

I've spoken the past several months about a possible merger of Branches 171 and 174. I've said it is a way to bring stability and health to our membership. I would like to lay out the rationale for a merger, discuss the support by your BEC, review the next steps, and seek your backing in embracing the direction we anticipate taking.

As background, we initially split because our membership had grown too large for our facility. It was a necessary step if we were going to grow. After our October ZOOM meeting, in which I hinted that a merger may be a possibility, I got a note from Jim Gibney (Big Sir in 2009) forwarded to me. Paraphrased, Jim said. "As Big Sir in 2009 I had the unpleasant duty of splitting up 171 and creating 174... I would be delighted to see 174 return to our ranks".

Informal conversations between leaders of each branch led to both BECs agreeing to create a joint task force to explore in detail the merger back into a single branch. After a series of meetings, many of the advantages of a merger became clear:

1. One set of directors, officers and committees
2. Easier recruiting for leadership as well as for new members
3. Increased organizational and financial stability
4. Ease of activity coordination by eliminating the need for cross-branch communication
5. Increasing membership size to allow us to meet the church's new minimum facility rental fee

The task force also established the process to accomplish a merger.

- Branch 174's BEC has voted to dissolve and merge into Branch 171. Their membership is voting on the merger according to State Guidelines.
- I will call for a vote of our members at our January meeting and recommend we approve the merger as well.
- A new BEC will be formed by a full slate of Officers and Directors recommended by the joint task force, and already approved by the respective BECs, made up from members from both branches.

If all goes as anticipated, you can expect:

- A change in our luncheon meeting from the first Wednesday of the month to the second Wednesday.
- An in-person luncheon in February made up of the newly merged membership.
- An opt-in system where members will respond to an 'invitation' to the monthly luncheon rather than calling in to opt-out. This will help our caterer prepare the right number of lunches, organize seating and streamline the work of the Attendance Committee. We will, of course, adhere to all COVID-19 protocols.

- A meal consisting of a 'box lunch'. This rather than a 'hot lunch' due to covid restrictions and resultant challenges with caterer staffing. This will change over time as allowed.
- A brilliant speaker and a pianist to accompany us as we sing God Bless America.

I thank you all for your support of the direction we are taking.

Steve