Fellows Lodges were considered "the men's Lodge" and Rebekah Lodges were considered "the women's Lodge". In fact, even today I still hear some of our more senior members refer to the Lodges in this manner.

At the start of the 21st Century, Odd Fellows Lodges opened to women, and slowly but surely, women joined Lodges throughout the state. And we should all be proud of that, as well. There are many Lodges in California where women comprise a substantial part of the membership. In my own Lodge, for example, women comprise approximately half of the membership, and women hold numerous officer and committee chair positions.

And yet, even today, there are still Odd Fellows Lodges which have no female members. What a shame.

For some, this may be a sensitive subject. But it needs to be broached, for many reasons, not the least of which is the following: In an organization with declining membership, it makes no sense to ignore the potential membership of half of our population.
Bottom line: I urge Lodges to open up to women, not only in theory, but also in fact.

Dave Rosenberg

For the past nine years, Davis Odd Fellows Lodge #169 has hosted "Breakfast with Santa" for 360 children, parents and grandparents. The children get a chance to sit with and chat with "Santa", and all receive a goodie bag and photos. Here, in the photo, is long-time Odd Fellow and Santa Doug Hatton and friend.
Consolidating Our Branches is a Natural Evolution of Our Order

July 21, 2013

Approximately five years ago, when I was relatively new as a member of this Order, I suggested several keys to survival and growth of the Order. I felt that Odd Fellowship was stuck in a time warp - reminiscent of the way things were in the middle of the 20th Century - and I thought it was necessary to evolve this Order and bring Odd Fellowship into the 21st Century. At the time, I suggested the creation of a Revitalization Committee to plan the future of our Order. Eventually, I made this suggestion by way of a resolution presented to Grand Lodge. It was adopted and it was presented, in turn, to the Sovereign Grand Lodge. And, I am pleased to say, that the Sovereign Grand Lodge launched just such a Revitalization Committee.

One of my suggestions - to be considered by the Revitalization Committee - was the concept that we are too diffused with too many branches. One hundred years ago or even fifty years ago - when we numbered in the hundreds of thousands and then in the tens of thousands - it made sense to have many branches. But today, when our numbers are a small fraction of what they used to be, it makes little sense to spread ourselves so thin.

Let me give you just one example of what I mean. The entire membership of Patriarchs Militant in California and Nevada is now only about 84 members (and, by the way, the entire membership of the Ladies Auxiliary Patriarchs Militant numbers approximately 60). Notwithstanding the dramatically diminished numbers, these branches continue to try to function virtually the same as they did in 1940. For example, last year the PM gathered in Stockton for their annual Department of California session.
They gathered for three days. There were only 15 voting PM’s present. Yet they went through the same or similar process as they did in 1940. A similar story can be said for the LAPM, and the Grand Encampment, and the Ladies Auxiliary.

Frankly, in the 21st Century, it makes no sense to continue to have separate organizations for the men and women in our Order. We need to merge the PM and the LAPM, and then the Grand Encampment with the LEA, and ultimately, the Odd Fellows and the Rebekahs. Some day, certainly within the next 10 years, I envision one strong Order with 10 or more Degrees.

SGL has created a Revitalization Committee and among its proposals is to proceed with unification of the Patriarchs Militant (PM and LAPM). Further, SGL’s Revitalization Committee is developing legislation which, over a period of years, will result in the merger of the Patriarchal Degree (Encampment and LEA) into our existing work. These are good first steps, and they make sense. The lessons and the Degrees are important. But we don’t need separate branches with a small and shrinking cadre of officers who, necessarily, keep rotating themselves to office year after year. These Degrees can and should be part of strong, revitalized Odd Fellows Lodges.

This natural evolution will strengthen our Order.

Dave Rosenberg
I thought you might find interesting the attached article I wrote a few days ago. Seven years ago, when I began the process of transforming the Davis Lodge into a model for the New Odd Fellows and the future of this Order, I strove to bring in husbands and wives as new members, and also to encourage families to come into Odd Fellowship. The DIVERSITY of ages, genders, interests, etc., makes us stronger as a Lodge and as an Order.

I hope you find the article, below, interesting and informative.

Dave Rosenberg

**Odd Fellowship Is a Family Affair**

*By Dave Rosenberg*

“I believe that people who have the power to help others, also have the obligation to do so.”

These are profound words. But who said them? Was it Thomas Jefferson? Teddy Roosevelt? Bobby Kennedy? Actually, it was none of the above. These words were spoken by Graham Fullerton, a 17-year-old high school student from Davis.

But there’s more, of course. Graham also happens to be an initiated member of the Davis Odd Fellows Lodge #169 who holds all three degrees in the Lodge, a member of Davis Encampment #21 holding all three Encampment degrees, and a member of the newly-formed Canton Davis #7, a Chevalier holding the Patriarchs Militant degree, the highest degree in Odd Fellowship. What makes this particularly significant is that
Graham has only recently turned 17 years of age. According to the Adjutant of the Military Department, Graham is the youngest member of the Order in California holding the PM degree.

Graham comes from a family deeply involved in Odd Fellowship. His mother, Alekka Fullerton, is an Odd Fellow, a Rebekah, a member of the Encampment, and a Chevalier in the Patriarchs Militant. His father, Michael, is also an Odd Fellow, member of the Encampment and a Chevalier. Older sister Elsie, 20, is a Rebekah. And younger sister Annie, 14, is looking forward to joining the Rebekah Lodge and the Odd Fellows Lodge in Davis when she turns 16. Recently, Alekka, her mother, and Annie, traveled to Kansas to visit the gravesite of Alekka’s great grandmother, Mary Maude Stewart, who was a Rebekah. Odd Fellowship is part of the history of the Fullerton family.

Asked about his experience in the Order, Graham was quick to comment: “I’m pretty excited and happy about it, and I’m ready to become even more active.” Graham emphasized his interest in helping others. “I joined because of the opportunity to do some good in the community.” Graham found that the Davis Lodge and the Davis Encampment, in particular, were dedicated to providing active community support.

“My parents talked about joining the Lodge and I’m glad we did,” said Graham. “I have enjoyed the chance to meet people who share my values. Plus the initiation was kind of cool.”

In actuality, said Alekka, it was Graham that prompted Michael and her to join the Lodge. Because Graham wanted an outlet to help others, the family as a whole got involved in Odd Fellowship. “Graham’s interest was what motivated us,” said Alekka.

Although relatively new members, the Fullerton family is now deeply involved. Graham helps on the Senior Project committee – assisting frail seniors with help around their homes. Alekka is
Secretary of the Odd Fellows Lodge and Clerk of the Canton. Michael is Guard in the Canton.

Graham’s outside interests include swimming and water polo. In fact, Graham is on the U.S. Youth National Water Polo Team. He plays center and is currently making a transition to the center defender position.

“I encouraged Alekka to join the Odd Fellows Lodge,” said long-time member Dave Rosenberg, “and I got even more than I bargained for. I was delighted to get the entire family interested. This, I believe, is the future of Odd Fellowship. It has to be a family-friendly place. And in Davis, we’re very proud of the Fullerton Family.”
The Image of a Bunch of Old Guys Sitting Around in a Darkened Room

July 29, 2013

Last week a young man came to see me inquiring about Odd Fellowship and the possibility of joining our Order. He is a fine young man, a lawyer happily married with three young children. He had done his research on-line, and had some knowledge of the Order. Subsequently, he and his wife and children came to my Lodge to visit, and I gave him a nice tour, and answered a lot of questions that he had. He (and his wife) may very well submit applications to join in the future.

What I found interesting, however, is the young man's initial comments to me. He said, "When I first thought about Odd Fellows, I thought of a bunch of old guys sitting around in a darkened room." To be very frank, that image really took me aback. But then as I thought about it, this young man was expressing the view of Odd Fellowship by his generation. And let's dissect the view: (1) "a bunch of old guys", (2) "sitting around", (3) "in a darkened room". How did we come to this place in our long and distinguished history as a fraternity? More importantly, how do we disabuse his generation of this notion?

Easier said than done, if we are frank with ourselves. Because there are many (perhaps most) of our Lodges which precisely fit the young man's view.

And that's a shame. Now, that's not meant to be a slight against "old guys" because there is nothing wrong with "old guys", per se. But why not also include "young guys" and "old gals" and "young gals" as well. And why should the Lodge members be
"sitting around" (e.g. really not doing much of anything) in "a darkened room" (e.g. shut away from the outside world) no less. The Lodge members need to open the windows and doors of their Lodges and get involved in their communities.

I will submit the following proposition to you: Lodges that are diverse - with men and women, ethnic groups of all kinds, different ages, professions, etc. - are the Lodges that will thrive in the future. We need to celebrate and foster our diversity, not stifle it.

We need to celebrate our "Odd-ness" in our chosen fraternity. After all, when this Order first formed in Merry Olde England, it was an amalgam of professions. It wasn't an elitist group. The early Lodges were composed of actors, carpenters, butchers, shop-keepers, ship-builders, and an assortment of trades. Heck, even the famous Thomas Wildey was known as a maker of coach springs.

As an Order let's have some fun with the fact that we are known as Odd Fellows. Let's celebrate our Lodge's 151st anniversaries, rather than the 150th. Let's organize Oddtoberfests, rather than Oktoberfests. Let's go on Odd hikes, and Odd bowling evenings, and Odd dinners at the Lodge. Let's not be so stuffy and full of our own importance that we can't have a good time in our Lodges with our Lodge brothers and sisters.

And let's work on erasing that image of "a bunch of old guys sitting around a darkened room." Let's replace it with the image of a diverse fraternity where the members know how to have a good time and know how to be involved locally to improve their communities.

Dave Rosenberg
A few days ago I received an e-mail from one of our DMC members who was concerned about losing new members in his Lodge due to "boring" meetings. His question: "How can we make our Lodge meetings more interesting?"

It's a fair question, and frankly, an important one. The rapid decline in our net membership numbers over the past 65+ years indicates that we are not attracting the new blood into our Order, certainly not in sufficient numbers to offset our membership losses. And if we were brutally honest with ourselves we would realize that the vast majority of men and women in their 20's and 30's and 40's simply don't want to stay connected to a Lodge where the members just gather once or twice a month for a highly structure ritual meeting, with little else going on. They might join that Lodge, but they won't stay. And if you don't believe me, check the statistics.

So, what's the answer to how we make our Lodge meetings more interesting?

I think the answer for each Lodge is ultimately up to the members of that Lodge, but I can certainly offer some suggestions:

1. **Have more social meetings.** There is absolutely no requirement that every single one of your Lodge meetings must be formal, with structured opening and closing, and full regalia. You are permitted to have social meetings. In fact, you are encouraged to have social meetings in your Lodge. Both Grand Lodge and Sovereign Grand Lodge have pushed us to have more social
meetings. At a social meeting, of course, we don't use alarms, passwords, signs and grips, and we don't open and close formally. You don't share fraternal secrets. Instead, the Noble Grand runs a much more informal meeting. But there is no restriction to the members talking about and planning for social events, community events and charitable causes. There is no restriction to reviewing the calendar or for Lodge committees to meet and report. In my opinion, Lodge members can even vote on things at these social meetings relating to social and community projects and events, subject to the votes being ratified at a subsequent formal meeting. One of the beauties of the social meeting is that it more casual and comfortable for members, and you can even invite prospective members, applicants and family members to these meetings. It is a great way to expose your Lodge to the community and to generate applications.

2. Develop your own agenda. Contrary to popular opinion, the formal agenda contained in the charge books is a suggested agenda - not a required agenda. A Lodge should feel free to tailor its agenda to its own special needs. Certainly, there are items on the agenda that should be on every agenda (e.g. Treasurer's report), but Lodges can tweak agendas as they see fit. For example, in my own Lodge at least half the agenda is dedicated to reports from our committees (we have 20 committees) and we also have time on every agenda for an historical report about the Order (that is one of the tasks we give to the Vice Grand). Plus, feel free to modernize the agenda. For example, I have found most Lodges have the Secretary actually read, word for word, the Minutes of the past meeting. If you find that time-consuming (and boring) you can dispense with that. In my Lodge, for example, all our members are on e-mail and the Secretary e-mails the Minutes out to each member several days before the meeting. There are also hard copies available at the meeting, just in case. The review and approval of Minutes at the meeting takes a very short time.
3. **Have some social time before the meeting.** If you want to liven things up, schedule a "social hour" before each evening meeting. The social hour can include dinner, or just snacks, and beverages. Nothing like a little social time to make members happy. Remember, this fraternal order was founded in Merry Olde England as a place for social interaction. In fact, the first meetings of Odd Fellows Lodges took place in pubs. And the founding location of this fraternity in North America was none other than the Seven Stars Tavern.

4. **Develop committees and have them do their own thing.** There is no substitute for activities and projects to liven up a Lodge and liven up a meeting. When members are planning social events, or community support events, or charitable projects, they are following the precepts of this Order, and they are having fun doing it. Committees should meet apart from the meetings, so that they plan in an informal and comfortable setting. What committees? Well, let the members decide. They may want to do wine tasting, or go hiking, or help a foster family, or go bowling, or golfing, or plan a Christmas event for the community, or paint a public building, or plan a potluck and movie night, or plant trees in the community - etc., etc. Don't reject ideas because they are new or different. Give it a try. What do you have to lose?

5. **Think outside the box.** Why only have meetings in the evening? How about breakfast meetings? Would a breakfast meeting (breakfast first, followed by the meeting) be of interest to your members? In other words, just because your Lodge has done something the same way for the last 50 years doesn't mean you have to continue to do it for the next 50.

Dave Rosenberg
Magazines, newspapers and books today are full of all sorts of “self-tests” which gauge your personality, your interests, your love-life, etc., etc. So why not a self-test to gauge your view of your own Lodge?

In this regard, I want to ask each of you a question, and I encourage each of you to take just five minutes to answer the question. The question is: Can you state 10 reasons to be a member of your Lodge? Seems simple enough. But it’s an important question and the answer will tell you a lot about your Lodge – or at least your view and perception of your Lodge. And even more importantly, the view or perception prospective members have of your Lodge.

But before you take this self-test, there are two important parameters (rules, if you will) that need to be established. These parameters are critical to assuring that this is a review of your LODGE, and not a review of the Order. So, the first parameter is that the “10 reasons” you give must be focused on your LODGE, not on Odd Fellowship. So, for example, for purposes of this test, you can’t give reasons like: “Odd Fellowship has a long and distinguished history” or “the Grand Lodge runs two wonderful retirement communities in Napa and Saratoga”. No, the answers must relate to your own Lodge experience for this test to have meaning. Second, you have to be brutally honest in your answers. This is a self-test. No one else is going to see it or grade it. The test is for YOU. So, for example, if you give the following as reasons “I really enjoy the company of my Lodge brothers and sisters” or “we take care of brothers and sisters who are sick and in distress”, those are really great answers, but please make sure
that they are true and honest answers for you.

To show you how this all works, let me give you two examples from hypothetical and fictional Lodges. Let’s call them “Zenith Lodge” and “Nadir Lodge”.

A member of Zenith Lodge has listed the following reasons to be a member of his/her Lodge: We support a local school with donations of backpacks every year, we have a monthly potluck where we invite prospective new members, my Lodge schedules a wine-tasting trip once or twice each year, we plant a tree in the community once each month, my Lodge conducts its own 3-degree ceremony live, when I had an operation my Lodge sent me flowers and helped me with dinners for a week, we have a yearly Halloween party that I really enjoy, we do poker night at the Lodge once each month, my Lodge planned and put on a spaghetti feed to help raise money for our volunteer fire department, we did a community clean-up project, we all went bowling last week and that was fun, my Lodge is going to host a guest speaker on homelessness and open the Lodge to the public on this important topic.

A member of Nadir Lodge has listed the following reasons to be a member of his/her Lodge: We do a monthly potluck before our meetings, I like to see my Lodge brothers and sisters once each month.

Now, if we analyze both of these member’s comments, two things are clear. First, it is impossible to say that the member of one Lodge is happier than the member of the other Lodge. While the member of Zenith Lodge lists far more reasons than does the member of Nadir Lodge, one cannot say that one or the other is less satisfied with his or her Lodge experience. But, second, from the perspective of a potential new member or applicant to those Lodges, it is apparent that a prospective member of Zenith Lodge – particularly a younger member in his/her 20’s, 30’s or 40’s – will
find the experience at Zenith Lodge to be much more diverse and appealing than Nadir Lodge. Simply put, if you were interested in possibly joining Odd Fellowship, which of these two Lodges would you rather join?

And one more thing. If you have developed your list of reasons to be a member of your Lodge, and you list 10 or more reasons, I would suggest that not only are you satisfied with your Lodge, but there is a high likelihood that you will be able to successfully recruit members to join (and stay engaged) as members of your Lodge. Alternatively, if you have difficulty listing 10 reasons to be a member of your own Lodge, perhaps it is time to re-evaluate the activities of your Lodge. Is your Lodge a place that will attract new members and that will retain existing members? And finally, if you have difficulty listing even 2 or 3 reasons to be a member of your Lodge, I would submit that your Lodge is in serious trouble. If YOU can’t articulate reasons to be a member of your own Lodge, then how in the world will you (or your Lodge mates) encourage new members to join?

So, the bottom line purpose of our little self-test is to test the ability of your Lodge to grow. I hope this self-test has helped you in your own self-evaluation of your Lodge’s viability to attract the new, young members which are the life-blood of our Order. Remember, it’s all about membership, membership, membership. If we don’t grow our membership, we will continue to shrink as we have done for the past three generations. It’s time – overdue time, in fact – to reverse that trend.

Dave Rosenberg
I have been reading a fascinating book recently, and thought you might be interested in the following excerpt from that work:

The first meeting of the Grand Lodge didn't take place in a grand building. It was convened in the back room of a public house. Taverns were the focal point of social life, where people met to conduct business, eat, drink and sing.

The elaborate symbolism and initiation ceremonies hadn't been invented yet. It seems, from the little we know from lodges of that period, that ceremonies were basic and brief, symbols were limited to the lodge panel, and there was no special furniture or physical tools. Symbols were drawn on a tracing board, or on the floor with chalk and coal, and then erased at the end of the meeting.

Meetings were primarily social events, involving dinner, drinking, and, more important, singing. The lodges in these early days were not steeped in the ritual and symbolism which developed during the next few centuries. Men came together for conviviality and social refuge at a time of political and social uncertainty, when new scientific and economic opportunities were being developed, and when rationalism was beginning to lay the foundations for the humanistic and empirical society which we enjoy today.

What is particularly interesting to me about this excerpt, and indeed the entire book, is that it is not about Odd Fellowship. The book is entitled "Secrets of the Freemasons" published in 2006. The excerpt above is about the early history of another fraternal order, the Freemasons (or "Masons" as they are often called). This book reveals that the Freemasons have, just like the Odd Fellows and
other fraternal orders, secret signs, grips, passwords, and symbols. And another thing that is revealed is that the Freemasons, just like the Odd Fellows and other fraternal orders, are rapidly losing membership.

In fact, the decline in membership is not confined to fraternal orders. Clubs and organizations around California and the United States are experiencing similar declines. I was just invited to speak to a meeting of the flagship club in the United States - Rotary - and I gave them a list of five potential topics for my talk. Interestingly (and revealingly) what they wanted to hear from me is how I managed to make my Odd Fellows Lodge grow! And that's because even Rotary is facing membership challenges.

I just came back from a visit to an Odd Fellows Lodge that has been around since the mid 1800's. But now this Lodge has just 9 members on its books, four of whom live hours away from the Lodge Hall and never attend. So, this Lodge is limping along with five members (actually four members and one associate member) - a bare quorum when they can get it. Of their four members, three are in the age range of 85-95. They haven't added a new member in years. And they don't really do anything except have a meeting (when they have a quorum) and a monthly potluck. The Lodge doesn't really do more than this. Now, frankly, how can that Lodge add new members in that mode? Who wants to join a Lodge like that?

For Lodges to survive and flourish in the 21st Century, we cannot just rely on the formality of our ritual in opening and closing meetings. There must be more. We have to do two things in addition. First, we have to take a page from our past (and the past of other fraternal orders) and start to have some fun. Lodges that engage in an active social life keep members and attract new members. Second, we have to open our doors and windows and reach out to our communities with substantive community projects. Helping others has been an historical hallmark of Odd
Fellowship. And equally as important, helping others in the community is what keeps members interested and attracts new members to the Lodge.

This is not rocket science. It just makes sense. And the proof is shown by the Lodges that follow that pattern. The Lodges that engage in good fellowship activities and also community service are the Lodges that are growing in this jurisdiction. Let’s learn from their successes.

Dave Rosenberg, GW

The Davis Odd Fellows - working through the Davis Encampment - planned and executed a huge all-day garage sale at the Lodge to raise money to send children (from very low income families) to summer camp. Over 25 Odd Fellows participated in the event and over $1,000 was raised.
The Decline Can Be Reversed

August 15, 2013

Statistics show that we are slowly disappearing as an Order. This trend, however, can be reversed.

First, the statistics. I have reviewed the Grand Lodge Journals from the turn of the 21st Century to the present. In reviewing the statistics from 2000 to 2013, we find that in 2000 we had 181 Odd Fellows Lodges in California. Today, in 2013, we have 126 Odd Fellows Lodges. That, brothers and sisters, is a loss of 55 Lodges in 13 years, an average of 4 or 5 Lodges lost each year. Put another way, since 2000, we have lost 30% of our Lodges.

But the situation is more dire than that. We may have 126 Lodges on the books, but only 7 of these Lodges have 100 or more members. Of the 126 Lodges, fully 55 Lodges (almost half of all our Lodges) have 20 or fewer members on their books. In fact, 10 of our Lodges have 10 or fewer members on their books. If we assume that only about half the members listed on the books of the Lodge actually participate in meetings and Lodge events, we have to also assume that these Lodges - if they meet at all - are experiencing significant quorum problems. These Lodges are limping along with the illusion of stability.

And we also see tremendous disparities in sizes of our Lodges. The 10 largest Lodges in California now have more than one-third the total membership of our Order. That is, one out of every three Odd Fellows in California is a member of just these 10 Lodges. The trend over the years shows that the 10 largest Lodges will soon have 2 out of every 5 members, and eventually will have half the membership in this Order. So, the few largest Lodges are growing, while the remaining 116 of our Lodges (over 90%) are (with a few exceptions) generally shrinking. That is not a happy trend.
In terms of membership numbers over that same period, the Journals show that on January 1, 2000, total Odd Fellows Lodge membership was 6,074. (These membership numbers are total membership which includes dues paying regular members, associate members and non-contributing members - so they represent the best possible scenario of membership.) On January 1, 2013, the total membership number was only 4,755. That's a decline of 1,315 members in that 2000-2013 time period. Put another way, we have averaged a decline of over 100 members per year.

If we drill down the membership numbers, year after year, however, we see an ominous trend. Typically, only a small percentage of our Lodges have a net gain of membership in any given year. The large majority of our Lodges have a net loss, or at best, stay stagnant. There are a couple of handfuls of larger Lodges that gain members. Most of the smaller Lodges lose members. There are Lodges in California that have not added new members in years, while the existing membership ages, withdraws from membership, or passes away.

And what we see in the Odd Fellows Lodges, we see multiplied in the Rebekah Lodges, and multiplied again in the Branches. For example, there are less than 200 active members in all the Encampments in California, and less than 100 active members in all the Cantons in California. The Ladies Encampment Auxiliary and the Ladies Auxiliary Patriarchs Militant are in similar straits.

The statistics show that the present course is unsustainable.

But it is not inevitable.

There is a solution to this conundrum. The solution is obvious and simple: We need to bring more members into our Odd Fellows Lodges. If our Lodges are strong, our Branches will be strong, as well. Grand Lodge has offered incentives to help recruitment of new members. For example, the Membership
Challenge Grant Program provided funds to Lodges for new members. And the new $1,000 Membership Grant Program supports Lodges that develop membership programs. But ultimately, membership development is not the task of the Grand Lodge, or even of the Lodges. Membership development begins at the basic unit of Odd Fellowship: YOU.

If YOU don't bring in a new member to your Lodge, you are failing your Lodge and your Order. It is up to YOU and me and each Odd Fellow to reach out into the community to bring in the new blood our Order needs to reverse the decline. Too many of our members have become complacent and expect that someone else will bring in new members. But that "someone else" is actually YOU. Don't sit back and depend on the other guy or gal to get the job done.

But ultimately, and honestly, this will not work until YOU work with your Lodge to make the Lodge an interesting place. New members won't join (and certainly won't stay) if all your Lodge does is have boring meetings. YOU have to work within your Lodge to develop fun good fellowship activities for the members. And YOU have to work within your Lodge to develop good community projects that not only benefit your community, but also provide worthwhile charitable work that will satisfy your members' community spirit.

I have called this "The Three-Legged Stool" in the past. A stool needs three strong legs to work. If any leg is weak, the stool will eventually topple. Too many Lodges rely too heavily on just one leg - the rich history and ritual of our Order. To be sturdy, a Lodge needs to also develop and strengthen the two other legs: Good fellowship activities within the Lodge for the members, and good community works to benefit the town or area where the Lodge is located. All three are needed for a strong and growing Lodge.

Dave Rosenberg
Let's Not Forget to Find Ways to Retain Existing Members  

August 21, 2013

As you know, the vast majority of our Lodges in California are either experiencing a yearly "net loss" in members, or (at best) are static, showing neither a gain nor a loss. Only a few Lodges are showing a "net gain" in members, and only only a small fraction show a significant net gain on a regular basis.

A Lodge can experience a gain when new members are brought initiated. And when members resign, or withdraw, or pass away, a Lodge will experience a loss. So, it's important not only to bring in new members, but also to do what we can to make sure existing members stay engaged in our Lodges and do not resign or withdraw. It is that latter issue that I will address in today's newsletter. Specifically, here is an excerpt from an e-mail recently sent to me by a long-time member of DMC:

"Dave, I had a chance to talk with one of our long-time members about why some members no longer attend meetings or others have resigned from the lodge. This member brought up one member who has not attended lodge in about three years. He said that this other member was a great worker, always there if you needed help and how he really appreciated all that this member did for the lodge.

So asked an interesting question of him; I asked, "Have you taken the time to tell them how much you appreciate what they have contributed to the lodge?" His response was, "Well, No."

I think that this subject likely may be occurring in many lodges. How often do we take the time to visit with a member who has stopped coming to the meetings to find out why they don't come
any more? Even more interesting, when is the last time we have
told that member how much we appreciate what they do for the
lodge? How many members would come back to lodge if we all
made a list of members in our lodge who have stopped
attending meeting and visit them to let them know how much
we miss them and appreciate their contribution to the lodge?"

Could this also be the situation in your Lodge? Have you done
all that you can to re-engage members whom you haven’t seen at
the Lodge for awhile? And when members come to the Lodge, do
you include them in discussions and activities? During "good of
the order" do you compliment members for their input, their
actions, and their contributions?

Certainly food for thought.

Dave Rosenberg
The Official Report of the State of the Order Committee, presented to the 2013 Grand Lodge in session stated the following:

"Membership, the Elephant in the Room. This is our most important and vexing problem. Each year we see a decline in members and the number of Lodges. In 1998 we had 189 Lodges and 6,464 members. In the Grant Secretary's report this last May he reported 4,429 members and 131 Lodge. In just 14 years we have lost 2,000 members and 58 Lodges."

These words are true. And sobering. Unless you want to watch Odd Fellowship diminish and descend into irrelevancy, you and I and every true Odd Fellow needs to take heed.

Let me put this in the simplest possible terms: We cannot continue with business as usual. We have operated that way for the last half century and we have seen in that time a continued erosion in membership and Lodges. We cannot keep doing what we have been doing for the last half century and expect a different result. To change the path of our descent, we have to change the way we operate.

We live in 2013. We simply can't continue to operate as if we were living in 1943, or 1953, or even 1963.

So, what can we do to alter the equation? Again, in the simplest possible terms, the answer is right before our very eyes: While our Order has been dropping in membership, there are a handful of Lodges in California which have grown in membership. Obviously, those few Lodges have re-calibrated the equation and are doing something that really works. If we want our Order to
grow, we should look to the successful Lodges and see if their formula for growth will work for our Lodge.

So, what are these growing Lodges doing that helps them to grow membership? What makes these growing Lodges different? If you dig deep, you will see that these Lodges are doing two things that make them unique, and that help grow membership in the 21st Century: (1) These Lodges are offering members a growing list of good fellowship activities. Odd Fellowship is, after all, a fraternal order and people want to enjoy each others' company and have a good time. Certainly, that's what the new generation wants to do. A spaghetti potluck before a formal meeting just isn't a selling point. (2) These Lodges are opening their doors and windows and reaching out into the community. They are working on community and charitable projects of all kinds - helping feed the hungry, working with aged-out foster kids, working on environmental projects, etc. Again, that's what the new generation wants to do.

These growing Lodges - and I emphasize this - are also holding more and more social meetings. As Grand Warden, I strongly encourage Lodges to hold social meetings. Grand Lodge encourages it and so does Sovereign Grand Lodge. Reach out. Open your Lodge doors to the community and to potential applicants. Let the community and potential members see the Lodge and see the activities you are planning. Don't hide behind the Lodge walls. At social meetings you can discuss and plan a wide range of social activities and community activities. Of course, no secrets of the Order are revealed at these meetings. And any decisions made can be ratified at the next formal business meeting of the Lodge. But such social meetings are a wonderful and effective tool to let applicants and potential applicants know about your Lodge and feel proud about pursuing membership.

Dave Rosenberg
Those of you who attended last May's Grand Lodge Sessions in Sacramento will remember that we had a significant number of bills, resolutions and elections, and we spent a very large portion of our time hand-counting (and re-counting) votes. Frankly, when you add it up, I wouldn’t be surprised if we determined that a good three or four hours of our collective time was spent just in the act of counting. I, for one, felt that this was not a productive use of our time, and (you may recall) that I stood up to speak (soon after my election as Grand Warden) and pledged to all of you that I would work to bring electronic voting to the next and future Grand Lodge Sessions. I felt - and I know many of you felt - that it was time to bring us into the 21st Century on the use of technology at our meetings.

I am pleased to report that the Grand Lodge Board of Directors (GLBOD) - unanimously - felt the same way.

We have now purchased an electronic voting system that will be used at our next Grand Lodge Sessions. And because we have purchased it (rather than renting), the system will be available to us at all future sessions. The system is simple and user-friendly. Each voting representative will be given a small electronic device (no larger than a garage-door opener or cell phone) that the representative will use to vote on bills and resolutions as well as elections. Simply clicking a button on the device casts a vote. The main benefit of this electronic system is that votes are instantly tabulated and are instantly announced. After voting is closed, we will have large screens which display the vote. No long and tedious delays while we manually walk around the room counting (and recounting) votes. And the system is accurate. No
longer will we have the concern that we miscounted a showing of hands.

In addition, the system can be made even more user friendly because the large screens can display the precise issue on which we are voting, and can also display amendments in real time. This avoids confusion and misunderstanding on the issue that is before the body. And as an extra, added attraction, each and every vote is recorded by the system for historical purposes, and can be printed out for the Secretary’s records. Of course, there are safeguards that will be put in place so that only authorized voting representatives can vote. (And clicking the device 10 times doesn’t record 10 votes - only the last click on each device is recorded as the actual vote.)

As with any new system, we will fully explain how it works at the next session, prior to actually utilizing it. But the system is no more complicated that marking a paper ballot. I think all of us, and the Order, will be well-served with electronic voting.

Dave Rosenberg

p.s. I will be on vacation and traveling for the next couple of weeks, and will be unable to send out DMC Newsletters for awhile. So, we will be on a little hiatus, but will return soon. In the meantime, please note that we are creating an historical record of all DMC Newsletters since our inception in December 2010. These old newsletters are being preserved, and provide not only a great historical record, but also provide useful and practical suggestions for growing our Lodges. You can access this historical information at www.davisloge.org. Once on the homepage, click on "About the Odd Fellows" and then click on "Dedicated Members for Change" - this will bring you to the page containing the old and recent newsletters. The webmaster, Stewart Savage, is slowly and carefully loading the newsletters and currently has them going back to May 2013.
Bringing in New Members Is a Job for Each of Us

September 14, 2013

My wife and I have just returned (yesterday at 1 a.m.) from a 12-day vacation in Bavaria. It’s great to wander, but it’s good to be back.

In addition to returning to California yesterday, I also had the opportunity to participate in a Skype hook-up to a Southern California Lodge that was giving a 50-year recognition to one of its members. This particular Lodge is one which has a number of older members, but also a significant number of newer and younger members. And this caused me to reflect on the fact that my own Lodge, in Davis, was in a similar situation 10 years ago. At that time, the Davis Lodge was significantly smaller than it is today and one man in the Lodge - also a 50-year member - bridged the gap to encourage the Lodge to bring in new younger members. That is precisely what had occurred in the Southern California Lodge to which I was speaking.

And as I was speaking to the members of this Southern California Lodge, celebrating the 50-year accomplishments of an important member, I could not help but reflect on the symbol of our Order - the Three Links representing Friendship, Love and Truth. These are not only symbolic of Odd Fellowship, but also of the links in the chain which connect us all to this fraternal order. We are each an important link in that chain. And it is the task of each and every one of us to make that link stronger and greater. When we joined our Lodge, it was because SOMEONE in that Lodge forged our link to the Order. SOMEONE stepped up and brought us into the fraternity. And now brothers and sisters, it is our responsibility -
each and every one of us - to continue strengthening that link by bringing in new members.

Odd Fellowship in California would not have a membership problem if each one of us brought in one new member.

That is a simple statement that is the truth. The problem is that while some of our members are active in bringing in new members, others (in fact most) just don't even try. And that's the main reason that Lodges diminish and fold. Because it is ultimately just math. Every year we lose members who die or withdraw. Every year we add new members, however, in lesser numbers than our losses. Unless we bring in new members in numbers exceeding our losses of members, Lodges will die. That is the reality of fraternal life.

So, I challenge each one of you - at your very next Lodge meeting - to encourage your Lodge mates to meet the membership challenge of the 21st Century. Surely, each of us knows at least one person who would add to our Lodge DNA and would be a good member. Don't wait for "the other guy" to bring in new members. The very existence of our Order depends on EACH OF US to add links to the chain of Odd Fellowship.

Dave Rosenberg
A couple of days ago I sent out a DMC Newsletter containing my thoughts on the "links in our chain of Odd Fellowship" and the need for us - each of us - to continue to add links to our chain by bringing in new members. I suggested that we are all connected through those links, generation after generation. And I urged each of us to do our part in bringing in a new member - we can't just rely on "the other guy" to do it. We each have a responsibility to continue the chain.

I received a thought-provoking response from a long-time member of our Order, and a Dedicated Member for Change. Who he is and which Lodge he belongs to is not particularly relevant. The point he makes, however, is. Here's what he wrote:

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Time is a powerful thing. And it has many powers. One of the most obvious is that is it truly the "great revealer". Humans are oft times in the habit of trying to fool themselves and others in order to forward a personal agenda or maintain a comfortable status quo or other such foolery. But time has a way of unveiling such charades to others if not, sadly, to ourselves.

I would like to gently suggest that we are not gaining members because for many Odd Fellows, it is not the primary goal. The primary goal is to hold on to the illusion of the past. Everything else is secondary. And if they are able to maintain that until death, then, in their own mind, they have succeeded. You won't see anyone challenging the goal of expanding the roles--clearly this is against the party line. But you will, at the same time, find little in the way of actions, changes, compromises, etc. toward such a goal.
Ironic and nearly absurd, then, I find your noble, persistent, yet largely unheeded call to action. You are humming a tune the choir refuses to sing, as they have no ear for it. And your audience is "out there". But for how to reach them in the cloister of the stale, dim light of a tired choral rehearsal room?

And this is my claim. And I offer time as my witness for such.

Unfortunately for our Order, I believe much of what this DMC Member suggests is true. I have seen it with my own eyes and have heard it with my own ears in some Lodges. And I still remember, years ago, discussing and debating with a long-time respected member of our Order the need to change and evolve in order to survive. He was against it. Ultimately, when he had exhausted all his arguments, he said to me: "I would rather see this Order die than change."

That comment was both shocking, and revealing, to me. But I learned a lesson from it. There are, in fact, members of our Order who are "comfortable" with the status quo. Their priority is to maintain things just the way they have always been in their particular Lodge so long as they are a member. I understand that. So, I understand and recognize our enemy - he is Complacency. But, I also understand that if this attitude were to prevail in this Order - we will surely diminish and evaporate in time.

My goal is to not dwell on the members who won't evolve and refuse to grow. That would be a waste of time and effort. My goal is to reach out to the members who understand that this Order - like any fraternity - must evolve and change to attract the 21st Century men and women we need to keep the promise of Odd Fellowship. For almost 200 years on the North American continent, Odd Fellows have taken it upon themselves a duty to add links to our chain of membership. If we are true Odd Fellows, and if we truly believe in the tenets of IOOF, then we cannot walk away from our responsibility to add links to that chain.

Dave Rosenberg
Complacency Is the Fraternal Enemy

September 19, 2013

A few days ago I wrote about the need for each of us to reach out and bring at least one new applicant for membership to our Lodge. I spoke about our great fraternal enemy: Complacency. Some members are simply too complacent and too comfortable in the status quo. I have heard from a number of Odd Fellows and DMC Members who feel strongly on the subject. Here's an excerpt from one of the e-mails I have received:

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I have met a lot of long-time members of our Order who would rather see their lodge die than change and see their lodge grow. Sadly, the lodge where I am now is like that. Every new member (mostly age 45 and below) who were initiated did not stay active and do not participate because of "older member's attitudes" of being too comfortable, complacent and close-minded. For many years, it is the same people holding officer positions and the younger ones they initiate just sit on the sidelines. As a result, these young ones do not get the "value" of attending the lodge or appreciate Odd Fellowship.

Many younger members have tried through the years to uplift and update this Order. All they got is discouragement so they become inactive.

~

So very true. Some of our long-time members have become so entrenched in the status quo that they don't want to change the way things are. They are comfortable with doing things the same way they have been done for the past 10, 20, 30, 40 or more years. They do not bring in new members, they cannot accept new ideas, and they will not step aside to let new members share in the leadership of the Lodge. These failures are each a recipe for decline. Simply put, we have three significant needs in this Order:
1. New members.

2. Active Lodges which keep new members interested and involved.

3. Long-time members willing to "let go" of the reins of "power" and share leadership with newer members.

The need for new members is obvious. The decline in membership in our Order is steady, shocking, and devastating. We cannot sustain the losses year after year. Each of us (not the other guy) has the responsibility to bring in new members and add a link the historic chain of membership. But equally as important, once new members are brought into the Lodge, we have to maintain an active Lodge to keep the new members interested and involved. I have been to Lodge meetings where there are no committee reports, no old business and no new business. The Lodge conducts a meeting with little more than a formal opening and formal closing. How boring is that! How will that situation encourage a new member to remain involved? Finally, it's imperative that long-time members step to the side and allow newer members to share in the leadership of the Lodge. I have been to Lodges where I have overheard new members suggest new ideas for Lodge activities. And I have heard long-time members immediately pooh-pooh the new idea with comments such as, "that won't work," or "we tried that once before," or even "that's a stupid idea." How discouraging is that to a new member!

The goal of an Odd Fellow should not just be to hang around till he or she receives a 50-year pin. The goal of an Odd Fellows should be to add links in our historical chain of membership - bring in a new member, nurture that new member into a leadership position, and be supportive if the new member proposes a new activity or a new idea for the Lodge.

Dave Rosenberg
Some Suggestions for Lodges That Want to Grow

September 22, 2013

This article is written for Lodges that WANT to grow. Those Lodges that don't care about adding new members and keeping them engaged can stop reading now.

I am often asked, "Our Lodge has stagnated. What can we do to help our Lodge grow?" This article will answer that question.

First of all, understand that this is not rocket science. It's just simple math. To grow, a Lodge must add more new members each year than it loses members through death or withdrawal. In other words, you need to bring in new members. But equally important, once the new members have come into the Lodge, they need to be engaged so that they stick around. To bring in new members and to keep them interested, I have talked about "the three-legged stool". If a stool has three strong legs, it will support the body. But if the stool is missing a leg, or has a weak leg, the stool will eventually topple. So what do the three legs represent? They represent (1) the rich history, customs and ritual of our ancient order; (2) good fellowship activities within the Lodge for the benefit of the members and applicants; and (3) reaching out into the community to do good works. Too many Lodges emphasize (1), but don't really do much, if anything, about (2) and (3).

I assure you that if your Lodge emphasizes all three elements listed above, you will be stronger and you will grow.

So, in an effort to help you, here are 20 examples of things you
and your Lodge can plan and implement to effectuate (2) and (3) above. Note that these are just examples - not an exhaustive list - to get your juices flowing. You may very well have other and better ideas that work for your Lodge. And, frankly, the suggestions should not come from me - they need to come from your members. You need to do things your MEMBERS want to do. Further, don't bite off more than you can chew. If you implement one or two or three new ideas each year, you are doing well. This is a process that builds year-after-year, not all at once. Here are some thoughts:

1. A Lodge Bowling Night - carpool to a nearby bowling alley.

2. A Lodge hike - start easy at first - on a local scenic trail.

3. An Oktoberfest (or "Oddtoberfest"), complete with sausages, music and beer, for the Lodge members and guests, or even opened up to the community.

4. Adopt a local group home of foster kids, and provide birthday gifts and other support (e.g. painting and minor repairs) for the home.

5. A music night at the Lodge. Invite local musicians to play and open it up to the community.

6. Odd Poetry. Members of your Lodge might enjoy reading their own poetry or poems by noted poets. Even cowboy poetry is encouraged.

7. Start a wine tasting club, alternating monthly at the homes of your Lodge members.

8. Organize a community project to paint a mural in town, perhaps on your Lodge Hall.
9. Volunteer Lodge members to help deliver "meals on wheels".

10. A Halloween Party at the Lodge, complete with costumes and prizes - and some music for dancing and / or listening.

11. Plant some trees in the community.

12. Organize a downtown clean up day for the community.

13. Plan a Bunko Night at the Lodge.

14. Game Night at the Lodge - checkers, chess, scrabble, charades, you name it.

15. Texas Hold 'em Poker Night at the Lodge.

16. Co-host a spaghetti feed at the Lodge with a local charity, as a fundraiser for that charity.

17. Rent a bus for Lodge members and guests and go visit some wineries.

18. Bring in good local speakers once each month for a speaker's series at the Lodge - invite the community.

19. Plan and implement a "Breakfast with Santa" at the Lodge for the local children and their families.

20. Plan a local fundraiser at the Lodge (or other community building) to raise money for a needed piece of equipment for your fire department, police department, or local hospital.

This is just a sampling of possibilities. YOU can come up with many more, I am sure. The point is, we can't keep repeating the
past in the same old way and expect anything to be different. We have to take a new and different tack to the future. And that new and different tack involves reaching out to the community and reaching in to the members.

What have we got to lose?

Dave Rosenberg

Davis Odd Fellows know how to have fun at their annual "OddtoberFest". Pictured are Odd Fellows (left to right) Diane Steele, Randii MacNear, and Lea Rosenberg.
In this article I will discuss what I call "The Three Great Excuses."

It's no secret why Odd Fellowship is diminishing. Every year - year after year - our statewide (and national) numbers go down. They go down for one simple reason: We are not bringing in enough new members to overcome the losses of older members who pass away or withdraw. As I have said time and time again, each of us has the responsibility to bring applicants for membership to our respective Lodges. We can't just sit back and depend on "the other guy or gal" to do it. Recruitment is something we all have to do. We are all links in the historic chain of Odd Fellowship and we - each of us - must all take responsibility to add a new link (e.g. a new member) to that chain.

And in this regard, I want to highlight "The Three Great Excuses" why Odd Fellows don't bring in new applicants.

Excuse Number One: "I don't know anyone who I could ask."

Excuse Number Two: "I don't know what to say."

Excuse Number Three: "I'm too busy."

In addressing "The Three Great Excuses", let me preface my remarks by noting that I have just received a special recognition pin from Sovereign Grand Lodge - it is a gold pin with diamond and it's inscribed "meritorious service". The pin was awarded to me by SGL because I have recruited over 100 new members into this Order over the past eight years. I know something about
bringing new members into Odd Fellowship, and I simply don't accept "The Three Great Excuses."

First, you all know people you can ask to consider joining your Lodge. No one is asking you to recruit 100 new members or even 10 new members. Just one new member will do. You can start with members of your own family - spouses, brothers, sisters, adult children, nephews and nieces, cousins, etc. You can then ask your business or work associates, friends, and even acquaintances. I have asked interesting people whom I have met and gotten to know - for example, I recently asked my barber if she was interested. (And she was.) Each of you talk to 10, 20 or more people every day. Certainly, one or two of them might really appreciate being asked, and may really enjoy being a member of your Lodge.

Second, if you don't know "what to say" you should ask yourself WHY you are an Odd Fellow. Why did you join in the first place, and why do you remain a member of your Lodge? The reasons that interest and engage you may very well interest and engage your prospective member. And I would suggest that the Lodges that are more active in the community and also plan more good fellowship events for members of the Lodge, provide a larger canvass of reasons for prospective members to join. No one wants to join a Lodge that is moribund, inactive or boring.

Third, we are all busy to a greater or lesser extent. That's a given. But if you are a member of your Lodge - at this point in our fraternal history there is no greater responsibility of membership than to increase our gene pool. Our Order is aging. And our Order is diminishing in membership. We cannot long survive without new members and new blood. And so, whatever else you may be doing in your Lodge - it must come second to your responsibility to bring in JUST ONE new applicant.

Dave Rosenberg
I recently received an e-mail from the Vice Grand of a Lodge from out of California. This member asks what I consider to be a very important and cogent question. Here is his e-mail (with certain personal identifying information deleted):

My name is ********** and I am the Vice Grand of ************. I really enjoy the blogs you post on the Davis Lodge website about how your lodge is growing and dealing with some of the changes that occur when an organization is growing.

I’m fortunate to say that our Lodge is also growing. We are initiating 6 new members on Wednesday night, and we welcomed 9 new members last year. For a town of 2000 people I think that’s pretty good. We are more visible in the community now and we give 100% of our donations back to the community instead of $20 here or there to a national association in the past. For increasing our visibility and hosting an annual open meeting has been a great way to attract new members.

I do have a question because I know as your membership demographic has gotten younger, and there is more of a work/family obligation outside of the Lodge. We had a discussion before one of our meetings about how we could make our meetings more time-effective. One suggestion was to not to spend 45mins going through the “what is your duty in the Lodge” portion of the Ritual and only do that monthly or quarterly, which would give us more time to plan community fundraisers and activities. To me Odd Fellows is about keeping the traditional aspect of the meetings, and increasing our goal of being there for our community.

I know if the Lodge decides this is something we should
explore further it’s a discussion we’ll have to ask our DDGM and Grand Lodge about, but I was just wondering if your Lodge has ever had a similar discussion and how you maybe got through it.

Keep up the great job on the website!

Reading about this growing Lodge is very encouraging. And you will note that one of the secrets of his Lodge's success is contained in his e-mail. That secret is reaching out into the community and being part of the community. For too long, too many of our Lodges have operated in secret, separate and apart from the community. That is ultimately a recipe for disaster, as it discourages new memberships. So I encourage his Lodge - and all Lodges - to open the windows and the doors of our Lodge Halls and reach out to the city, town, or village. Be involved in community activities, initiate your own community support activities, and reach out.

I replied to this Vice Grand and encouraged him to tell his Lodge about "social meetings." Such social meetings are perfectly permissible pursuant to our Code and are, in fact, encouraged by Sovereign Grand Lodge. I encourage them as well because they allow the Lodge to be opened, they demystify Odd Fellowship, they allow family members to attend, and they permit potential members from the community to attend. Lodges can have these social meetings at any time. The social meetings can be dinners, musical events, lectures, or simply meetings without the ritual opening and closing and without revealing the unwritten work. A Lodge can plan a social event at such a social meeting, subject to ratification at a later business meeting. Lots can be accomplished at these social meetings. Plus, they are relaxed, informal and fun.

But the significant part of a social meeting is the opportunity to expose the Lodge, the fraternal order, the members and their good
works to the community at large. There is hardly a better recruiting tool, as we seek to grow the membership of our Lodges and of this Order.

Dave Rosenberg

Because a number of Davis Odd Fellows wanted to take hikes, the Lodge formed a “Take a Hike” committee that plans hikes - almost every month - in locations throughout Northern California.
Dedicated Members for Change (DMC) was launched on December 13, 2010, as the brainchild of three active members of this Order: Don Smith (Past Sovereign Grand Master and Past Grand Master of California), Rick Boyles (currently Grand Master of California) and Dave Rosenberg (currently Grand Warden of California). The first newsletter was forwarded via e-mail to 39 brothers and sisters. The hope was to provide a big electronic tent for members of this Order, focusing on the decline of our membership and on ways and methods to increase membership and grow our Lodges. It's been almost three years since that launch, and I am pleased to say that our little electronic matrix has grown to hundreds of Dedicated Members for Change. And in that time we have not lost our focus - we are all about increasing membership in this Order.

Since the launch in December of 2010, we have published well over 100 DMC articles. The vast majority of these articles have been about our primary subjects: membership, membership and membership. The articles have discussed the statistics of decline, but more importantly, the articles have focused on practical techniques to bring new members into our Lodges and to retain existing members. I have heard from many brothers and sisters who have found these articles useful, and who have used them to begin to transform their Lodges. The Grand Master has determined that DMC is an important adjunct to the Order and has declared it to be an official committee of the Grand Lodge.

Now that we are approaching the three-year mark of DMC's existence, we felt it is important to preserve these DMC newsletters not only as historical writings, but also as a
compendium of practical ways and methods of membership development. The past DMC Newsletters are a great resource of information. Accordingly, the vast bulk of these newsletters are now available for you to access at any time. You can find these DMC Newsletters at the following website: www.davislodge.org. Once on the homepage just move your cursor toward the top of the page to the words ABOUT THE ODD FELLOWS and then click on the words DEDICATED MEMBERS FOR CHANGE. The historical articles will then pop up for your use. Feel free to share this information with your Lodge brothers and sisters, and other members in other Lodges.

And if you know anyone else who wishes to be added to our DMC e-mail matrix, just let me know. Any brother or sister is welcome, so long as they support the need to grow our membership. Just ask them if they wish to be added to the matrix and then send me their name and e-mail address.

Dave Rosenberg
Lost in the miasma of time is the derivation of our name: Odd Fellows.

There are many tales that have floated around over the years and centuries regarding that unique identification for our Order. Some have speculated that the name was coined because fraternal orders at the time tended to focus on a single profession, but "Odd Fellows" were a conglomeration of shipbuilders, clerks, barristers, farmers, and the like. Others have hypothesized that the name was actually meant to be derisive - suggested by competing fraternal orders. Still others have said that the name "Odd Fellows" was designated because the members of our fraternity gave freely of their time and energy to help people in need and, at the time in England, that was "odd". There are many stories surrounding the origins of our name. But no one knows for sure.

One thing is certain, however. The name "Odd Fellows" is unique - in fact, one would say "catchy".

And so I would suggest that we enjoy the name we have been given. I suggest we revel in it. And I propose that we display our name proudly and prominently - and have some fun with it. I think an effective use of our name can be a great adjunct to our efforts to interest people in our Order, and recruit new members to our Lodges.

What do I mean by all that?

Let me give you an example. My Davis Lodge has, for year, put on an Oktoberfest. But we don't call it Oktoberfest. Rather, we call
it Oddtoberfest. Last night our Lodge put on our annual Oddtoberfest - we had a great turnout, and in fact, one of the guests (a young man of 22) has already submitted his application to join our Lodge.

So, let's celebrate our "oddness".

If you schedule a meeting, set the start time for 7:01 p.m., rather than 7:00 p.m.

If you want to go on a hike, call it "Odd Hiking".

And why stop there? How about Odd Bowling, or Oddly-Brewed Beer, or the Odd Movie Series, or Odd Bunko Night. You get the idea.

As a fraternal order we are often engaged in some pretty serious and important business. But nothing says that we can't also have some fun.

Dave Rosenberg

The author, Judge Dave Rosenberg, in a rare moment of leisure.
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 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 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.

Dave Rosenberg
Did You Know That Our Fraternity Is Constantly Evolving?

October 20, 2013

Did you know that Odd Fellows first held their meetings in pubs and taverns, singing songs, eating food, and drinking ale?

Did you know that Odd Fellowship once excluded from membership all women, black men, Asian men, Native American men, and persons who were deaf or blind?

Did you know that once the only men who were permitted to join a Rebekah Lodge were men holding the Third Degree of Odd Fellowship?

Did you know that the first Lodges in North America were “self-instituted”, that is no Grand body authorized their formation?

Did you know that Sovereign Grand Masters were once known as Grand Sires?

Did you know that Odd Fellowship once had a “sign of distress” and an answer to that sign? And when the sign could be observed, the member in distress could use certain words, pronounced in full, to indicate distress.

Did you know that once upon a time when a member of the Order desired to be recognized as an Odd Fellow by another Member of the Order, he could give a secret “sign of recognition”? When both the sign and the answer were given, the members could advance to each other, shake hands and exchange the words “Are you looking for me?” and the response “For you.”
Did you know that in Odd Fellowship there was once a “warning sign” and a “sign of safety”, as well as a “sign of danger” that a member could use when conveying warning, danger or safety?

Did you know that the First Degree, the Second Degree and the Third Degree of Odd Fellowship once each had its own unique and secret grip?

Did you know that once Odd Fellows Lodges provided money to help support members who were out of work?

Did you know that at one time there were five Degrees obtainable by a member in a Lodge of Odd Fellows (not just four degrees that are presently available)?

Did you know that once two or three members of the Order could “black-ball” or prohibit new applicants from being initiated?

Did you know that consumption of alcohol was once always prohibited in Odd Fellows Lodges?

Did you know that the word “Independent” was not added to the name of Order of Odd Fellows until 1814?

Did you know that the ritual of our Degrees has been revised and re-written on numerous occasions since the 1800’s?

I offer this short summary of some changes in Odd Fellowship, for those members who don’t believe that this Order evolves and changes. Clearly, evolution is part and parcel of our history as an Order. We have, in fact, evolved, to fit our times. And we need to continue to evolve to meet the needs of the 21st Century – because, at bottom, it is men and women in the 21st Century that we have to attract to our Order.

Dave Rosenberg
About a week ago, I sent out a DMC Newsletter highlighting a significant number of changes that have taken place in Odd Fellowship over the centuries, decades and years. And there have certainly been a lot of them! Well, that one newsletter has generated a plethora of memories and reminiscences from some of our long-time members. Here is a sampling of the recollections and reflections:

Past Grand Master Gene Breeland writes: "There was a time when an applicant had to be under 55 years of age. It was part of the questioning on the application. The reason was the payment of death benefits."

Long time Odd Fellows Homes of California Board Member Jerry Worth muses: "Yes, I know most of these. I attended an Odd Fellow/Rebekah meeting (they had merged) in London in 1957 that was held over a bar, and served liquor. I was black-balled by the Napa Lodge for membership (transfer from San Mateo) around 1980. The Grand Master closed our monthly dances in San Mateo because we served liquor. And a good friend of mine could not sign the application to join the Junior Lodge because he was not of 'full white blood' (I convinced him no one cared and he joined anyway). He is still a member 60 years later. Many things may have been 'normal' for the times, but certainly are out of place several years later."

Grand Instructor Peter Sellars adds: "If I had time to sit down long enough, I could give you several more changes we have had over the years. Heck, just in the last 15 years, we removed the alter from the center of the floor, stopped giving the signs to the VG, and allowed alcohol to be served in a hall, changed..."
degrees to DVD's, universally (however, not codified) accepted DDGM's and NG's not knowing the Unwritten Work, women are now allowed to join Lodges, we have made numerous changes to our Roberts Code of California Laws which have given self-control to the Rebekahs (it wasn't this way before 1999)."

The history of Odd Fellowship is, in fact, a history of evolution and change to fit the times. Unquestionably, more evolution and change is needed to keep this Order vibrant and alive in the 21st Century.

Dave Rosenberg

A recent initiation of new members into Davis Lodge #169. Lea Rosenberg, Noble Grand, is standing near the middle of the photo with chain regalia. The Davis Lodge has so many applicants that it schedules two initiations every year.
Without naming names, I have attended a number of meetings at Lodges in California which conduct what I call "the 20-minute meeting". As much as we all like to attend short meetings, this is in reality, not a good thing for Odd Fellowship. Let me explain what I mean.

The typical 20-minute meeting includes about 7-8 minutes of a ritual opening, the reading of the minutes of the last meeting, a treasurer's report and the paying of one or two bills (usually a city bill and a power bill), no committee reports, no old business, no new business, a couple of "good of the order" comments, and a 4-minute ritual closing.

If this is the common fare of the Lodge, there is no way this Lodge can attract (or retain) new members and grow. This Lodge is on a slow train to nowhere.

What is wrong with the 20-minute meeting? Plenty. It shows that the Lodge is just treading water. NO committee reports. NO old business. NO new business. This Lodge has no activities planned for the members or for the community. Why would anyone apply to a Lodge such as this? And if someone applies, and starts attending such meetings, why would they remain a member? Do the members of this Lodge really believe that Odd Fellowship is only about opening and closing a meeting in form?

The 20-minute meeting will ultimately lead to the demise of this Lodge.

Dave Rosenberg
A few weeks ago, a long-time, quite traditional member of our Order told me, "I like new ideas." I think it was his way of saying that he is open to suggestions made by DMC which, to many, are perceived as "new ideas".

I took it as a compliment. But, in reality, I must say that the "new ideas" being espoused by DMC are really "old ideas".

DMC is, as you know, all about increasing membership in this Order. We simply can't continue to lose members at the rate we've been declining for the past 60-plus years. But DMC wants this Order to move into the future with a clear understanding and appreciation of our past. The "new ideas" are no more, nor less, than a re-dedication to what made Odd Fellowship the premier organization in the United States over a Century ago.

Let me explain what I mean.

There was a time in America when Odd Fellowship was the largest and most vibrant fraternal Order in the country. In towns all across the USA, the Odd Fellows Lodge Hall was the center of the community, both physically and in practice. Everybody who was anybody wanted to join this fraternal order. Lodges typically had hundreds of members, and scores of applicants every year. No one had to really seek out and recruit new members - those potential new members coveted joining the Lodge and there was never a dearth of applicants. Memberships included university professors, bank presidents, ranchers, mayors, judges, senators -
even Presidents of the United States. Odd Fellows marched through the streets in parades on holidays. Odd Fellows ran cemeteries, retirement communities, orphanages, and hospitals. Members of the Order were visible in the community, and Lodges actively supported community projects. Newspaper articles touted the good works of IOOF, and recognized members who were leaders in their towns.

Odd Fellowship was remarkably successful a Century ago because Lodges reached out into their communities and Odd Fellows were very visible in those communities.

But then Odd Fellowship turned inward. Lodges focused more on secret ritual, fancy regalia, grips and passwords - and focused less on the outside world. Odd Fellowship became all about "secrets" and less about "community." Ultimately, this inward focus may have pleased the members, but it was the beginning of a death spiral for the Order as it tended to exclude the public and thereby diminish applications for membership from the world outside. Odd Fellowship, in many communities, became invisible.

And so, when DMC talks about "new ideas", we are really talking about the "old ideas" of being active in our communities, reaching out to our towns, and engaging in good community projects and good community works. We are talking about getting outside of the four walls of our Lodges. We are talking about opening the windows and doors of Odd Fellowship to the outside world.

When we engage the public, the public will engage with us.

Dave Rosenberg
I became an Odd Fellow in 2004, and within a year I had realized that our Order is declining in membership at an alarming rate. This steady decline is a drum I have been beating ever since. In fact, that is the impetus to the formation of DMC. We are all about bringing attention to the decline, identifying reasons for it, and suggesting methods to reverse it.

At one time, Odd Fellowship was the largest fraternal order in the USA with over one million members. Since the end of World War II, our membership has declined year after year at an alarming rate - during that time, our membership has declined by over 90%. We lose Lodges every year - on average about four Lodges lose their charters every year. At present, we have less than 4,500 Odd Fellows in California, and if the rate of decline continues at the same pace, our Order will have less than 2,500 members within the decade (and, as you know, 2,500 members on the books, in reality, means about 1,000 "active" members). It is unsustainable.

But that is only part of the problem of declining membership.

Equally distressing is what occurs during the journey of decline. Lodges that lose members also lose the normal checks and balances that are required for a Lodge to be fiscally and legally solvent. For example, a Lodge with less than 20 members on the books probably reflects a Lodge that has only nine or ten members who are active. What sorts of problems will such a Lodge experience? For one thing, this Lodge will have difficulty making a quorum, and so meetings may be infrequent, or even non-existent. Another problem such a Lodge will experience is
that there are simply not sufficient members to fill elected or appointed offices. And so, this Lodge may see the same people in the same offices year after year, or alternatively, may see a small cadre of members playing musical chairs with the offices.

But the biggest single problem with a small and declining membership is that the Lodge will lack the normal checks and balances that a Lodge must have. Increasingly, such a small Lodge will fall under the thrall of one or two members. There may be no checks and balances as between the Secretary, Treasurer and Financial Secretary. There may only be a Finance Committee on paper, not in reality. And where are the Trustees who should control and manage the assets of the Lodge? When one or two members take over, those members know where all the records are kept and are the only ones with keys to all the doors and closets. Those one or two members might wind up paying themselves a "salary" or a "stipend" and may feel entitled to do so, with no control over the reason the money is paid or how much is paid. The Lodge can become their own private fiefdom, and they may justify their actions because they are "preserving" and "maintaining" the Lodge for the present and future. And who in the shrinking and dependent membership is left to say, "stop - you can't do that"?

No one.

So, it is important that Lodges approaching (or below) the 20-member mark make renewed efforts to bring in new members - this new blood will eventually lead to a robust membership of the many, not the control of the few (or the one). It won't be rectified overnight, but two or three new members in a small Lodge will make a huge difference over time. Simply put, we need to restore our system of Odd Fellows' checks and balances in all our Lodges. And in order to do that, we need to grow.

Dave Rosenberg
Statistics That Should Concern Us

November 11, 2013

Time for another journey down "Statistics Lane."

If you take a look at the journal identified as "Proceedings of the 161st Annual Session of the Grand Lodge of California" you will find some statistics that may point a bony finger to the future of Odd Fellowship in California.

The tally of Lodges in California shows that as of the start of 2013, there were 126 Lodges on the books in California. Total dues-paying membership of these Lodges was 4,404. Parenthetically, I note that at the high point, California boasted 58,820 Lodge members and hundreds of active Lodges.

Of these 126 Lodges that existed in California on January 1, 2013, the journal always prints the names and membership numbers of the 10 largest Lodges in California.

They are:

- California #1 ...................... 341
- Apollo #123 ...................... 296
- Yerba Buena #15 ............... 247
- Davis #169 ....................... 188
- Golden West #322 ............. 164
- Lodi #269 ......................... 120
- Vacaville #83 .................... 104
- Franco-American #207 .......... 96
- Santa Rosa #53 ................. 90
- Mt. Brow #82 .................... 88

The total membership of these 10 Lodges is 1,734.
These 10 Lodges make up only 8% of the 126 Lodges in California, yet the membership of these 10 Lodges makes up 40% of the total membership of this Order in California. That needs repeating: Just 8% of the Lodges make up 40% of the total membership.

Let's look at the statistics from the other direction as well. In analyzing the numbers of members of the 126 California Lodges, you will find that 71 of these Lodges have 25 or fewer members. In fact, if you drill down even further, you will find that 54 of our Lodges have 20 or fewer members. Drilling further, we find that 34 of our Lodges have 15 or fewer members.

So, 56% of the 126 Lodges in California - more than half - have 25 or fewer members listed on their books. And 42% of our California Lodges have 20 or fewer members. Finally, 27% - more than a quarter - of our Lodges have 15 or fewer members.

These statistics show ominous trends for our Order in this State.

First, the statistics show that, increasingly, the Order in California is devolving to fewer and fewer Lodges. If the trend continues, it is clear that within a decade, this Order will have (at best) only half the Lodges that it currently has. The trend will be toward fewer, larger Lodges.

Second, the statistics show an increasingly troubled Order as Lodges shrink through withdrawal, attrition, and death of members. Smaller and smaller Lodges present their own challenges as Lodge leadership diminishes to only one or two people, and the normal financial checks and balances start to disappear. Significantly, we all know that membership on the books does not translate into active membership in a Lodge. At best 50% of Lodge membership is "active." Accordingly, a Lodge with 15 or fewer members will almost certainly be a troubled Lodge. For example, a Lodge with 10 members probably means a Lodge with 5 active members. How does that Lodge get a quorum for meetings? How does that Lodge fill officer positions?
Can this Order take a different path? Of course it can. But the only way to change the trajectory of the Order is for Lodges - particularly the ones with 25 members or less - to increase their membership every year.

Will Lodges do so? I am not convinced that this will happen. It appears to me that through complacency many of our Lodges are "satisfied" or resigned to the status quo. To me, this is the height of selfishness. These Lodges want to keep their small world to themselves. They are comfortable the way things are during the lives of their current members. But they ignore the next generation and the future existence of their Lodge.

Why do I say this? Let me give you one example of Lodge complacency.

Recently, the Grand Lodge - through the Membership Committee and the leadership of Peter Sellars - developed a special grant program whereby Lodges could submit one or two page letters requesting a grant of up to $1,000 for a membership development program. The application was the height of simplicity. The membership development program chosen was completely up to the discretion (and imagination) of the Lodge. Every single one of the submitted grant requests was approved. BUT, only 9 Lodges in California took advantage of this $1,000 grant program. The other 117 Lodges submitted no grant request.

So, wake up, smell the coffee, and change the future. The first step is to bring in that first new member. Then the second. Then the third. And let's all work on preserving Friendship, Love and Truth for the next generation.

Dave Rosenberg
Time to dip into the "Old Mail Bag". I get a lot of feedback and responses from DMC members. That feedback and those responses include many suggestions for the future growth of Odd Fellowship, and also sometimes include the frustrations of Odd Fellows who see the results of a shrinking membership in their Lodge and in other Lodges. The opinions are diverse.

I thought you might enjoy a quick tiptoe through a few of these missives from DMC members and so I have re-printed a handful of them, below. Please note that what is expressed is the opinion of the writer, not necessarily the opinion of anyone else. I have also deleted the names of the writers and identifying information regarding the Lodge about which they are writing. I believe such confidentiality fosters a franker and fuller discussion.

Enjoy!

Dave Rosenberg

Dave,

If we all start practicing friendship, love, and truth, we will be halfway there to generating acceptance. However, we must think of these principles as more than words. Friendship, for example, should be unconditional. When we start to place limitations on extending the hand of friendship we have totally lost the true meaning. The idea that we only want new members who look and act like us then we are doomed. Unfortunately I know a member in my own lodges who position is so rock bound that he stopped coming to the Odd Fellow lodge and now only attends the
Rebekah meetings. His complaint is that those new members that have been brought into *********** don't think and act as Odd Fellows as he knows them. I explained to him at one time if we did not have these new members that we would be without a quorum on many occasions. His reply, "As far as I am concerned that would be acceptable". I don't have an answer to this situation except that this individual believes that he is right, and it is those who want change that are destroying the order. As for me, I will continue to recruit men and women of good character and good will.

~

Hi Dave,

While I enjoyed **********'s letter and appreciate his suggestions, I have to point out the obvious, even having a lovely, loving, and social lodge can't overcome the outdated and deadening ritual. In my lodge, members state that the boring antiquated ritual as the main reason for not attending meetings. What can be done about that?

~

Dave,

A quick status from **************. I read a couple of your newsletters to the group last night. We have established a committee to explore new ways of finding potential members who are a good fit and are interested in the three aspects (legs) IOOF has to offer. This will be a slow process but a necessary one which your visit catalyzed.

~

Dave,

I must agree that a lodge that is meeting for twenty minutes is doing nothing but entertaining its members. By that statement I mean that the meeting is just a prolog to the real event they came for, the "card game". This may hold the interest of the few that are coming for the bi-monthly poker game, but they are no longer an
Odd Fellow Lodge. They are now a card club with a ritualistic opening. When a lodge reaches such a position that their sole purpose is the twice a month card game or domino game they may be beyond recovery unless the Grand Master steps in and demands that they start meeting for the real purpose for which they were organized. This may require an audit to determine their use of funds, and if necessary a charter suspension pending a planned redirection. Harsh action but sometimes necessary.

Dave,

When a lodge has so few and older members it no longer has the ability to change in many cases. It is very hard to attract people to join an organization so tied to, let’s face it, silly rituals at every meeting and silly rituals to even being initiated. People join organizations to feel a sense of belonging, common interests and common cause. But how can a lodge with fewer than 20 members mostly over age 60 install activities to attract people? And even when this does occur, they are driven away by people who pull out the rule books, of which we have many, and use them as a weapon over members.

Some ritual is good but ours is too verbose, too Old Testament oriented and some just plain silly! My Lodge is controlled by "Mr. Rule Books" with disastrous results - a declining membership, especially in enthusiasm. I get very discouraged about how to encourage people to join. Oh well . . . .

Hi Dave,

Your last message hit home for me. I am an associate in one lodge in which there is a tacit agreement not to get new members and simply keep having dinner together and proforma meetings until the lodge shrinks through death. It is very saddening.
Dave,

My lodge ************* had shrunk to about [less than 10] members attending an average meeting with most members just coming for dinner and paying little attention to the functioning of the lodge. It had gotten to the point where two members began making decisions for the whole lodge, misleading and withholding information from the rest of the lodge and voting against new members joining. It finally got to the point when a rebellion occurred and those two members are now marginalized with a great deal of animosity and hurt feelings through the lodge.

~

Grand Warden Dave,

I believe the focus, as I have discovered, that the members grew the ideology that the "lodge is mine". I don't have to share it. Then, because they discovered that they did not plan their retirement well, the income from the lodge had the same ideology with a twist that the "money is mine". They forgot they have to pay it forward. Now they are dying out and so is the building. Unfortunately, there are members still today that are keeping the income for themselves. Along with, the new renters have discovered to become members to control the lodge and are not paying the rent to the lodge. They only pay the bills to keep the building in somewhat of a working condition. Therefore, there is no money to do the charity and community work. The members just don't want to go to the meetings because they get tired of fighting.
Ours is an ancient fraternal Order, with its origins clouded in the mists of 17th and 18th Century history. Our history is something of which we should be rightfully proud. But our historical artifacts should not make us relics in the 21st Century. Our odd traditions should be celebrated, but they should not be barriers to the entry of new young members into our Lodges. We want to turn on those new members, not turn them off.

Let me give you just one example of what I mean.

The ancient "command of our Order" is to "visit the sick, relieve the distressed, bury the dead, and educate the orphan." Historically, these were important admonitions in the development of Odd Fellowship. Keep in mind that our fraternity was born and emerged in a time of no government services or support. If you were poor and sick, there was no medical service or hospital for you. If you were in trouble and had no family support, you were on your own. If you were poor and died, you wound up in a pauper's grave. If the working man in the family died, there was no social network to take care of the widow and the orphan. So the Odd Fellows (and other fraternal orders) were born to fill those vacuums. Odd Fellows established hospitals to care for the sick. Odd Fellows Lodge members supported one another and Lodges would help members who were out of work by providing small stipends and helping them find a job, and Odd Fellows established homes for the aged. Odd Fellows established cemeteries. If a member passed away, Odd Fellows paid death benefits to the survivor. Odd Fellows set up orphanages throughout the country.

Now, fast-forward to the 21st Century. Odd Fellows hospitals
don't exist anymore. Odd Fellows Lodges today don't provide money to members out of work - there are government agencies to help folks find jobs and to re-train when needed. Very few Odd Fellows cemeteries remain, and most are in need of serious repair. Only a handful of Odd Fellows retirement communities exist anywhere in the USA, and they are all open to the general public. Only one Odd Fellows "orphanage" remains in this country (in California) - and it's not an orphanage any longer, but rather a place for foster children.

Times have certainly changed. Dramatically.

And yet, this Order continues to hang onto the ancient "command of our Order" to "visit the sick, relieve the distressed, bury the dead, and educate the orphan." How does this ancient command translate for the 20-year-old or the 30-year-old we are trying to recruit to join our Lodge? Not well, to be frank. We might as well be telling the prospective new member that one of our ancient commands is to "re-shoe your horse at least once a year."

"Educate the orphan" makes no sense to new member, simply because we don't have "orphans" in this country - having been replaced by the foster care system. Why don't we consider adjusting and modernizing the ancient admonition to focus on foster children, and recently emancipated foster children? "Bury the dead" is downright ghoulish for prospective new members. There certainly was a time in our history when the Odd Fellows did great community service by burying the dead (for example, after an epidemic). But that ancient admonition also needs to be modernized. There is, of course, nothing wrong with visiting the sick and relieving the distressed, but again, we need to focus on how that translates in the 21st Century.

We are an ancient Order and we need to be proud of our roots. But we are a modern Order - and we need to start living in the present.

Dave Rosenberg
Today, November 24, 2013, was the "Celebration of Life" for Don Smith, PSGM and PGM, at the Linden Fraternal Hall. Don was born on August 20, 1932, and died on November 9, 2013. Hundreds of his friends, neighbors, family, and fraternal brothers and sisters attended this lively and moving ceremony. I was privileged to be one of the speakers at the "Celebration of Life."

Here are the comments I made in remembrance of a life well lived.

Dave Rosenberg

Don Smith was my fraternity brother, my friend, and in many ways, my mentor in Odd Fellows. I first met Don in 2008. Don was a major figure in Odd Fellowship, having served as Grand Master of California at a very young age, and then having served as Sovereign Grand Master - a rare recognition in this Order for a person from California. I was a relatively new member in this Order, having only joined the Davis Lodge in 2004. But my Lodge was in trouble when I joined - losing members and diminishing to less than 40 members on our books - and I had found myself become Vice Grand and then Noble Grand in 2005 - only a year after I was initiated. Soon after I became Noble Grand, I realized that it was not only my Lodge - but Lodges throughout California that were in trouble and so I started instituting changes to reinvigorate and grow my Lodge.

Don had heard about some of our changes, and he asked if he (and a few of his Lodge mates) could come up to Davis to attend one of our breakfast meetings. He did so in November of 2008,
and then wrote an e-mail to me. I would like to share two paragraphs of that e-mail with you: "We really enjoyed attending your meeting, and the breakfast was excellent. The meeting reminded me of Scio Lodge #102 about 12 to 15 years ago. I understand that there were many public officials and several office holders present for your meeting. Back in the 1990s we had plenty of activities and included in our active membership were our County Supervisor, six of the seven town council members, half a dozen of our Chamber of Commerce Directors, and others.

Other members of Scio Lodge at that time were our District Attorney, County Sheriff, superintendent of schools, etc. During this period Scio Lodge was the largest lodge in the county and the tenth largest lodge in California. Today we are the second largest lodge in the county (more than 50 members) with the Lodi lodge taking over the number one spot in San Joaquin County. Back then we also gave the Lions Club a run for its money as far as activities and membership, but now the Lions have more than 200 members and it is the 10th largest Lions Club in the United States. Linden has a population of about 2,000, so many of the Odd Fellows and Lions came from the greater Stockton area. During this period Scio Lodge sponsored a Crab Feed for up to 1,000 persons with nearly every judge in the county attending along with most public officials in the county.

One of our members, Andy Guy, was chairman of the California Judicial Review Board (I believe that is what it was called). Andy has since passed away as has the brother that owned the barn where we held the crab feed. One year the governor of California attended one of our crab feeds, which was a complete sell out every year with several hundred on a waiting list to obtain tickets that seldom were available. We charged between $32 and $40 for tickets over the years, and we were able to sponsor many community service projects in our area including the purchase of a car for the County Sheriff’s STAR program.”
Don went on to write the following: "Anyone being realistic understands that Odd Fellowship needs to make some major changes if the Order is going to survive. You have demonstrated this fact in Davis, and the fraternity needs to wake up and be willing to make these changes or we will be out of existence except for a small number of lodges that have a lot of assets. The traditional Odd Fellows Lodge, following the ritualistic ceremonies, is a thing of the past. Very few lodges exist that can conduct the degree and ritualistic ceremonies as they were performed years ago. A few lodges exist that take great pride in conferring degrees, but that is the exception."

Don was a man of vision and great influence in this Order. He was, as I said, a mentor to me. Don convinced me to run for and serve on the Odd Fellows Homes of California Board of Directors, and I had the great privilege of serving with Don as a member of that Board for many years. Don took great pride in the work of the Board, and in the fine homes this Order owns in Saratoga and Napa. He felt that our homes were among the best - perhaps the best - endeavors and assets of our Order. Don was also the man who encouraged me to run for election as Grand Warden of California.

I did so, and much to my surprise - but not to Don's - I was elected and I currently serve as Grand Warden. But I would say that my most memorable engagement with Don Smith occurred on December 13, 2010, when Don Smith, Rick Boyles (the current Grand Master of California), and I formed an internal group within our Order. Don actually came up with the name - Dedicated Members for Change.

The purpose of our group - starting with just us three - was to re-focus this Order on just three things: Membership, membership, membership. The three of us understood that our fraternity had been losing members for over 60 years - in fact, had diminished more than 90% in membership - and that this was simply
unsustainable. Our group wanted to refocus the Order on the need to evolve and change to attract and retain members in the 21st Century. I am delighted to say that Don’s vision for the Order is flourishing - as perhaps his greatest legacy. Our Dedicated Members for Change (DMC as it is known) has grown from 3 members to hundreds - from California, Oregon, Washington, Oklahoma, around the country and around the world.

Don Smith was loved and respected and he will be missed, not only by his beloved wife, Darlene - his constant companion, adviser, and supporter - his family, his Lodge brothers and sisters, members of this Order who knew him personally or by reputation - but also by me - his friend. He was a man of vision. And he was a man who made a difference during his time on this earth.
I receive e-mails from members of our great fraternal Order from throughout the nation and the world. They are all interesting. Some are quite revealing. I share, below, a recent e-mail I received from an Odd Fellow. I have deleted the Odd Fellow's name, Lodge and any other information which might reveal his/her identity.

I publish this member's e-mail because it makes an important statement. If you recognize YOUR Lodge in this description, please make a note. Long-time members of a Lodge are not all-knowing and all-seeing, nor are they always right. New members of a Lodge must be given a chance to bring new ideas into the mix. If long-time members always say "no", or "that's not going to work", or "that's a dumb idea", or words to that effect the result is that new members get turned-off and tune out.

If you want to recruit and retain new blood into your Lodge, then welcome them, let them develop new ideas and projects, and let them spread their wings.

If you want to become an "Old Man's Retirement Lodge" or a "Last Man Club", then just keep saying "no".

Dave Rosenberg

Hello Dave,

I was cc'ed on a recent email exchange between you and another member of my lodge. At this time I don't really want to confront
anyone on this subject, but I feel that the focus is in the wrong place. However, I feel that my story and perspective might give you a window into what, in my opinion, is a major problem with our recruitment and retention strategy.

When I joined just a few years ago I was the youngest member by at least a generation, and since I've helped to draw in over 10 people around my age (late thirties) and younger. Last term I became an elected officer of my lodge, a proud moment, but the feeling didn't last. I haven't been to a meeting in many months. I wish I could say I'm the only younger person feeling this way, but I was one of the only hold outs.

Young people feel that they don't have a voice. This goes for the world at large as well as in our lodges. It was rather disheartening to watch friends drop away. Their desires for the lodge's direction seemed irrelevant, and their proposed social events were looked upon with suspicion. Adherence to Robert's Rules of Order were rarely observed, so one comment from the Noble Grand such as "No. I don't think that's a good idea." was enough to sidetrack a legitimate motion away from debate and voting. The rules stood for nothing, and they were ignored. No one wants to be where they're not wanted, so they left.

On ritual, some things can and should be streamlined or evolved, but this often leads to complete disregard for inclusion of dissident voices. The Odd Fellow goes right back to being the Old Fellows, and that, in my opinion, will lead to NO FELLOWS.

One can only hope things become more inclusive in the future.

In Friendship, Love, and Truth,

(Member's Name Deleted)
Can you believe it's already December? Where has the year gone?

Seems like when we were really young, time moved so slowly. And now, as age creeps up on us, time seems to move very fast. So, in this regard, I want to pass along to you an inspirational (perhaps, motivational) quote for the day, that was sent to me by PGM Gene Breeland. Here it is:

"You've been given the innate power to shape your life . . . but you cannot speak change, you have to LIVE change. Intent paired with action builds the bridge to success. You can't just want it; you have to do it, live it . . . BE it. Success isn't something you have, it's something you DO!"

From my perspective, these words are certainly true.

"You cannot speak change, you have to LIVE change." For this Order to succeed, this Order must evolve. We ain't your grandfather's Lodge anymore. New members will not be attracted to a Lodge that does little more than hold ritual meetings. Those new members certainly won't stay with such a moribund Lodge. So, DMC urges Lodges to open the doors and windows of the Lodge to your community, reach out and be active in that community to support those in need and to improve your towns and neighborhoods. When a Lodge is part of the community, you will find that community members want to be part of the Lodge. "You cannot speak change, you have to LIVE change."

Dave Rosenberg
Ask the proverbial "man or woman on the street" about the Odd Fellows and you are likely to get one of two reactions: (1) A blank look, or (2) "Aren't those the guys that wear those funny collars and the women that walk around in those long dresses?"

Ask that same "man or woman on the street" about the Shriners and you are likely to get one of the following responses: (2) "Aren't those the folks that run those burn hospitals for children?" (2) "Don't they wear fezzes and drive around in those mini cars during parades?"

Contemplate, for a moment, why you are likely to get these disparate responses about two different fraternal organizations.

Here's my theory.

Both are fraternal organizations and both have an "image" in the public eye (See Response #2). But, substantively, the image of what they do and who they are is quite different (See Response #1).

Why?

I believe it's because the Shriners have FOCUSED all their energies and attention on one, and only one, major project. The operation of burn hospitals for children is the signature project of the Shriners. They are identified with the hospitals for children and that is the image - a very good one - in the public eye.

Now let's look at the Odd Fellows. Nationally, we are NOT
FOCUSED on a signature project. We have, over the years, jumped into whatever project happened to appeal to a particular Sovereign Grand Master or a particular gathering of the Sovereign Grand Lodge. So, Odd Fellows are all over the park in terms of projects and ventures. To mention just a few - the Educational Foundation, Visual Research, S.O.S. Village, U.N.E.P. (United Nations Educational Pilgrimage), Pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, etc., etc. Now, don't get me wrong. ALL of these are worthy and important projects. But the fact that we have so many and so disparate projects working at the same time diffuses the attention of the public on Odd Fellowship.

It's all about "image" of our Order in the public eye. Because, ultimately, it is the "public" that is our source of new applicants and new members.

Dave Rosenberg

The Davis Lodge often schedules music shows, dances, or parties for the members, family, friends and applicants for membership. It’s OK to have some fun at the Lodge. Here are three Davis Lodge members enjoying a quiet moment during the Grand Master’s Grand Ball, held in 2013.
In December of 2010, a few of us launched "Dedicated Members for Change" (DMC) as a vehicle to focus attention on the serious decline in our Order's membership, and as a forum to bring out ideas and methods to reverse that trend. We have come a long way since then. DMC's e-mail matrix has grown dramatically, leadership of the Grand Lodge is focused on membership development (with particular kudos to Peter Sellars - Membership Chair), the Grand Master has recognized DMC as a committee, we have held well-attended DMC dinner meetings at the last three Grand Lodge sessions, we have put forth numerous suggestions to encourage Lodge growth, and most importantly - Lodges are implementing these methods to evolve and grow. We are making a difference.

To commemorate DMC's anniversary and three years of active work (and the beginning of our fourth year), we have been re-publishing some of the "classic DMC Newsletters" of the past - and we will continue to do so for the next few days. Here is one of the past DMC articles from February 25, 2012.

Dave Rosenberg

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Words I Would Rather Not Hear in the Lodge

By Dave Rosenberg

When I first joined this great order eight years ago, I remember attending Lodge meetings where we could barely muster 10
members. The members who attended were 6 or 7 of the "old-timers" (long-time members of the Order who were in their 70's and 80's), 1 or 2 "journeymen" (members who had about 3 or 4 years of membership under their belts), and a handful of us "newcomers" (newly initiated members who, in reality, had limited knowledge of the Order).

I have distinct memories of those early days. At the time, the Lodge, basically, did little more than have formal meetings twice each month, considered donating relatively small amounts of money to local charities and causes (e.g. $25 to the local boy scouts) and to Odd Fellows charities ($50 to the Children's Home), and spend about 6 months in planning a spaghetti dinner. I also have memories of us newcomers - fresh and shiny - suggesting all sorts of things at the meetings, primarily under the "new business" agenda. However, the clearest memories of these early days are the memories of the words spoken by the old-time members each and every time one of us new members made a suggestion.

You may have heard words like these in your own Lodges.

Here are the words that were spoken by the old-time members in response to the new members' suggestions:

"We can't do that."

"That's against the Code."

"We tried that before - it doesn't work."

"That's not the way it's done."

"That's a stupid idea."

Can you imagine how discouraging (insulting even) these words
are to a newcomer? Some of our new members, after hearing the negative and dismissive attitudes, simply never came back to meetings and quietly left the Order, soon after initiation. But, fortunately, I never did - and others hung in there as well. And, to be fair, we had one of the old-timers who had the courage to stand up to his colleagues, and push back a bit - giving the Order's new blood the opportunity to make suggestions, discuss ideas, plan things, make some mistakes, and actually change the way the Lodge functioned. Our Lodge became active, and that attracted new members. And eventually, the old-timers stopped being so negative.

So the moral of this little story is that if you hear words spoken like those above, push back a little. No idea is stupid. Just because it's never been done, doesn't mean it shouldn't be tried. Even though it's been done a certain way in the past, doesn't mean that this is the best way. Merely because it's been tried in the past and failed, there is no law that says it can't be tried again in the future. And just because someone says "it's against the Code" doesn't mean that it is - one should actually check the Code to see.

Let's resolve to be more positive and supportive in our Lodge meetings, not so negative and dismissive.
We are celebrating the third anniversary (and the start of our fourth year) of "Dedicated Members for Change" by re-publishing some of the classic newsletters of the past. Today, we are re-publish the February 13, 2012 newsletter.

Dave Rosenberg

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Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

As you know, Dedicated Members for Change is focused on one thing, and one thing alone: Bringing new members into the Order. This is a goal around which ALL of us in Odd Fellows should rally. The biggest single challenge faced by our Order (and, frankly, faced by all fraternal orders in the nation) is the decline of membership. Declining membership affects everything we do. In Odd Fellows, our membership nationwide has declined steadily since World War II and is today only 10% of what it was during the 1940's. Obviously, such a decline cannot continue, and inevitably will lead to the diminution and death of our ancient Order. So, DMC is all about bringing in new members to rejuvenate, rehabilitate, and renew this fraternity! To do that, we need to refocus, recharge, and refresh the way we do business.

This last Saturday, my Lodge (Davis #169) voted to admit 14 new members - and we have scheduled the initiation for these 14 in March. To put this into perspective, there are some 40 Lodges in our California which have fewer than 14 members. And here we
have one Lodge which will admitting 14 at one time. And to put it in further perspective, our Lodge already has 16 applicants for the next group of potential new members - scheduled for initiation in the Fall. How do we do it? And who are these 30 prospective members?

We do it with a relatively simple formula based on three things.

First, we don't make it easy on the prospective new members. We don't admit new members soon after they submit applications. We make them go through a "pledge process" that takes about six months. During this pledge period, they learn about us, we learn about them, and most importantly, they learn about our unique Order. During the process, we have them print out a "pledge book" from our website (you can find it at www.davisoddfellows.com - the pledge book is on the home page, under "downloads"). The pledge book provides useful background information on Odd Fellowship. The pledges are each given a "mentor" who is not their sponsor, and who acts as a big brother or big sister, introducing them to others and answering their questions. The pledges are required to meet and interview a minimum of 13 of our members, and to attend a minimum of 8 of our social meetings and Lodge events. We encourage pledges to join and participate in our committees, planning events for the Lodge and the community. To join our fraternity, the applicants have to earn it.

Second, we focus on community and charitable works. We have found that one of the reasons that new members are attracted to our Lodge is because we actively support the community. So, our Lodge has committees that reach out into the community. We do good works and we are highly visible. We run Bingo games every month, each of which benefits a community group. We organize Breakfast with Santa and also Breakfast with the Bunny for the children and families of our town. We have a Helping Seniors Committee which helps frail seniors with projects in their homes;
a Social Services Committee which works with persons with mental health issues, a Planting Trees Committee which plants trees throughout the town, a Community Support Committee which co-hosts events to benefit community and charitable groups. We have a Music and Concerts Committee that puts on monthly music venues at our Lodge for the benefit of musicians and the community, and so on. Helping others is a big draw to our new members. Our members don't just sit within the four walls of our Lodge.

Third, we have a good time together as a fraternity. We have found that people also join our Lodge because we provide a social network for our members. So, we have committees that organize wine trips, bicycle trips, movie nights and game nights at the Lodge, hikes, wine tasting, and the like. We hold an annual OddtoberFest at the Lodge, as well as an annual St. Patrick's Day Party, and an annual Halloween Party. This year, we may start a new tradition with an annual New Year's Eve Party. We have monthly social breakfast meetings. Our last breakfast was attended by over 100 Lodge members and pledges. We have a weekly informal "Lodge Night" where members come by the Lodge to enjoy food, drink and each others' company. We should never forget that our fraternity was founded in the pubs of England.

Our 30 prospective new members include an almost equal number of men and women. They range in age from 16 to 60 - but most are in their 20's, 30's and 40's. There are a number of husbands and wives in the group. All ethnic groups are represented. We have the county sheriff, a physician and surgeon, a retail sales worker, a construction manager, a stay-at-home dad, a lawyer, a high school student, the deputy commissioner of the CHP, a judge, a music teacher and musician, a marriage and family therapist, a winemaker, a homemaker and knitter, a budget and finance assistant, a prep cook, an accountant, a graduate student, a brew master, a real estate broker, a bartender, a public
health worker, a security guard, a university professor, the owner of a yoghurt shop, a real estate appraiser, etc. In short, a microcosm of our community.

In the 19th Century and the early part of the 20th Century, Odd Fellowship was the place to be. We can be that place again in the 21st Century.

Dave Rosenberg
DMC began on December 10, 2010, as the brainchild of Don Smith, Rick Boyles and me. The goal of DMC - then and now - was to focus on our declining membership and to offer suggestions for reversing the tide and growing this Order. In celebration of our third year (and the beginning of the fourth year) of DMC, we are re-publishing some of the articles from past newsletters. Today, we look at an article that appeared on August 18, 2012.

Dave Rosenberg

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Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Since Odd Fellowship was founded in Merry Olde England in the 1700's, it appears to me to have undergone at least nine dramatic changes in its history. We learn about our future by understanding our past, and so I think it would be useful to travel down the historical path of this great Order.

1. Odd Fellows started when working men of different trades met in the pubs of England. The earliest printed record stems from 1748 where "Odd Fellows" met in the Globe Tavern in England. I'm reasonably confident that drinking ale was a major part of these social gatherings. There is also evidence that our fraternal Order was linked to the "Ancient Order of Bucks", and its symbol of three bucks with antlers intertwined. These men were led by a "Most Noble Grand" and also met in taverns.
2. Odd Fellows were not the only fraternal order in England - in fact, there were dozens of them. And most of them evolved into what was known as "friendly societies". Before social security and unemployment insurance and health care subsidized by employers, folks in England were pretty much on their own. In stepped Odd Fellows (and other fraternal orders) to help members who were sick or in distress, to educate orphans of members who died, and to bury members in Odd Fellows cemeteries. Odd Fellows Lodges were the social fabric (in lieu of government) which helped members and their families. In large measure, this is why Odd Fellows developed secret grips, signs and passwords - only by such secrets could one Odd Fellows Lodge know that it was helping a true Odd Fellow, as opposed to someone who was passing himself off as an Odd Fellow simply to receive financial or other assistance.

3. And then for a time, Odd Fellows and other friendly societies were suppressed by government in England.

4. But eventually, these fraternal organization became prevalent, and the suppression ceased. Odd Fellowship was revived in 1803 by an organization called "London Union of Odd Fellows" which, in turn, morphed into "The Grand Lodge of England" which assumed control over all Odd Fellows Lodges in England.

5. But not all Odd Fellows Lodges in England were happy with that. In 1809 Victory Lodge in Manchester declared itself independent of the Grand Lodge of England. And in 1814 the six Lodges in Manchester met and joined together as the "Manchester Unity of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows" and proceeded to elect officers and "standardize" the degree work.

6. Odd Fellowship came to the United States in 1806, but it wasn’t until 1819 that Odd Fellowship in America took off like a rocket
with the work of Thomas Wildey. He and a handful of others "self-instituted" an Odd Fellows Lodge called Washington Lodge #1 in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1820, they received a charter through an English Lodge, and then Odd Fellowship - through the work of Wildey - rapidly expanded across the country.

7. In 1834, Odd Fellowship in America became independent of the Order in England.

8. In the middle of the 1800's, Odd Fellowship became the first fraternal order to open its doors to women with the formation of the Rebekah Lodge; and in the late 20th Century, membership in Odd Fellows Lodges were opened to women and in Rebekah Lodges were opened to men.

9. And in 1869, a California Lodge (Templar Lodge #15 in San Francisco) helped to establish a Lodge in Germany (Wuertemberg Lodge #1 in Stuttgart), and from there Odd Fellowship traveled world-wide.

Frankly, the history of Odd Fellowship is a history of change. Why should it be any different today? In fact, I suggest that Odd Fellowship is in the midst of another historical change in its personality - the tenth change, if you will. Sometimes it is difficult to discern change when you are in the midst of it. And I assure you that change (evolution) is happening right now. Both Grand Lodge and Sovereign Grand Lodge recognize that Odd Fellowship - to survive in the 21st Century - must evolve. This evolution must open Lodges up to the public. We have simply got to be more visible in our communities. This means more community outreach, involvement and support. This means inviting the public into our Lodges in social meetings and social events. This does not mean revealing the secrets of the Lodge. But it does mean becoming an active part of the communities in which we live. If we do so, we will attract the young blood of new members which
we need so that the Order can flourish.

If we fail to leave the four walls of our Lodges, those walls will become the coffins of our Order.

Dave Rosenberg
Just when I have adjusted to writing "2013" I now have to adjust, again, to writing "2014." Happy New Year to one and all.

Do you still make New Year's Resolutions? If so, put this one on your list: I resolve to bring in at least one new applicant to my Lodge.

Sounds like a simple resolution. But, you know, if each and every one of us in this Order made that resolution, and actually kept it, we would have absolutely no issue with declining membership. We would reverse the 66-year trend of losses in just one year. Yes, it's true. In one year, our membership would add thousands of new members and (deducting the normal losses of members due to deaths and withdrawals) would virtually double in size.

So, why doesn't this happen? Adding new members is, without question, the single greatest challenge facing this Order. The declining membership is a problem in and of itself, but it spawns all sorts of other problems for Lodges and for the Order - including lack of financial checks and balances, self-dealing by members, loss of property, etc. So again, why doesn't this happen?

I've contemplated this dilemma and have determined that the failure to bring in new members is the result of three reasons. Here are the terrible three:

1. Inertia and ennui. Most members figure that bringing in new members is not their problem, their issue, or their responsibility. If they think about it at all, they figure someone else in the Lodge will do it.
2. Design and control. There are members out there who don't wish to bring in new members and don't want their Lodge to grow. Even though the aging of their Lodge is a significant problem, they are happy with their Lodge just the way it is and want it to remain that way until they pass away. Sometimes, these members are the ones who run everything and control everything in the Lodge. Adding new members, in their minds, runs the risk of loss of control and of changing that "old gang of mine."

3. The empty vessel. And, finally, some Lodges have diminished to such an extent that virtually nothing remains to attract new blood. If the Lodge is composed of grandfathers and grandmothers, does no community work, and only holds monthly ritual meetings with an occasional potluck, what could possibly attract a new applicant to join this "moribund society of the three links".

If you recognize your Lodge in the listing above, it's long overdue time to snap out of the torpor. The future of your Lodge and of this Order depend on us - each of us - pulling our own oar. As I have said many times: Growing this Order is not something that Sovereign Grand Lodge or Grand Lodge can accomplish. Ultimately, it is the job of each Odd Fellow, working within his or her Lodge, to bring in new members and save this Order for future generations.

Dave Rosenberg
Happy New Year to one and all.

There is an interesting poll circulating around the nation right now about evolution. It appears that 2 out of 3 Americans believes in evolution of the human species and other living things.

Frankly, all things evolve over time, whether they are living organisms or not. Even rocks change over time. Certainly, institutions and organizations change as well. Change is everywhere. Television has changed. Cars have changed. Clothing and fashion has changed. Our eating habits have changed. The US Government today is quite different than it was in a prior decade or prior century. Religious institutions today are not the same as they were in past years. Your electronic gadgets are changing almost weekly.

Why should it be any different for the Independent Order of Odd Fellows?

Indeed, Odd Fellowship has changed over the years. We used to operate retirement homes only open to members of the Order who would work for their keep. Today, Odd Fellowship runs only a handful of retirement communities and they are open to all. We used to operate orphanages in every state. Today, Odd Fellowship operates only one home - and it’s not an orphanage, but rather a home for foster children. We used to bar women and minorities from membership in Odd Fellows Lodges. Today, those Lodges are open to all.
Yet, today, there are still Lodges that do not accept evolution and change, and cling to a way of thinking that is mired in a prior century. For example, we still have Lodges that do not have female members. When women comprise 50 per cent of our population, this attitude is inappropriate, at best, and certainly unsustainable.

To survive in the 21st Century, our Order and our Lodges need to embrace evolution, not ignore it or shun it. We need to open our Lodges and our meetings. We need to reach out into our communities with projects that will enhance those communities, and give our members pride in being Odd Fellows. We need to provide an active social life within the Lodge, because without a little fun we lose the fellowship and friendship that Odd Fellows purports to espouse - plus we become boring. Evolving to fit our times, while retaining the important principles that make us uniquely Odd Fellows, is the secret of success for our Order going forward.

Dave Rosenberg
From time to time I hear from Odd Fellows who tell me that they want to bring new members into their Lodge, but they don't know HOW to do it.

Fair enough. If the spirit is willing, that's half the battle. The other half is about the method.

Accordingly, today's DMC article is all about a proven method of bringing new members into a Lodge. I am going to relate to you the method that I use. I do so because this method has proven, time and again, to be successful for me and for my Lodge. In March of 2014, I will have been a member of this Order for 10 years. In that time, I have sponsored and brought into my Lodge well over 100 new members. This averages over 10 new members per year. In past years, I have been recognized by Sovereign Grand Lodge as #1 in North America for new members initiated into IOOF. I mention all this not to toot my horn, but only to assure you that I have bona fides when I talk about the method for bringing new members into our fraternity.

So, without further ado, here is the "method" that has worked for me, and I believe will work for you:

1. **Be aware.** It all begins with awareness. At bottom, you have to be aware - at all times - of the possibility that the person you are speaking with is a potential new member. This person could be a neighbor, a business associate, the plumber that fixes your sink, the fellow who sells you a car, etc. If you remain
aware, and you find that the person you are speaking to might be a potential new member of your Lodge, then you can - in the course of your conversation - start talking about Odd Fellowship and about your Lodge. I also find that the best times to talk about these things is if you are engaged in a Lodge community project or a Lodge function open to the public. Obviously, if your Lodge does not engage in community projects or functions open to the public, you lose out on an important venue for recruitment. And as I have said many times, bringing in new members is a task for all of us - and that means YOU. Don't just depend on "the other guy" to bring in that new member. YOU have to do your share as well. Simply put: If each of us brought in one new member each year, our Order would have absolutely no problem in diminishing membership.

2. **Be ready.** I always have application forms with me, or at least close by (e.g. in the glove box of my car) in case a person I am speaking with desires to take the next step. I always take their e-mail address so I can send them more information. I keep on my computer a form e-mail that I can send to potential new members (which I tweak each time, targeted to the person to whom I am writing). This form e-mail tells the person about the Order, about my Lodge, about the activities we engage in, and about the process of joining. If your Lodge has a good website, all the better - you can refer them to the website for more information about your Lodge. Again, if your Lodge has no community or Lodge activities, and no website, you lose significant tools for recruiting.

3. **Be active.** I want to be very frank on this point. All your efforts to "be aware" and to "be ready" will be next to useless, I'm afraid, if your Lodge is not active. Virtually no one joins Odd Fellowship in this day and age because the Order supports arthritis research, or because we have a float in the Rose Bowl Parade, or because we have a secret grip, password and signs. People in the 21st Century don't want to join a Lodge because
the men wear tuxedos and the women wear long dresses with corsages. People in the 21st Century, particularly young people, are interested in joining a Lodge because it provides a fun social network for them and because the Lodge engages in good and important community and works. If your Lodge is, essentially, a moribund group of septuagenarians and octogenarians that simply holds closed and secret meetings with a monthly potluck featuring overcooked spaghetti and lime jello - well, no one really wants to join such an organization. So, kick your Lodge into another gear if you really want to grow. My personal efforts in my first three years of membership in my Lodge were to re-focus my Lodge on social activities for Lodge members and outreach into our community with projects meant to help people and the environment. And I found that every time we had a function and every time we engaged in a community project, there were community members who wanted to learn more about the Lodge and ultimately, were interested in joining.

4. **Be patient.** This process of reforming a Lodge takes time. It doesn't happen overnight. So you must learn some patience. And that patience applies to potential new members as well. Some Lodges immediately initiate new applicants. I find that this is generally, a mistake. New applicants get initiated and then wonder what in the world they got themselves into. Sometimes, they attend one meeting and then are not seen again. And sometimes, they turn out to be weak members. Remember, it's not just quantity that we seek. It's quality. My Lodge does it differently. We make new applicants go through a six-month "pledge period" before we vote on their application. During this time, they learn about us and we learn about them. We have a significant number of events and social meetings that the pledges attend. It's a helpful process for them, and for the Lodge. Many don't make it through the process. But the ones who do are better members for it.

Dave Rosenberg
Today, I would like to talk about "Quaint Historical Relics". Odd Fellowship, as you know, has many of them.

Today's quaint historical relic can be found on the back of the "official certificate" of the Encampment. The "official certificate" is just the Odd Fellow's way of saying "membership card." Parenthetically, the membership cards used by Odd Fellowship, in all it's branches, is itself a quaint historical relic. Rather than having them computer generated, the cards are only available in hard-copy and are painstakingly hand-written. Plus, they are so small that the type is virtually invisible. A magnifying glass is needed to read some of the 2-point type. But, I digress.

Today's quaint historical relic is printed on the back of the Encampment membership card. Found there is the "telegraphic cipher and key". Now, if you were to ask potential new members of the Order in their teens, 20's and 30's, I imagine very few would know what a telegraph or a cipher is. Telegraphs and telegrams were used extensively a century ago. Yet, being outmoded or superseded has never stopped Odd Fellows. There, on the back of the card is the telegraphic cipher and the key to it's interpretation.

The cipher and key harkens back to a time (in the late 1800's and early 1900's, I imagine) when telegraphs and telegrams were the major method of communication, and when Odd Fellows would travel from town to town and community to community in search of work. Sometimes, Odd Fellows in the new town or community would help the traveling Odd Fellow with work or housing or money. Sometimes, the traveling Odd Fellow would become ill or
pass away. And sometimes, the traveling Odd Fellow was not an Odd Fellow at all - but rather a charlatan who tried to get some free food, housing or money. Hence, the telegraphic cipher and key. Odd Fellows Lodges used telegraphic codes to communicate with each other about these travelers. Let me give you some examples from the back of the membership card.

"Black" - If that cipher was telegraphed, it meant: "He is a fraud, and if he has a card or other papers from this lodge, they are forgeries."

"Boat" - That means: "He is an expelled member, and has not been in good standing for ______."

"Doubt" - "Identity in doubt. Wire description."

"Green" - "Wire instructions to us at once as to the disposition of his remains."

"Help" - "Will your lodge pay nurse hire, and how much per day?"

"House" - "Is in our city, holding a visiting card from your lodge and asking of us financial assistance."

"Secretary" - "He has a fraudulent card."

"White" - "We don't know of any such party, and he does not belong to our lodge."

"Yellow" - "Is in our city and very sick. Claims membership in your lodge. Shall we give him attendance on your account."

These and other ciphers and keys are contained on the back of the Encampment membership card - holdovers from another time and another age. Yet Odd Fellows has not caught up to the 21st Century. Other examples abound. Odd Fellowship still uses
hard-copy application forms. In fact, the forms use slick paper so that if the wrong pen is used, the writing will smear. Odd Fellows still requires annual reports to be painstakingly filled out by hand. Most Odd Fellows Lodges still distribute their newsletters in printed form, mailed to the members.

But change is coming. Here’s a positive example of that change: For the past 161 years, voting at Grand Lodge sessions has been a slow and laborious process, subject to human error, of counting votes by hand. At the 2013 Grand Lodge Sessions, I (as the newly elected Grand Warden) suggested that we revise our voting methodology and use electronic voting. Newly elected Grand Master Rick Boyles enthusiastically supported the concept and I am delighted to note that the Grand Lodge Board of Directors, unanimously, approved electronic voting. And the 2014 Grand Lodge Sessions (the 162nd such session) will - for the first time in our Order’s history - have such electronic voting. The voting will be swift and accurate, and instantly displayed for the session. This sort of movement into the 21st Century is a healthy sign for this Order, and long overdue.

Dave Rosenberg

A Taste of Davis has become a premier community function of the Davis Odd Fellows Lodge. Over 25 local restaurants, wineries and breweries provide their wares for sampling, and hundreds of local residents come through the Lodge.
Recently, Grand Master Rick Boyles wrote an article which laid out the ultimate differences between successful Lodges and failing Lodges.

A few days later, I received an e-mail from a member of our Order who, I had always considered, came from a more "conservative" perspective of Odd Fellowship. This member, whom I highly respect, is on in years and had achieved high station and high office in his Lodge and in the statewide Order. Here is what he wrote:

Rick is right on. I agree 100%! A lodge that is without heart and soul has no love of the order, and you usually find the members there wrapping themselves in that cloak of bitterness and blaming everyone else for their problems. The Grand Lodge is trying to steal their assets, all these DMC people are ruining the order with their newfangled ideas, and it isn't the way we did it in 1950. I know, I have heard it, and at one time I was swayed by the negativity, but I woke up. We can still be a practicing fraternal order, and bring our lodges into the 21st Century. True friendship, love, and truth never dies.

I was truly touched by this member's sentiments. The member has been in this Order longer than most, and has seen it all: The bitterness, the complaints, the blaming of others, and the rejection of anything and everything that wasn't the way it was done a half century ago. But, ultimately, this member has seen through the buzz and realizes a simple truth: We must evolve this Order and change the way we do business.

Albert Einstein (a pretty smart fellow) used to define "insanity" as follows: "Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." In many ways, there are members and
Lodges in our Order that epitomize "insanity". They believe that if they just keep running things the same way as they have been doing it for the past 50 or 60 years, all will be well. But all is not well. This Order has been steadily losing members for close to 70 years - that's over TWO GENERATIONS of steady loses of members. These losses have resulted in our Order's numbers being over 90% less than they were 70 years ago. There are Lodges now composed of members in their late 60's, 70's and 80's. They have very few, if any, members younger than that. They have, essentially, skipped two generations of potential members. These Lodges do very little except hold formal meetings once or twice a month. They have no committee reports, no new business, and little, if any, unfinished business. They are not visible or active in the community. Frankly, they offer potential new members very little reason to join a moribund Lodge. The Lodge has been losing members far in excess of its addition of new members. The remaining members are either oblivious to the obvious or content to continue down the same path they have traveled for the past 20 or 30 years. But this is a selfish path. It may be comfortable for the remaining few members - but it is a path of destruction of the Lodge. When these few members pass away, the Lodge will lack a quorum, the charter will be pulled, and the Lodge will die.

Is this the legacy we wish to leave?

The words "friendship, love and truth" are timeless and can sustain this Order into the future. But the Lodge members who choose not to evolve and change are NOT practicing "friendship, love and truth". But it requires more than repeating slogans to save this Order. We have to reach out into our communities to do good works, we have to develop fun events for our members, and we have to open our Lodges to the community by holding more social meetings. In short, we have to make our Lodges more visible, active and inviting to a new generation of members.

Evolve, or die.

Dave Rosenberg
An Observation from Abroad

January 24, 2014

Sometimes it's useful to hear the observations from abroad. Below is an e-mail I recently received from an Odd Fellow who resides outside of the United States - about his observations of U.S. and California Lodges. Food for thought, brothers and sisters, food for thought.

Dave Rosenberg

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Brother Dave,

I do hope all this in-fighting and being mean to each other will someday diminish within the Order here in the United States. It is a bit obvious that one of the ancient purposes of Odd Fellows which we adapted from the practices of the guilds - improving members' morals (character) - has been long forgotten by several members of our Order in United States.

It is true that no organization is perfect. That there are always two sides in everything. But how are we dealing with these differences? We now see members shouting at each other and insulting each other face-to-face or behind each others' backs. We have progressives versus conservatives. Old members versus younger members. Men versus women. Whites versus non-whites. We can read in reports of several members stealing money - some stole lots of money. We see members who do not want to get younger members involved in their lodge because they want the Lodges' funds by themselves. Have we lost the principles of Odd Fellowship? It is a shame for outsiders like me (Odd Fellows from other countries) to notice and witness these kind of troubles.
within lodges and Grand Lodges in various States. Some members from other countries once told me, "For an Order that professes friendship, love and truth, it is ironic to see what our Order in the U.S. has become". One of the reasons the Order is failing in the U.S. is, in fact, having members who can "drive away" people from joining.

For an Order that says "Improve and Elevate the Character of Mankind" and "Make the world a better place", are we really practicing what we preach? Does this mean that the teachings in our rituals are ineffective? How come we see members being jealous with each other when our first degree alone teaches us of real friendship? How come we see members not wanting to help members and people in need and, in worst cases, hating each other when the second degree teaches us about brotherly/sisterly love?

I've been so enthusiastic about the Odd Fellows. I believe its a great fraternity and I still do (historically speaking). I believe it is one of the oldest humanitarian institutions that existed and I do not want to see it fade. But it is a lie if I do not admit that I had told myself to quit the Order a few months ago after witnessing members being mean to each other, and in some cases, being mean to other people (non-members). I was shocked of what I have seen and one time, I told myself "This is not the Order I was looking for". I am still holding on. . . .

"The world is a much more pleasant place if people are nice to one another. By being decent people. By not belittling others to make oneself feel better. By lending a hand when someone needs help. By willing to forgive and asking forgiveness if one have to..."
I have just returned from the annual IOOF Members' Educational Seminar held yesterday and today in Santa Nella. (Believe me, there is nothing to do in Santa Nella except attend the seminar or eat Andersen's pea soup at the local restaurant - so we were all focused on the seminar!) We had 75 participants from 26 Lodges, ranging in age from their 20's to their 80's. Instructors were Peter Sellars, Don Lang and Ron Carrey - who all did a fine job. Grand Master Rick Boyles attended the entire time (as did I) and the GM's presence definitely elevated the discussion. We covered a wide range of topics including (but not limited to) laws and rules laid out in the Codes, how to escort visiting dignitaries, parliamentary procedure, and membership development. Overall, I found it to be a valuable exercise, in particular the sharing of information between members and Lodges. I certainly encourage recipients of this newsletter to attend such a seminar in the future.

While the seminar was useful, it was also a reminder of how far we still need to go as an Order to CHANGE so that we can finally stop the decline of membership and GROW.

What do I mean by this? Let me explain.

I talked to a number of new members of the Order who attended the seminar. These are members who joined only one or two years ago. Some of them were very young - in their 20's and 30's - and their frustration was palpable. These new members want to make their Lodges more visible in their communities and desperately want to bring in potential new members. But, they find themselves stymied at every turn by the long-time members who
find reason after reason and excuse after excuse to say "no" to the new member’s suggestions. Here are just some of the stories I heard from these new (frustrated) members:

One new member was very proud of his new Lodge and wanted to open it and expose it to the community. At a meeting, he suggested working with local community artists and having the Lodge host an art show for the public. He thought this would be good for the art community, would expose the Lodge to the community, and could bring in some new applicants. But he was cut off by the long-time members with the following admonition: "We can't do that - it might damage our wood floor."

Another new member proposed that his Lodge develop a website which might be of interest to the younger members of the community. The long-time members of his Lodge flatly turned him down and said "no", they were not interested in being on-line.

A third new member was completely taken aback when the long-time members of his Lodge proposed to remove the phone from the Lodge Hall. The reason they gave for this is "none of us want to take messages.” The younger challenged the proposal but was voted down.

This is just a sampling of the strange stories I heard.

I encouraged these new members to stay the course, keep at it, and work to bring in younger friends. In time, attitudes may change as the membership changes. (Although the new members noted that it was very hard to bring in new members to a Lodge that offers very little.)

But these stories encapsulate the seminal problem in this Order. We have long-time members who, at bottom, understand that their Lodge and this Order are shrinking and is slowly dying as members pass away. But they are unwilling to change the status...
quo. Keeping things pretty much the same as they have always been is - for them - comfortable, acceptable, and preferred. They don't really care that their legacy to the future is a failed Lodge or a failed Order. It's really quite selfish, when you think about it. They just want to keep it going in the same way as they have always known it - I suppose, till the day they die.

My hope for the future is these new young members and the few long-time members who have the courage to work with the new members to try new things. Honestly, what have we got to lose? The old ways are simply not working - they haven't been working for the last 70 years. So, let's try a different approach.

If we learn to say "yes, let's try it" as opposed to "no, that won't work" - we might just have a chance to turn it around.

Dave Rosenberg
A strange thing has happened in the Order this year.

At the last Grand Lodge Session, the membership approved the creation of a Membership Development Grant Program, and under the direction of Membership Committee Chair Peter Sellars, the Grand Lodge Board of Directors launched the grant program a few months ago. A number of e-mails and letters went out to all the Lodges alerting them of the launch of this program. It is a very simple program. Lodges can apply for a grant not to exceed $1,000 for membership development. All a Lodge needed to do is e-mail or snail mail a one-page proposal of how the Lodge intended to use the money for the purpose of bringing in new members. Could not be simpler or easier.

Now here's the strange thing: Only 11 Lodges submitted their e-mails or letters requesting the funds. Let me repeat: Only 11 Lodges of California’s 120 Lodges submitted requests for funding. That’s less than 10%. Parenthetically, each and every one of the 11 Lodges that did submit proposals were approved and received their money. Kudos to the 11 Lodges who submitted. But what in the world happened to the other 209 Lodges?

Our number one challenge in Odd Fellowship is our decreasing membership numbers. There is no greater priority for this Order than to work to bring in new members. And yet, only 11 Lodges took the time to submit a request for these membership development funds. The program did not mandate a particular type of membership development proposal. Lodges were given complete
freedom to submit requests for funding. Yet only 11 Lodges took the time to pursue it. Why is that? I have thought about it, and have come up with only four possible scenarios:

1. Lodge Secretaries - to whom the requests for proposals were sent - simply did not read their e-mails or letters from Grand Lodge.

2. Noble Grands never pursued the subject with their Lodge members and no one took responsibility for submitting a proposal.

3. Lodges could not come up with a plan for membership development.

4. The majority of our Lodges in California do not wish to grow or bring in new members.

I can think of no other scenarios why Lodges left money on the table and never pursued a plan for bringing in new members. All these scenarios are sad, to be brutally frank. But the scenario that is the most troubling is the fourth one - there are Lodges in California that do not wish to grow or bring in new members. That scenario - I am afraid - is prevalent in this State and in this Order. Due to laziness, inertia, or a desire not to change the status quo - Lodges in California have become comfortable and complacent. This comfort and complacency is, ultimately, a death sentence for those Lodges.

So, I commend the 11 Lodges that have pursued the Membership Grant Program - those are the Lodges that care about the continuation of this great fraternity of Odd Fellowship. And for the other Lodges that failed to pursue this grant program, I urge those Lodges to examine "why" they failed to do so.

Dave Rosenberg
We received quite a few e-mails from DMC members in response to the last newsletter which wondered why only 11 Lodges out of our 120 California Lodges applied for the $1,000 grant (available to any and all Lodges) for membership development. The grant application could be submitted in a one-page letter - so it didn’t involve complication application forms. This newsletter had posited that there could be only four reasons why so many Lodges did not pursue the grant money: (1) The Lodge secretary ignored the request for proposals; (2) The Lodge Noble Grand never pursued the subject and no one took responsibility for submitting the proposal; (3) Lodges could not come up with a plan for getting new members; or (4) The Lodge does not want to add new members.

Here is an example of one of the e-mails we received in response to this thought-provoking newsletter (I have deleted the name of the writer to protect his confidentiality):

David,

I would be more inclined to look to reasons 1 and 2. I think the majority of lodges would like to bring in new members if someone else does it for them and the new members are the "Right Kind of People". Maybe that does equate to no growth, but I think that pure laziness and "the let someone else do it" is the primary reason for the lack of response. I know in my lodge we did not respond because when the letter was read, no one took the bull by the horns to develop a program. I was chairman of the membership committee of my lodge and could have easily written up a proposal but did not. We have recently initiated five
new members and are actively seeking others. We have no other explanation except that no one wanted to get off his lazy butt and write up a proposal. If it ain't easy don't do it. Very sad.

In FL&T

On another subject, a pundit once said (in part): "The only way that we can live, is if we grow. The only way that we can grow, is if we change." That philosophy applies to to living organisms as well as organizations.

It applies, as well, to Odd Fellowship. There are some in this Order who are apprehensive about Dedicated Members for Change. I don't think the "Dedicated Members" part of the name troubles them. Who could be troubled by that, as we should all be "dedicated members" of this Order. No, I think it's the "for Change" part of the name that concerns them. But it shouldn't. DMC is not about some radical alteration of Odd Fellowship. We are focused on just one thing: helping this fraternity grow. Because without growth, we will eventually fade away. In fact, this Order has been losing members, pretty steadily, for close to 70 years - that's 3 generations of losses. Obviously, doing things precisely the same way we have been doing them for 70 years will likely result in continued losses of members. That's just unacceptable. DMC has proposed opening our Lodges to the community, having more social and informal meetings, and fostering more community and good fellowship events. Only holding closed formal meetings with little or no business just doesn't cut it in these modern times. Maintaining the status quo is a recipe for disaster.

And members should not be afraid of "change". The Order has certainly changed over the years - it is part and parcel of the Odd Fellows' history, in fact. None other than Thomas Wildey "changed" the way things were done in 1819 when he "self-
instituted" a Lodge in the United States. Other examples? There was a time when officers of the Order were expected to memorize their parts in the ritual opening and closing. Frankly, that made sense in those days since a number of members could not read, or had difficulty reading, and gas or kerosene lighting in Lodges was often poor. Memorizing passages in the ritual is rarely done nowadays. Another example? Once Odd Fellows ran "orphanages" throughout the United States. This was done at a time when "orphans" were prevalent due to disease, economic conditions, and otherwise. Today, we have no "orphans" in the United States. We have foster children and foster care programs. Only one "orphan" home is run by Odd Fellows anymore (in California) and it has been transformed from an orphanage to a foster facility.

So, does Odd Fellowship change with the times? You bet it does. Does Odd Fellowship need to change, again, in this 21st Century? Indeed, it does. Unless our Lodges can become relevant to 21st Century men and women, we will continue to diminish to the point of no return. The good news is that some of our Lodges are opening their doors and windows, are involving themselves in their communities and in community projects, and are planning fun events for the members. Those Lodges are attracting new members in their 20's, 30's and 40's and are growing. They are showing us the way into the future.

Dave Rosenberg
The Lodge Should Be a Place for All People - Not Just an Exclusive Place for the "Right People"

February 5, 2014

When discussing membership development and bringing new members into your Lodge, have you ever heard a Lodge brother or sister talk about only bringing in the "right people"?

I have heard that term used from time to time. The "right people". It's sort of like the term "true Odd Fellow." I wonder what is really meant when people use the term "right people"? Do they mean a person who believes in friendship, love and truth, and who will work hard for the Order and the community? Or do they use it as a euphemism to keep out women, or racial minorities, or people of various religions, or young people?

There are Lodges in California that have no women, that have no racial minorities, where all members are of one or two religions, and where there are no young people under the age of 60. Is this a coincidence? Perhaps. Or is it something more troubling.

Remember, we are ODD FELLOWS. Our history shows that we formed at a time when fraternal orders had members cut from the same mold, EXCEPT for Odd Fellows. We brought in an eclectic assortment of members from various trades and professions. We were dubbed "Odd Fellows" as a result. We should be a fraternal order that is welcoming and open to all men and women of good character who hold a belief in a greater, higher power. Anything less and we turn our back on our history and our future. We ignore - to our detriment - the majority of our community if we exclude everyone who doesn't come from our own particular cookie cutter.
I'm going to share with you a letter I recently received from one of our members, expressing concerns about the use of the term "right people". To protect this member's anonymity, I am not revealing the member's name or Lodge.

But it's food for thought. Here is the letter, in pertinent part:

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Hi Dave,

It is sad but true that even some newer Odd Fellows in positions of authority take the attitude that we need to attract only the "right people."

As a new member, I recall raising the issue of the need to attract other new members with the then Noble Grand of a certain lodge.

He said, yes but they need to be the "right people." I pressed him on this statement and asked him to give me examples of ones who would not be right. He struggled and came up with a lame example of somebody who wanted to use the lodge as a place to give private music lessons.

I wondered to myself what would be wrong with that if they were willing to pay a reasonable rent to the lodge for use of a room.

Now I hear, that same lodge is allowing a candidate for membership to give massages on a professional basis at the lodge and wonder what is the difference. Obviously this candidate enjoyed the backing of the N.G. whereas the other unfortunate apparently did not.

Dave Rosenberg
Have you ever heard the expression: "Everything I need to know about life, I learned in Kindergarten"?

There is a great deal of truth in that expression, and it could easily be tweaked to read: "Everything I need to know about getting along in your Lodge, I learned in Kindergarten." With a touch of whimsy, a little bit of respect, a modicum of irony, and a sense of humor, let's review what we learned in Kindergarten:

1. Follow the rules.
2. Don't argue with each other.
3. Don't interrupt when someone else is speaking.
4. Have fun at recess, but no screaming or pushing.
5. Respect each other.
6. Don't interrupt.
7. If you get tired, take a nap.
8. Be on time.
9. Don't be bossy.
10. Remember to say "please."
11. Remember to say "thank you."

12. If someone falls, make sure to help them get up.

13. Share with each other and don't hog all the toys.

14. If you have hurt someone, apologize.

15. If you had a problem with someone, shake hands, maybe hug, get over it, and move on.

Seems to me that if we all follow the same basic truths we learned when we were five years old, in Kindergarten, we would all get along much better within our Lodges as sisters and brothers, and we would have a lot more fun together as Odd Fellows.

Don't you agree?

Dave Rosenberg
What is the secret of success for Lodge membership growth?

That's the ultimate question facing Odd Fellowship in California today. I can't give you a simple and ready answer. However, I can give you the experience of one Lodge that has grown - dramatically - over the last few years, and I can identify for you the reason that I believe that Lodge has grown. I am referring to my own Lodge - the Davis Lodge. Ten years ago, the Davis Lodge - in membership - was much like any other Lodge in California. About 30 members on its books, around a dozen of whom might come to meetings, and only 2 or 3 who were really "active". Today, the Lodge has over 200 members, is scheduled to initiate another 11 new members later this month, and has several applications for membership pending.

What did this Lodge do that has allowed it to grow so dramatically, year after year?

There are, of course, many factors. Certainly, the Lodge changed it's focus. The focus of the Lodge has expanded into doing good works in the community and hosting fun social activities for the members. But if I had to point to the one single factor that made the difference for this Lodge it would be the following - Committees.

Let me explain.

I have been to Lodge meetings in other Lodges where meetings last 20 minutes, with no old business, no new business, and no
committee reports. Those Lodge are, essentially, just going through the motions of being a Lodge. Those Lodges are boring. And they have a history of saying "no" or "that won't work" or "we tried that before" when a member suggests or proposes an idea.

The Davis Lodge is just the opposite. When a member suggests an idea that interests him or her, the Davis Lodge welcomes the idea and is ready to try it. Three years ago, for example, a member suggested that the Lodge organize a Bicycle Parade and try to break a Guinness World Record. The Lodge members said "yes". It took a lot of planning and work, but the Lodge did organize such an effort, drew thousands of interested people, donated a lot of money to the schools from the effort, obtained high visibility and publicity for the Lodge, and broke a Guinness World Record. On top of that, several people applied to join the Lodge. On yet another occasion, the Davis Police Department needed to pay for a new K-9 officer, but didn't have the funds. So, Davis Lodge members organized a committee and hosted a "DogtoberFest" which energized the community, brought lots of people to the Lodge for the Fest, and raised most of the money to purchase a K-9. The DogtoberFest was the talk of the town for weeks. Recently, a proposal was made to start a Classic Film Festival at the Lodge. The proposal was embraced and the Film Festival was launched. Lots of community interest, lots of publicity, and lots of people attending the Fest. It brought people into the Lodge who otherwise would never have seen it.

The Davis Lodge has over 25 Committees. Some (like Finance, Visiting and Bylaws) are required by our Bylaws and Code. Others (like Good Fellowship, Take a Hike and OddtoberFest) are focused on the members of the Lodge - providing fun social activities for the Lodge members and potential members. Still others (like Community Support, Senior Project, Bingo) reach out into the community to provide an outlet for Lodge members to do good works in town and the county.
I am not suggesting that every Lodge have 25 committees. But every Lodge can have (over and above the committees required by your Bylaws) some! Start with 2 or 3, and go from there. Find out what your Lodge members really want to do and form a committee to do it! Monthly spaghetti feeds? Downtown clean-up? Taking hikes every few months? Lodge renovation and maintenance? Planting trees in the community? The only limit is your imagination and energy! Bottom line: Your Lodge members will find the Lodge experience more rewarding if you have an active social life in the Lodge and an active effort to support the community. And your Lodge will encourage potential new members to apply. To give you some ideas for the future - perhaps in your own Lodge - here is a listing of the current Davis Lodge Committees:

- Finance
- Bylaws
- Visiting
- Bingo
- Membership & Initiation
- Good Fellowship
- Music and Concerts
- Community Support
- Take a Hike
- Senior Project
- OddtoberFest
- St. Patrick’s Day Dinner
- Halloween Party
- Historical
- Pedometer Project
- Picnic Day Pancake Breakfast
- Legacy Tree
- Social Services
- Farm to Fork
- Classic Film Festival
- Wine Club
- Breakfast with the Bunny
On April 22, 2009, the Davis Odd Fellows Lodge initiated 28 new members. The Lodge has increased its membership roll 1000% between 2006 and 2014.
Some Suggestions to Liven Up Your Lodge

February 21, 2014

Recently, I received an e-mail from a new, young member of our Order. He expressed frustration that his Lodge seemed to be locked in a time warp. "We really don't do much of anything except go through the red book and plan some dinners or potlucks for the Lodge." He wanted to know what else he could suggest to the Lodge to liven things up. He said he is bored at Lodge meetings and doesn't know how much longer he can take it. He added that he doesn't want to bring in potential new members into his Lodge because "they will just be as bored as I am."

Well, step number one in solving any problem is recognizing that there is a problem. This young man has achieved the first step. He recognizes that his Lodge is essentially one-dimensional. Just having ritual meetings without much more is a problem. This young man is frustrated and bored. Why would he continue his membership and why would he bring in new members? Why, indeed, would a new member consider joining a boring, one-dimensional Lodge?

The next step is doing something about it. That's the more difficult step. The young man is asking for suggestions, but even if he accepts the suggestions, he still has to convince his Lodge brothers and sisters to accept them. In some Lodges this is truly challenging, because the long-time Lodge members are generally "comfortable" with the status quo - change is hard.

Yet, to survive and flourish in the 21st Century, we have to recognize that there are, ultimately, two other dimensions that should be explored in order to transform a one-dimensional
Lodge into a full three-dimensional Lodge. The other two options are: Involvement in the community and good fellowship activities within the Lodge. Lodges that engage in good works in the surrounding community and who have an active and fun social life within the Lodge are truly well-rounded and three-dimensional Lodges. These are the Lodges which provide a satisfactory fraternal experience for the membership and which also attract new members.

Ultimately, however, new ideas must come from the members of the Lodge. I can (and will) make some suggestions to this young man. But these are only suggestions to get the juices flowing. At bottom, it is the Lodge members of each individual Lodge who must determine which projects resonate with them. That being said, here are 5 suggestions of projects and activities that might liven things up for the young man's Lodge:

1. Plan a potluck at the Lodge, inviting friends and family, and have an hour set aside for "Trivia Night". Set up teams of 4 - 6 players around tables. Appoint one of the members as "Trivia Master". After dinner, run three rounds of trivia questions - 10 questions each round - and award prizes (candy bars are fine) for the winning team in each round. Lots of fun, lots of bonding, easy and inexpensive.

2. Start a "Senior Project" in your community. You will need two, and preferably four, volunteers for this. Contact the Senior Center or Senior Housing in your community and offer to help out frail seniors in their homes with one-time projects. Send teams of two Odd Fellows into the homes to do the projects. Without revealing names of the seniors, let your local newspaper know what you have done.

3. A "Wine Club" is a simple and inexpensive way to socialize. Schedule a "wine club" once each month in the home of a member or applicant to the Lodge. People who attend bring a
bottle of wine and appetizers. The host supplies wine glasses and plates. Each month can be a theme like Pinot Noir or Chardonnay or Zinfandel.

4. Breakfast with Santa. Around the holiday season, if your Lodge Hall is big enough, think of organizing a "Breakfast with Santa". All you need is volunteers, a kitchen and a member who can wear a Santa suit. Invite the community to attend for a nominal price, and provide a meal, perhaps a small goodie bag for the children, and an opportunity for the kids to meet Santa. It’s a feel-good event for the members, and a popular event for the children and their parents.

5. Take a hike. There is no cost involved. Just organize a local hike for the members who wish to participate. Some hikes can be easy and some can be more strenuous, depending of the members who participate.

I could offer many more suggestions, but the above provides a flavor of the kinds of things your Lodge could do to enhance the fraternal experience for members, and to attract new members to a more active Lodge. Ultimately, Lodges in the 21st Century need to reach out into their communities and need to engage in good fellowship activities within the Lodge. That's the secret of success for Odd Fellowship. That's the fountain of youth for our Order.

Dave Rosenberg
Three-Dimensional Lodges Will Transform Odd Fellowship

March 5, 2014

Too many of our Lodges are one-dimensional Lodges. In my opinion, that’s why Lodges are failing, and the membership numbers in our Order are diminishing.

We need to strive to become three-dimensional Lodges. That effort will, ultimately, increase the satisfaction level of our membership, will halt the decline, and will result in an increase in membership.

I make this bold statement because the facts support it. And the effort to become three-dimensional will transform Odd Fellowship.

Let me define my terms. A one-dimensional Lodge is a Lodge that focuses on one thing – running a traditional closed meeting with ritual and regalia. The one-dimensional Lodge focuses on little else. Now, don’t get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with this dimension. I completely support it. The history, the ritual, the secrets, the regalia – these are the things that make us uniquely Odd Fellows! Without it, we might as well be Masons, Elks, or Rotarians. This one dimension is the foundation of Odd Fellowship and must be followed by each and every Lodge.

BUT, it’s only one dimension. Lodges that focus almost exclusively on this one dimension are depriving the Lodge members of the full enjoyment of being an Odd Fellow. Further, the one-dimensional Lodge curtails the ability of the Lodge to attract a new generation of members from the ranks of 21st Century men and women. If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that virtually no one is interested in joining a Lodge of
Odd Fellows just because that Lodge has a rich history, secret meetings, secret grips, passwords and signs, and the members wear nifty regalia. They want more. And if you require any further proof of this fact, just take a look at our one-dimensional Lodges and the membership declines experienced by those Lodges over the last generation or two.

So, what’s a three-dimensional Lodge? This is a Lodge that retains the one-dimension identified above, but ADDS two additional dimensions to its focus. Those other two dimensions are: (1) good fellowship activities for the Lodge members that are fun and bring enjoyment to the members, their families, and potential new members; and (2) community and charitable outreach projects that benefit the local population, and provide satisfaction to the members, their families, and potential new members of the Lodge. Ultimately, a three-dimensional Lodge adds these two dimensions which provide a social network for members and which provide for the community support needs of the members. And if you require any further proof that three-dimensional Lodges increase membership, take a look at those three-dimensional Lodges and the membership increases experienced by them.

Now, some of you may say, “That’s all well and good, but isn’t that something for the large Lodges? My Lodge is too small to become three-dimensional.” I don’t agree. This formula will work whether your Lodge has 6 members, 60 members, or (as California Lodges were a century ago) 600 members.

Even a 6-member Lodge can engage in good fellowship activities for the members as well as a community project or two – thus transforming itself into a three-dimensional Lodge. The members simply have to decide what they enjoy doing – and then do it! For example, the members might wish to have poker night at the Lodge once a week or once a month, or may wish to go bowling together, or form a book club that meets once each month, or do wine tasting at member’s homes – and certainly invite potential
members to these events. The members may also decide amongst themselves to undertake a community project – again, based on what the members feel is important for their community – this could include a myriad of ideas, such as making the Lodge Hall available for free to a charitable organization for a fundraiser, or a small downtown clean-up project, or planting a native tree in a park, or working with a local senior center to address needs of the residents, etc. Obviously, again, potential members can be invited to participate. Bottom line, you don’t need a huge Lodge to have some fun or to do some community work. And, I guarantee this small Lodge will grow.

Furthermore, what do you have to lose? If your Lodge has lost more members than it has gained over the past 10 years – perhaps it is time to try a different approach . . . .

Dave Rosenberg

The Atrium at the Meadows of Napa Valley - one of two retirement campuses owned by the Odd Fellows.
Today’s subject is all about a great and ancient fraternal order. This fraternity had its beginnings in the USA over 150 years ago with the formation of a Lodge back East started by a far-sighted man. This fraternal order is distinguished by three words (hint: the first word is "Friendship"), that became synonymous with the fraternity. It is international and non-sectarian. It has a branch primarily dedicated to women, and it has junior branches for boys and girls. This fraternity strives to do good works in the community and prides itself on an ancient and long-standing ritual. The fraternal order is composed of Lodges, brought under the jurisdiction of Grand Lodges, and of course, a has a national supreme Lodge. Members who attain the highest rank can be uniformed and can carry swords.

Sound familiar?

And if you thought I was talking about Odd Fellowship, you would be wrong. The references above are to the Order of Knights of Pythias. The Knights of Pythias, at one time, was the third largest fraternal organization in the United States, right behind the Masons and the Odd Fellows. The Knights of Pythias’ watchwords are "Friendship, Charity, Benevolence". They were founded in 1864 by Justus Rathbone. Once, California was dotted with hundreds of Knights of Pythias' Lodges. In fact, a Knights of Pythias Lodge, years ago, used to meet in my Davis Odd Fellows Lodge Hall building.

But today, the Knights of Pythias website shows that there are only 12 Knights of Pythias Lodges in the entire State of California.
Let me repeat that: There are only 12 Lodge left in California, where once there were hundreds.

I tell you this tale because, if Odd Fellowship does not change the way it does business, the future of our own fraternity may soon parallel that of the Knights of Pythias. Can it happen. Certainly. Odd Fellowship once also had hundreds of Lodges throughout the State of California. Virtually every town and hamlet in this state once had an IOOF Lodge. Some of these Lodges had memberships in the hundreds. Grand Lodge Sessions drew thousands, as did Grand Encampment Sessions. Uniformed Patriarchs Militant marched in colorful parades through California cities by the hundreds with their bands playing. Yet over the last 70 years, our numbers have declined dramatically. We now have only 120 Lodges in the entire State of California. And of those Lodges, most show net membership losses every year. Today, over two-thirds of our remaining Odd Fellows Lodges have less than 30 members on their books. Some 35 of our Lodges have 15 or fewer members on the books, and 10 of our Lodges have 10 or fewer members. And that's members on the "books". It is likely that, in most Lodges, only about half the members on the "books" actually participate in Lodge meetings and gatherings. You don't need a PhD to see the trajectory of Odd Fellowship.

Do I believe that Odd Fellowship will die? No, I do not. But do I believe that - without changing the way we do business - Odd Fellowship could travel the path of the Knights of Pythias? Yes, I do. At the current rate, without change, our 120 Lodges may very well become 12 Lodges within the next generation.

I don't want to see that happen. And I know that the vast majority of you don't want to see that happen either.

Can we reverse the trend of declining membership that we have experienced over the last three generations? Yes, we can. How? We have Lodges in California which - contrary to the trend - have
gained members and have grown. Why? Because they have become three dimensional Lodges that feature three elements: (1) Adhering to and respecting the history and ritual that makes us uniquely Odd Fellows, (2) Reaching out into their communities to undertake good community and charitable projects, and (3) Organizing good fellowship activities for the members and the public that bring the "fun" back into Odd Fellowship. Those three-dimensional Lodges provide a satisfying fraternal experience for the members, but also provide an attractive base for the men and women we need as new members in our Order.

As one long-time member recently said to me, somewhat laconically: "We have Inside Guardians that keep our members in our Lodges, and Outside Guardians that keep everyone out of our Lodges. And look where that has gotten us."

And we are changing the way we do business, little by little and inch by inch. Ultimately, because I am ever the optimist, I do see the trend of diminishing membership starting to slow down, stop, and soon reverse. In my opinion, it will happen this year, or next year, or very soon after that. The slide will stop, and the Order in California will start to grow.

Dave Rosenberg
I have often said that our Lodges, to survive in the 21st Century, need to be three dimensional. And you have heard me often speak about the second and third dimensions which - in most Lodges - are anemic and need to be re-emphasized. Those second and third dimensions are: Reaching outside of the Lodge into the community to do good community and charitable works. Having fun as a fraternity with good fellowship activities within the Lodge.

But today, I would like to talk about an aspect of the first dimension of our Order: The great history, traditions, and ritual of Odd Fellowship.

Yesterday, my wife, Lea, and I visited the Apollo Lodge in San Francisco, at the historic San Francisco Odd Fellows Lodge Hall. This is a great and noble building on the corner of Market and Seventh Street. The Lodge room used by Apollo is beautiful, and Lea and I had occasion to meet many of the members at a dinner and Lodge meeting. The Lodge members looked great in their regalia and conducted a well-run meeting in form and following the ritual of our Order. It was a pleasure to see it done correctly, and I commend the members of this Lodge.

But what I really want to talk about is the Museum that is found on the second floor of the San Francisco Lodge Hall. Lea and I received a tour of the Museum from Peter Sellars. Peter, as you may know, is one of the charter members of DMC, and he serves as the Grand Instructor of our Grand Lodge, and Chair of a very active Membership Committee for the Grand Master. He has
achieved numerous high offices in Odd Fellowship, including the position of Grand Patriarch, and he is the spark plug who has increased the membership of his Lodge, and has taken charge of restoring the San Francisco building, inside and out. More to the point, Peter is the guiding force for this remarkable Museum. If you have not had the opportunity to visit this museum, you should definitely make a point of doing so. Bring some of your Lodge mates! You can contact Peter to make an appointment for a guided tour at ioofsf@earthlink.net.

(I want to commend both Peter and Nancy Johnson, who Co-Chair the Order's Historical Committee and do an amazing job in restoring and preserving the history of Odd Fellowship.)

If history interests you, the San Francisco museum is the place to be. The museum is jam-packed with costumes, photographs, memorabilia, jewels and badges, gavels, musical instruments, fezzes, dishes, swords, headgear, and all things Odd Fellows. It is a trip down memory lane, and a journey through history of our

Dave Rosenberg
You Might Be a Good Odd Fellows if . . . .

April 10, 2014

Julie Machado, Sycamore Lodge #129, and one of the real spark plugs to the resurgence and progress of that Lodge, recently wrote to me and challenged me to write an article on "what makes a good Odd Fellow". I accept the challenge!

Here is my list of 25 (gotta be an "odd" number) qualities that, at least from my perspective, make a good Odd Fellow. If you have suggestions, please feel free to send 'em in!

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you feel that the initiation ceremony and your receipt of the Initiatory Degree was a meaningful and memorable experience.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you look forward to attending meetings and events at your Lodge, and attend on a regular basis.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you try to bring in at least one new member each year and don't rely on other members to work on membership development.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you have earned your three degrees so that you could hold an office some day and advance in your Lodge and in the Order.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you take the time to ask your Lodge brothers and sisters how they are doing and what's new in their lives.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you volunteer to help on a committee of your Lodge.
You might be a good Odd Fellow if you helped clean up the Lodge after a meeting even though no one asked you to do so.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you spoke during Good of the Order and said something really nice about one of your Lodge mates.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you visited a member who was sick or took the time to talk to a member who was in distress.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you proposed a new idea or event for your Lodge and then volunteered to work on it.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you introduced yourself to a prospective new member of your Lodge and spent some time chatting with that applicant.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you had a good, friendly word for a member of your Lodge.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you found a way to diffuse a disagreement among members in the spirit of F-L-T.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you memorized the Odd Fellows Valediction.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you paid your annual dues timely, without waiting for a reminder.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you carried your dues card in your wallet or purse.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you keep an IOOF bumper sticker on your car or wear an IOOF shirt around town.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you have visited a neighboring Lodge.
You might be a good Odd Fellow if you urged your Lodge to work on a community project to benefit your town.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you urged your Lodge to contribute funds to benefit an Odd Fellows charity.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you worked to bring women and people of color into membership in your Lodge.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you didn't immediately say "no" to a new member's idea for a Lodge project.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you helped a brother or sister who was in distress.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you never disparage or say a negative word about another Odd Fellow.

You might be a good Odd Fellow if you didn't just talk about "friendship, love and truth", but actually lived your life in accordance with those principles.

Dave Rosenberg
Are We Turning the Corner on Membership Declines?

April 13, 2014

DMC was formed in late 2010 with the following purpose: To focus Odd Fellows on our steeply declining membership numbers and to offer suggestions on how we, individually and collectively, can increase our membership rolls. DMC has become a bit of a "think tank" of new ideas and approaches which can help our Lodges grow. For example, we have published a three-year suggested plan for Lodges to increase membership, we have published examples of techniques that Lodges have used to increase their membership, and we have published 10 suggested ways that Lodge members can bring in new applicants. And, working with the active Grand Lodge Membership Committee (led by energetic and effective Chair Peter Sellars) and active members throughout California, we have achieved some successes. Certainly, we have re-focused our attention on declining membership. No longer is the decline just sitting there like an elephant in our fraternal living room. Members and Lodges are now well aware of the elephant and are making efforts to remove him and send him back to the wild. A number of Lodges have started to apply the new ideas and approaches to growing membership, and some successes have been achieved.

But a major problem remains. We have some Lodges that have shrunk to such a small number of aging members that it is doubtful the new ideas and approaches can help them. It is a case of too little, too late for those Lodges. Let's be frank. While our membership numbers show that there are about 4,700 dues-paying Odd Fellows in California, we all know that those are merely numbers in paper. Grand Master Rick Boyles has recently voiced concerns that he has discovered Lodges that list members...
in their reports, and that pay dues on behalf of those members, yet those "members" don't attend meetings and in many cases have lost touch with the Lodges that list them. The truth is, if we have 4,700 dues-paying members on our books, we really have only half that number who actually participate in their Lodges and are active. That means we have about 2,350 active members of this Order in California. That's remarkably low for a statewide organization. There are high schools in this state that have higher numbers than that. Put in stark local terms, a Lodge that shows 14 members on its books, may only have 7 members who actually participate and come to meetings. And with the minimum quorum requirement as 5, we may have a Lodge that is dangerously close to extinction. If that Lodge's members are all in their 60's, 70's, and 80's and they haven't added a new member in years . . . . well, you can see where the trend is going. Perhaps worse, a Lodge with only 7 (or 6 or 5) active members runs substantial risks. All officer positions can't be filled in such a Lodge. Members simply revolve in office. And where are the checks and balances that avoid mistakes, misappropriation, and self-dealing?

For the last 10 years, I've been tracking the historical ups-and-downs of our membership. In 1853, Grand Lodge started keeping tabs on membership numbers in our Order. The numbers show a pretty steady 75-year growth from 1853 to 1928. In 1928, Odd Fellowship in California hit its high-water mark of 58,820 members. Then, the Order entered a period of decline until 1943. In that year of 1943, the numbers increased during the years of World War II and the immediate aftermath. But then in 1948 the decline began anew. And that decline has continued, virtually unabated till today - a period of almost half a century.

I recently had the opportunity to review information on Odd Fellows membership as of December 31, 2013, submitted by our 123 California Odd Fellows Lodges in their annual reports. It was interesting and revealing. Let me highlight some of the statistics. But I must interpose one caveat: the statistics are not complete.
Some 18 Lodges had not yet submitted their annual reports - that, by the way, is a sobering statistic in and of itself. With that caveat in mind, here are the statistics:

- In 2013, we added 392 new members and we lost 378 members. If I added the numbers correctly and these statistic stand up (after the submission of the 18 missing Lodges) our Order will have shown a very small net gain of members - the first such net gain in many, many years. But even if the small net gain doesn't hold up, I believe the statistics will show a much smaller net loss than in prior years. To me, that shows that our re-focus on membership is beginning to bear some positive fruit. We may have bottomed out the steady decline and are in a position to start a slow ascent. That would be really good news.

- In 2013, we show 2 Lodges each with over 300 members, 2 Lodges each with over 200 members, and 2 Lodges each with over 100 members. All other Lodges have less than 100 members on their books. The 5 largest Lodges in California have 1,286 members and comprise over 26% of the entire membership of this Order. The 10 largest Lodges have 1,739 members and comprise 35% of the membership of this Order. Put another way, 1 out of every 4 members of this Order belongs to one of the 10 largest Lodges, and 1 out of every 3 members of this Order belongs to one of the 5 largest Lodges. At the other end of the spectrum, and in contrast, we have 49 Lodges in California showing 19 or fewer members on their books.

- In 2013, only 37 Lodges showed a net gain of membership. The other Lodges either showed a net loss of members or were neutral (no net loss or net gain). Of the 37 Lodges showing a net gain, only 15 Lodges showed a net gain of 5 or more new members.

What does it all mean? Nothing yet, until we get the final numbers.
from all reporting Lodges. But, I am hopeful that the overall statistics for 2013 will at least show that the net losses have declined and we are close to turning the corner in California. I am hopeful that if continue to emphasize membership growth, we will in the near future show a net gain in our membership and will never turn back. On the other hand, the statistics show that there is an increasing gap between the 10 largest Lodges - which, for the most part, continue to grow - and the vast majority of medium, small, and very small Lodges - which continue to show declines. Our future Grand Masters should focus on those smaller Lodges and offer them help, encouragement and support on how to grow. Most of these smaller Lodges have been in place for well over a Century - we should do all we can to encourage and support their efforts to grow into the next Century. It is a darn shame to have to close Lodges that have served their members and their communities for over a Century.

Dave Rosenberg
New Tools Needed For a New Generation

April 26, 2014

Earlier this week I was on a plane flying to Southern California to give a talk, when I ran across an article which contained two amazing facts.

Fact #1 is that 90% of Americans now own cell phones. Fact #2 is that 50% of Americans now own smart phones. Let's take a moment to digest these two facts - because they are significant.

We are at a very transitional place in our American society and culture today. And it's important for those of us born in the 30's, 40's and 50's to understand this transition. I am sure that the vast majority of the folks reading this article - leaders in their respective Lodges - grew up in the tube television and typewriter era. Juxtapose this to the generation of folks who were born in the late 80's and the 1990's - that is a generation that grew up in an electronic and cellular world. We all kind of know this to be true when we ask our grandchildren to adjust the controls on our televisions. But this generational and cultural difference is far more than knowing how to program a remote.

The generation of Americans in their teens and twenties is all about being electronically connected. We're talking about WiFi, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the vast array of social media that is out there in the ether.

Why is this important to Odd Fellowship?

It's important because this new generation is the very generation we need to attract into our Order. It's important because there are many Lodges, Lodge leaders and Lodge members who are
completely out of touch with the new generation. And if we remain out of touch, we will have great difficulty bringing in those new young members we need.

How out of touch are we? There are Lodges in our State with members who don't use e-mail. There are Lodges that conduct all their transactions and notifications with paper, and not electronically. There are Lodges that still put out newsletters printed on paper and mailed through the US postal service with postage stamps. There are Lodges that don't have WiFi capability in their Lodge Halls. There are Lodges that don't have Facebook accounts.

Believe me when I tell you that the young men and women under 30 years of age will quickly lose interest in joining a Lodge that is one generation behind the electronic curve.

Can we adjust to the tools and interests of the new generation? Sure we can. I know Lodges where 100% of the membership are connected via e-mail. I know Lodges that regularly send out an electronic newsletter. I know Lodges that have a Facebook page, and are connected to Twitter and Instagram. I know Lodges that are a WiFi location. And I know Lodges where minutes are sent out to the members electronically soon after the conclusion of a meeting.

Do these electronic connections alter the core purposes or goals of Odd Fellowship? Not at all. These connections are simply modern tools of communication. It's not really any different than the transition from the telegraph to the telephone, or the mail to the facsimile. This is just another transition in the communication age. And we better keep up with it, or be viewed as an Order for grandparents.

Dave Rosenberg
Recently, I sent some questions to three leaders of our Order and asked them to give me their thoughts on the questions. I found their remarks quite interesting and I think you will, as well. The first one of the leaders from whom we will hear is John Morgan, a long-time member of the Grand Lodge Board of Directors (GLBOD), who currently serves as Chair of the Board.

Here are the three questions that were posed to John, and his responses.

Dave Rosenberg

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What do you consider the three greatest accomplishments of the Grand Lodge Board of Directors this past year?

1. Financial management. Another good year with managing the Order’s assets. Over the past 6 years, our revenue has increased by 79%, our investment base (principal) has increased 78% and our expenses have only increased by 18%. This keeps our per-capita tax at $45.00. Some may wonder why we don’t lower the member’s dues? Years ago, we annually used general funds to balance the budget, so the dues would remain at $45.00. We have incurred debt over the past that needs to be repaid, example, we were forced to pay off a bank loan of $1.4 million. A loan that a lodge/cemetery incurred. Grand Lodge was not aware of the loan until the Feds audited the lenders books and forced the bank to recall some of their notes.
2. Benefit Fund reorganization. After 2 years of attempting to get the Benefit Fund Board of Directors to agree to acceptable By-Laws, a decision was made by the Grand Lodge Board of Directors to dissolve the Benefit Corporation and replace the elected directors with a committee to manage any request for grants. In no way does this decision effect the purpose/or intent that this fund was created to do.

3. We were also able to recover funds that were misappropriated. In two examples it amounted to about $155,000.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the Grand Lodge Board of Directors in the next couple of years?

1. We have 4 sets of rules that we must live by
   b. Code of General Laws
   c. Roberts Code
   d. Organizational By-laws

   Roberts Code rules as long as we are in compliance with a. and b.

2. With our shrinking membership base to draw from in the future, effective leadership will be a big challenge. If all of the orders assets were placed in one bucket, it would amount to about a half billion dollars or more.

3. Detrimental behavior. We seem to have to many members who find it necessary to spread rumors that are not true, causing harm to ones character and integrity. It works its way through any organization. It affects lodge meetings, social events and board meetings.

4. Odd Fellow cemetery’s that collect/or have collected funds that are held in trust, could be a serious liability to the order. Missing trust funds, poor record keeping, and unacceptable
Cemetery Bureau audits, would/could be investigated by the Cemetery & Funeral Bureau, which is part of the Calif. Dept of Consumer Affairs.

**Where do you see Odd Fellowship in California in the next 5 years?**

1. I believe that the CA Rebekah Assembly will either be gone or broke.

2. We will most likely see another 15-20 Odd Fellow Lodges (or more) in the history books.

3. Today’s active lodge’s that are growing and involved in community and social activities will prevail into the future.

In Friendship, Love and Truth,

John Morgan

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Davis Odd Fellows visit the Sobon Winery in Amador County. The Lodge often rents a bus to take day trips.
An extraordinary thing has happened to Odd Fellowship in California! I am excited to share it with you.

First the background.

As you know, for the past 10 years we have been beating the drum to draw attention to what I have described as the "elephant sitting in our Lodge room" - our rapidly declining membership. These declines have dramatically reduced our membership since World War II so that our membership is less than 10% what it was during the mid 1940’s. And over the last few years - since 1999 - the decline has accelerated. In 1999, our records showed that we had 6,190 members on our books. At the start of 2013, the number had declined to 4,755 - that’s a drop of about 25%. The decline since 1999 shows a drop of over 100 members per year - in other words, each and every year we lose over 100 more members (through death and withdrawal) than we bring in through initiation. And if our books show 4,755 members in 2013, we all know that really means about half that number - perhaps 2,400 - are "active" members; the rest rarely, if ever, come to meetings or participate - and are members on paper only. Today, half our Lodges in California have less than 20 members on their books, and many of these small Lodges have aging memberships, rarely bringing in new members. We have Lodges where the youngest members are in their 70's. And when Lodges have less than 10 members who are active, they start having quorum problems, and lack the necessary checks and balances to ensure compliance with financial rules and procedures. Further, where Lodges are weak, necessarily we find Encampments and Cantons that are weak and
diminishing. The challenges faced by Lodges are exacerbated in our Encampments and Cantons.

Obviously, this steady decline is unsustainable. Unless it's stopped, and then reversed, the Order is in peril.

Now, the good news of this "extraordinary thing".

It has recently come to my attention that the membership statistics for the start of 2014 show that the Order in California has had a decline of only 3 members! What a remarkable turnaround! There are two caveats to this number: First, the numbers are preliminary and need to be confirmed, and second, there are still a handful of Lodges that have not yet (even at this late date) filed their annual reports and reported their numbers. But whether the final number turns out to be a net loss of 10, or a zero net loss-net gain, or a net gain of 10 - the point is that it appears we have finally put the brakes on the decline! That is step one. You have to stop the free fall first, then reverse it and start the ascent - the slow gain of membership again.

Kudos to Grand Master Rick Boyles - who has made the membership issue into a central issue during his year. It is under the watch of Rick Boyles that we have seen the beginning of the halt to the decline. Kudos also to Membership Committee Chair Peter Sellars and the members of the Membership Committee. The programs that the Membership Committee launched - supported by the Grand Lodge Board of Directors - have certainly been a factor in the positive change. Kudos also to "Dedicated Members for Change." DMC's constant drumbeat (since 2010) on the issue of membership development, and the many suggestions, best practices, and helpful hints made by DMC to assist membership development have borne fruit. Ultimately, however, the halt of the decline and the movement to gain membership has to start with the members - the brothers and sisters - each of us. The Lodges play an important role, and Grand Lodge can help to a degree. I
want to commend those members and those Lodges that have
taken to heart the message that DMC has been sending out since
2010. Kudos to the brothers and the sisters and the Lodges that
have gotten that elephant to stand up, and are guiding him out of
our Lodge room.

I urge our incoming Grand Master Tim Brown to continue the
focus on membership development, and continue the good works
of the Membership Committee so that next year at this time we
can truly say that under Brother Tim's watch we have a net
gain in membership in our Order, and the elephant has left the
Lodge room.

Dave Rosenberg

The "Manor House" at the Odd Fellows' Saratoga Retirement Community.
Reflections on the Drive to Modesto

May 14, 2014

As I drive from my home in Davis to Modesto, I take some time to reflect. I am preparing to participate as a voting representative in the 162nd California Grand Lodge Session. I first joined Odd Fellows in 2004 and now, in 2014, I am about to finish my term as Grand Warden of California and will soon start my term as Deputy Grand Master of California Odd Fellowship. What a long, interesting and "odd" journey it has been over that decade.

When I first became an Odd Fellow 10 years ago, I had no conception of Grand Lodge. I had no idea what Grand Lodge Sessions were all about. I barely knew what a Noble Grand was, let alone a Deputy Grand Master. I was unfamiliar with the Codes, Constitutions, and By-laws of our Order.

The one thing I learned pretty quickly, however, was that my own Lodge was hurting. We might have had 25 members on our books, but we could barely muster a dozen for meetings. I determined that I would change the focus and the culture of my Lodge - and over time, I did.

And then I realized that my Lodge was not an isolated situation. Other Lodge throughout California - indeed the entire Order in California - was diminishing. Members were withdrawing or dying at a faster rate than new members were being initiated. Every year - year after year - we were losing members and we were losing Lodges. I determined that I would seek to change the outlook of the State Order - and over time, we did. In 2010 Don Smith, Rick Boyles and I started this group called Dedicated Members for Change - focused like a laser on the subject of our declining membership and suggesting ways to reverse that trend. Today in 2014, I do believe we have made great strides in convincing this Order of the need for new blood and new energy.
in our Lodges. We have realized that our Lodges cannot continue to operate in secret behind closed doors and windows. We have come to accept that Lodges must reach out into their communities with good public works and musts strive within to develop fun social activities for their members. It is these efforts, at last, that will bring in those new applicants we need to grow and continue this ancient fraternity. We are beginning to see the results of all these, and other efforts. Statistics show that in 2013 (Rick Boyles' year as Grand Master) the Order in California has finally put the brakes on declining membership - the numbers show that are losses and our gains are almost even. I am hopeful that in the coming year we may start to show the slow ascent of our membership and we will have reversed the decline that has hectored Odd Fellowship for the last half Century. And in doing so, we can serve as an example for the Order throughout the nation. Even Sovereign Grand Lodge will have to take notice.

Lodges are strong when they are three dimensional, not just one dimensional, focusing on: (1) the great history and ritual of this Order, (2) community projects and good works, and (3) fun social activities for the members.

So, I am proud to be driving to Modesto this morning as we re-focus, re-energize and re-dedicate ourselves to Odd Fellowship now and in the future.

And I hope to see many of you there! I am delighted to announce that we have 100 RSVP’s for the DMC Dinner this Thursday, May 15, at the DoubleTree Hotel - this is an all-time record and I look forward to seeing so many of you at the dinner. We will be in the Hotel's Arbor Theater, starting at 5 p.m. with wine tasting, then the buffet dinner at 6 p.m., followed by a few short but pithy speeches, and then musical entertainment for the evening offered by the popular band "Wealth of Nations". A memorable evening is in store!

Dave Rosenberg
Real Progress Seen at the California 
Grand Lodge Sessions 
May 19, 2014

You haven't received a DMC Newsletter since May 14, because I 
have been otherwise engaged, attending the 162nd Grand Lodge 
Session of the Jurisdiction at the convention center in Modesto. 
The sessions ended yesterday, I'm back in the world, and I'd like 
to report on some of the highlights.

1. First and foremost, I want to say how pleased I was to hear the 
"C" word throughout the sessions. Once upon a time not too 
long ago, most folks avoided using the "C" word, but now I 
hear it said and I see it printed often. It's the word which will 
ultimately transform our Order, and I am delighted to hear 
how mainstream this word has become. The "C" word? Why, 
it's "change", of course. Odd Fellowship needs to evolve, and 
ultimately, change to become more relevant to the 21st 
Century women and men we need to join us and restore, 
reform, revive, replenish and rejuvenate our Order.

2. Rick Boyles has now joined the elite ranks of Past Grand 
Masters. Rick, as you know, was one of the founding members 
of DMC. Rick, Past Grand Master and Past Sovereign Grand 
Master Don Smith and I formed DMC in December of 2010 as 
a vehicle to refocus Odd Fellowship on our membership losses 
and to suggest ways to reverse that trend and bring in new 
members. After 66 years of virtually unchecked net losses of 
100-200 members per year, it was in 2013 (under Rick's watch) 
that California Odd Fellowship finally bottomed out showing 
a "net loss" of only 3 members. Congratulations, Rick, on a job 
well done. I am very hopeful that in the next year - under the 
watch of new Grand Master Tim Brown - we will see that flat
line evolve into a small net gain. This will be the start of a new trend and a new direction: Years of growth in the California Order.

3. DMC can be rightfully proud that progressives were elected to high offices at sessions. By acclamation, I was elected Deputy Grand Master of California. Peter Sellars, one of the charter members of DMC, was elected to the position of Grand Warden. John Morgan, also a charter DMC member and Chairman of the Grand Lodge Board of Directors, was re-elected to a new term on that important Board. Other DMC members were elected to positions on Boards of our Order.

4. I met the Deputy Sovereign Grand Master (the second-highest ranking office in North American Odd Fellowship) who was visiting from Georgia. His name is Jimmy Humphrey and he is a progressive - his talk during Installation of officers focused on "change". Jimmy told me that there are 22 states where the number of Odd Fellows in the state is less than 200 (e.g. we have Lodges in California that have more members than each of these 22 states). Jimmy and I spoke the same language, and we have exchanged e-mails.

5. The DMC has suddenly become respectable. Our annual dinner at the sessions was well attended with over 100 persons - and many of the leadership (including Jimmy Humphrey) were there. A couple of years ago DMC was shunned. In fact, in a growing sign of acceptance, a proposal to commend DMC and its work received an affirmative vote of the Grand Lodge 114 "yes" and only 26 "no". Just two years ago, the vote probably would have been 26 "yes" and 114 "no." We have come a long way in a short time.

6. At my suggestion, the Grand Lodge Board of Directors approved and Grand Lodge Sessions used electronic voting - for the first time. This is an important step forward in the
modernization of this Order. Electronic voting was a smashing success, and saved us hours of delays and tedious vote counting. We got results a split second after voting closed. The electronic voting system was operated by Davis Lodge member Stewart Savage - who even received a medal in commemoration given by the Deputy Sovereign Grand Master - and Stewart got a standing ovation from the group. Well deserved. I am confident that electronic voting will continue, and it wouldn't surprise me to see it expand to other states and the Sovereign Grand Lodge Sessions.

7. A very important piece of legislation - brought to Sessions by me and the Davis Lodge - passed with overwhelming support. The legislation changes the Code in support of "social meetings" - a progressive and modern approach to meetings - allowing us to focus more on social activities and community outreach. The Code prior to the change permitted one and only one social meeting per month, and the definition of social meeting was severely limited. The change we proposed (and which was adopted) now has the Code read as follows:

"This Lodge is authorized to hold Social Meetings each month in accordance with the provisions state herein. Said Social Meetings shall be at the discretion and call of the Noble Grand. No Social Meeting shall be held on the evening of an Official Visitation by the Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master, Grand Warden, or District Deputy Grand Master unless that officer has specifically approved the same. During a Social Meeting all Ritualistic Work is suspended and the meeting may be opened to the Public. Social Meetings may include, but are not limited to, Dinners; Forums; Invited Guests, Invited Speaker; Prospective Members, Family Members; Entertainment; Educational Presentations and/or Recreational Activities. Lodge members at said Social Meeting may also discuss and vote on planned Social Events and Community Projects and other routine Lodge matters, so long as each such vote is
recorded in Minutes and subsequently ratified at the next business meeting of the Lodge."

8. A number of recommendations in my Grand Warden's Report were accepted and adopted by the body. Among the recommendations is the launch of a "mentor program" where successful Lodges could help struggling Lodges, and a recommendation to continue the popular and successful membership grant program, started by Peter Sellars.

9. I learned that we have dropped to only 14 Encampments and only 7 Cantons in California, with increasingly aging members. Obviously, these Branches are hurting. This, and the decline in membership and revenue in the Rebekahs, are concerns for our Order going forward.

10. And we still have a long way to go. While progressive suggestions to modernize were on the ascendancy, one of the voting delegates at sessions approached me and said the following words to me: "I view you as the enemy." Obviously, this member is part of a strong conservative element in the Order who resists change and supports the status quo. I appreciate this member's candor, as it reminded me of how far we still have to go.

Dave Rosenberg
Some Interesting IOOF Statistics for 2013

May 22, 2014

As your newly elected Deputy Grand Master for the Jurisdiction of California, I want to start the same way I left off. I want to focus on three, and only three, topics. And those topics are: membership, membership, membership.

The year 2013 ended remarkably well for our Order in California. Instead of showing a net loss of 100-200 members for the calendar year as we have been showing for the past decade, we actually showed a flat line figure (a net loss of only 3) which, to me, says that our membership efforts over the past two-three years are starting to work, and we may have put the brakes on the membership free-fall we have seen for the past two or three generations. I am hopeful that 2014 will show a continuation of this trend, and perhaps even the beginnings of net gains in our membership. The signs are encouraging, and our new Grand Master Tim Brown has indicated that he intends to continue the good works we started in 2013 regarding membership development.

But while the overall membership statistics show a better trend, there are still some troubling realities revealed by those statistics. We need to slice and dice those statistics and really drill down to the heart of the numbers. And in doing so, here is what is revealed below the surface:

1. As of the start of 2014, we had 220 Odd Fellows Lodges in the State of California with 4,751 members, including associate and non-contributing members. (The number of dues-paying members is 4,399.) Of our 4,751 members, 3,630 are men and
1,121 are women. We have 2 Lodges with 300 or more members, 2 Lodges with 200 or more members, and 2 Lodges with 100 or more members. All the remaining 114 Lodges have less than 100 members per Lodge - most have far less. We have 48 Lodges with 20 or fewer members on the books. We all know that members reflected on the books do not translate into active members. It is estimated that about 50% of the members listed "on the books" are active participating members in the Lodge. That being the case, a Lodge with 20 members is likely to have 10 active members. So, drilling down further, of our 220 Lodges, 33 Lodges have 15 or fewer members. I would submit that these 33 Lodges are in a very fragile zone and should be on "yellow alert". A Lodge with 15 members is likely to have only 7 or 8 active members, and runs the risk of quorum problems. And if we dig even deeper, we find that California has 9 Lodges with 10 or fewer members. Those 9 Lodges are in a "red alert" status as I see it. I would submit that a Lodge with 10 or fewer members on the books is precariously close to becoming a defunct Lodge. We should be watching and assisting those 9 Lodges as best we can, to find ways to bring in fresh new members.

2. Our 5 largest Lodges (in membership numbers) hold 1,266 of the members of our Order. That is close to 27% of the total membership of the Order. In other words, 1 out of every 4 California Odd Fellows is a member of just 5 Lodges. These large Lodges continue to grow, while a large number of small Lodges continue to shrink. The trajectory of these statistics show that in just a few years, the 15 or 20 largest Lodges in California will hold more than half the membership.

3. Women have been admitted as members in Odd Fellows Lodges for about 15 years. And yet, in 2014, we find that there are 21 Lodges in this jurisdiction which have no women on their roster. Zero. Nada. Null. Nothing. While some of these 21 Lodges are quite small, there are others that are medium-sized
or large Lodges. It is frankly illogical for any Lodge in the 21st Century to have no women as members. To exclude women is to exclude half our population. And as a shrinking Order, we simply cannot afford that. In addition to the 21 Lodges with no female members, we have another 21 Lodges that show only 1 or 2 women on their rosters. We can do better.

4. At this year's Grand Lodge Session, we had less than 200 voting delegates. Yet, statistically our Lodges were entitled to send more than three times that number. In reviewing the voting representatives, we found that only 70 of our Lodges sent voting representatives to Grand Lodge - that is an embarrassing 57% of the Lodges. Fully 43% of our Lodges sent no representatives at all. And of those 70 Lodges that sent a representative, 23 sent just 1 representative. A number of these Grand Lodge representatives also came to Modesto as Rebekah Assembly representatives, and in this double-duty rarely, if ever, came over to Grand Lodge sessions. And so, typically, only 100 to 160 actually voted depending on who was still in the room. These statistics are discouraging. Lodges that fail to participate at Grand Lodge sessions lose out - they fail to enjoy a great resource available to them to share ideas, to network, to create unity, and to build this Order. And I suspect that many of the Lodges that do not participate in Grand Lodge sessions are the very Lodges that could use some help growing membership.

So, Brothers and Sisters, we have our work cut out for us in the coming year. We must continue to tackle - head on - the biggest challenge to our Order: We must work individually and collectively to bring in those new members.

Dave Rosenberg
I'm pleased to share with you a short e-mail I recently received from the Jurisdiction of Hawaii. Odd Fellowship is alive and well in the Aloha State - the Lodges are active and growing in membership. I was delighted to read that the perspective of the Hawaiian Lodges is very close to the perspective we have touted in these DMC articles over the years. To grow membership, our Lodges have to be three dimensional, not just one dimensional. Those dimensions include emphasizing the rich history and ritual that makes us uniquely Odd Fellows; engaging in an active social life within our Lodges; and reaching out into our towns and environs with good community and charitable projects. Three dimensional Lodges provide members with a complete fraternal, social and community-giving life. Three dimensional Lodges give members significant satisfaction. And significantly, three dimensional Lodges attract applicants and new members.

Dave Rosenberg

ALOHA,

Thank you Brothers and Sisters from across the globe! I know I speak for my Brothers and Sisters here in Hawaii when I say we too love our organization, especially the rich traditions, rituals and teachings of Odd Fellowship, for these are some of the cornerstones of our wonderful Order. However, the other cornerstones, and in my opinion, more important than the brick and mortar of our Order are the PEOPLE (my brothers and sisters) that comprise our Order, for I would rather be with my Brothers and Sisters in a vacant lot than to be amongst others in an extravagant venue.
I am of the opinion that pairing the rich traditions of yesterday and the new ideas and technology of today will undoubtedly aid The Order in strengthening its place in the new era of benevolent fraternal organizations. We do need to consider how we can infuse new and fresh methodologies with which to recruit and retain a different demographic from what we are accustomed. However, we must first accept the fact that change is necessary.... Maybe I’m being naive, but I feel the SGL needs to get more young members involved at the SGL level to provide a totally different perspective to those that are piloting the SGL.

Our Hawaii lodges are seeing tremendous membership growth since we have begun to coordinate joint service projects with our five lodges. We try to keep our community calendar full with as many varying types of community service projects as possible to accommodate members with differing capabilities and or restrictions. We know our new members have joined primarily for the service projects, but we also coordinate member events as well. We must remind ourselves that NO MEMBERS = NO LODGE = NO ODD FELLOWS!

Fraternally, Steven Tseu
Past Grand, Excelsior Lodge No. 1

In 2011, interested Davis Odd Fellows started a “Take a Hike” Committee - still going strong today.
How Did the Davis Lodge Grow So Quickly?

June 7, 2014

Every year for the past several years, my home Lodge (Davis #169) has been listed in the Grand Secretary's report as one of the Lodges that has shown the greatest net increases in membership. The secret of success is, ultimately, net growth in a Lodge. Every Lodge loses members - through death, withdrawal and otherwise. So, the goal of a Lodge is to bring in sufficient new members to cover those net losses, and hopefully, to exceed the net losses and show a net gain.

When I joined the Davis Lodge in 2004 (10 years ago) we had a membership in the neighborhood of 25. Today our membership is 220, with 23 applicants seeking to join our Lodge. In many communities, Odd Fellows Lodges are almost invisible, or if visible, are considered a strange curiosity from another era. In Davis, the Odd Fellows Lodge is a high-visibility, premier organization, that is a focal point of activity in the town.

How did this happen?

I am often asked this question by members of other Lodges. And while every community is different, it may be useful to look at what the Davis Lodge did to change its complexion from a quiet, almost moribund Lodge, to an active and dynamic Lodge that members of the community wish to join. Here, in a simplified and condensed version, are the secrets of success of one growing Lodge:

1. **Listen to the Members.** It is important - very important - for the leadership of a Lodge to listen to the goals, needs and desires of the bothers and sisters. A Lodge - to thrive in the 21st
Century - must do more than simply open meetings and close meetings in form. In the 19th Century it was enough that members memorized their parts in the ritual. In the 21st Century, we need to do more to retain members and attract the young men and women we need to grow. So, take the time to listen to the members and poll their opinions on what the Lodge should engage in socially and within the community. My Lodge, for example, doesn't say "no" when members propose new ideas - and we set up new committees to handle these new ideas. Such new ideas have resulted in the Lodge creating new committees to handle such diverse projects as: bingo, music, hiking, social services, community support, zymurgy, legacy trees, good fellowship, classic movies, etc. Our Lodge now has 26 committees.

2. **Community Outreach.** Lodge members (and potential new members) want to be involved in the community. Not only do members enjoy such community involvement, but it brings great visibility to the Lodge and to Odd Fellowship. Significantly, every time my Lodge does a community activity, not only are we benefiting our town, but invariably folks come up to me to ask me about IOOF and about joining the Lodge. When our Lodge does Breakfast with Santa, Breakfast with the Bunny, a Taste of Davis, etc., this sort of dynamic takes place. Let me give you an example. Recently, one of our members suggested putting on a "DogtoberFest" to help raise money to purchase a new police dog to replace a retiring canine. It was a fun project that attracted hundreds of community members (and Lodge members) to the event at the Lodge Hall. Not only did everyone have a good time, and not only did we raise a significant amount of money for the new K-9, but a young couple who attended expressed great interest in the Lodge and submitted applications to join. That happens a lot.

3. **Social Activities.** Let's face it. We are a fraternal order. Fraternal orders are meant to have a social component. Heck, when Odd Fellowship started in Merry Olde England, the brothers met in pubs to dine and drink and socialize. Not only are these social
functions enjoyable for the membership, but they are important in attracting the young men and women of this Century. So, let the ideas flow and don't be too quick to say "no". Some social activities take time to organize and some are pretty simple - but it's important to allow your Lodge to become a social center for your Lodge members. As an example, my Lodge has a "club night" once every week where members can drop in and socialize - we offer dinner during this evening, as well as activities such as "trivia night" or "poker night" or "bunco night". My Lodge offers an annual Halloween costume party, an OddtoberFest, wine country trips for members and friends, etc. Again, let your imagination be your guide.

4. **Recognition of History.** We are an ancient and storied fraternity. Let's never forget our history, which makes us unique and which is of considerable interest to many potential new members. My Lodge has recognized that history by decorating our Lodge Hall with memorabilia of Odd Fellowship, and actually creating a small museum with cabinets displaying Odd Fellows paraphernalia, ribbons, pins, jewels and the like. These items make great conversation starters with visitors. When we give tours of our Lodge Hall, we have a tri-fold brochure that we provide to visitors which tells them about the Order, about our Lodge, and about the social and community things that we do.

5. **Upgrading the Lodge Hall.** Not every Lodge can afford to do this. On the other hand, no Lodge can afford not to do this. I remember peeking into the window of my Lodge before I joined (I had to peek into the window as the Lodge was rarely open). All I could see was some dingy carpet, some horrible green paint and a chair lift on the railing. What sort of message does that send to prospective new members? Take some time to upgrade and remodel. A fresh coat of paint can do wonders. The Grand Lodge is always available if your Lodge wishes to negotiate a loan for remodeling and upgrading. When a Lodge looks clean and modern, it becomes inviting to the public.
6. **Handling Applications.** New applicants for membership in the Lodge are the lifeblood of a Lodge and this Order. I am often asked about the Davis Lodge handles new applicants - because our process is a little different. Most Lodges almost immediately schedule an initiation for new applicants. And then, sometimes, the new applicants are surprised at what they have gotten themselves into. In the Davis Lodge we do it a little differently. We conduct two initiations each year - one in the Spring and one in the Fall. Our current Fall 2014 Pledge Class has 17 applicants, and we already have 6 applicants for the Spring 2015 Pledge Class (which will officially begin in late August of this year). The process takes at least six months between application and initiation. When we receive an application, we place that person in a "Pledge Class" with the other applicants, leading to initiation to those who make it through the process. We give each applicant a "Pledge Book" full of information about IOOF and the Lodge, and we assign a mentor. There are requirements in the "Pledge Book" to interview a number of members of the Lodge (it's a great ice-breaker and a great way for the prospective member and the Lodge members to get to know each other), and we expect the prospective member to attend a certain number of social meetings and Lodge events. We invite them to join our Lodge committees. We want them to be involved and to get to know us (and we want to get to know them). Some don't make it for one reason or another. Better to know now, than later. Those who do make it, however, are committed, knowledgeable, active, interested and involved. And our Lodge experiences very little turnover. If you are interested, the Pledge Book can be found at www.davislodge.org. Move your cursor over "About the Lodge" and click on "Forms and Documents".

I hope there are some kernels of wisdom in the above thoughts that you and your Lodge can use to help you in the quest for new members and growth of your Lodge.

Dave Rosenberg
What makes a viable, strong and healthy Lodge?

I have often talked about the concept of the "three-legged stool" as a simile for the Lodge. If all three legs of the stool are sturdy, then the Lodge will be sturdy. If one of legs is weak or missing, the stool will wobble. And you can only imagine what will occur if two legs are weak or missing. The three legs represent (1) the rich history and ritual of our Order, (2) social activities within the Lodge for members creating good fellowship and allowing members to have some fun, and (3) outreach into our towns and villages to do good community works. If a Lodge emphasizes all three, it will be a three-dimensional Lodge and I guarantee that it will be a Lodge that is healthy, retaining existing members and attracting new members. These, by the way, are not new or radical concepts. Sovereign Grand Lodge, and your own Grand Lodge, emphasize holding more social meetings and reaching out into the community to do good works.

One way that a Lodge can develop good fellowship and community outreach activities is to create committees of interested members to plan and coordinate such activities. I am a great believer in the committee structure which allows interested members of the Lodge to shepherd activities (from start to finish) that benefit the Lodge and its members. I have (sadly) attended meetings of some Lodges where there are NO committee reports, NO old business, and NO new business to discuss. What a sad state of affairs. Such a Lodge is moribund and static, and is destined to diminish and fail. How does one retain the interest of existing members or attract new members to a Lodge that doesn’t
really do anything for the benefit of the members or to help the community? Statistically, the 90% decline in our membership numbers over the last three generations proves that one-dimensional Lodges are a relic of a prior age, and simply are not sustainable in the 21st Century.

So, let's talk about committees.

All Lodges have the basic internal committees that are required by Code or By-laws. And, if done right, these committees do important work. I am talking about committees such as the Visiting Committee, Finance Committee, By-laws Committee, Membership Committee and the like. But Lodges can do more - much more - in the way of committees. My own Lodge - Davis #169 - has 26 committees, all staffed by members of the Lodge who are interested in the subject. Now, let me be very clear. I am not saying that Lodges should have 26 committees, or even half that number of committees, or any particular number. And I am not saying that Lodges should have the same committees as the Davis Lodge. What I am saying is that each Lodge should develop appropriate committees that reflect the interests of that Lodge's members. And even two or three new committees will spark a lot of enthusiasm in a Lodge. It's important for Lodges to encourage members who present new ideas, and to support and implement these new ideas by the formation of committees.

By way of example only, I will briefly discuss 10 of the committees we have formed in my Lodge - the point of this exercise is to stimulate your brain cells, encourage discussion within your Lodge on the subject of committees, and to give you examples of the sorts of committees that could be created. So, here goes:

**Good Fellowship Committee.** This committee plans social activities for the members (and applicants for membership) to the Lodge. For example, each and every Thursday evening, from 5 to 8 p.m. the Lodge is open for what we call "Club Night at the
The Lodge" which is just a relaxed, informal social time for members and applicants (and friends) to drop in and chat. We have a big-screen TV which is usually on, the bar is open with libations, dinner is available for those who wish to participate (at $7 a plate) and there is typically an activity going like trivia night, karaoke, poker night, etc. This committee also plans trips - for example, in September we are renting a bus to visit the Amador County wine country.

Community Support Committee. This committee is given an annual budget to help community groups and do good projects in the town and county. With this budget, the Committee sponsors co-hosted events at the Lodge Hall with diverse groups such as Hospice, the Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Center, the Mexican-American Concilio of Yolo County, etc. The Committee also purchases tickets to community events to support community and charitable groups. Finally, the Committee gives grants to worthy local programs like the Yolo Crisis Nursery.

Bingo Committee. For the past seven year, - with the concurrence of the City Council - the Lodge has operated real Bingo games on the second Sunday of every month, which bring 75-90 people to the Lodge to enjoy Bingo and which generate a fair amount of revenue. Every month the Bingo Committee designates a community beneficiary to receive the proceeds of Bingo. This July, for example, the beneficiary is the Davis Encampment which raises funds to send children from very low income families to Three Links Camp. These grants total between $600 - $800 per month.

Music and Concerts Committee. One the first Thursday of each month, the Music Committee hosts "Thursday Live!" at the Lodge, free of charge and open to the general public, featuring local musicians and musical groups. The music has ranged from rock and roll, to classical, to jazz, to country and western, to Japanese, to Klezmer. Over 100 members of the public and Lodge members attend these monthly gatherings.
**OddtoberFest Committee.** Every year our Lodge has an Oktoberfest which we have dubbed "OddtoberFest" for our members, our applicants for membership and friends and family. Typically, we have close to 100 attendees who enjoy traditional German food, Bavarian music, dancing and door prizes. Prior to the OddtoberFest, another one of our committees - the Zymurgy Committee - brews up three different beers to enjoy at the Fest.

**Social Services Committee.** This small, but active committee has dedicated members who spend time - one on one - with persons who have mental health challenges. Sometimes, these folks just need a friend to talk to.

**Odd Poetry Committee.** A group of Lodge members enjoy poetry and meet once a month just outside the Lodge Hall under the "Poet Tree" to recite poems they have found or they have personally written. Often, other members bring their guitars or flutes and perform a few songs. These "Odd Poetry" evenings are done in conjunction with the city's once-a-month "Art About" where folks walk around the downtown visiting art galleries and admiring public art (including a great historical mural which was just painted on the side of our Lodge Hall). Typically, members of the public who walk by, join in and provide their own poetry readings.

**Breakfast with Santa Committee.** For many years now, this Lodge Committee organizes "Breakfast with Santa" for the children of our community. The event has grown so popular, that we have three breakfast seatings. The children and their parents/guardians enjoy breakfast, each child gets a goodie bag, and they all get to meet "Santa". Many of our members (including the gentleman who plays "Santa") first came to the Lodge with their children or grandchildren for Breakfast with Santa.

**Taste of Davis Committee.** Once each year, the Lodge - through this Committee - hosts "A Taste of Davis" featuring over 20 local
restaurants, wineries, and breweries who provide samples and tastings of their wares. This extremely popular event brings hundreds of folks to our Lodge Hall, and also raises a significant sum of money which enables our Lodge to make contributions to Odd Fellows charities and other worthy causes.

**Hiking Committee.** A number of our members wanted to go on day hikes. Hence was born the Hiking Committee - or as we like to call it, the "Take a Hike Committee". Members plan hikes throughout northern California - some easy, some moderate and some hard. As many as 20 Odd Fellows and friends have gone on some of these hikes.

These committees accomplish three very important goals: (1) They provide a great deal of social interaction and enjoyment to members of the Lodge; (2) they provide a significant outlet to members who wish to give back to their community; and (3) they bring members of the public into the Lodge and expose the Lodge to the public - many of our applicants for membership have come through the work of our committees.

I hope these thoughts have sparked some ideas as to what can be accomplished for your Lodge through committees.

Dave Rosenberg
Will This Be the State of Our Order in California in Ten Years?

July 7, 2014

Perhaps no one knew Odd Fellowship better than George Hannaford. After all, Brother George served as Grand Treasurer of this jurisdiction from 1966 till his death in 2009 - a period of leadership spanning some 44 years. Recently, a Brother who knew George Hannaford quite well related to me a conversation he had had with George during his last years. George Hannaford said to the Brother, "Unless we change, in a few years only the San Francisco Lodges and the Davis Lodge will remain."

A long-established truism reads: "The past predicts the future." That being the case, Brothers and Sisters, what does the future of Odd Fellowship in California look like in ten years, say 2024?

It's not that hard to figure out - because the numbers of the past 60 years show us the trend. In 10 years, without changing the way we do business, here is a future scenario that we could see in California:

1. There will be less than 40 Odd Fellows Lodges in existence, and at least half of the remaining Lodges will be very close to having quorum problems.

2. There will be less than 15 Rebekah Lodges, and a majority of the remaining Lodges will be very close to quorum problems.

3. California will have only 3 or 4 Encampments. There will no longer be any functional LEA in existence.

4. California will have only 1 or 2 Cantons. There will no longer be any functional LAPM in existence.
5. Theta Rho and Junior Odd Fellows will be historical footnotes.

Is this the future of this Order in California? Without change, it is certainly possible. We know that there are at least 20 jurisdictions in the USA that have less than 200 members.

But in truth, I don't expect this scenario to occur for many reasons. For one thing, I fully expect there to be significant changes in the way we do business. Even the Sovereign Grand Lodge will be compelled to make changes to save the Order, because while California can continue to function (as the largest IOOF jurisdiction in the USA), other jurisdictions are in dire straits. So, I fully expect that SGL will implement significant changes for our Order, including but not limited to a revised and modernized ritual, a merger of our branches, a renewed emphasis on community visibility and community involvement.

The fraternal landscape of America is littered with the skeletons of orders that were once large and vibrant (e.g. Knights of Pythias, the Redmen, the Moose, etc.) that are now mere shadows of what they were a Century ago, or even 50 years ago. Without significant change in the way we do business, Odd Fellows will travel down the same road of obscurity.

Regrettably, some in our Order don't get that. They continue to operate as if we were the fraternal order of the 1920's. But in those days, we had hundreds attend our meetings and gatherings. Today, some Lodges can count their attending members on two hands - sometimes just one hand.

Dave Rosenberg
At last May’s Grand Lodge Session in Modesto, I had the pleasure of meeting a gentleman from Georgia by the name of Jimmy C. Humphrey. Brother Jimmy is a well-spoken, smart and refined member of this Order. He has a deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this fraternal order, he has vision, and he has an understanding that Odd Fellowship must evolve and change if it is to prosper in the 21st Century. Significantly, Jimmy is the Deputy Sovereign Grand Master, and is next in line to be elected Sovereign Grand Master at Sovereign Grand Lodge Session in Victoria, Canada, next month.

Brother Jimmy is on our DMC e-mail list and after reading an article I had written on July 7 (about the need for Lodges to reach out into their communities to do good community works, and the need for Lodges to plan more social activities together), he wrote to me that same day saying "I liked what you said" and penned the following e-mail (below) to me.

Bottom line: This Order needs to evolve and change. Many changes will have to be made at the Sovereign level; some changes can be made at the Grand Lodge level; but ultimately, the need for change has to occur at the Lodge level - and it requires a commitment from each member of this Order.

Dave Rosenberg

~

Bro Dave,

Read your post of July 7, 2014, felt compelled to answer. Perhaps you could send this onto your list. Two points I would make, The
Sovereign Grand Lodge is made up of Representatives and they guide the old barge. The elected Officers try to guide those folks but that doesn't work all the time. I will probably be elected as Sovereign Grand Master this August and if so will continue doing what I have done these last two years.

Try to get the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs to "BUY INTO THIS PROGRAM".

The success of our Order is going to start, going to continue at the Local Lodge Level. Be it Rebekah Lodge, Odd Fellow Lodge, Encampment, Canton. The SGL, the Grand Lodge of Cal can establish programs, (some great, some workable, some exciting and worthwhile) but the desire to succeed as a Lodge in a community has got to come from the local lodge members. I believe that in almost every lodge hall in the land, there are Brothers and Sisters that want to have a vibrant lodge, one that works joyfully in the community, one that is a part of the community serving their brothers and sisters of the lodge and the community.

The first change is ATTITUDE, Yours, because that is the first step. I have heard all the "EXCUSES" about why we can't, why we don't. I tell you this. That dog don't hunt anymore. The new you is this, I think I can, I think I will, then, I know I can, I know I will. My Brothers and Sisters, take the first steps. What do you want your lodge to be? Make plans on how to get there. Use every tool you have, lodge members, other non-profits, tools from your Grand lodge, from the SGL.

The Attitude has got to be, Don't Quit, Don't give up. Never Quit, Never Give Up. I know what I want for my lodge and we, as a lodge are working toward that goal. Clean the lodge hall, open the doors to the community, assist the lodge members, assist the community. I am committed to making this happen in the world of Odd Fellowship. You can make it happen in your lodge.

Jimmy
For several years, I have focused on one major subject: How do we stop the decline in membership of this Order? In my opinion, the steady decline of membership in the Odd Fellows, Rebekahs, and all our branches is the single greatest challenge we face today. Frankly, it is a matter of survival. I have raised this issue again and again, and over the years I have suggested numerous ways in which we can evolve, change, and truly reverse the course of our decline. I would say that I have accomplished at least part of my mission - virtually everyone in the Order now at least recognizes the problem of declining membership, and many have sought to address the problem in various ways.

In fact, we are beginning to show some signs of progress after 66 years of almost continual free-fall in our membership numbers. Two years ago, the decline slowed considerably. And last year, it had almost come to a halt. With further work, I believe our Order in California may actually show a slight increase in membership in the next year or two.

But as I have also often said, the solution to declining membership cannot be found at Sovereign Grand Lodge or at Grand Lodge - although these entities can certainly make fundamental changes to the Codes that will make it much easier for our Lodges to thrive and attract new members. At bottom, the retention of existing members and the introduction of new members into our Order can only be solved by the members themselves (you and I) with the assistance and support of our respective Lodges. As members, we cannot look to “the other guy” to solve the problem. The solution is in each of our hands, hearts and minds.

To this end, I attach an actual letter I received which was sent out
recently by a Noble Grand to the members of his/her Lodge. This
is a powerful letter.

I have deleted some identifying words in this letter. I do not
identify this NG, nor do I identify his/her Lodge or the area
where the Lodge is located. I don't identify these things because
they are not really relevant. This NG could be the NG of 100
different Lodges in California, and hundreds more throughout
the United States and Canada. This is a Noble Grand who really
cares about the decline of his/her Lodge and the (dare we say it?)
complacency of most of the members.

Please read the letter, below. Could this be your Lodge?

Dave Rosenberg

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Independent Order of Odd Fellows
July 2014
Lodge #

Subject: LODGE MEMBERSHIP AND STATUS

Dear Brothers and Sisters

SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE: It is with heavy heart that I
inform you of the closing of our Lodge # ------. This closing has
been coming for many years as the membership, attendance and
Lodge participation has been dwindling throughout the past two
decades. Members age and either can or no longer want to
participate. Our formal meetings barely make the necessary
quorum. New members have been difficult to enroll. An example
is in 2013, the Lodge enrolled 4 new members but sadly 3 of those
quit participating before the end of the year. The Lodge functions
have been supported by the same 5-7 members who also are
ageing and are overwhelmed by the load they have. For those
reasons, this Lodge will consolidate with another Lodge and the
building returned to the Grand Lodge for disposal.

BACK TO THE PRESENT: No, the Grand Lodge is NOT consolidating Lodge # ----- at this time. However, the above message is one which members will receive in the near future unless membership apathy changes. Membership has been declining, not only at this Lodge but State and Nationwide. Active members are becoming tired of carrying the load for those who do not participate. The facility is becoming run down. We have --- Odd Fellow members on the roll, however less than 1/3 seem to ever make it to any activity. The last social function, hosted by the Rebekahs, had only two Odd Fellows in attendance. Other social functions have experienced less than 20 attendees including both Rebekahs and Odd Fellows. Even the free dinner social, provided due to the membership stimulus funding from the Grand Lodge, was attended by only 34 people including spouses, children, and a few guests. A poor turnout and why is that?

This Lodge has and is starting some great projects. We have established a community benefit with the Adopt-A-Highway and are initiating a cooperative effort with an organization in ---------- that provides clothing and necessaries for single moms and their children. We are awarding three scholarships this year to High School graduates. Members from Lodge # ---- have been very active in helping our sister lodges in starting their own breakfast fundraiser. We are in the process of obtaining bids to renovate the hall. We have supported the Three Links Camp in both funding and in labor. We hosted, in conjunction with the Rebekah’s a two day art class which culminated with a spaghetti feed. Very little funds were made from that. And, finally we are developing a web page for this Lodge, which will provide active news and a calendar of events. We are still planning the annual ------ event at my house on -- August (hope you can make that). Many other ideas for fundraisers and socials are being considered. But again the core 5-7 members attending our meetings cannot do this alone. I commend those members who have dedicated themselves to the Order but we need everyone involved.
Let me ask a few thought provoking questions:

1. Since less than 1/3 of our members are participating in Lodge events, and most of those for the Sunday breakfast. If you are not involved, what do you get from your membership?
2. The lodge pays almost $50 each year per person as a tax to the Grand Lodge. The $40 most members pay does not cover that. Should we raise membership fees?
3. What is this Lodge doing wrong or not doing that prevents you from participating more fully? We have reduced our formal meetings to one each month. I understand that some people work, some are ill but is one meeting a month too much?
4. A number of the proposals which have been made by members on how to change Lodge # ----- e.g. Increased socials e.g. baseball games, bingo night fundraisers, card nights at the lodge, etc. Wouldn’t you like to contribute to those changes?
5. The converse of that, I would like to hear from you as to how this lodge should change to enable increased attendance and entice new members. The Grand Lodge is encouraging us to be more relevant in today’s environment. How do we accomplish that from your perspective. Please e-mail me at -------------- and let me know your thoughts.

Now is the time for you to step up for your lodge. Yes, I understand that you did or may have stepped up sometime in the past but your efforts are direly needed now. We are having a series of meeting with this as a topic in the Good of the Order section. Attend and share your thoughts if you care about your organization. Also, we will be having a picnic on ------ at ------ park in --- singleton starting at 10 AM. Come and help cook the lunch and provide me your ideas, criticism and concepts then. Hope to see you there or at a Lodge meeting.

Sincerely, in Friendship, Love, & Truth.

--------------  --------------, NG
Bringing New Members into the Order Is a Job for Each of Us

July 19, 2014

There was a time when the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was the largest fraternal order in the United States. Yes, it’s true. Odd Fellows had more members than all other fraternal orders, including Masons. In those years, about a century ago, America had a multitude of fraternities. It was an age when hundreds of fraternal orders formed and flourished. It was the goal of many Americans - in the time before television and movies - to be part of a fraternity, and fraternities had a friendly competition with one another for members and for prominence. In those days, Grand Lodge sessions drew literally thousands of participants. Patriarchs Militant marched through the streets in parades, numbering hundreds, complete with uniformed marching bands.

Well, we’ve traveled down a long road since those days. I recently saw some statistics about fraternal numbers today. These statistics are revealing. Comparing Odd Fellows to two other fraternal orders today we see the following: Masons show 5,000,000 members in 30,000 Lodges in over 100 countries. Elks show 800,000 members in 2,000 Lodges in 5 countries. Odd Fellows show 190,000 members in 10,000 Lodges in 28 countries. What do these number tell us? Primarily, of course, they show that Odd Fellowship has fallen, rather dramatically, from its prominence as the largest fraternity in the United States. Those halcyon days are long gone. Today, our Odd Fellows Order is a mile wide and an inch deep; we have a lot of Lodges, but relatively few members in each Lodge. The numbers show that entities such as the Masons average 166 members per Lodge. Odd Fellows average 18 members per Lodge. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to know that an 18-member Lodge is “challenged”. We all know that, in a
typical Lodge, the number of members “on the books” don’t reflect the number of active members – a Lodge with 18 members on the books, might have in reality only 9 or 10 members who participate as active members, and the rest are members on paper. And if 18 is the “average”, then we know that a number of Lodges will be above that number and a number of Lodges will be below that number.

California Odd Fellows' numbers appear to be a tad better than the international numbers. In California we have 120 Lodges and we have about 4,700 members. That translates to 39 members per Lodge, on average. But even that average number is misleading. California has two Lodges with 300 or more members, two Lodges with 200 or more members, and two Lodges with 100 or more members. The other 114 Lodges have 99 or fewer members. Taking out the numbers for those six largest Lodges, we are left with an average of only 29 members for the remaining 114 Lodges. If we assume only half the members are “active” and the rest are essentially “paper” members, those 114 Lodges average about 14 or 15 “active” members. Worse, again, we are talking about “average”. We know that there are many Lodges above, and many Lodges below the average. And we know that there are a significant number of California Lodges with 10 or fewer “active” members.

The warning light has been blinking “yellow” for Odd Fellowship for the last 50 years. The light is now blinking “red”.

What's the solution?

The solution is not words, slogans or platitudes. We can't "wish" the problem away. We don't solve the problem of membership decline by catchy slogans, or mottoes, or choosing flowers, or colors, or songs as part of our annual program. The solution is action. And that action must be local and must be focused. Some have suggested that we spend a lot of money on television
advertising to bring members into our Order. That would be a mistake (and a pretty darn expensive one), because it’s not national or regional television ads that will revive our Order. Odd Fellowship can be saved by one thing, and one thing alone: **Current members of this Order must bring new members into our Lodges.** That is a responsibility for each of us who profess to be "true" Odd Fellows. It's not the job of "the other guy". It's our job, you and I. And our job of bringing in members is made infinitely easier if our respective Lodges offer a full plate of fun activities for the members and good works for the community. It’s hard enough to bring in new members. It’s even harder – nearly impossible – to attract new members to a Lodge that does little more than have meetings and an occasional potluck.

Dave Rosenberg

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*Odd Fellows walk to raise money to fight cancer in the "Relay for Life".*
"Why Should I Join Your Lodge?"

July 27, 2014

The common (and obvious) question I am asked by potential new members is: "Why should I join your Lodge?" I imagine you get the same sort of question, in some form, from folks you recruit to join your Lodge. If you are not prepared to answer this basic question, then you are not prepared to bring new members into your Lodge.

It's a simple question, and a fair one. Most people are pretty busy. They have family commitments. They may have job commitments. They have avocations and hobbies. They are members of other organizations, And, for their available time, they certainly have the option of considering and joining a multitude of other clubs, groups, committees, boards, and lodges. Why, indeed, should they choose to dedicate a portion of their valuable time to Odd Fellows?

Let me be brutally frank. Ultimately, if you can't answer the question of "Why should I join your Lodge?" you will not be able to bring in new members to your Lodge. You have to give folks a reason. They won't join your Lodge just because you ask them and you have a bright, shiny face.

Because I was asked that question so many times, I endeavored, a few years ago (November 24, 2011, to be exact), to jot down the reasons why someone might join my Lodge. When I was done compiling my list, I had recorded fully 100 reasons to join the Lodge. (You will actually find this list on my Lodge website at www.davislodge.org.) And as a result of compiling this list, I realized that my efforts at recruiting new members was - at this point in time - completely facilitated because my Lodge was active
and involved. At its most basic lever, it works out to be a mutually advantageous equation: An active Lodge brings in new members, and new members make an active Lodge. It is symbiotic.

Look. I don't ask or expect all of you to compile a list of 100 reasons. But I will suggest to you that if you are unable to compile even a small list of 10 answers to the question "Why should I join your Lodge?" you may be able to convince your retired uncle Henry to join, but you will be unsuccessful in growing your Lodge from the general public. If the only reasons that you can come up with are that you hold a monthly meeting and potluck, that your Lodge contributes $250 per year to the local boy scout troop, and that your Lodge is repairing the roof and fixing the chairlift - it's unlikely that those reasons will resonate with young men and women in this century. No one is going to beat down your door to apply.

When you compile your list, the best reasons are the reasons that show an active Lodge and a fun Lodge. The list of things that a Lodge can do to be an active community and social center are virtually endless - let your collective Lodge members' imaginations be your guide. By way of example only, Lodges can engage in downtown clean-ups, tree plantings, volunteering at the local food bank or homeless shelter, reading to elementary school children at school, co-hosting an event at the Lodge Hall to benefit a local charity, schedule a community meal, schedule an Oktoberfest for Lodge members and their families, go bowling, take a hike on a nearby trail, visit a winery, etc., etc.

I have attended meetings of some Lodges where the entire meeting lasted 20 minutes and (other than the ritual opening and closing) all the Lodge members did was read the minutes of the last meeting, report on funds in the bank, approve payment of two utility bills, and report on a member who was ill. The meeting had no committee reports, no old business, no new business, no announcements and no good-of-the-order. These sorts of Lodge
meetings are at one level, boring and moribund. But more significantly, they show a Lodge that is tired. We want active young men and women to join our Lodges. And those young men and women of today are busy and have many choices to fill the hours of their "available" time. Why would they join a tired Odd Fellows Lodge?

Dave Rosenberg

In 2011, the Davis Lodge organized "The World’s Greatest Bicycle Parade" and set a Guinness World Record for longest line of bicycles in motion. Over 1,000 people participated in this community event.
Progressive Lodges Are Growing

July 30, 2014

As you know, my prime focus has been, is, and will continue to be: Membership! Over the years, I have done my best to draw attention, again and again, to the decline in our membership, and the serious problems that decline engenders to Lodge life and the health of our fraternity. But as the old saying goes, simply complaining about something without offering solutions to the problem is no more than whining. So, over the years I have offered solutions. In numerous articles (and in my book "The Future of Odd Fellowship - To Be or Not To Be"), I have pointed out methods and techniques to bring in (and retain) members. At bottom, I have advocated that Lodges can no longer afford to be one-dimensional in the Twenty-First Century. Successful Lodges in this Century are three-dimensional: (1) emphasizing not only the history and ritual of our Order, (2) but also opening the doors and windows of our Lodges to reach out into our communities with good works, (3) and further making sure that we bring the fraternal social life back to our Lodges and just have some fun.

It is interesting to note that the serious decline in our membership is NOT an Odd Fellows phenomenon. We are not alone. Indeed, other fraternal orders have seen very similar declines over the past several decades. I thought you might be interested in thoughts from some leaders of our sister and brother fraternities – gathered from news accounts around the country. I think you will find them instructive.

“The young people – we’re talking married couples 25 to 35 – their priorities have changed as far as joining fraternal organizations,” said Phil Kirmse, exalted ruler of an Illinois Elks Lodge. “They have so many outside interests.” The Elks, nationally reported a
drop since 1980 of 125,000 members. Mr. Kirmse’s lodge had 1,300 members when he joined 10 years ago. It’s has dropped to fewer than 700, and the average age of its members is about 62. “So, in 10 years,” he said, “unless we bring some young people in, we’re just going to go downhill because we’re so old.” The Elks annual report for 2010-11, nationally, showed 869,019 members with a net loss of 23,868 members for the year ending March 31, 2011.

Mel Spizzo, secretary of a Moose Lodge, said, “We get some young people, but mostly old-timers join. New enrollees have to stay here for an hour and a half and listen to people tell the history of the lodge. You have to sit and stand, sit and stand. It’s like being in church. It turns some people off.” Nationally, in 1979 there were 1,323,246 members of Moose Lodges. In 2013, the number of members had declined to 800,000.

The Improved Order of Red Men, a fraternal organization that traces itself to the Boston Tea Party, is strongest in New England, the Far West and Texas, but it’s membership is down to about 23,000 nationally, and has declined from its high of 500,000 in the 1920’s. “All of the organizations have the same problems,” said David Lintz, director of the Red Men Museum and Library in Waco, Texas. “Guys just don’t commit as much anymore to the requirements, the memorization and ceremonies and rituals. The fraternities aren’t as needed anymore for things like insurance or political clout.”

Even the largest fraternal organization of all – the Masons – has shown a serious decline in membership. The high point for the Masonic Order in the United States was in 1959 when they showed 4,103,161 members. Since 1959, the Masons’ membership has declined every single year without fail (a steady decline of over 50 years). In 2012 membership had dropped to just 1,306,539. In a recent article appearing in USA Today, it was noted that despite the impression given by books such as “The Da Vinci Code” and “The Lost Symbol” and movies like “National
Treasure”, the Masons are not a clandestine group. “We’re not a secret society,” said Mark Bennett, historian of a Freemasons lodge in North Carolina. “We’re a society with secrets.” In an effort to boost flagging membership across the USA, a number of Masonic lodges, like other fraternities, are abandoning secretive ways and inviting the public to see what the organization is really all about. In 2001, the Masons produced a report called “It’s About Time” which encouraged lodges to invite the community in. Most, however, didn’t start opening their doors till 2009 when Masons in Massachusetts saw success with the new policy.

And, of course, Odd Fellowship has experienced a precipitous decline in membership over the years. The high watermark for Odd Fellows’ membership in California was 1927 (almost 90 years ago) when our Order boasted 58,398 members. Then starting in 1928, our membership started to decline, with an occasional year of growth, until the World War II years, when membership increased for a few years. In 1948 our California membership was 30,600. But starting in 1949, membership began a steady 64-year descent (with the exception of one year which showed a slight gain) until the present day. And currently (as of December 31, 2013), California Odd Fellowship shows that we have 4,727 members. One has to travel back in California history to 1859 (over 150 years ago) to find membership totals less than 4,727 members. In 1859 we had 4,603 members. And no one suggests that 4,727 members "on the books" represents the true number of Odd Fellows who participate in Lodge and fraternal life. We all know that Lodges carry "paper members" - folks who may pay their dues and are listed on the annual reports, but who rarely if ever appear at the Lodge. I will surmise that of the 4,727 members on our books, the number of active and engaged Odd Fellows in California is less than 2,000. There are high schools in our state with higher enrollments than 2,000.

Business as usual is unacceptable. When we had 58,000 members, we could ignore the problem. When we had 30,000 members, we
could be complacent about it. But today, with our membership on the books of less than 5,000, we must address it as our highest priority. It’s the elephant sitting in the middle of our Lodge room, and can’t be ignored any longer.

It seems pretty clear to me that if simply continue to do what we have been doing for the last 64 years, we will certainly continue the decline. On the other hand, if we are willing to evolve and change - and become three-dimensional Lodges - we will stop the slide and reverse the trend. Certainly, our sister and brother fraternal orders are changing the way they do business. And in the last year (under the leadership of Junior Past Grand Master Rick Boyles and 2013-14 Membership Chairman Peter Sellars) we actually halted the precipitous drop in our membership. In 2013-14 we were almost flat - our net loss was only 3 members (rather than hundreds of members as in past years). We halted the descent in 2013-14 because we emphasized membership and we encouraged Lodges to become three-dimensional.

The proof is right before our eyes. Progressive Odd Fellows Lodges in California which have opened their doors to the public, have involved themselves in the community, and have brought the fun aspect back to fraternal life have shown significant growth, while Odd Fellows Lodges that have not changed their ways have shrunk in membership or, at best, have remained static.

The path to the future should be clear to any Odd Fellow who wishes to see this Order continue, prosper, thrive, and grow.

Dave Rosenberg
The Branches of This Order Are Mere Shells of What They Once Were

August 6, 2014

I have written many articles about the slow and steady decline in membership that we’ve seen in the Odd Fellows Lodges in California and throughout the United States for the past three generations. We all know the scenario, and the efforts that are being made (recently, with some measure of success) to slow, stop and ultimately reverse that trend. As we all should recognize by now, the decline cannot be halted by continuing to do business as usual. That "business-as-usual" approach hasn't worked for the past 64 years, and won't suddenly work just because we repeat it in the 65th, 66th or 67th year. To succeed in the 21st Century, our Odd Fellows Lodges must become three-dimensional Lodges emphasizing not only our history, heritage and ritual, but also opening the doors of our Lodges to reach out into our local communities with good works, and reaching out to our members to bring back the social and fun aspects of belonging to a fraternity.

But what about our other branches? What about the Rebekah Lodges, the Encampments, the Cantons, the Ladies Encampment Auxiliary, the Ladies Auxiliary Patriarchs Militant, Theta Rho, and Junior Odd Fellows?

Let's be frank. It's not a pretty picture. If the Odd Fellows Lodges have suffered membership declines, the other branches have also suffered declines, multiplied and squared.

The Rebekahs in California were once a remarkably large and powerful branch. In 1950 (just 64 years ago), California had 50,002 Rebekah members in 367 Rebekah Lodges. In 2004 (just 10 years ago), the number of members had dropped like a stone to 5,718
and the number of Lodges had shrunk to 123. Today, the decline continues in that there are just 1,951 regular members in our Rebekah Lodges, and the number of Rebekah Lodges has fallen to 62. The downward trend is shocking and concerning. And, clearly, it is unsustainable. In the last 10 years alone, the membership numbers have dropped to just one third of what they were; the number of Lodges has halved. If the trend were to continue at the same rate, we can expect to see 10 years from today just 650 Rebekahs in 31 Lodges.

And 1,951 members in 62 Lodges averages just 32 members per Lodge. While that doesn't sound too bad on the surface, if we peel away the layers of the onion, we see that the situation is dire. First of all, of the 1,951 members, only 1,728 are dues paying members. Second, 136 of the members are members in the jurisdictional Lodge. Third, we all know that having members "on the books" doesn't mean they are all active members; we know that at least half the members of any Lodge are members on paper and rarely attend or participate. Accordingly, I would estimate that there are, today, only about 800 "active" Rebekahs in California. Divided into the 61 non-jurisdictional Lodges, that averages out to about 13 members per Lodge. We all know that a Lodge with only 13 active members - particularly if the members are in their 70's, 80's and 90's, is a Lodge with challenges. Of course, an "average" or 13 also means that there are Lodges with more than 13 and Lodges with less than 13 - perhaps far less than 13 members. The alarm light is surely blinking red for those Lodges.

And, indeed, we see all sorts of challenges and problems when numbers diminish to these levels. Lodges have difficulty filling officer positions. Members are recycled year after year into offices. Checks and balances fail at the Lodge level. Often quorums can't be reached to have real Lodge meetings. The Rebekah Assembly - a hard-working entity - has had real budget challenges due to the great decline in membership. The Grand Encampment and the Cantons of the Patriarchs
Militant are in even more dire straits. It's, frankly, hard to get the actual numbers, but it is my understanding that there are about 208 members of the Encampment, serving in 13 Encampments in California, and there are about 92 Patriarchs Militant serving in 7 Cantons in California. Those numbers show that these branches are shells of what once existed in California, when thousands attended the Grand Encampment, and uniformed Patriarchs Militant, complete with bands, marched by the hundreds in parades. And if we continue applying the reality that only half the members of any organization are "active" members, then we really have only about 100 active members in the Grand Encampment and less than 50 active Patriarchs Militant in California.

Why have these numbers diminished? The answer is simple. Members of the Encampment can only come from third-degree Odd Fellows. If the Odd Fellows Lodges are weak, the Encampments must be weak. Similarly, members of the military branch can only come from the Encampments. If the Encampments are weak, the Cantons must be weak. And yet, these branches blithely continue to do business as usual as if it were 1920 and thousands of members were in the Encampments and Cantons. They continue to hold four-day grand gatherings, even though in some cases, less than 20 voting members show up.

The numbers and the stories are similar for the Ladies Auxiliaries. The numbers are even worse for the youth groups. Statewide, Theta Rho is a mere shadow of what it once was, and Junior Odd Fellows exist virtually in name only.

And that's just California. We know that there are jurisdictions in the USA where the numbers of members are far, far less than in California. We know that there are jurisdictions - quite a few of them - where the sum total of membership is less than 200. In California we have less than 5,000 Odd Fellows on the books and less than 2,000 Rebekahs. And we have difficulty supporting the assorted branches. How can a jurisdiction with 200 members
support the various branches of this Order?

Why do we go through this facade? Odd Fellowship certainly has a history or evolution and change. Dramatic changes occurred in the middle of the 20th Century when the call to join fraternal orders diminished as government and private sector assumed many of the tasks previously undertaken by fraternities (e.g. insurance, hospitals, orphanages, retirement communities, etc.). Another huge change occurred after World War II when fraternal social life took a back seat to television, movies and the electronic age. Everything changed again in the 21st Century, when Odd Fellows opened to women and when the age of membership was dropped to 16. Odd Fellowship must adjust to change or be buried by it. To continue business as usual is simply no longer sustainable.

What is the solution? To me, it's apparent. Within the next five years - hopefully sooner rather than later - we must re-write the Codes and develop the protocols to merge our branches. When Schuyler Colfax, in the 1860's opening Odd Fellows membership to women, developed the Rebekah Degree and the concept of Rebekah Lodges, it was unique and progressive in the fraternal world - for the 19th Century. However, in the 21st Century, the quaint "separate but equal" concept of the "men's Lodge" and the "women's Lodge" is an anachronism and no longer viable in this century. This next evolution of our Order is inevitable. And, inevitably, this change can only be launched at the level of Sovereign Grand Lodge. The change must begin with a merger of the Patriarchs Militant and the LAPM. It must then move to a merger of the Encampment with the LEA. Next, Odd Fellows and Rebekahs must merge. And ultimately, all branches must merge and become one Order, with 9 degrees.

Sovereign Grand Lodge meets this month in Victoria, Canada. The time is now.

Dave Rosenberg
Letting Go So That Newer Members Can Lead
August 27, 2014

It's sometimes hard to let go.

Parents certainly experience this phenomenon. As children grow older, it's a fine line that parents tread in protecting the children from the world, while at the same time allowing the children to participate, learn and grow in the world. And, certainly, at some point, parents must "let go" and have the grace to allow the children to become independent in that world - to develop on their own, mistakes and all, as adults.

Well, what is true for parents is also true for a generation of leaders in our Lodges. At some point in time, the leaders of the last generation have to "let go" and allow a new generation of leaders to develop and to flourish. And it's sometimes hard for that last generation to let go the reins and allow that new generation to assume leadership in the Lodge. I have seen this failure to let go first hand in some Lodges - much to the detriment of the Lodge and the good fellowship within the Lodge. I have seen men and women who have led the Lodge for the past 20-plus years simply refuse to truly let go, and truly allow the younger members to become the new generation of leadership. This failure to let go can be terribly frustrating for the new members, and frankly, it can be very damaging to the Lodge. Those new members feel shut out of decision-making, and sometimes even feel resentful of the last generation. And it's quite short-sighted. No one lives forever, and inevitably the new generation must assume positions of leadership. But if the old leadership team refuses to develop that new generation, and refuses to let go of those reins of power, that new generation may not still be around.
You can't expect new members to "wait their turn" for a decade or more.

Many members are important to a Lodge, but no member is indispensable to a Lodge. Just like the task of a Noble Grand is to develop candidates to become Noble Grand some day, it should be the task of every senior member of the Lodge to develop young member's skills and knowledge so that those younger members can assume positions of responsibility in the Lodge. It's really very selfish for members of the last generation to ignore the new generation of leaders, or worse, to refuse to empower that new generation. The welfare of the Order and the Lodge should come before any personal pride and personal titles.

When I first joined my own Lodge, it had less than 25 members on the books and was inactive. Within a short time after I joined, I assumed the position of Vice Grand, then Noble Grand. In the position of Noble Grand I changed the culture of our Lodge and moved us to become a strong, dynamic, large and growing Lodge. But I did not continue as "Noble Grand for Life". I worked on developing the future leaders of our Lodge, and then moved on. I did the same in our Encampment and our Canton. I assumed the positions of Chief Patriarch and Captain, respectively, changed the culture, attitude and direction of these branches, and then relinquished the leadership positions to the next generation. And the new leaders have done the same. I moved on, and so did they. It's healthy for the organization, and the results can be very satisfying for all concerned.

This is not to say the last generation of leaders should go sit on the proverbial Lodge rocking chair. Not at all. There are many, many options available to senior members of our Order. Those senior members can continue to serve in numerous positions in the Lodge such as Warden, Conductor, Right Supporter of the Noble Grand, and others. Those senior members can assume responsible committee positions in the Lodge, such as
Membership or Good Fellowship. Those senior members can take responsibility to organize Lodge events. Further, they can advance at Grand Lodge or even Sovereign Grand Lodge. They can join and advance in the Encampment and the Cantons of our Order, or the Rebekah Lodge. Lots of options exist short of the pasture.

So, it may, indeed, be hard to let go, but the future of our Lodges depend on passing knowledge, responsibility, and leadership to the next generation. If we fail to do so, we have failed the future.

Dave Rosenberg

The annual Installation and Awards Dinner at the Davis Lodge has attracted over 100 members and guests. The Davis Odd Fellows don’t just install their officers, they also present awards and recognition to members who have made substantial contributions in the prior year.
What's in a name?

Sometimes, a name can be very revealing - particularly of an organization. Let's take just a moment to look at the name of our fraternity: Independent Order of Odd Fellows. What does it tell us? Well, perhaps it tells us quite a bit - if we take the time to slice and dice and actually analyze the five words.

**INDEPENDENT.** Our predecessors had many word choices available to them for the first word in our fraternal name. They could have chosen "Mystic", or "Benevolent", or "Secret", or "Loyal", or "Ancient", or "Knights" or "Improved", or even "Hermetic" - as did some other fraternal orders. But they chose "Independent". This is a strong word, meant to convey a strong message. The message says that we are not beholden to any other entity. We are free to make our own way and create our own rules. And, indeed, the history of Odd Fellowship is a history of evolution and change, in fact, outright "rebellion" at times, as groups of Lodges went their own way, or even "self-instituted".

**ORDER.** The second word of our name is equally interesting. Our predecessors had fewer choices for that second descriptive word. They could have opted for "Society", or "Fraternity", but they settled on "Order". I have to believe that they chose "Order" because the name implies a social system with a hierarchy and rules. Indeed, that is appropriate to us. We have degrees, and Lodges, and ritual, and regalia, and Grand Lodges, and a Sovereign Grand Lodge. Certainly, we are an Order.

**OF.** Often overlooked, because it's just a short connecting word, but let's not forget the third word of our name. Our founders did not choose "for" as the connector. They specifically chose "of".
There is, indeed, a difference. We are not just "for" ourselves. We are a group "of" Odd Fellows, but we can be (and we historically have been) a group of brothers and sisters who help others.

**ODD FELLOWS.** It is appropriate to consider the fourth and the fifth words together. This is because our name, in England where we originated, was combined as "Oddfellows". In this country, the words were separated. But what is the origin of this unique name? What do the words "Odd Fellows" really mean? We know that there are many theories regarding the origin of "Oddfellows" - I've heard at least a half dozen of those theories - some mundane and some rather interesting. But that's all that they are: theories. The truth has been lost in the fog of time. No one alive today can say with certainty what the origins are of the name. Nevertheless, two things are apparent. For one, the name is unique. For another, the name has a certain fun, whimsical quality to it.

And so I suggest that we should enjoy our "Odd-ness" and our "Odd-Fellowship". Why not? It's part of our persona and uniqueness. The name alone causes people to pay attention. (And isn't that step one in bringing new members to a Lodge?) Personally, I think the social time Lodge members spend together is quality time. It harkens back to the earliest days of our fraternity, when the members would gather in pubs to drink, eat, tell tales, sing songs and just have a good time. Let's not ever lose that quality. Let's not get so serious, so dour, and so straight-laced that we forget to just have fun with our Lodge mates.

So, what have we learned?

Well, we've learned that our name actually tells us quite a bit about who we are. We are Independent. We are an Order. We are "of" Odd Fellowship, not just "for" Odd Fellows. And, ultimately, we are ODD FELLOWS. So, let's all remember to savor our Oddness. We are the Independent Order of Odd Fellows!

Dave Rosenberg
Have I gotten your attention with that headline? I thought I might. Those are strong words. And certainly controversial. But I do not say them lightly, and I say them with due respect, in the vein of constructive criticism, and in the hope that the structure can be changed. Obviously, we all want a structure that supports success, not one that fosters failure.

First, let me define my terms. When I refer to "Sovereign Grand Lodge" (hereafter, "SGL") I am referring to the ultimate legislative body of Odd Fellowship. This is the entity that, at bottom, controls the fraternal life of our Order - everything from regalia to ritual and all points in between. When I refer to "structured" I am not talking about the individuals who are part of SGL - I have the greatest admiration and respect for our new Sovereign Grand Master Jimmy Humphrey, and all the officials and representatives who comprise the membership of SGL. When I refer to "structured" I am talking about the dictionary definition: "The way something is built, arranged, or organized." And when I refer to "failure", I am focusing on the long-term viability of our Order - and specifically, Odd Fellowship in North America.

So, what’s the problem, you say? After all, the SGL has been in existence in North America (in some form) for almost two hundred years. That doesn't sound like failure, does it?

Indeed, if one is looking at Odd Fellowship through the lens of 1914, one would argue that SGL was doing quite well. But, Brothers and Sisters, we are not talking about 1914. We are talking about 2014, and the years going forward. The structure of SGL
may have been well-suited during the rise of fraternal orders in the 19th and early part of the 20th Centuries. But now, in the early 21st century, in the midst of the era of the decline of fraternal orders, the structure of SGL is an impediment.

Don't get me wrong. We need a SGL. I am not advocating for its abolition.

I am, however, advocating for its reform. I am suggesting that the SGL needs to be restructured - to make it an effective and responsive force to deal with the single greatest issue faced by Odd Fellowship in the 21st Century (and, frankly, faced by fraternal orders in general): The decline in membership. That decline has been steady for decades now, and is absolutely unsustainable at its current pace. We simply cannot continue to lose hundreds of members every year. The decline in membership in our Lodges directly affects a host of other issues faced in Lodges, such as lack of membership to implement the checks and balances required for financial stability and security. There are Lodges that have shrunk to such a degree that less than 10 members are listed on the books, and officer positions simply get rotated every year amongst the handful who can serve. Some Lodges become so small that they lack quorums to conduct meetings, and are controlled by just one or two people. These are not healthy situations. And the membership statistics that we have been keeping for the last half century show an alarming decline. There are entire jurisdictions in North America - and quite a few of them - that have less than 200 members on their books. And we all know that "book" members don't necessarily translate into active members. Our many branches (Theta Rho, Junior Odd Fellows, Encampment, LEA Patriarchs Militant, and LAPM) are, in membership, mere shadows of what they once were.

Ultimately, the solution to this dilemma of declining membership can only be achieved by individual Lodge members, with the assistance and support of their respective Lodges. Grand Lodges
can play peripheral supporting roles in membership development (e.g. membership development seminars, membership development grants, membership brochures, and the like). And, in my opinion, SGL can play a significant role as well. But, currently, SGL’s structure prevents it from helping to overcome our membership decline. Rather, the structure of SGL is a structure of inertia, not progress. It is structured to preserve the status quo. And what is the status quo? It is 60 years of membership declines. No one should want to preserve that.

So, what do I suggest? Here are the four structural changes at SGL which, I hope, can be accomplished in the near future:

1. SGL should be structured more like a "House of Representatives" rather than like a "Senate." Currently, every jurisdiction receives the same number of votes at SGL. This is inherently unfair. A jurisdiction with less than 200 members receives the same 2 votes as does a jurisdiction with over 4,000 members. I would suggest a modification of this structure which would not deprive any jurisdiction of its present representative numbers, but would grant larger jurisdictions some modicum of equity. So, for example, while every jurisdiction would receive the minimum of two representatives, some jurisdictions would receive a total of 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7 representatives, depending on the number of members in that jurisdiction. It won't be a full "one person-one vote" equity - but it would go a long way to providing a fairer and more representative voting system. And it certainly would recognize jurisdictions that are growing.

2. SGL needs to be able to move a lot faster. Currently, for example, it takes literally years for changes to be made in ritual, if they happen at all. I know, for example, that representatives from California a few years ago, proposed some relatively simple (but important) changes to an Encampment degree that would have eliminated some blatantly racist and offensive passages. To this day, the changes have not been made. This
inertia discourages members, and leaves in place language that is outmoded, or stilted, or even offensive. Another example, is the oath taken by new members in the Initiatory Degree. That oath is the longest I have ever heard. It's length is downright painful. It takes over five minutes for new members to recite this oath. Heck, the oaths taken by the President of the United States, or a Governor, or a Judge are also important - but they are about one-tenth the length of this degree oath in Odd Fellowship. Can it be readily modernized and shortened? Apparently, not.

3. Form should not take precedence over substance. I am aware that jurisdictions submitted legislation and proposals to SGL this last session which were not considered by the body because a new committee chair imposed a requirement on the form of the submission, that had not been effectively communicated to the jurisdictions in advance. Accordingly, proposals were not considered on the floor and were bounced to a future year. That sort of process dampens fraternal democracy. Virtually all of the work of SGL is done within an antiquated committee structure that gives inordinate authority to one person (the chair), and relatively little of substance is taken up on the floor. The committee structure allows issues to be sidelined, delayed, or even buried. One could say that SGL, with its committee structure, is formed to support the status quo, and is structured to resist change. And yet, change is the imperative needed to attract a new generation of members to our Lodges and to our Order. It was once said that true insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over again and expecting a different result. Well, for the past 60-plus years we have been doing the same thing over and over and over again, and for the last 60-plus years we have been losing members year after year after year. And yet, some in our Order still believe that if just keep doing things the same way we will suddenly start gaining members.
4. SGL needs to join the electronic age. In case no one has noticed, we are in the 21st Century. Yet voting continues to be done at SGL in an antiquated, non-electronic way. At my urging, California tried electronic voting rather than ballot or hand voting at the 2014 Grand Lodge sessions, and it was quite successful. Previously, we had spent at least 25% of our floor time during sessions in the laborious process of counting (and recounting) ballots and hand votes. With the use of electronic voting several remarkable things were achieved: (a) The item on which we were voting was displayed on a screen so that everyone was on the same page when voting; (b) the actual voting took less than a minute, and at the end of the voting, results were immediately displayed on the screen; (c) the vote tallies were accurate and disputes were avoided; and (d) the meeting secretary had an instant and complete record of each vote.

At the local level we can revitalize our Lodges by bringing in new, quality members. Ultimately, the health of our Lodges and the growth of our Order is an individual responsibility of each of us. At the state and province level, we can make our Grand Lodges viable by electing strong, progressive leaders. But all our work at the Lodge and Grand Lodge levels will be stymied unless we can restructure the old battleship that is the SGL. I commend our new Sovereign Grand Master Jimmy Humphrey for intending to re-charge and re-focus the SGL's Revitalization Committee. Several years ago a Revitalization Committee was created. (Such a Revitalization Committee was something that I, and others, had proposed.) In its initial term, the Revitalization Committee had some suggestions for change. But, over the succeeding years, this committee has been relatively moribund. This Revitalization Committee offers hope for structural change that will make our Order more responsive, better, and stronger in this new century.

Dave Rosenberg
In my message when I was running for Grand Warden and, again when I was a candidate for Deputy Grand Master, I emphasized two things: (1) A renewed focus on retaining and increasing our membership, and (2) A desire to reduce and eliminate the conflicts, bad-blood and infighting I see in some Lodges and in the Order.

I have spent considerable time in these DMC Newsletters talking about the first item. And today, I’d like to spend a few moments talking about the second item. Frankly, they are intertwined and interlinked. If a Lodge is disrupted by fights between members or factions of members, it becomes and uncomfortable place - certainly not a place conducive for new members. In this regard, I note the speech given by Bob Smith, the out-going Sovereign Grand Master, during last month’s Sovereign Grand Lodge sessions. Brother Smith talked about this very topic. Here is what he said:

"I was Sovereign Grand Master for less than 30 minutes when I had to deal with two brothers fighting. Two days before I came here, I had to deal with two brothers fighting. Not the same two but Odd Fellows all. And it breaks my heart to see the tension that we face because of the inner fighting in our lodges, in our Grand Lodges and between lodges and it is tearing us apart. It was wonderful to sit here tonight and listen to the marvelous things we've have done this year. We have given over 750 million dollars to help people. Isn't it strange that we can help people we don't see and we don't know but we have trouble getting along with the person sitting next to us...with the amount of wonderful
things we can do fighting each other. Just imagine what we can
do if we work together..."

Simply put, our Lodges are too small and our Order has too few
members to allow such personal, and often petty, disruptions. When we engage in such fighting, have we forgotten the
instructions we learned in the Degree of Friendship, the Degree
of Love, and the Degree of Truth?

So, what are we to do when we see such infighting and conflict
within our Lodge? First, it is the antagonists who must make an
effort to resolve the discord. Hopefully, these antagonists -
Brothers and Sisters in the same fraternal order - can step back,
apologize, and find a better path forward. But if that doesn’t work,
it is up to us to find that senior, respected member of the Lodge
who can intercede and help the antagonists find the way to reso-
lution.

And these conflicts must find a resolution. The alternative is a fes-
tering sore and disruption in the Lodge. That disruption creates
an environment which is not conducive to retaining members,
and certainly not friendly to potential new members. Who wants
to join a Lodge full of tension and bad-blood? Where’s the fun in
that? And why join a Lodge where the members violate the very
tenets for which the Lodge stands?

Dave Rosenberg
You never know what you will find when you rummage through old boxes. Well, looking through some old boxes at my Davis Lodge the other day, I came across a card dated 1946 (almost 70 years ago) that a Noble Grand had printed. This Noble Grand - by the name of J. Osborn Brink - had served in Monrovia Lodge #330. I did a little research in a wonderful book by Frank Christy entitled "California Odd Fellowship" and found that this Lodge was instituted in 1887 in Monrovia, Los Angeles County. In 1935 Temple Lodge #398, at Temple City, consolidated with Monrovia #330. Regrettably, in 1966, Monrovia #330 surrendered its charter and is no more. But this Past Grand of Monrovia #330 had printed a small card which contained the following few words, which that Noble Grand entitled "Odd":

"An Odd Fellow is a fellow who was odd until he became an Odd Fellow. Yes, before he became an Odd Fellow, he was just an odd fellow, a fellow who is odd. You see, an odd fellow ceases to be odd when he became an Odd Fellow. Or does he?

When you are looking for an Odd Fellow, do not be deceived by taking a fellow who is odd for an Odd Fellow. An Odd Fellow is no longer odd when he becomes an Odd Fellow.

It would be quite odd for an Odd Fellow to mistake an odd fellow for an Odd Fellow, for odd fellows are just odd fellows until they become Odd Fellows.

I am looking for you to be less odd when you become an Odd Fellow. And when all odd fellows cease to be odd by becoming Odd Fellows, then it will be really odd to see a fellow who is not an Odd Fellow.
Brother, the odds are against you if you are not an Odd Fellow."

I got quite a chuckle out of this little refrain from the pen of Brother J. Osborn Brink. I imagine he used his little card as a recruiting tool, and one day one of the members of Davis Lodge picked up that card in the 1940's and it found its way into a box and ultimately, into my hands, so I could share it with all of you. It reminded me that Odd Fellows of the last generation, and the generation before that one, and the generation before that were not Dour Fellows. They were not Joyless Fellows, or Sad Fellows, or Stern Fellows, or Severe Fellows, or Gloomy Fellows. They were fraternal members who knew how to laugh, have a good time, and have some fun.

If we are dour, joyless, sad, stern, severe, or gloomy our Lodges will be dour, joyless, sad, stern, severe, and gloomy. That won't retain members, and that certainly won't attract members.

So, let's all endeavor to have some fun and enjoy our "oddness". And in memory of Brother J. Osborn Brink, and all the fun-loving Odd Fellows of past generations, I have been inspired to compose the following "Ode" which I call:

**Having Fun with Oddness**

You may think it odd
That I wish to trod
The venerable sod
Of oddness.

You may even think me a clod
That I purport to prod
And give a hearty nod
To oddness.
In truth, I don’t mean to be a lightning rod
And I don’t wish to ride roughshod
But from Cape Cod to Riyadh
There is oddness.

Here in our own community
I speak to you with alacrity
About a certain commodity
That transcends our heredity.

Do you sense a bit of rigidity?
A touch of liquidity and fluidity?
A certain turbidity and morbidity?
Or just a taste of acidity?

I offer it with validity
And a fair amount of timidity
Assuming a certain absurdity
It’s all about our oddity.

For I am a futuristic mod
By no means an Olympic god
I trust the instincts of my bod
And support oddness.

It’s far heavier than a monkey pod
It’s much lighter than a hot rod
Its tastes better than a boiled cod
Let’s all hear it for oddness.

So, don’t report me to the Mossad
Don’t spit in my direction with a wad
Instead, lift your glass of Pernod
And toast the oddness.

Have fun with your oddness.

Dave Rosenberg
On September 10, 2014, I sent out an article in this newsletter entitled "The Sovereign Grand Lodge is Structured for Failure". I raised several points highlighting how the SGL is set up to maintain the status quo and to resist change. While maintaining the status quo was just dandy in the 19th Century, and even in the beginning of the 20th Century, when this Order was in growth mode - it is singularly inappropriate in the late 20th Century and now in the 21st Century when the Order is in serious and steady decline.

This Order has to adjust to a new world and to new (potential) members with modern interests. The basic tenets and teachings of Odd Fellowship are, of course, timeless. But if we continue to teach them in stuffy Lodges that are out of touch with 21st Century reality, we will wind up teaching them only to ourselves. And that will be a shame. We need to attract the young energy and enthusiasm of new members in their 20's, 30's and 40's. But moribund Lodges that have forgotten how to have a good time in the social atmosphere of the fraternal Lodge, and have failed to reach out into their communities with good works are not going to attract new members.

As I pointed out in my September 10 article, the SGL is unrepresentative of the membership, heavily favoring very small jurisdictions at the expense of jurisdictions which have the bulk of the members. In fact, SGL gives the same number of votes to jurisdictions that have 200 members as is given to jurisdictions which have 20 times that membership. How is that fair or
equitable? The article also noted that SGL moves incredibly slowly - new ideas are buried for years and never see the light of day. The article pointed out how SGL elevates form over substance. And the article also noted that SGL operates in an antiquated way - far removed from the electronic age.

I have received a fair amount of feedback on this article, and that’s good. The purpose of the exercise was to get some dialog going. And it did.

I’d like to highlight one of the e-mails I received in response to this article. It was written by a gentleman who I highly respect, and who has the respect of Odd Fellows throughout California. He is a unique individual who served as Grand Master of California for two terms, and is also beginning a term as Grand Patriarch of California (a distinction held by only five men in the history of Odd Fellowship in this state). What is particularly poignant and unique about the comments, below, is the fact that this gentleman is very traditional, very conservative, and highly respectful of the history, heritage, tradition, and ritual of this Order. The comments, below, were written by PGM Gene Breeland:

Dave,

Thank you for the thoughtful and dead on article. Coming from the largest jurisdiction in the order, and having attended SGL; I can say with certainty that there are a core of members at that level whose sole purpose is to see that nothing gets changed and that any new or radical idea is successfully pushed aside or covered up so it never sees the light of day. These are members from small jurisdictions who unite with others from like sized jurisdictions for self preservation who do not see themselves as the problem, and therefore criticize anyone who offers an idea counter to their own thinking as being against true fraternalism. They will continue to sit in the dark, robed, repeating their Gregorian
Chants as the order decays around them. A truly sad situation. Perhaps it is time for a revolution, the beginning of a new order. My thoughts.

Gene Breeland, PGM

Dave Rosenberg

The Davis Lodge opened its doors to the community for a New Year’s Eve Party. The 225 tickets were all sold out.
Some Remarkable Statistics That Should Concern Us All

October 3, 2014

A few months ago, I asked Louie Sarmiento (a young, active, and energetic Brother who I call the spark plug leading the resurgence and growth of Odd Fellowship in the Philippines) to undertake a "small" project. I asked him to identify the largest Odd Fellows Lodges in North America, particularly those with over 100 members. I had a motive, of course. It was my belief that while this Order has been shrinking in membership for the past three generations, there were some Lodges that have bucked the trend and have grown and prospered. And, based on that belief, it was my theory that these large Lodges can provide examples of ways that other Odd Fellows Lodges can grow and be successful. In other words, these large Lodges may very well be "laboratories" showing successful treatments for the malaise of shrinking rosters that have hectored this Order for over 60 years.

Well, Louie dug into the project, as I knew he would. It was not easy. And the numbers that he checked out in the Sovereign Grand Lodge data base are only as accurate as the numbers provided to that data base by the various Grand Lodges on this continent. Ultimately, Louie focused on the annual reports that were compiled as of December 31, 2013, as his base line. These reports, viewed from the 30,000 foot elevation of SGL are revealing, troubling, and inspiring all at the same time. I offer, below, Louie Sarmiento’s statistics (and a big "thank you" to Louie, as he has done a great service for our Order).

And here are some other thoughts from Brother Sarmiento on his project: "Sadly, only 27 lodges all over the United States and Canada are in the '100 membership mark'. Approximately 70% of the 'active' lodges in the U.S.A. and Canada are within or
below 20 active members. Quite a number are actually in the '5 members' or even '4 members' mark. If combined (without re-counting people because they are members of other branches like Encampment, Canton, Rebekahs, etc.) there are more or less 20,000 members in the U.S.A. and Canada. A majority of the Grand Lodges have a total membership of less than 500 in their State or Province. This is a reality check . . . that IOOF in the U.S.A. and Canada needs to do something . . . IOOF in Europe is the strong-hold with more than 90,000 members . . . the other approximately 15,000 are in Latin America, Asia, Australasia, Africa."

Indeed, this is a reality check. Knowing that some 70% of the Lodges throughout North America have 20 or fewer members should prompt us all to sit up and take notice. And if we realize that in most Lodges, only about half the "active" members are really active, engaged, and attend meetings with any regularity - then the numbers are even more dire. Clearly, leadership at the Sovereign Grand Lodge level has a great challenge before them. And the challenge must be addressed today. The fact that the structure of our Order compels us to turn over our leadership every single year makes the challenge even more difficult. But we can't wait till next year, or the year after that. We must address the issues now, and continue to address them. We have to accept the fact that our greatest challenge is (and has been for years) our continued loss of members. To essentially continue business as usual like we have been doing for the past 60 years and expect different results is, truly, insanity. We must change the structure of our Order, and we must change the way we do business. Anything less than this will result in the continued diminution of our great and ancient fraternity. I have every confidence that our new Sovereign Grand Master Jimmy Humphrey understands the challenge and is up to the task. But are the representatives who attend Sovereign Grand Lodge sessions up to the challenge of change?

Dave Rosenberg
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*Source: Grand Lodge Annual Reports (As of December 31, 2013)*
As you know, DMC was founded to address three, and only three, issues: Membership, Membership, and Membership.

The declines in membership in our Order over the past half-century have been appalling. On this continent, we have lost over 90% of our membership numbers. We have many jurisdictions (states and provinces) where the sum total of membership is under 500, some under 200. In California - the largest jurisdiction - our total Odd Fellows membership numbers used to be over 58,000, and are now under 5,000. We once had over 600 Lodges in this state, and now have 120. We have dozens of Lodges with 20 or fewer members on their books, and some with 10 or fewer members. Our Branches are in even worse shape. The sum total of members of Encampments in California today is less than 200. And there are less than 75 Patriarchs Militant in this entire state. And, as always, those are the numbers on paper - query how many of those are active members.

I believe - by now - virtually everyone in California understands the challenge of declining membership and understands that the responsibility to reverse that trend lies with each of us. We can't just depend on "the other guy" to fix the problem. However, it may be that there are some Odd Fellows out there who still don't "get it" and still don't appreciate that the Order (and perhaps their own Lodge) is in trouble. So, with tongue slightly in cheek, for these few unseeing andunknowing members, I offer the following 10-point Primer.

How Do You Know if Your Lodge May Be Failing?

1. You know your Lodge may be failing if you have to get on the phone each month to roust out members to have a quorum of five for a meeting.
2. You know your Lodge may be failing if you haven't initiated a new member into your Lodge for over two years.

3. You know your Lodge may be failing if, at your yearly elections, you have to rotate your elected officers between the same 5 or 6 people.

4. You know your Lodge may be failing if your "members sick and in distress" item is the longest segment of your meeting agenda.

5. You know your Lodge may be failing if your Lodge Hall is rarely used except for your Lodge meetings.

6. You know your Lodge may be failing if your youngest Lodge member is over 65.

7. You know your Lodge may be failing if your Lodge meetings last 20 minutes, and there is no new business and no committee reports.

8. You know your Lodge may be failing if your Lodge has no fundraising activity to replenish the Lodge bank account.

9. You know your Lodge may be failing if your Lodge members organize no activity to benefit the local community, and have no social activity for the members.

10. You know your Lodge may be failing if you have some Lodge members who shoot down every new suggested idea with words such as "that won't work", "we tired that once", or "that's a dumb idea".

There you have it. Now you know.

Dave Rosenberg
The other day I received an e-mail from one of our Brothers who wrote that some people are not happy with the DMC newsletters: "The general complaint was that they were always negative in tone and playing like a broken record. I think they wanted to hear stories on how to become a success story."

I want to thank the Brother for writing, and I can understand how some people might not be happy with the DMC newsletters. Our newsletters, since we started them in December of 2010, have focused on the steep declines in our membership and the need to face this problem and address it with solutions. Facing a problem does, I know, make some people unhappy. Facing the fact that Lodges are dying, also makes people unhappy. Facing the reality that our Order's membership numbers have dropped from 58,000 to less than 5,000 certainly makes some people unhappy. Facing the truth that we have less than 120 Lodges (when we once had over 600) and half our Lodges have 25 or fewer members, is without question an unhappy pill. I guess the unhappy people would rather kill the messenger.

But to complain that the DMC newsletters are "always negative in tone" is just plain wrong. I wonder if the folks who are complaining have actually read the newsletters. Because if they had, they would understand that while a handful of the newsletters are blunt (stating the fact that Lodges are failing because members refuse to try new things or to engage with the community), and another handful of newsletters are humorous, tongue-in-cheek expositions of the foibles of failing Lodges (for example, we have written newsletters about the "20-minute
meeting” in dull and boring Lodges that don’t do much of anything), the vast majority of articles are, in fact, "how to" articles about getting active, getting involved, having fun, and growing a Lodge.

And we have been quite successful with the focus of DMC newsletters. The issues we raise have been discussed at Lodges, have helped some Lodges that do wish to evolve, have changed the way we do business at the Grand Lodge, and have even inspired our new Sovereign Grand Master Jimmy Humphrey in his approach.

So, just in case the unhappy members may have missed them, we will take a trip down memory lane for the next week few newsletters, and re-print some of those helpful and positive articles from past newsletters which talk about what it takes to bring in new members, grow our Lodges, and save our Order from shrinking. In case the unhappy people missed these articles the first time, they can have a chance to read them now. Here is an article that first appeared in the December 6, 2011 DMC Newsletter.

Dave Rosenberg

~

10 Helpful Hints to Bring New Members into the Order

By Dave Rosenberg, PG #169

December 2011

Most of you who read this article will have been Odd Fellows longer (perhaps far longer) than I have been. I’m a relatively new member of the Order, having been initiated in March of 2004. So, as I write this article, I’ve been an Odd Fellow for about seven years. And yet, I am asked, again and again, for advice on how to bring new members into the Order. In response to these many
requests, I’ve been urged to write this article. And, ladies and gentlemen, we absolutely have to recruit new members – Odd Fellowship in California has now dropped 90% in membership since WW II, and we have less than 5,000 dues-paying members. This situation is unsustainable, and – as Lodges diminish in membership - is causing innumerable problems throughout the state.

I suppose that I’m asked for advice because I have, personally, brought so many new members into Odd Fellowship. Specifically, I’ve sponsored about 100 new members. In 2009, the Sovereign Grand Lodge recognized me as #2 in the SGL jurisdiction in bringing in new members; and in 2010, SGL recognized me as #1 in the jurisdiction. I am a member of the Grand Lodge’s Membership Committee, and I’ve developed a “Membership Development Workshop” which, by the way, Grand Lodge has available to anyone who wants it, on a DVD. I serve as the Chair of my own Lodge’s Membership and Initiation Committee.

Yet, I do not profess to say how YOU or YOUR Lodge should recruit new members. Frankly, that’s up to YOU to determine. What I can do is give you some helpful hints that have worked for me. If those hints happen to make sense to you, or fit your style, or you wish to try them out, then please do! So, without further ado, here’s Dave Rosenberg’s 10 Helpful Hints to Recruiting New Members into the Order:

Recruitment on the Brain. The single most effective tool in recruiting new members is to have “recruitment on the brain” at all times. Talking to potential new members is not an occasional thing – it has to be a constant thing. When I meet new folks, I size them up, assess them, get to know them, and often ask them to consider applying for membership to the Lodge. For example, we recently hired a contractor to do some work at our Lodge Hall. After getting to know him, I talked to him about Odd Fellowship, and invited him to apply. He did. And I never give up. I talked to one woman for over five years about joining the Lodge.
Recently, she did. I constantly carry application forms in my pocket. You never know when you may need one.

Functions at the Lodge. One of the absolute best tools for recruitment is to have an active Lodge. Most of the new members I have recruited have first come into contact with the Lodge through Lodge functions. They come to the function, have fun, meet members and are curious about Odd Fellowship. I have recruited dozens of new members who first came in contact with the Lodge through our community events such as “Breakfast with Santa” or who came to the Lodge as a guest of a member during our annual “OddtoberFest” or when we rented a bus to visit wineries in Amador County. Active Lodges create opportunities to recruit.

**Husbands and Wives.** I have found that one of the best draws for new members is to make it user-friendly for husbands and wives (or significant others), and also for young parents with children. Very few organizations offer couples the ability to work and play together. Odd Fellowship does. Those Odd Fellows Lodges that restrict membership, or discourage membership of women, have cut off 50% of the population. Those Lodges that fail to recruit young parents have cut themselves off from a large segment of the community.

**Community Support.** The regalia, ritual, grips, passwords, and symbols of Odd Fellowship make us unique and distinguish us as a fraternal order. They should and will always be with us. However, virtually no one joins because of that. A full appreciation of the ritual will develop over time. But, frankly, most folks are drawn to IOOF when the Lodge engages in local community support. New members want to be part of good works in the community – whether it’s feeding hungry people, or working with people with developmental disabilities, or planting trees. When a Lodge engages in active community support activities, that Lodge opens a gateway to recruitment.
**Good Fellowship.** The other draw for potential new members is good fellowship activities within the Lodge. People today seek a social network and a fun place to enjoy activities with others. When Lodges have a full slate of social activities, recruitment of new members is dramatically enhanced. My Lodge, for example, hosts music events, good fellowship “Lodge Nights”, an “OddtoberFest”, a Halloween Party, and numerous other social events for members and potential new members. Let’s not forget that Odd Fellowship was started in Old England in pubs.

**Social Meetings.** Social meetings are not prohibited by the Code of Odd Fellowship, and in fact, are encouraged by Grand Lodge. What’s a social meeting? It is simply a meeting of the Lodge where no regalia are worn, no ritual is employed, and no secret signs, grips or passwords are used. Lodges that engage in social meetings have another huge technique available to them for recruitment. Potential new members can attend, can see what the Lodge is up to, and can meet members.

**Don’t Make it Easy.** There are Lodges that are so desperate for new members that when they get one, they immediately rush into an initiation. And then, once initiated, that new member is plunged into a formal, ritual meeting, and often the Lodge never sees him/her again. In my Lodge, the process of joining (we call it the “pledge period”) takes at least 5-6 months, the applicants (we call them “pledges”) have a number of requirements to accomplish before the interviewing committee and membership even vote on them. This makes the goal of membership a valuable goal for them – plus it gives them a chance to meet the members and for the members to meet them – to determine if Odd Fellowship is the right fit.

**Diversity.** The strength of America is its diversity. That should be the strength of Odd Fellowship, as well. When I recruit new members, I am looking for diversity in age, ethnicity, employment and gender. I want the Lodge to look like my community. It’s
particularly important to bring in new members in their 20’s and 30’s. They are the next generation of Odd Fellowship. When a Lodge’s members are all in their 60’s and 70’s and older, it’s virtually impossible to attract the younger generation we need to grow.

**Leadership.** A critical factor to growth of a Lodge is the ability to attract community leaders. A century ago, everybody who was anybody in town was an Odd Fellow. We lost that edge over time. But, if you can attract one or two community leaders, those leaders will attract others. Members who are recognized leaders in the community will elevate the status of the Lodge and open the Lodge up to new memberships. In my Lodge, for example, we have elected city and county officials, school board members, the police chief, several judges, the district attorney and public defender, and so on. What a great recruitment tool you have when you can tell prospective members that your Lodge is the Who’s Who of the community.

**Mentors.** It’s important not only to attract new applicants, but to keep them in the process and to actually initiate them. In this regard, it’s useful to appoint a Mentor for each new pledge. The Mentor may be an experienced member, but often it’s better to have a relatively new member Mentor the pledge. The Mentor acts as a big brother or big sister, a buddy, available to answer questions and to introduce the applicant to other members. An effective Mentor system can really help move the applicant into membership.

Recruitment of new members is a job for each of us in this great and ancient Order. We can’t just sit back and wait for the “other guy” to do it. YOU are the other guy.
Are Our Lodges Truly Non-Sectarian?
October 26, 2014

The subject of today’s newsletter will, undoubtedly, be perceived by some as controversial. But just because it's controversial, doesn't mean we shouldn't discuss it. Believe me when I say that I do not mean to offend - but only to broach a subject that most in our Order have, essentially, ignored for decades. Yet, it is a subject that directly affects our ability to attract new members on this Continent and around the world.

I correspond with a number of Odd Fellows throughout the United States and Canada, as well as Europe. It is interesting to note that while we are all bound by the ties of Odd Fellowship, our rituals and practices differ - sometimes with considerable variation. I learned, for example, from a brother in Denmark, that the Chaplain during Lodge meetings does not recite a prayer as we do in North America. Instead, once at the beginning of the meeting, and once toward the end of the meeting, the Chaplain offers a contemplative thought for the day. Further, the Lodges in Denmark do not keep a Bible in the Lodge room.

And the Lodges in many countries of Europe - particularly Scandinavia - are strong and growing. In Denmark, there are 14,000 Odd Fellows (out of a national population of 5.6 million), in Sweden, there are 40,000 Odd Fellows (out of 9.6 million), in Norway, there are 23,500 Odd Fellows (out of 5 million), in Finland, there are 9,000 Odd Fellows (out of 5.4 million people). In Iceland, there are 3,649 Odd Fellows out of a population of 321,857 people - that's 1.13% of the nation's population, and they have been increasing at an annual rate of 2.2% for many years. Compare this to California where there are 4,000 Odd Fellows out of a population base of over 38 million. If, for example, our
numbers of Odd Fellows to population were in the same ratio as Denmark, then we would have 95,000 Lodge members in California.

The practice in Denmark caused me to reflect on the practice in the United States and Canada, because there is a distinct difference in our ritual. I'm going to broach the subject at this time, even though I understand it may be a difficult subject for many in our Order, and controversial. But it needs to be discussed and considered - because it may very well affect our efforts at growing our Order. And let me put on the table - right here at the beginning - that I, personally, believe in a Supreme Being. That being said, it seems to me that we have an inherent conflict, and perhaps a dichotomy, as we approach the issue of "religion" in our Order and in our Lodges. Let me be specific.

In Odd Fellowship we proudly say that our Lodges are non-sectarian, and we purport to welcome potential members of all religions. The Sovereign Grand Lodge website explicitly says that Odd Fellowship is "non-sectarian". But what does that mean? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the term non-sectarian as follows: "Not affiliated with or restricted to a particular religious group."

Are we truly non-sectarian?

It appears to me that we are not. Consider the fact that Odd Fellowship requires that a member must believe in "a Supreme Being" and we keep a copy of the Holy Bible in the Lodge room and we read from it. Parenthetically, we also offer a New Testament prayer in the Lodge. How are these practices consistent with being non-sectarian and being open to members of all religions? If we are completely honest with ourselves, we must conclude that they are not.

Further, there are major religions on this planet which do not have
"a Supreme Being" - for example, Buddhists and Hindus. Our requirement of belief in a Supreme Being would seem to exclude these, and other people from membership. That is a real shame since one billion people on this planet are Hindu, and another 400 million are Buddhists. Further, why does our non-sectarian philosophy compel the Old Testament in the Lodge room? There are religions - some with hundreds of millions of followers - which follow other books - the Koran, for example, or the Talmud, the Tripitaka, the Vedas, or even the Book of Mormon, etc. If one is a Christian, then the Lodge room and ritual is a very comfortable place. But if one is a follower of other religions - for example, a Muslim, or a Sikh, or a Hindu - the Lodge room can be quite uncomfortable and can conflict with their religious and spiritual beliefs.

And what about the Deists? Many great Americans were and are members of the Deist belief including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, James Madison, Ethan Allen, John Muir, Mark Twain, Thomas Alva Edison, Neil Armstrong, among others. Deists certainly believe in a Supreme Being - but they eschew the writings of man - such as the Bible, the Koran, the Talmud, the Book of Mormon, the Vedas, etc. Having a Bible in a Lodge room can be a direct affront to and uncomfortable for a Deist - yet Deists fit nicely in the requirement that an Odd Fellow believe in a Supreme Being. If we profess to be an Order that is non-sectarian, how is keeping and quoting a Christian Bible in accord with that philosophy?

How much more accommodating and truly non-sectarian is the approach of Odd Fellows in Denmark. In those Lodge rooms the Chaplain does not read a prayer - instead, the Chaplain offers a thought for the day at the beginning of the Lodge meeting and a thought for the day at the end of the Lodge meeting. And there is no Bible - or any other religious work - in the Lodge room itself.

This conflict in philosophy of our Order creates a wall excluding
members who reside around the world, and in our own country. Where is the proof? Look at your own Lodge. How many Buddhists or Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs are members of your Lodge?

Dave Rosenberg

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**The Future of the Order**

*Your Grand Lodge Membership Committee*

*Cordially invites you to attend a Special Workshops on how you can*

**Increase the Membership of your Lodge!**

**Time:** 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

*Cupertino Odd Fellow Lodge #70*

*Address:* 20589 W. Homestead Rd, Cupertino

*Date: Saturday, February 26, 2011*

*(Any interested Odd Fellows or Rebekahs may attend)*

The workshop subjects include:

- Best recruitment practices
- How to increase the visibility of your Lodge
- Writing effective press releases
- Creating a “Good Fellowship Committee”
- Community projects that work
- Implementing that “big splash project”
  .... and much more

Please arrive at the Lodge around 9:30 a.m. Coffee and donuts will be available.

Also, a working lunch will be available at noon for a nominal $5 donation.

Presented by: Dave Rosenberg & Members of Davis Lodge

---

C. Eugene Breeland, Grand Master

Attested by: Ray Link, Grand Secretary

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Davis Lodge members conducted a well-attended “Membership Development Workshop” for other interested Lodge members.
Taking Another Dip Into the Old Mailbag

November 2, 2014

Well, it's time to reach into the "mailbag" and pull out a few e-mails from Brothers and Sisters addressing the topic of the week - that is Odd Fellowship and religion. There has been considerable buzz on this topic on Facebook. And, needless to say, I've gotten a fair number of responses from members (from throughout the United States and beyond), and I would like to share some of them with you. I am not listing names or Lodges to protect the free flow of discussion and to preserve confidentiality. Enjoy the dialogue!

Dave Rosenberg

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We have a member who will not come to lodge meetings because there is a Bible in the lodge room (she is Jewish). She joined because she wants to support us and because her father was an Odd Fellow. I believe the religious aspects of the order turn off many younger people. There is a way to include spiritual beliefs without being so Christian-focused - for example, simply require that applicants "have a spiritual or religious practice" rather than "believe in a Supreme Being." Or perhaps we need to let people have their own spiritual beliefs and remove that aspect, i.e. return to the approach that Odd Fellows used prior to 1900.

Of course, more than the religious aspects need to be addressed. We recently had a prospective person join us for dinner and lodge meeting, and a few days later she asked to be removed from our mailing list. We had all enjoyed meeting her and talking to her. When I asked for feedback about why she was no longer interested, she said, "I felt for $65 a year, I would not get enough
bang for my buck and it felt like a dying service that was stuck in a time warp! The meeting I attended lacked organization and meaning. I am not trying to be rude, I just couldn’t see myself trying to be active in your group."

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Hooray for you, Dave! Thank you for your loyal service to IOOF and all the amazing work you are doing to get movement in Odd Fellows before it croaks.

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Am I reading this correctly? Are you suggesting we take the Christian basis out of Odd Fellowship? This is my main selling point to my friends, that the order has a Biblical basis. Without that, I would not participate with the Buddha, Hindu, etc. Sorry. I guess I personally will have a huge problem with this. The churches are already bending before social pressure and not staying true to the Bible. In our Bible study we find we learn and follow more and more what the scriptures say. I will not weaken nor depart from my faith.

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In many other countries where we have Odd Fellows Lodges, there is no chaplain as an officer in the Lodge room. This is for the benefit of people from other religious backgrounds. One member shared, if we are really non-sectarian, why do we recite prayers in the lodge room and why do we even question people if they believe in a supreme being or not? All these prayers and all makes the Odd Fellows quasi-sectarian or even look religious or "churchy" to people.

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Thank you, Dave! It's about time someone had the courage to put these issues on the table for discussion. We can't afford to just keep doing everything the way we did it ten years ago or fifty years
ago. The religion thing is a big deal to a lot of people. How can we say we are non-sectarian when we have the Christian Bible in the Lodge room and recite prayers from the New Testament? Isn’t Truth the Third Degree? We are not being truthful to ourselves or to others. I know many members who are absolutely uncomfortable in the Lodge room because of the Christian

Dave, it's always interesting and thought-provoking to read these. I also agree that it is good to examine all the Odd Fellowship beliefs and practices, but would like to offer a minority opinion. I believe that those advocating removing Christian Judaic moral examples are missing the point . . . .

1. Supreme Being issue. I offer the following perspective. The definition of Supreme Being seeming being used in these mailings seems to be one of a divine being or god. I contend that is not necessarily the case. A SB can be someone or something which idealizes a concept or principle of a group. It can be argued that both the "religions" you are using as examples have a Supreme Being although not necessarily a divine or theistic one. Buddhism points to Siddhartha Gautama a.k.a. Buddha as their "Enlightened or Awakened One" and states that all should strive to be like him. Ergo a "Supreme Being". Likewise Hinduism while having three branches of thought, one branch at least states that - there is one one god although sages may give him different names. The American Indian culture also believed in a Great Spirit. Even Hitler was thought of by some as a Supreme Being. Requiring Odd Fellows to believe in a Supreme Being is hardly a limiting factor preventing anyone from joining and is only clouding the reason IOOF is loosing members which I shall discuss later.

2. Religious artifacts in the lodge. Once again, focus on these items only is a distraction from the real issue of IOOF membership growth. While it was pointed out by Brother Louie that
the Chaplin and Bible are relative new additions to the Lodge, the real question (unanswered) is "Why did the leaders decide to do that"? While I haven't researched it, I am sure it was because religion was on the rise during that time due to world influences, i.e. war, plague, etc. Religion is still on the rise today by 1.41% worldwide per Britannia Encyclopedia. In fact, the more fundamental religions are growing the most. Again, since both sides of any argument should be examined, perhaps instead of removing traces of Christianity religion from the lodges we should be including faith healing and speaking in tongues. :)

3. The real issue from what I have observed causing the decline in members is that Odd Fellowship no longer offers the tangible benefits to people it once did. While visiting relatives and friends if Phoenix recently, I asked several young professionals if they had heard of IOOF and if they would consider joining. The common response was, "Why should I?" and "What does it provide beyond what I am currently getting in...(church and professional networks)". As pointed out in several articles, IOOF was formed for trade networking, offered limited health benefits, burial options, and support for the widow and orphan. In addition, it offered fellowship and entertainment. All these were clear incentives for a person to join. All of which have diminished for various reasons which we need not recap here. In the 1800 - 1900 IOOF had a clear Charter and Mission. It doesn't seem to today and that is the main reason for the decreasing membership. That being said, it is true that some Lodges are offering Odd Fellowship, entertainment, dinners music etc. and I applaud them for recapturing the fellowship. But those lodges are the exception and are the ones which are fortunate enough to have the funds available from rental properties and other resources. Most lodges can not offer free monthly dinners, renovated facilities with wide screen HD TV etc. Let's briefly turn our focus to other fraternal organizations. Most are also decreasing in size
due to the same external influences, readily available entertainment, government programs which have replaced what IOOF once offered, etc. Those that are not declining seem to have a clear Mission. The Masons have Children's Hospitals, Rotary has many missions, but seems to focus on overseas medical assistance among others. I would like to advocate that Odd Fellows capture a new or revitalized mission to attract members and to define what we offer. I also believe we have that Mission currently in our oath ..."educate the orphan". We need to utilize and supplement the existing Children's home and the Camp and use those facilities as our "Brand" to attract members. The camp for example could host 2-3 one week music lessons focused camps for children. Instructors could come from current IOOF volunteers. Other focus camps could be added until that camp is utilized every week. That would in turn attract numerous new members from the parents of those children. I'm sure much discussion is needed to realize something along these lines but we need a immediate committee to start exploring this.

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It appears that some people are missing the point. This is not about anyone's belief in God. Everyone is and should be free to believe in whatever Supreme Being, God, gods, spirit, or higher power they wish to. That's freedom of religion. This is about being truthful and honest as Odd Fellows. We do say we believe in Truth, don't we? We can't be hypocrites in Odd Fellowship by saying on the one hand that we are non-sectarian while on the other hand quoting Christian scripture in our ritual. It's also about our membership. We are losing members and are a dying order. Why should we put up barriers to membership to non-Christians?
A Committee Structure Can Make a Lodge Vibrant

November 12, 2014

The other day I was ruminating about the various Committees we have in my Lodge (Davis #169) and, just for the heck of it, decided to list them. Here's what I found:

Bingo
Breakfast with the Bunny
Breakfast with Santa
By-laws
Cigar Lounge
Classic Film Festival
Communications & Website
Community Support
Finance
Good Fellowship
Halloween Party
Historical
Installation & Awards Dinner
Living Legacy
Lodge 145th Birthday Party
Membership & Initiation
Music & Concerts
New Year's Party
Odd Poetry
OddtoberFest
Photography
Picnic Day Breakfast
Picnic Day Float
Saturday Morning Breakfast
Scholarship
I counted 32 Lodge Committees. This then caused me to reflect on what has occurred in my Lodge over the past 10 years. When I first joined Odd Fellows in 2004, my Lodge only had about 25 members and was rather moribund. In a fairly short time, I was elected Noble Grand, and in that position, I decided to change the attitude and culture of the Lodge. I held the position of Noble Grand for four years and I used that time to bring my Lodge into the 21st Century. Today, we have 230 members (making us the fifth largest Lodge in North America), and we have 21 applicants for membership. What attitude and culture change brought us to this point?

As I reflected on it, I determined that there were three significant adjustments we made that moved our Lodge in a new direction. (1) First, we undertook a major project to physically transform the Lodge building. It took us over six years, but we improved the building inside and out, making numerous changes to upgrade, modernize and beautify the structure. We also made sure that there was plenty of signage, flags, even a mural, which made us visible to the community and identified our building as an Odd Fellows Lodge. (2) Second, we targeted the one-half of our population that had been largely ignored: women. I made a real effort to bring husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, into Lodge membership. Today, our Lodge is almost equally divided between men and women. (3) Third, and perhaps most importantly, we re-charged the activities of the Lodge. We opened our doors to the public. We involved ourselves in the community. And we organized fun activities for the membership. In short, we
said "yes" when members wanted to try new things. And we created committees of willing and enthusiastic members to organize these activities and events.

So, let's talk about Committees.

In my opinion, Lodge committees are the key to success going forward. They will reflect fraternal activity that the members want. They will energize the members. They will make a Lodge a place of activity. And that activity will bring in new members. Every time we put on a community activity (for example, Breakfast with Santa, or A Taste of Davis) people ask about our Lodge, people take tours of our Lodge, and people submit applications for membership. My Lodge in Davis is now at a place where I suppose Odd Fellowship was 100 years ago. Effectively, we went "back to the future." We don't recruit new members. Applicants now seek us out. They see what our Lodge is doing, and they contact us wishing to learn more and ultimately wanting to join. Our Lodge has become the place to be. We are an active place - a center of the community - just like Lodges were in 1914.

Now, I certainly don't suggest that all Lodges can or should have 32 committees. But there is no reason that a Lodge - any Lodge - can't have 5 or 7 or 11, or 13 committees that focus on the interests of the members.

Essentially, Committees can all be divided into three general categories (although there is some overlap with some committees): (1) Administrative Committees; (2) Community Outreach Committees; and (3) Social Committees. Administrative Committees are those that undertake the required functions of a Lodge, such as the Visiting Committee, By-laws Committee, Historical Committee, Membership & Initiation Committee, and Finance Committee. Community Outreach Committees are those that reach out into the surrounding community to undertake good
works. In the Davis Lodge such Committees, for example, include the Bingo Committee, Classic Film Festival Committee, Senior Project Committee, Breakfast with Santa Committee, Breakfast with the Bunny Committee, Taste of Davis Committee, Community Support Committee, Music & Concerts Committee, and Social Services Committee. Finally, the Social Committees are those that plan fun activities and events for the membership of the Lodge. Examples of these are the Good Fellowship Committee, Halloween Party Committee, OddtoberFest Committee, Odd Poetry Committee, Photography Committee, the Take a Hike Committee, Scholarship Committee, Installation and Awards Dinner Committee, and the Zymurgy Committee. Certainly we know and practice the ritual of an Odd Fellows Lodge - that’s what makes us uniquely Odd Fellows. But just adhering to ritual would make us one-dimensional. We try to be three-dimensional. When a Lodge reaches outward into the community to do good works, and also reaches inward organizing fun activities for the members and potential members, it performs the quintessential functions of a fraternal order. That Lodge is three-dimensional. That Lodge provides satisfaction to its members. And that Lodge will grow and prosper.

Dave Rosenberg
At a time when Odd Fellowship had very large numbers of members - in the hundreds of thousands - our fraternal Order created Branches. We created the Encampments and Ladies Encampment Auxiliaries and Patriarchs Military and Ladies Auxiliaries Patriarchs Militant. These Branches once also had large numbers, sometimes in the thousands. We have all seen the old photographs, for example, showing hundreds of uniformed members of the P.M. marching in parades, complete with P.M. bands. We have seen the photographs of Grand Encampment gatherings with hundreds of delegates.

I imagine these Branches were created for a number of reasons. The Branches afforded opportunities for leaders of Odd Fellows and Rebekah Lodges to move on to leadership positions in the Branches, thus freeing up leadership positions in the Lodges for newer members. The Branches also afforded members of the Order to advance to "higher" degrees, and obtain the teachings of those degrees. Finally, the Branches offered members the opportunity to receive more degrees just like other fraternal orders.

This was all well and good in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries when Odd Fellowship numbers were very large. The way our system is structured, numbers do matter. For example, one cannot become a member of the Encampment until one has attained all degrees in an Odd Fellows Lodge. And one cannot become a member of the Patriarchs Militant until one has attained all the degrees in an Encampment. So, I have always said that you can't have a strong Encampment unless you have a strong Odd Fellows Lodge, and you can't have a strong Canton unless you have a strong Encampment. This concept is proven by my
own experience in Davis. When I joined my Davis Odd Fellows Lodge 10 years ago, we had only about 25 members on our books, our Encampment was virtually non-functional, and we had no Canton. Today, my Davis Lodge has about 230 members, and we resurrected our Encampment about six years ago (when membership had dropped to 3), and now have 45 members in the Encampment, making us the largest in California. We mustered and instituted a Canton less than two years ago, and now have 24 members, making us the largest Canton in California. Accordingly, strong Lodge = strong Encampment and strong Encampment = strong Canton.

But this is an exception in California, and I suspect, throughout North America, because we have very few large strong Lodges. It is not that easy to obtain the numbers regarding the strength of our Branches, but I have gotten them. Here's what they show regarding the relative membership of our four Branches in California:

Encampment: 194
LEA: 170
Patriarchs Militant: 74
LAPM: 60

These numbers are staggeringly low. And the situation is even more dire because the number of local units in these Branches is dropping dramatically. For example, there are only 7 Cantons in California and less than 15 Encampments. Similar situations exist for the LEA and LAPM. Most of the local units have fewer than 10 members, and several are on the brink. (Take away the Davis Encampment and Canton Davis and the numbers are revealing. Davis alone makes up almost 25% of the Encampment membership in California and almost 33% of the Patriarchs Militant membership in California.)

In fact, the continuation of these Branches in their current form makes no sense. For one thing, we all know that the number of
members on the books does not reflect the true number of "active members". Typically, only have the members listed on the books are active. So, for example, with 74 Patriarchs Militant on the books, probably only 37 are "active" members. This is shown by participation at the Grand gatherings. For example, on October 14, 2013, at the grand gathering of the Military Council of Patriarchs Militant, only 17 members were eligible to vote. Similar numbers are presented by the other Branches. In fact, these grand gatherings aren't so grand anymore. Certainly, 75 or 100 years ago, the grand gatherings of these Branches were truly grand with hundreds, and perhaps thousands, in attendance. Yet today, with only 17, or 38, or 45 members in attendance, the Branches go through the same motions that they went through 75 or 100 years ago - with the same opening ceremonies, the same meetings, the dinners, and so one for four or five days. If truth be told (and we are fraternally obligated to be truthful) the gatherings are a mere shell of what they once were. They are, regrettably, a facade. (Merriam Webster defines "facade" as "a way of behaving or appearing that gives other people a false idea of one's true situation.")

What's the solution? In my mind, the only reasonable solution is to eliminate all the stand-alone Branches and instead convert them into Degrees in Odd Fellows and Rebekahs. So, an Odd Fellows Lodge would, with this change, now provide eight degrees to members: Initiatory, Degree of Friendship, Degree of Love, Degree of Truth, Degree of Faith, Degree of Hope, Degree of Charity, and Degree of Universal Justice. A similar arrangement would be designated for the Rebekahs. An added benefit of this approach is that it will encourage more Odd Fellows and Rebekahs to obtain the teachings of these advanced degrees.

Now is the time to consolidate our Order, not diffuse it.

Dave Rosenberg
From the time DMC was founded in 2010, our focus as a "think tank" has been consistent. It's been all about "membership". We have highlighted the 70-year drop in membership in our Order, and we have suggested ways in which we can bring in new members and retain the members that we have.

One of the disturbing realities (and an impediment to growth and retention of members) are the members who use "the Code" as a weapon to beat back new ideas or even to bludgeon brothers and sisters in the Lodge who might disagree or have different opinions. Many of us have seen this behavior. There is nothing wrong, of course, with using the Code or correctly citing the Code. But there is something seriously wrong with misinterpreting the Code or using technical passages in the Code to block progressive suggestions or modern ideas. Remarkably, the problem is not a new one.

Brother Louie Sarmiento - a researcher with few peers - has discovered this telling comment (below) from J. Paul Kuhn, who served this Order as Sovereign Grand Sire (the former title for Sovereign Grand Master) in 1943-44. The insidious problem within the Order that Brother Kuhn highlighted in 1944 is still with us today. Here, 70 years later, is the quote from Brother Kuhn - as applicable today as it was in 1944.

Dave Rosenberg
"The Code Fellows"
By J. Paul Kuhn, Grand Sire (1943-1944)
(An excerpt from his speech during the 1944 S.G.L Sessions)

From my experience as Grand Sire, I have concluded that entirely too much dissension, discord and discouragement comes from the activities of the "lodge lawyers". I refer to the type of member who devotes so much time and energy in search for the Code and decisions in an effort to find some technical reason why any progressive program which may have otherwise met an enthusiastic response of the members, cannot be put in effect or carried through. I am firmly of the opinion that one way to materially increase our number of Odd Fellows is to first reduce the number of "Code Fellows".

It is my opinion that the laws of the Order should be established by broad legislative enactment, and that few laws should result from judicial interpretation, where too often all of the details which would have an important bearing upon the interpretation are not known to the Grand Sire. Again, after the decision has been given, an effort is made to apply it to a statement of facts of conditions in other jurisdictions where again some important fact is different than the one which existed under circumstances for which the decision was given. All of this creates difficulty and discord, and impedes practical progress.

In certain Grand Jurisdictions there is found to exist other disturbing circumstances and discord, based upon the desire and determination of certain members of the Order to have complete control of the investment of large funds accumulated for various purposes, and whose fraternal interest is apparently limited to that determination. I do not believe it will be helpful to the Order, in general, to here deal with specific cases of this character which have arisen this year, for those who have threatened to do the greatest injury have been largely disposed of.
In this report I want it to be known that I can see approaching in
the near future, other similar difficulties, and believe that by
giving early attention to them they can be prevented from
blossoming into more serious problems in those jurisdictions.

The Davis Odd Fellows Lodge started a Classic Film Festival, with screenings at the Lodge. The Lodge was opened to the community for these screenings, and the event drew so much interest and attendance, that the Odd Fellows now schedule two Classic Film Festivals each year.
The "Philosophy of Odd Fellowship" below was sent to me by Jule Machado, from Sycamore #129 in Hayward. Julie spotted this posted on the Facebook page of Sovereign Grand Lodge on October 30, 2014. I'm not sure who posted it, but I wanted to reproduce it here. We may quibble with some fine points, but generally the "philosophy" expounded below is a sound one for an Odd Fellow. It embraces the three links - friendship, love and truth - which will always serve as bedrocks of our Order.

What I find most appealing in this "philosophy" is the following: If all Odd Fellows comported themselves in the manner described, our Lodges would be friendlier, more loving, and more honest places. Our members would feel more comfortable, and importantly, our Lodges would be places that retain members and attract new members to our Order. We would recapture what we once were in Merry Olde England where we originated: a friendly society.

Dave Rosenberg

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Philosophy of Odd Fellowship

An Odd Fellow bases his thoughts and actions on healthy philosophical principles. He believes that life is a commitment to improve and elevate the character of humanity through service and example. He is humble in a way that he never boasts about himself. He knows and accepts his strengths and weaknesses and keeps away from badmouthing people and making unreasonable allegations. He understands that certain things in life are unavoid-
able. He is aware of the vanity of earthly things, the frailty and inevitable decay of human life and the fact that wealth has no power to stop the sureness of eventual death. He then asks the question, "How am I going to spend my life?"

An Odd Fellow an advocate of FRIENDSHIP and never looks at people with prejudiced eyes or bases his judgment on outward appearances. He supports the idea that all people, irrespective of race, creed, nationality, color, social status, sex, rank and station are equal. He does not take an undue advantage of his power or the weaknesses of those around him. He is gentle in behavior and never inflicts pain. He avoids impurity in thoughts and unchaste conduct. He also knows that he should respect himself by following temperance in his desires, fighting vices of every form, chastity of person and purity in heart and mind.

An Odd Fellow is an enactor of LOVE in a way that he feels jointly responsible for his fellow men and prepared to give attention and help wherever and whenever help is needed. He is a person who treats others, especially women and children, with dignity and respect. He accepts the fact that nothing is perfect but believes that he has an obligation to contribute in making the world a better place to live.

An Odd Fellow adheres to equality, justice and righteousness and a pursuit of TRUTH. He sees searching for truth as searching for clarity in the sense of his life. Every time a small piece of truth is found, he will try to use it only in ways where he will be able to be true to himself and his fellow men. Oftentimes, he thinks before he acts and speaks. He knows that, as a human being, it is a fact that he can think. He gives account to himself and knows that before he starts doing something, he can make the choice what to do and can think it over and consider whether the choice was the right one. He believes that making good and well-considered choices is called "behaving in a responsible way".
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 proceed-
ings 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, 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.

Dave Rosenberg

The Long and the Short of it. Perhaps the tallest member of the Lodge and perhaps the shortest member of the Lodge stand side by side in the serving line, during the Davis Odd Fellows annual Breakfast with Santa.
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.

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.

Dave Rosenberg

It’s OK for Odd Fellows to have a little fun!
"It Is Time for Our Lodge to Disband . . . ."

December 8, 2014

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 #--- of ---------, Ca. 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 lose its charter. That, in and of itself, is distressing. Here is a Lodge that was founded over a Century ago. And now it is going the way of the historical afterthoughts.
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. This, however, sounds like a Lodge that hasn’t added a new member in 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.

Third, this should have been attended to at least a decade earlier in time.

Fourth, this is the condition of many of our Lodges.

Fifth, over the last few years, as this Lodge diminished in membership, it ran the risk of financial self-dealing and ruin. As membership of this Lodge dropped below 15, 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.

Dave Rosenberg
The Future Belongs to Lodges that Are Willing to Evolve and Change

December 21, 2014

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 employ-
ment 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.

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 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.

Dave Rosenberg
How about a good news story?

I was recently sent a copy of an e-mail from an Odd Fellows Lodge near Seattle - from Orcas Island - by the name of Mt. Constitution Lodge #88. The e-mail brought a smile to my face, because it validated my philosophy for the future of our Order: Odd Fellows Lodges can thrive and grow, and be places of joy and fulfillment for members, if they involve themselves in their communities and let themselves have some fun in the Lodge. Lodge members need to open the doors and windows of their Lodges to their communities, and be part of their communities.

What is particularly significant is that this Lodge happens to be located in a very small, very isolated community. The entire population of Orcas Island is about 4,500 people. Why is this important? Because I have heard over and over again from some of our more "conservative" members that my philosophy for Odd Fellowship may work just fine in a large city like San Francisco or in a university town like Davis, but it would never work in their small community. Nonsense. Orcas Island Odd Fellows Lodge completely debunks that assertion. This is a Lodge that doesn't just tread water to survive - this is a Lodge that is active, vibrant, and thrives.

The Orcas Island Lodge is active and completely engaged in the community. In fact, the Lodge has become the center of the community. I invite you to visit their main website at www.oiof.org as well as their hall rental website at www.oddshall.org. These websites reveal a Lodge where things are
happening in the fraternity and at the Hall all the time. The Lodge Hall is the place not only for Lodge meetings, but also for birthday parties, wedding receptions, art fairs, karate for the kids, yoga, jazzercise, fusion dancing, tonga dancing, zumba, playing the Native American flute, and classes and community events of all kinds.

I hope you enjoy the letter from our brothers and sisters from Orcas Island as much as I did. This Lodge exemplifies what can be done, even in the smallest of communities. This Lodge is a three-dimensional Lodge: (1) Running smooth and respectful meetings, proud of the rich history and ritual of the Odd Fellows; (2) Recognizing that it is a fraternity with a social component, and so willing to have some fun in the Lodge; and (3) Opening the doors and windows of the Lodge to the community, involving the members in good community works.

Dave Rosenberg

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To Whom It May Concern,

We have a thriving lodge on Orcas Island, 100 miles north of Seattle. We have fantastic weekly meetings that concentrate on community service, camaraderie, inner works, and making sure that each meeting runs smoothly and that our members speak respectfully for the good of the order and listen while softening the need to be right and have things go a certain way. The communication is excellent and the brotherhood is close. We help each other in so many ways: with projects, helping grow food or with building projects, burying each other with dignity when the time comes. We participate in our local parade with a lot of zest and enthusiasm. We deliver firewood to people in need. We help people move who can't afford to hire help. The community knows us well and loves the spirit that we offer. We have a thriving building where people have weddings, dances, community classes, and
gatherings of all kinds. We are here to do what we can to elevate the character of human kind.

We are happy to reach out to any lodge to share what is working, why we’re not just surviving, but thriving. Reach out to us and send out our communication to lodges that are also thriving and those that are struggling with meaning and fun.

In Friendship, Love, and Truth,

Didier Gincig, Orcas Island, Mt. Constitution Lodge #88

*he Davis Odd Fellows Lodge entered a float in the annual Picnic Day Parade in 2011, featuring the work of the Lodge Bingo Committee.*
About the Author

Dave Rosenberg is a Superior Court Judge in the State of the California, County of Yolo, a position he has held since October of 2003. He joined Odd Fellowship in March of 2004, initiated in the Davis Lodge #169. Soon after joining the Order, he realized that Odd Fellowship was slowly failing due to a remarkable decline in membership that had stretched over three generations. Rosenberg determined that Odd Fellowship had to evolve and change to become relevant and important to men and women in the 21st Century. He resolved to do something about it, and he committed to using his own Lodge – Davis #169 – as the “laboratory” to show how a Lodge could thrive with a new approach. Rosenberg became Noble Grand of his Lodge, a position he held for over four years. Over the next years, Rosenberg oversaw a Renaissance in the Davis Lodge. He took the membership from about 25 in 2004 to over 230 in 2014, transforming the Davis Lodge from one of the smallest into one of the largest Lodges in California, and one of the most active in the United States. The Davis Lodge is now the sixth largest Lodge in North America.

Judge Rosenberg has earned all degrees in his Odd Fellows Lodge, is a member of and Past Chief Patriarch of Davis Encampment #21, and is a member of and Past Captain of Canton Davis #7. He also is a member and Past Secretary of Davis Rebekah Lodge #253. Rosenberg resurrected the Davis Encampment (which had become moribund with three members) to make it the largest Encampment in the State of California. He instituted Canton Davis #7 and has made it the largest Canton in California. Rosenberg is a Major in Patriarchs Militant, and Commander of the Second Battalion. He has also served as a District Deputy Grand Master. In 2013, Rosenberg was elected
as Grand Warden of California, and in 2014 he was elected Deputy
Grand Master. He is scheduled to be elected Grand Master of
California in May of 2015. Rosenberg has received the Merit Jewel
from the California Grand Lodge, and he has received several awards
and recognitions from Sovereign Grand Lodge, primarily due to
membership recruitment. Rosenberg has personally sponsored well
over 100 new members into the Order.

In 2012, Rosenberg published a book on Odd Fellowship entitled,
“The Future of Odd Fellowship – To Be Or Not To Be”. The
instant book, “The Future of Odd Fellowship – Evolution and
Change,” is his second book on the future of the Order.

Prior to becoming a Superior Court Judge in 2003, Rosenberg worked
as a civil litigation attorney for 19 years. He also served on the City
of Davis City Council for 12 years, including two terms as Mayor of
Davis. He served on the Yolo County Board of Supervisors for seven
years, including two terms as Chairman of the Board. Rosenberg
worked on the Senior Staff of two California State Governors. He
worked as Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor Jerry Brown, and he
worked as Director of Operations and Director of Community and
Intergovernmental Relations for Governor Gray Davis. Rosenberg
has also served as Chairman of the California State Lottery
Commission and as Chairman of the Victim Compensation and
Government Claims Board (the former Board of Control), and as
Chairman of the California Law Revision Commission. As a Superior
Court Judge, he was twice elected Presiding Judge by his Colleagues,
and has served as Chairman of the Trial Court Presiding Judges
Advisory Committee. He is a voting member of the 21-member
California Judicial Council, which governs the California State
Judicial Branch. He is the author of "Rosenberg’s Rules of Order -
Simple Rules of Parliamentary Procedure for the 21st Century" and
is a recognized expert in parliamentary procedure. He is also the
author of a full-length science fiction novel entitled "Endgame". Rosenbeg has been married for 47 years to Lea Rosenberg, is the
father of two adult children, and has two grandsons.