

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Before I joined my Lodge, I would walk by the Lodge Hall located smack in the middle of the downtown. I never saw anyone enter or leave that building. Typically, it was dark. If I peered through the glass of the front door, I could barely see in the dim light of a hallway, a letter board with meeting times for an Odd Fellows Lodge, a Rebekah Lodge and an Encampment. But there was no contact information. As far as I or anyone else in town was concerned, the building was just an old, rarely used structure.

Over the past 10 years, my Lodge changed all that. We changed the look of our building, we changed the culture of our Lodge, we involved ourselves in the community, and we made sure that we provided plenty of social activities for the members and the community. We changed the culture of our Lodge. And we increased our membership by 1,000%.

Odd Fellows have got to learn that while we can certainly be a society with secrets, we cannot continue to be a secret society. To survive and prosper in this 21st Century, we have got to open the windows and doors of our Lodges to our communities. Our Sovereign Grand Master Jimmy Humphrey recognizes this fact. Each of us must also recognize this if we are to grow and advance as an Order.

Junior Past Grand Master Rick Boyles recognizes this reality as well. Please see his article, below.

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Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master

Why Do We Fear Change?

All of us in our day-to-day lives prepare ourselves for eventual change and we consider it often. We prepare for school, adulthood, marriage, long lives, possible disaster, and many of us even prepare for our own deaths. The fear most of us may have is invasive change, abrupt change, and hurtful change. So then we may feel comfortable within our lodge settings, never changing, never evolving, and never opening up to the world. If a psychologist would study us as a group, this is probably the diagnosis we would receive: that evolution of any type is fearsome and full of pits and falls we may not be aware of. Yet change happens constantly within and without our order. Saying that we resist change is like standing in the rain and demanding it stop. Somehow some of us have deluded ourselves into believing that if we stand still, we do not change, but nothing could be further from the truth. Just as a tree grows, each of us grows, changes, and adapts. Whether or not we accept change does not affect the simple truth that it is coming. The fact that some of us persist in speaking about the 1850s, or the 1920s, as some glorious time to be an Odd Fellow only belies

the truth. If we are a vibrant, active, forward looking group we would not need to resurrect the past, in fact, we would actually see how ludicrous this is. Our order is wonderful, rampant with heart, and full of thoughtful individuals, even beloved, but to continue harkening to the past only succeeds in weakening the present.

History, tradition, heritage, all of these are great and wonderful things, but they are things only, images of our past, a fading photograph, a snapshot in time. While our history is full, our future is still in doubt. We do not solidify our future by dwelling on our past. History is like a medal we wear on our chests - something to wear proudly but it does not take the place of real life. Many of us have spoken about our history and proudly, but if our history was easily transposed to today, we would not have any difficulty with numbers nor would we have to explain ourselves to the public. Not only have we diminished heavily in numbers, we have become hidden in plain sight - we are often the old dilapidated building in the middle of town. Many of our events also are traditional, some of them wonderful, but to think that suddenly members are going to spring up around them after they have been in existence for many years is really not logical. To get new members, we need to make ourselves appealing - find something that the onlooker finds interesting or exciting not just simply revisit old events and old snapshots of a time long past.

Many of our members have expressed the idea that we have lost a lot of our charitable instinct. I could not agree more. We need to do more than help some nationalized charities: we need to look to our own communities as to what they may need within our own city limits. Fraternal groups I have seen do such things as sponsor little league sports teams, feed the homeless, help the aged, sponsor holiday dinners for the impoverished, welcome everyone in for a free drink or a kind thought or a smile. In order to appeal regionally, we need to deal with each other regionally and not just on some sort of universal level. Many lodges have large bank accounts in either dormant checking or near dormant savings accounts and yet they act like *giving* a free meal is anathema to their existence. It's really time to question that reasoning. If your lodge is on the ropes financially, perhaps it's already too late, but if you have funds just languishing in a dusty checking account with little or no return, then it's time to question your own intentions. Are we saving for a rainy day? If so, I submit that as pointed out by no less than our Sovereign Grand Master, the time for action is now. We can't assume that we are going to survive indefinitely without some kind of active response. It is a proven fact, that many states now number less than 200 members! Rather than attending additional musical chair receptions for the same individuals over and over again, how about feeding the homeless, or acknowledging that there are needy individuals within our very midst? If you are religious, how about walking the walk rather than just talking the talk? The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Go." Does this mean we ourselves can't have money or possessions? Of course not, but to me it means if we see someone else suffering we need to react and not just stare dumbly past them without reaction. In my travels as Grand Master, I found lodges with "calendars of giving" and perhaps not coincidentally these lodges were experiencing growth. In order to be known by the

public, we need to seek to know the public. Our lodges can be community centers again, but we can't survive if we just hide in plain sight within our own communities. How much does it cost to be brotherly to our fellow man? Many of us in our order practice Christian ideals. Is it Christian to act better than others? Why do we even persist in debate over whether or not we want members? How ludicrous is that? I still hear racism, sexism, religious bigotry by some of our so-called leaders which should not be accepted by anyone. Where else is this accepted? It may sound funny but many of us even though we are mostly of an advanced age, act like children: we guard our premises as if the outside is the enemy. Our real enemy is apathy and hatred, and whether or not this is shown by the eldest of our members or the youngest matters very little; it should not be tolerated nor ignored. No more committees need to be appointed to study an issue; the time for change and modernization is now.

In Friendship, Love, and Truth, Rick Boyles