

Provincial Grand Masters Address 7th April 2022

Brethren it is a real pleasure to see you all here today after a somewhat challenging few years.

Have we learnt anything or made any permanent alterations to our lives?

Or will we just return to the same old ways of doing things?

We will see over the coming years.

It is now three years since I was appointed to be Provincial Grand Master and my pride in my appointment grows each year as I see what a tremendous group of citizens I am privileged to serve.

Your response to each crisis has been **spontaneous and generous** both in time and money and above all you have been kind to each other.

I have had numerous notes from members bringing such kind acts to my attention and you will have all seen the charity reports every time you read the newsletter.

As regards our charity is concerned:

Over **£130,000** has been given to local charities, made up:

£60,000 has been given by lodges to non-masonic local charities

£20,000 including MCF matched funding from the provincial charity

£51,000 given to DoE, Poppy Appeal and Youth Opportunities

Our cycling club are endeavouring to raise £10,000 next month for several local charities.

But there is also the considerable work carried out by our almoners and visiting volunteers. Together with numerous phone calls and acts of kindness there are the **100** Grants Awarded from the MCF which totalled **£193,941**.

The leadership from London may not have been as speedy as I would have liked and at times confusing but at least we have **had** leadership, and the response by the MCF has been exemplary, identifying specific areas of need, giving not only financial support but also publicising those organisations which underpin the most in need in our communities.

Homelessness, food banks, refuges, and carers, all helping the weak and the victims, to keep their heads above water.

The unravelling of civilisation in Eastern Europe just shows how fragile we are and how careful we must be avoiding conflict and self-destruction.

Moving on to matters closer to home may I congratulate all those who are to receive the honour of promotion to Grand Rank. believe me you will earn those collars.

Mike Greedy our provincial secretary, Past Ass Grand D.C

Graham Puddy our provincial charity steward, Past Ass Grand Std B

Adrian Robson our provincial almoner, Past Ass Grand Std B

Richard Reeve PAssDC for his work as Provincial Mentor in Gloucestershire

I will also mention Richard Parrish our Past Provincial Mentor, who has gone about his task quietly and without fuss or any regard for himself. One of many who put others first and will be Past Ass G.D.C.

Today We also recognise those who have given great service to their lodges over the years, and I trust will continue to do so.

We also appoint a new active provincial team whom I have no doubt will be just as good as the outgoing team.

The work you will do is important but equally as important is that you carry out your duties with a smile and a sense of humour, there is no room in Somerset for self-importance, only self-sacrifice.

In terms of the future, I am committed to supporting the new Superintendent of Royal Arch in any way possible. After the tragic loss of Barrie, I can see no better recognition of his legacy than to see Royal Arch grow and strengthen. Brothers or companions we all want the same thing and together we are stronger.

To that end I think it is only proper that service in Royal Arch is considered when appointments and promotions are decided in craft masonry, and I will also encourage a continuation of sharing of resource with almoners and charity stewards.

With the introduction of Pathway and the positive attitude towards the national digital advertising campaign it surely makes sense to not only encourage and facilitate new brethren into the joys of Royal Arch but also the other orders in Freemasonry. Those seeking to join Freemasonry have a thirst for knowledge and we must make sure that thirst is satisfied, pointing them in the direction of Solomon is not enough.

This brings me nicely onto the topic of Pathway. We have made an impressive start introducing the program to the Lodges and I give a huge thank you to the presentation team so ably led by Martin Slocombe, Barry Palmer, John Townsend and Russ Woodland. Brethren this is not going to go away but will form the backbone of masonry in the future. Those who support it and actively engage with the program will have the full support of the province. Those who don't will still have our support, but I expect it will be too little too late.

Those lodges who believe making new masons is the answer are usually mistaken. It's not the making, it's the retaining of new masons.

We have seen the closure of lodges handing their warrants back. There is no shame in this, in fact it should be a celebration of what has passed. The tragedy is if we lose those masons who have kept the lodge going, they are the ones who we need to join another team.

Using my sailing analogy, stop bailing and start rowing. Move from head down in the bottom of the boat to feeling the breeze on their faces.

In my 6 years as assistant Provincial Grand Master, 7 years as chairman of the festival committee and 3 years as APGM I realise that one size does not fit all and that every lodge is different. What works in one does not necessarily work in another. However, what I am convinced of is that freemasonry is a team effort and is the sum of its parts.

We will be consecrating a new lodge next month and it is a strategic move to enable members of our armed forces to find a new team to belong to. If they enjoy the flavour of freemasonry, I hope this will lead to them finding lodges closer to home in which to enjoy and participate in.

There is a future for specific interest lodges, but I hesitate to look at new areas unless we are convinced that there is a fertile seed bed for ongoing growth.

The next few years will see huge changes in the craft due to all the hard work carried out over the last ten years and I know some initiatives may fail but rather than say "I told you so" I would rather we congratulate those that succeed. An immense amount of work has been done in London, most of it carried out by volunteers like you and I. So, I believe that even if we disagree with some of the detail we still need to put our backs into making it work.

The time of the "we've always done it this way" and the back seat "tut tutters" has past and we now welcome the "how can I help" and "can do" brigade.

A huge thank you to the many brethren who put together today's event. It always seems to just happen, and we tend to forget that it requires man hours and leadership. The price of a job well done, is that it is usually thankless. So, thank you.

Before I conclude I should like to bring to your attention the gift aid envelopes on your chairs. This year it is my intention that the money raised will go towards our efforts to help the people of the Ukraine within Somerset.

As of 6th April the MCF appeal had already reached £565,000 and that charities dealing with problems within the Ukraine, refugees in the neighbouring countries and with resettlement within the UK would share £500,000 within weeks if not days.