



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

April 13, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

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?



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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 statistics 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



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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.

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Dave Rosenberg  
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