



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

July 13, 2013

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.

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