



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

May 21, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

I'm happy to share the thoughts from our Brothers and Sisters in the Philippines. Louie Sarmiento, the moving force in this Order in the Philippines has submitted the article, below, to emphasize the importance of opening up our Lodges to the public. We have simply got to get out from behind our four walls and open the windows and doors of our Lodge Halls to our communities. Odd Fellowship will flourish if we de-emphasize the secret society aspect of our Order, and emphasize the public service aspect.

Louie recommends the "Open House", and that is a very good idea to demystify our Order in the minds of the public.

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Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master

Lodge "Open House"
By Louie Sarmiento

Over 100 years ago, the best method used by many fraternal groups to attract people is to have that "mysterious awe" or that "secret society fascination" because it generates public "curiosity". Exclusivity was a trend at that time that non-members have to ask to be members of a lodge. Nobody recruits people to join, it was this "mysterious awe" that dragged people to join fraternal orders along with the exclusive financial benefits members' get when they get sick, lose a job, and so on.

Fraternalities with a "secret society awe" was a trend in those times. In fact, more than 5 million Americans were actually members of hundreds of fraternal orders or "secret societies". In fact, the Odd Fellows was the largest fraternal order from 1870 to 1920, also known as the Golden Age of Fraternalism, and was one of the richest institutions in North America at that time. We probably have all the rights to be exclusionary because people were asking to join our lodges at that time. The name "Odd Fellows" was familiar to the public ears, majority of people knows who the Odd Fellows are. Our good works were so known by people. We were a great fraternity.

Starting the early 1900's, this love for "mysterious awe" in fraternal orders declined and was replaced with the founding of civic clubs that were more "socially-relaxing" and "inclusive" to



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the public such as the Rotary Club, Lions and so on. Welfare State and National Health Insurance was adopted so there was no need for the financial benefits in the Lodge. Many people were beginning to see "secrecy" as a bit of non-sense as "transparency" became the norm. In several studies, it actually showed that it was during the mid-1900's that many of these "civic clubs" were founded and grew in membership as answer to people's question towards "secretive" organizations. By the late 1900's, newer organizations were founded - clubs of any kind, leisure activities, technology, etc. So many groups emerged that fraternal lodges were pushed in the way-side and the name "Odd Fellows" became "non-existent" or "unfamiliar" to many people.

Today, majority do not know who the Odd Fellows are. Many actually think that the Odd Fellows are already a dead organization or I say, defunct (as many of our lodges are). Some people, especially those who are fond of reading conspiracy theories or came across some articles about "secret societies", think that the Odd Fellows are a "cult", a "religious organization" or a "masonic group" involved in conspiracies or cultist rituals. In fact, we do have members who do not want their membership in the Odd Fellows to be known to the public because they know that there is a "stigma" towards the Odd Fellows as some sort-of a "secret society". We have people who pass-by an Odd Fellows Hall and say "scary...., a secret society". I have experienced people calling the Odd Fellows "illuminati!!!". I came across several members who told me that he or she doesn't want his or her family or friends to know that he is a member of the "Odd Fellows" because of that reason. We have people who were initiated in the lodge via the "initiatory degree" and then stopped attending meetings because they think the degree was "creepy" and "cult-ish". We indeed have an "image problem". Yet we have members who are still so fearful of social networking websites and the internet that they ban their members from posting anything about the Odd Fellows on facebook or on the internet because they think that the Odd Fellows should be "secret" from the public eye. More often, we have become our own enemies. We have kept the Odd Fellows a secret for so long that we became a dying breed, an organization that is near-extinction.

To reverse this trend of extinction we need people to join our lodges. We need people to know who the Odd Fellows really are. We need to explain to them the meaning and relevance of the degrees. We need to change our traditional attitudes of being too secretive and exclusionary. We need to change our image and free ourselves from the labels of "cult" and "secret society" while still maintaining important traditions. We need to establish a "relationship" between our lodges and the public. Aside from internet propaganda, there is one method that is quite effective in letting the public learn about our fraternity and, if there is luck, in gaining people to join the Odd Fellows. This method is called an "Open house". This is done by many organizations and companies to entice the public. College fraternities and sororities, civic clubs, sports clubs, motorcycle clubs, even big corporate companies have organized "open houses" through the years. This is either to attract new members or recruit new employees. While I do most of the



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IOOF public relations over the internet for the meantime, I believe that this is just the first step. The best method of "public relations" for our local IOOF lodges are "open houses". Local public relations is very important if each lodge wants to gain "public trust", "rapport between community and lodge" and if we want the public to be familiar again with "Odd Fellowship". Several of our lodges have organized open houses for the past 5-10 years. Below is a video of Belgia Lodge organizing an "Open House" somewhere in Belgium and was featured in the local TV news: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzTalkxDnCM> (Preview)

In California, sister Julie Machado shared the good benefit of open houses:

"Open Houses are one of the best ways to attract potential members. We attracted over 40 members this way at Sycamore Lodge #129 in Hayward, California!"

In my lodge in the Philippines, we organize an "Orientation program" at least twice a year. This is equivalent to an open house where we invite non-members to meet us in a certain venue then we present a power-point presentation about the Odd Fellows to them, probably some video presentations about our Order, let some of our members talk about their good experiences in the Lodge, then an open forum to give non-members an opportunity to ask questions and then, followed by a fellowship dinner or snacks.

So, have you ever organized a Lodge "Open House" to let the community know the existence of your lodge? And answer misconceptions about Odd Fellowship?