



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

February 3, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

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

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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



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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 Willey "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.

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Dave Rosenberg  
Grand Warden