

DISTRICT GRAND LODGE OF SOUTH AFRICA, NORTH

Of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of England



FREEMASON'S HALL, 8 PARK LANE, PARKTOWN, JOHANNESBURG, 2193. PO BOX 17037, HILLBROW, 2038. Tel: 011 643-33111/2. Fax: 011 643-2460. EMAIL: district@freemason-jhb.org.za

Annual Meeting, District Grand Lodge of South Africa, North

DGM's Address – 6 October 2012

Brethren, welcome to this our 117TH Annual Meeting of District Grand Lodge and thank you all for your attendance here today. I would like to thank those Brethren who have travelled far to be with us for this occasion. I would particularly like to acknowledge Wor Bro Bhuruth, Wor. Master of the Lodge of Friendship, who is accompanied by 10 Brethren - one of the largest contingents from Mauritius that we have ever had the pleasure to welcome to District Grand Lodge. I do hope you are all enjoying your stay in Johannesburg.

I acknowledge the presence of RW Bro Gerald Fotinakis, Past District Grand Master and I thank him for his attendance. I also extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guests and I will formally acknowledge them at the end of this address. I trust that you have enjoyed our Ceremony and that you will join us at the Festive Board following the meeting.

This is a special occasion for those Brethren who have received District Grand rank today, and I congratulate you all. I would particularly like to acknowledge W Bro David Pikard on his promotion to District Grand Secretary. I wish him every success in his new appointment and I look forward to working with him over the next few years.

On this occasion, I would particularly like to thank W Bro Stanley Elms who today, has retired as District Grand Secretary for all that he has done for the District over the past seven years. Stanley has led this District firmly into the electronic age. The establishment and management of the District data base has been outstanding. His meticulous handling of matters has been superb. Indeed there are some extremely large shoes to fill. I'm sure you will join me in wishing him well in his retirement.

I also extend my sincere congratulations to those Brethren who received Grand rank earlier this year. First appointments were received by: Wor. Bros. David Johnston, Brian Kretzschmar and Tony Townsend to PAGDC. The following received promotions: Wor. Bros. Graham Bendell, Ed Jordan and Chris van Gaalen to PJGD. I look to them for ongoing commitment to the Order and to this District.

Brethren, earlier this year it was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of R.Wor. Bro. Ted Ablett, Past DistGM. Ted served the District with distinction in various offices over a 34 year period, culminating in his term as District Grand Master for 11 years from 1978 to 1989. We also lost Wor. Bros Travers Penrose and Koen Roorda, both senior Masons in this District and who also served as heads of other Orders. I refer you to their obituaries which have been presented in the Cornerstone Magazine which you will find on the District website.

Brethren, during the financial year ending 31 March, our membership decreased by 10 representing a loss of 0.4% of total membership, which is the lowest loss that we have had in the last 10 years. Unlike the Royal Arch we still have not shown a growth in the Craft, but I am positive that will shortly be realized. Our intake of new members is healthy, but we must address the reasons as to why Brethren cease membership. In terms of demographics, our membership is relatively healthy with 75% of the membership less than 65.

Brethren, in April this year I had the pleasure of attending the Annual Investitures of Grand Lodge and Supreme Grand Chapter. At that occasion, the Pro First Grand Principal, who is as you are well aware the Pro Grand Master, introduced a strap line "From Initiation to Exaltation", emphasizing the call for all Master Masons to be exalted into the Royal Arch. Those of you who have listened to me on many occasions in the District will also be well aware of my call for all Master Masons to complete their Masonic journey by an uninterrupted step into the Royal Arch. Indeed, to emphasise the importance of completing this fourth step, it is my intention to only make first appointments of District Officers in the Craft to either Active or Past rank, if they are Royal Arch Masons. There will be exceptions to this, where some Craft Brethren do not have access to a Royal Arch Chapter, but that is rare and I will take that into consideration. In general, I expect all Grand and District Officers to be members of the Royal Arch. This step is not unreasonable; it follows the primary declaration of our Constitution that the Royal Arch is an integral part of Regular Masonry. In addition, the requirement of being a Royal Arch Mason for Craft rank has already been put in place in several Provinces in England.

At the September Communication of Grand Lodge, the decision was made to withdraw recognition from the GLNF (Grande Loge Nationale Française). French Freemasonry remains in absolute turmoil. The National Grand Lodge of France is still not in full control of its own affairs. Its administration and finances are under the control of a Court appointed administrator. To complicate matters, a group of former members of the GNLF (now estimated at 10 000 members and 500 Lodges) have broken away and formed a new Grand Lodge. Yet more recently, a further split has occurred with another Grand Lodge being formed. I bring this to your attention because one of these new Grand Lodges, Grande Loge d'Alliance Maçonique Française (GL-FMA: Grand Lodge of French Masonic Alliance), has been established in Mauritius. Let me emphasise that at this stage, none of the 5 major French Grand Lodges that I am aware of, are currently recognised by our Grand Lodge and as such there can be no inter-visiting and no joint membership is allowed with any French Lodge. I hope that this sad state of affairs will shortly be resolved.

Brethren in 2017, in five years time, United Grand Lodge will be celebrating its Tri-Centenary. During the past 300 years our relationship with Society has changed from periods of secrecy and silence to those of openness. But out of the periods of silence has grown an atmosphere of rumour, misinformation and false statements about our Order and the extremely negative way in which our Order is perceived by some members of the public.

Grand Lodge has set a target that by 2017, we will have dispelled many of the myths held by non-Masons through a new communications strategy. Our Grand Master, HRH The Duke of Kent, has stated "Talking openly about Freemasonry, as appropriate, is core to my philosophy, central to our communications strategy and essential to the survival of Freemasonry as a respected and relevant organization."

So how is openness being addressed? As part of the strategy, for the first time Grand Lodge commissioned an independent, non-Masonic body, the Social Issues Research Centre in Oxford to produce a report for the media on the Future of Freemasonry. As stated by this research group "we needed to test Freemasonry's claims for openness and transparency". The full research report is available on the Freemasonry Today website, which I encourage you all to access. To quote from the report, it states "One thing that immediately became apparent was that the notion of Freemasonry as a secret society was clearly inappropriate". In fact, one of their key findings is that "Freemasonry shows genuine openness and transparency". Secondly, as part of the Grand Master's strategy, the Grand Secretary has conducted the first media tour, talking to local and national media throughout England about Freemasonry. This has been enormously successful.

In June this year, the Grand Master in his address, again reminded everyone of the need to demonstrate transparency and to work towards regaining our enviable reputation in society. However, to reach this goal of openness and transparency, it is essential that all our Brethren are behind this change and we have much to do to put our own house in order.

So what are we doing at District and Lodge levels? First, as stated by the Pro Grand Master, it is the Mentoring scheme which will play a vital role in the drive towards openness. I am pleased to report that following the decision in Grand Lodge to create the office of Lodge Mentor, Lodges are now appointing a Mentor and their duties outlined by the Grand Secretary have been sent to Lodge Secretaries. Whilst acknowledging that a Lodge Mentor is an additional permissive office, it is my recommendation and wish that all Lodges appoint a Mentor. I thank the District DC team who are playing an important role in assisting to ensure that my recommendation is being brought to the attention of all Masters Elect.

In August, the District Grand Mentor, W Bro Roger Webster organised the first Regional Mentors Conference at Freemasons' Hall, to start the process of rolling-out the concept of Regional Mentors and the way forward to ensure that the mentoring process is implemented at Lodge level. The conference was successful and he is currently busy selecting Regional Mentors throughout the District.

It is through the Mentoring process that the Candidate will develop a basic understanding of the Ceremonies and help him with his own personal development and Masonic journey. An understanding of the ritual, will give the Candidate the knowledge and confidence to talk to the non-Mason about what Freemasonry means. Importantly, the Candidate might like to start by explaining and talking about Freemasonry to family and friends. This can then be expanded into talking to other members of the general public.

I would like to acknowledge the sterling work which is being done by W Bro Jeff Spiller, W Master of Lyceum Lodge of Research, together with Past Masters and members of the Lodge in presenting the series of presentations for the Younger Mason, Masters in the Making and on occasion, presentations for the non-Mason. I am delighted to see that Masonic Education is going hand-in-hand with Masonic Research.

To assist the Candidate and younger Masons gain a better understanding of our Ceremonies, a walk-through explanation of the First Degree has been established mainly by the District Grand Mentor, Wor.Bro Roger Webster together with the Assistant District Grand Master, Wor.Bro Chris van Gaalen, who is Preceptor of District Grand Stewards Lodge, with input from Wor. Bro Dick Glanville of the District Grand Stewards' Lodge and the Lyceum Lodge of Research. The walk-through explanation of the First Degree is proving to be highly successful. A walk-through explanation of the Second Degree is currently being developed.

At Lodge level, open days and lectures organised by Lodges, where members of the public are invited to attend are also proving to be highly successful. In this regard, I would like to congratulate W Bro Jeff Spiller, Wor Master and members of Lyceum Lodge of Research, together with Wor Bro Peter Veal, Wor Master and members of Baden Powell Lodge who organised the presentation of a prestigious Grand Lodge Prestonian Lecture entitled "Freemasonry and Scouting: Two Parallel Organisations?" delivered by W Bro Tony Harvey the Prestonian Lecturer for 2012. Presented in powerpoint, the presentation was professional and was one of the best Prestonian Lectures I have personally experienced. The lecture was presented as an open event and attracted an audience of some 160 of which approximately 50 % were non-Masons, including a troop of Ranger Scouts and members of the Scouting fraternity. The event also allowed us to showcase Freemasonry and Freemasons' Hall. After the event, Bro Paul Mckinley and members of Lyceum Lodge, offered tours of Freemasons' Hall and a short talk about Freemasonry to some 40 non-Masons in No.1 Lodge Room, to those who were interested. It was well received and I congratulate Bro Mckinley and members of Lyceum for this initiative.

Another very successful Open Day which I would like to draw your attention to was recently held by Barberton Lodge. Members of the general public including a journalist from the Lowveld Press were invited into the Lodge and listened to a presentation on Freemasonry. This proved to be highly successful and the Wor Master, W Bro René de Villiers and Brethren of Barberton Lodge are to be congratulated. The outcome has been a better understanding of Freemasonry by non-Masons of the local community and also resulted in a full page article on Freemasonry published in the local Press. For the

first time, a positive stance has been made to counter the severe anti-Masonic criticism from a local pastor and church in the area. I would like to thank the District Grand Mentor, the President of the Board of Benevolence and Regional Mentor, W Bro Rodney Dennett for their role in presenting and assisting with the open day and their interaction with the Press. I might add that local Church leaders have been invited by the press to comment on the article and we will be given the opportunity to rebut their arguments in a follow-up full-page article. To date there has been a remarkable silence from our erstwhile critics in the Lowveld.

With the move to increased openness, Brethren should be aware that I have no objection to Lodges advertising Open Days and events for the public in the local Press. However, as recommended by the Board of General Purposes at Grand Lodge, any Brother who is approached at national or local level by the media for participation in discussions, debates or articles on Masonic matters should refer the matter to myself at the Office of District Grand Lodge, before entering into such discussions. It is also important that we have sight of any press article prior to publication so that we can correct any possible erroneous statements before publication.

I wish to congratulate the President of the Board of Benevolence, W Bro Brian Kretzschmar for his excellent power-point presentation at the Freemasonry Cares session of the District Grand Masters' Conference in April in London. The presentation was well-received and really put our District on the map. Indeed, copies of the presentation have been requested by several Districts ranging from the Far East to the Caribbean.

A great deal of work has been undertaken over the past year by the President of the Board of Benevolence and his Board. I thank them all for what they have done this year. The Board has been busy in setting up a new guidance structure for Lodge Almoners in the District, which will be headed by the President and members of his Board, assisted by several Area Almoners at centres throughout the District. I am delighted to report that a new Almoners handbook will shortly be distributed to every Lodge Almoner and will be an extremely useful resource. Specific training sessions are also planned during the forthcoming year to assist the Lodge Almoners having a much better understanding of their duties.

This new District structure will allow us to act as a portal for Freemasonry Cares and role-out access to the Grand Samaritan Fund in London. Board members will take oversight of potential applications where there is a real demonstrable need. The Board will also deal with applications and renewals of grants through the Transvaal Inter-Constitutional Masonic Charity.

Brethren, the first application for a medical grant through Freemasonry Cares in the District has been made to the Grand Samaritan Fund in London for a wife of one of our members who is facing a life-saving, multiple by-pass heart operation. I would like to record my sincere thanks to W Bro Kretzschmar for giving oversight to this application which we hope will be successful. From this first case, a great

deal of information and experience has been gained with dealing with the medical fraternity and hospitals which will give the members of this Board a great deal of confidence.

Our District Charity and general funds are in good shape: Thank you Brethren for your unstinting support and generosity. In February this year, we focused on donations to senior members of our community. We donated an amount of R 800,000 to GEM (Gunners, Engineers and Moths) ex-servicemen's' retirement village for the installation of solar thermal pumps and a bookshop outlet; R200, 000 for the purchase of a car for the Masonic Haven in Pretoria and R 100, 000 towards the Samaritan Fund.

I envisage that we will again donate R 1 Million to major charities at the end of this year. The District Boards of Benevolence and General Purposes have yet to decide on the recipient or recipients, but the presentation will be held at our Annual Banquet at the Wanderers Spots Club, on Saturday 5th March, 2013. Please diarise this gala event.

In conclusion Brethren, I would like to express my thanks to the outgoing District Grand Secretary, W Bro Stanley Elms together with Mrs Fern Rowles and the staff at Freemasons' Hall. They together with W Bro Colin Lewis, Chairman of the Organising Committee and members of his committee together with W Bros Graeme Mackenzie and the DC team, have contributed to the success of this Annual meeting. I wish you all a safe journey home.

RW Bro Prof. E Guy Charlesworth
District Grand Master
Johannesburg,
6 October 2012

-oOo-