



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

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.



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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.

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