



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

May 3, 2012

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

This group of brothers and sisters - Dedicated Members for Change - has just one mission: Providing a focus on the single most significant problem facing our Order - declining membership - and suggesting ways to combat the problem. No more, and no less. While the mission is singular, it is of vast importance to our Order of Odd Fellows. We simply can't continue the decline.

As I'm sure everyone knows, our great Order used to be HUGE in California. Mayors, Judges, Senators, Governors, and Community Leaders up and down the State were members of the Order. The membership in California once numbered in the six figures. Odd Fellows Lodges were the centers of their communities. Everyone who was anyone aspired to be an Odd Fellow. Odd Fellows were active and involved and very visible in their towns and villages. And, as I am sure that everyone also knows by now, Odd Fellowship has seen a precipitous decline over the last two generations. Since World War II (a period of 66 years) Odd Fellows membership in California has declined year-after-year (with the exception of only one year when membership saw a small increase). Today, our dues-paying regular membership has dropped to below 5,000. (And we all know that a "dues-paying regular member" does not always translate into an "active" member - I suspect that we have only about 2,000 "active" members in our Order in California today.) There are Lodges in this state that have skipped an entire generation, sometimes two generations, of new members. We lose Lodges virtually every year, as well. Where once California had hundreds of Lodges in every town and hamlet, today Odd Fellowship has just 132 Lodges in this State. And fully half of those Lodges show less than 21 members on their books. We know that there are Lodges that have difficulty convening a quorum (only 5 members) for a meeting. And as a sign of the times, it cannot be ignored that the five largest Lodges in California now constitute about 25% of the state's membership - that is, one out of every four Odd Fellows in this state belongs to one of those five Lodges. It shows that we are devolving to just a few Lodges - in 10 years, at this rate, we may have less than 20 Lodges in this state with a regular membership of only 2,000 or less.

We can't just sit back and watch this slow train wreck in progress.

In these DMC newsletters, we have suggested, over the past year, many ideas and "best practices" used by the handful of Lodges that we have in California that are actually



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growing. Yes, while the vast majority of Lodges in this state are static or have declining membership, we actually have some Lodges that are growing. And a handful of them are growing significantly. These Lodges show that Odd Fellowship remains relevant to Californians today, and that Lodges CAN grow their membership. If we ignore their successes and methods, we ignore the last, best hope of Odd Fellowship in the 21st Century. Clearly, Lodges that continue to operate like they did in WW II, are doomed to repeat the decline. On the other hand, Lodges that look to new methods to attract and retain members can enjoy a re-birth of Odd Fellowship in California.

Here's what I believe: Growth of membership CANNOT be accomplished by the Sovereign Grand Lodge; it CANNOT be accomplished by the Grand Lodge; it CANNOT really be accomplished by a Lodge. Growth in membership is something that can only be accomplished by the individual brothers and sisters in our Fraternal Order. In other words, it all depends on you and me. And we can do it. Since I joined this Order in 2004, I have personally sponsored about 100 new members into our Order. Since 2004, other members of my Lodge have brought in an equal number of members. And the vast majority of those new members have remained members of the Order. Why is that? It's because we have taken upon ourselves the personal desire, responsibility, and commitment to bring in new members. Equally as important, we have created a Lodge which attracts and keeps those new members - offering numerous community and charitable projects which fulfill member's desire to help their communities, and offering numerous Lodge-sponsored social activities which provide the good fellowship and social interaction that member's want in the 21st Century. In short, we have made our Lodge relevant and desirable to the folks in their 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's who are, after all, the lifeblood and the future of a fraternity.

In my Lodge, we use many techniques to grow membership. I'd like to share with you one of those techniques.

We don't make it easy for potential new members to join our Lodge. Now, this may seem completely counter-intuitive to you, but believe me, it really works. Let me explain. In some Lodges, when they finally find a potential new member, they rush that member into initiation, sometimes initiating within mere weeks after the application is submitted. What then happens, in some cases, is that the new member attends his/her first meeting, gets to meet his/her new brothers and sisters for virtually the first time, is kind of shocked by it all, and that Lodge may not see the person again. We do the opposite. Once a person submits his or her application, they enter into a six-month processing period. We encourage them to attend our Lodge events and our social meetings, and get to meet and know their future brothers and sisters. We give them goals and projects. We expect them to "interview" at least 13 members (an ice-breaker



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technique which helps them get to know the members and allows the members to get to know them). At the end of the long period, they are interviewed by the Membership & Initiation Committee, and then if recommended, are voted on by the entire membership. At the end of this process, the applicant REALLY looks forward to initiation, and they know the members and the Lodge a lot better. Once initiated, they dive right into membership, and fully participate in our activities and programs. They feel a real kinship from the very start.

It works.

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Dave Rosenberg

p.s. The Second Annual DMC Dinner is on May 17, just two weeks away. If you haven't already submitted your reservation for this fun event, please do so. Time is running out. This dinner will be provided during Grand Lodge Session on May 17, at El Torito Restaurant and Cantina, a mere 4 minute walk from the Doubletree Hotel. Cocktails at 5 p.m. and dinner at 6 p.m.