

PGM's Address - Wednesday 26th October 2022.

My first pleasant task is to welcome the Assistant Grand Master and the team of Grand Officers accompanying him. R.W. Bro David, I thank you and your team for being with us today. I doubt that it is unique in the history of Grand Lodge but it is certainly very unusual for a PGM to be installed by his immediate predecessor. As you and I have known and worked with each other for some time, it is especially pleasing for me to welcome you today. Adding to that feeling of a unique day is not only reappointing the Deputy PGM, Ben Batley, and also Richard Winter as Assistant PGM, but also to reappoint my Brother and son, Tony, as Assistant PGM.

I also offer a warm welcome to the Provincial Grand Masters and our guests from other Provinces who have all taken the time and made the effort to be with us today. Your presence here to help us celebrate this new Chapter in the history of the Province is also much appreciated. Visiting is the lifeblood of Freemasonry, how many times have we heard that Brethren, but it is very true, be it a Lodge or a Provincial Grand Lodge, without visitors we are the poorer.

The pandemic interrupted our lives and our Masonic activities and we are still feeling the aftershocks today. This Masonic season from September through to June next year is hopefully going to be our first full Masonic season since 2018/19. There are still those Brethren who are perhaps vulnerable health-wise who haven't returned. We hope that they will soon feel able to do so.

My predecessor's motto was that this is a happy Province. That is something we can all identify with and an ethos that I will continue. Masonry with a smile! I hope we will all enjoy it. Something else that won't change are the challenges that we all face going forward. Having put the disruption of Covid behind us, we now face the double challenge of massive increases in energy prices and inflation. How that will impact on the running of Masonic Halls and individuals' finances, we have yet to see but, as a Province, we are aware of those challenges and we will do our best to give support and good guidance to Lodges and Masonic Halls.

On membership, there is some good news Brethren. Despite Covid, in the past year we have seen positive growth in members. It's not a large growth by any means and it is too early to be able to call it a trend, however, after many years

of membership numbers declining, a rise is very welcome indeed. Part of that increase in numbers is due to the candidates we received from the digital marketing campaign run by UGLE last year. I'm pleased to say that the current UGLE campaign, on Facebook and Instagram, looks like being even more successful and will provide more good candidates. I know there is scepticism from some members about the quality of potential candidates that come via this route. I would say, however, there is currently no evidence to suggest that the drop-out rate for candidates who come to Freemasonry this way is any worse than candidates who come through the traditional route of being introduced by a friend or family member. The Provincial membership officer, W.Bro Barrie Palmer and his team are responsible for matching suitable candidates with Lodges. They take into account the potential candidates' preferences for the night of meeting and type of Lodge. Lodges that have good mentoring in place, are using Pathway, and have an up-to-date profile on the Provincial website are much more likely to receive those new candidates.

My predecessor was very supportive of the Royal Arch, ensuring a good working relationship between the Craft and the RA. As your PGM and Grand Superintendent, that working relationship obviously will become even closer. Just one in three Craft Masons in Somerset are members of a RA Chapter. I would like to see that number increased. To that end, as Grand Superintendent, I am encouraging Chapters to institute some changes that have already been shown to work in our Craft Lodges, specifically, the introduction of a Provincial Mentor as well as Chapter Mentors, and sharing the ritual so that no one feels daunted by the task. Always remembering that there is a space in the Royal Arch for everyone, including those who do not want to progress through the Chairs but are happy to contribute in other ways, just as there is space for everyone in the Craft. These changes will, I hope, in turn encourage more members to join and stay in the RA and, perhaps, those who still wear their Royal Arch Jewel but are no longer members, will consider re-joining.

There are many thanks that I need to make today Brethren, to the Provincial Grand Secretary and his team, the Provincial DC and his team, W.Bro Keith Baker and his team, the management and staff here at the Webbington Hotel. All of them involved in organising this meeting and the lunch that will follow

and ensuring we have a successful day. But it is to you, the Brethren of this fine Province, that I owe my grateful thanks, be you Master Mason or Past Provincial Grand Master.

As I look around here today, it is wonderful to see so many Brethren, from all over the Province, who have given me friendship and support during the last twenty years that I have been involved in the management of this Province. I regard myself as very fortunate to have so many good friends and such great support. In turn Brethren, I will try to do my very best to lead this Province so that it remains a happy and united one. With your continued support, I am very optimistic about the future of the Craft and the Royal Arch in this Province. I'm looking forward to the challenges and enjoying the time spent with you all. Brethren and Companions, I thank you for your attention and may the Great Architect of the Universe look after you all and keep you safe.

Ray Guthrie. Wednesday 26th October 2022.