



Annual Meeting District Grand Lodge of South Africa, North

District Grand Master's Address

30th October 2021

Right Worshipful, Very Worshipful, Worshipful Brethren, Brethren all:

Brethren welcome to this our 126th Annual Meeting of District Grand Lodge and thank you all for your attendance here today.

I acknowledge the presence of RW Bro Gerald Fotinakis and RW Bro Prof. Charlesworth, Past District Grand Masters' and thank them for their attendance. A warm welcome is extended to our distinguished guests, heads of Progressive degrees and Independent orders,

Brethren who have travelled; your attendance is greatly appreciated, do travel safely on your return journey home.

So too, I acknowledge all who were unable to attend due to restricted occupancy, travel restrictions, or health concerns. I recognise you in your absence.

May I warmly congratulate those Brethren who have received District Grand Rank today and I look to them for continued support and guidance in their Lodges. I also extend my sincere congratulations to W Bro Brian McDermott who was invested Deputy District Grand Master at the beginning of the month. As well as to the Assistant District Grand Masters who were re-appointed under my patent of authority, congratulations once again to each in turn.

I extend my sincere congratulations to those Brethren who received Grand Rank earlier this year. The Most Worshipful The Grand Master gave first appointments as PAGDC to the following brethren;

W Bro's Christopher Adams, Alan Clothier, Lance Epstein & Charles

Russett. I look to them for ongoing commitment to the order and to this District.

Ordinarily I would comment on and highlight successes of the Board of Benevolence and Board of General Purposes for the period under review. The reports of the respective Presidents have been printed and tabled for your perusal. In Brief, to all the brethren who are stepping down, have now been appointed and elected or co-opted to serve, may I quote the following; "Volunteers are not paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless."

Brethren your contributions in time and effort in serving the respective Boards is priceless, Thank you for your dedication and look forward to your continued support.

I would like to express my thanks to the District Grand Secretary, W Bro Roland Dunstan and Mrs Fern Rowles and the staff at Freemasons' Hall who are involved in the administration of our District. They together with W Bro Leighton Shaw, Chairman of the Organising Committee and members of his committee together with the DC, W Bro Guy Ray and his team have all contributed to the success of this Annual meeting. Assistance has also been given by W Bro Richard Fahrenheit who has been working behind scenes contributing largely to the success of this meeting. Thank you one and all.

#2022&beyond

The Deputy Grand Master R W Bro Jonathan Spence recently launched the new UGLE mission statement to help guide the 2022 strategy. I have chosen to couple our post COVID recovery plan to this strategy which will require action in abundance. Action from many willing contributors realising the old idiom "*Many hand make lite work.*" no one single approach is sufficient to revitalise and re-establish our relevance as a fraternity post COVID all the while championing our core values: Integrity, Respect, Friendship and Charity.

From the Deputy Grand Masters mission statement we have direction and a timeline; What we are, what we aim for ~ and how we will achieve this. I have identified 5 pillars of excellence to support our recovery plan, each to be a functional working group, each to become a pillar of excellence.

So where do we find ourselves now and what is this five point plan all about?

Just as we entered hard lock down on the 1st April 2020 our memberships totalled 2214. Extrapolating and accounting for individual members, including honorary members we totalled 1818 at the same date. During the period under review and despite our extended suspension, we gained seventeen and sadly lost one hundred and eighteen members. Our closing member total as of 31st March 2021 was 1717 which includes honorary members. A retrition of -5,56% Yes, COVID is a huge driving factor and in my opinion, has not reviled the true nett effect on membership retrition and for that reason critical intervention was initiated with further support required.

To Date we have successfully and for good reason directed funds to Masons in distress how were food insecure as a result of the Covid pandemic.

- 1) #donatemymeeting - Individual contributions from Brethren instead of the money that they would have spent at lodge, contributions from progressive and independent orders , Doubled up from our

Samaritan fund , contribution from Grand Secretaries discretionary fund (5K GBP) .. When this initiative is wound up now in December, we would have disbursed some R450 k and assisted some 70 brethren with virtual food vouchers.

- 2) A support program to be communicated shortly:
#leavenobrotherbehind - this initiative is aimed at assisting lodges that are struggling to retain members after the covid period . The payment will be in the form of a credit to the lodge equal to a year’s capitation fees. More detail on this support program will follow and be expected to run for no more than two years upon approval from the Board of General Purposes.
- 3) #2022&beyond – UGLE new mission statement as guidance and our five point plan working groups, our strategic centres of excellence.

Lodges in the main have weathered the COVID storm; sadly, some are accounting for losses, whilst others, capitalising on renewed enthusiasm. Both ends of the spectrum require our support and those in the middle; every encouragement to gain traction.

The reality of where we are currently, requires Lodges to take a long hard look at themselves before projecting an image of confidence. We, too, must recognise that pruning a fruit tree is imperative to producing healthy limbs and encourage blossoms for the new season. Likewise, we need to consider right-sizing our District and allow week Lodges and Chapters, for that matter, to close. Members are encouraged to migrate to Lodges with whom they have an affinity. In the fullness of time, Lodges again I pray, will be bursting at their seams and petition patents for consecration.

The #2022&beyond strategy will requires “all hands on deck.”
And the following statement” ***It’s time to put the Craft first***” will require deliberate and focused effort. Craft first brethren, the foundation of all other masonic opportunities. The success and improvement of Craft masons will deliver dividends on so many levels, innumerable to unpack at this time. After all, we ought to be here to contribute, have fun and enjoy our freemasonry.

This process begins with a strategy consisting of a five-point plan. The five working groups or centres of excellence, are as follows and are chaired accordingly:

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| 1. Administration | W Bro Howard Freeman |
| 2. Communication | W Bro Vaughn Williams |
| 3. Learning and Development | W Bro Brian McDermott |
| 4. Inspire and challenge members to
practise our core values | W Bro Simon Knutton |
| 5. Re-launch the Heritage appeal fund | W Bro Leighton Shaw |

Each pillar is chaired by a senior member of our executive who has been tasked to establish a working group or committee or ad-hoc advisory panel as circumstances might dictate. Each consisting of motivated brethren eager to champion and contribute to our recovery plan in particular.

Brethren, everything referred to above involves massive mobilisation. None of which can truly succeed if we remain restrained by restrictive Covid protocol. The law of the land must however be observed and our respect for each other demands our observance of premises Covid compliance protocols. To enable this point of view, I communicated in circular 18/21 a decision to relax certain of the restrictions introduced in the Covid -19

Installation Adaptive Rituals and so begin the process of moving our installation meetings closer to the normal state that we enjoyed pre Covid-19.

All my decisions taken to secure the safest possible outcome for our membership has been derived from the science presented by academia, common sense and collective consultation with Brethren in the know. Science shows right now we have less than a 2% covid positivity rate nationally, the lowest it's ever been in eighteen months. For this reason, other than installation ceremonies referred to in circular 18/21, all regular workings may resume as per our original ritual script from Monday the 8th of November 2021. New guide lines will be communicated directly.

Please note, all legislative requirements such as wearing of face masks, Social distancing, etc... must be observed and respected including Covid premises compliance protocols.

The Pandemic is not over nor is it "gone" it is in all likelihood going to be around for a long time. We ought to seriously practice the first of our core masonic values "respect" We need to respect the space we occupy and consider the health, and wellbeing of members around us when frequenting Masonic centres and lodges. Act responsibly and regularly sanitise after active contact points have been disengaged. Your well-being is my concern, let this be the beginning of our Covid exit recovery plan.

We have so much good news to share Brethren, I can impossibly cover all adequately at this time. Our new communication pillar will augment what has already found traction such as "**Masons@Work**" zoom presentations. Furthermore, referencing the popularity of the personal letters dispatched by the executive during covid lock down. A new website, Interactive notice board, promotional video clips, newsletters and circulars all forming part of the value chain being designed. We will report and communicate on all of the workings groups championing the five pillars of our Covid recovery plan.

I look to every member of this district to avail themselves to the success of our recovery, the revitalisation of our lodges, and swift return to our customs and traditions albeit with a Covid twist.

Brethren, I thank you for your attention

RW Bro Christopher van Gaalen
District Grand Master
Freemasons Hall
Johannesburg

Administration:

- Summonses distributed accurately and on time.
- Workings identified and planning championed
- Treasurer functions reinforced, Bank accounts managed, financial reports submitted at Installation meetings. Virtual training sessions.
- Treasurer and Secretary Manuals updates completed and distributed

Communication:

- Establish a vehicle to channel news and information regularly.
- letters and working group updates, circulars and directives.
- Creation of a new District Web site, notice board and information portal.

Connect Lodges outside of the metropole by audio visual platforms to include the whole district in real time. Case in point, our Board Meetings with representation from Mauritius, Gaborone and the Northern region.

Learning and Development

A huge portfolio requiring a Learning and development strategy

Sub committees to be formed to accommodate strategy outcomes

Lyceum Lodge of Research: Encourage research simultaneously presenting “Intro to Freemasonry” “Master in the making “ etc..

Masons@Work presentations to support conversation points, available to the working groups as a presentation platform.

Mentor program, support and guidance offered

Inspire and challenge members to practise our core values

Our conduct and behaviour in the Lodge emulated in our lives at home at work at play.

Integrity, Respect, Friendship and Charity

Re-launch the Heritage appeal fund

Most importantly, linking to our “Charity” core value.

Our buildings require support, not only Park lane but every Masonic centre, without a home, we are lost to that aria. The poorer to support Charity objectives.