



The Sovereign Grand Lodge
Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Office of the Sovereign Grand Secretary
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By the Executive Committee of The Sovereign Grand Lodge regarding belief in a Supreme Being and provisions of the Rituals with input from the Committee on the State of the Order.

To: All Members, Local Units, Grand Bodies, and Jurisdictions under the jurisdiction of The Sovereign Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows:

Dear Officers, Brothers, Sisters, Patriarchs, Matriarchs, and Chevaliers,

The Executive Committee of The Sovereign Grand Lodge has observed with profound concern that certain important and obligatory provisions of our Rituals, Codes, Eligibility for Membership, and the Member Application and Initiation Process are not being fully adhered to by some Local Units, Grand Bodies, and Jurisdictions. In light of this, it has become necessary to clarify and remind all members of the foundational principles that govern our Order.

Our Rituals are of the utmost importance and hold the highest authority, followed next by the Code of General Laws, with the Jurisdictional Codes, and finally Local Unit By-laws coming thereafter. These documents form the very foundation of the structure, purpose, governance, and continuity of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

Since the founding of Odd Fellowship, one of its core tenets has been a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being (a deity), and loyalty to one's country of Citizenship. It has come to our attention that certain Lodges have failed to follow well-established rules of the Order, such as failing to make use of a Chaplain, neglecting to display the Holy Bible during meetings, or omitting the Opening and Closing Prayers as required by the Rituals. These practices are not only required by our laws, but essential to our identity and the integrity of our Order.

The history of Odd Fellowship is deeply rooted in an affirmative belief in the existence of a Supreme Being and a loyalty to one's country. Our earliest rituals set forth that belief in a deity was not tied to any specific religious sect nor any theological system or doctrine, but was an acknowledgement of objective truth as a requirement of membership. This commitment remains in place today, and it is still a requirement for applicants to affirm their belief in the existence of a Supreme Being in writing prior to their initiation. If any applicant does not hold such a belief, or is unable to answer honestly in the affirmative, they cannot be initiated into the Order.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows has clear and uniform membership requirements. These are set forth in our Membership Application, our Rituals, our Code of General Laws, and various other official publications. All prospective members are to be made aware of these requirements when they apply. Specifically, prior to receiving the Initiatory Degree, or in the beginning of the Rebekah Degree, applicants are required to give a written or a verbal answer respectively, to a series of Preliminary Questions, one of which pertains directly to their belief in a Supreme Being. The

"WE SEEK TO IMPROVE AND ELEVATE THE CHARACTER OF MANKIND"

question is as follows: "Do you believe in the existence of a Supreme, Intelligent Being, the Creator and Preserver of the Universe?" It is important to note that in the Odd Fellows Initiatory Degree the applicant's response to this question must be recorded in ink. Should an applicant answer "no" to this question, they are to be dismissed, as this requirement is non-negotiable and integral to the very nature of our Order.

Each individual who becomes a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows has voluntarily agreed to and acknowledges they meet this criterion. They have read and signed their application, answered the Preliminary Questions truthfully, and have chosen to proceed with their initiation fully aware of these requirements and expectations. This same criterion of belief applies to all current members, without exception, and we admonish each member that they are obligated to honor this commitment they made upon joining. If an Applicant or a Member cannot in good conscience profess such a belief, they are prohibited from holding membership in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

By becoming part of this Order, each member pledges to uphold the core values of Odd Fellowship and its laws and rules. These values are integral to the Degrees that are conferred, which are granted to members based on their commitment to these shared principles. This is why we refer to one another as Brothers and Sisters, bound by a common commitment to our Order.

It is important for all members to consider: "Why would anyone seek to change the foundational values upon which two centuries of members have agreed?" While other organizations may adopt different beliefs and practices, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows remains committed to those members who hold fast to their faith in a Supreme Being. Our tradition has been clear on this matter, and we remain steadfast in our principles.

As such, we reiterate the non-negotiable obligation of all Units to adhere to the requirements of the Rituals during Opening and Closing ceremonies as well as all Degree Work. Rituals are the highest authority within our Order, and they must be followed without deviation. It is the duty and responsibility of all Officers at every level, whether at the Local Unit, District, Grand Body, or Jurisdiction; to ensure that these requirements are upheld and that every member understands and acts in full compliance with our Rituals, Laws, Rules, and membership standards.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows is a diverse and welcoming organization, one that embraces individuals from all walks of life, irrespective of race, age, gender, religion, national origin, or disability. We are committed to providing equal opportunities for membership and participation to all qualified persons who wish to join us. Our membership is composed of individuals from a wide range of religious backgrounds, many of whom serve as Chaplains within the Order. We continue to extend our invitation to anyone seeking to better themselves through the teachings of Friendship, Love, and Truth under the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, and the Sisterhood of Woman.

We herein make it clear that the Independent Order of Odd Fellows is neither a religious institution nor a church. While some individuals may mistakenly perceive us as such because of our use of the Holy Bible in our Rituals, it is important to remember that it was chosen for the valuable lessons it imparts, and we do not endorse any specific translation or version of the Holy Bible. The Holy Bible is required to be present and open at every meeting of Local Units and Grand Bodies, not as a symbol of a specific religious dogma, but as a constant and visible reminder of the source for those principles of truth, compassion, and charity which are central to our work. Additionally, we wish to note that it is not mandatory for any Chaplain to read from the Holy Bible during our

meetings, and no prohibition exists preventing a Local Unit or Grand Body from placing other religious texts at the Chaplain's Station or upon the Altar in addition to the Holy Bible.

If any member wishes to propose a change to the Rituals, they may submit formal Legislation and Resolution to The Sovereign Grand Lodge for consideration. However, it is essential to understand that altering the foundational principles of our Order is a serious and weighty request. Such a proposal would challenge the core values upon which the Independent Order of Odd Fellows has been built and which millions of members over the past 200 years have willingly agreed to uphold.

In conclusion, we ask that all Local Units, Grand Bodies, and Members reaffirm their commitment to the Rituals, Laws, Rules, and traditions that have shaped our Order since its inception. Let us continue to honor our values of Friendship, Love, Truth, Faith, Hope, Charity, and Universal Justice that make us who we are. Together, we must remain steadfast in the obligations and promises we have made and the Laws, Rules, and Regulations of the Order we have pledged to uphold on our sacred honor.

We as the Executive Committee of The Sovereign Grand Lodge, hereby direct the following:

1. That this letter shall be read in its entirety on the floor at the next regular meeting of every Local Unit in the Order upon receipt thereof;
2. That the contents of this letter shall be recorded in the minutes of each Local Unit at the meeting of its having been read;
3. That each Local Unit in the Order shall within 90 days of receipt of this letter, notify each individual member of their Lodge to inform them of the contents of this letter; and
4. That each Local Unit shall certify completing the aforementioned tasks in writing to their Deputy, or their Grand Body / Jurisdictional Secretarial Officer within 60 days of completion, who shall then notify The Sovereign Grand Lodge of compliance.

DISTRO:

All Jurisdictions – global
 All Grand Bodies – global
 All DDSGM – global
 All Local Units – global

In FL&T, FH&C, and UJ,


 Jerry Banett

The Sovereign Grand Lodge, I.O.O.F.