

Provincial Grand Master's Address - May 2019

Welcome once again to the Winter Gardens and to this our annual Provincial meeting. We have had a long agenda today and there is still more to come.

Firstly, I would like to mention Grand Lodge's stance on the media, 'Enough is Enough', I hope you will all agree that they and in particular, David Staples our newly appointed Grand Secretary, have done a good job in standing up for us - and there are many who would say, not before time. We have, over many years, been on the receiving end of the worst that the national and provincial press has to offer but hopefully that is about to change and from now on when they are short of column inches, they will think twice before they target Masonry as a soft option. In fact, I've got news for them; we're not anymore!

In this instance, paradoxically we have much to thank the press for because on the weekend following 'Enough is Enough,' we had over fifty enquiries from gentlemen wishing to join our fraternity and the number of enquiries continue to rise - just let's hope that continues and that they are not all just reporters looking for more stories. In all of this, each of us have our part to play in living our lives as good men and by practising out of our lodges the virtues we profess to admire while we are in it.

Membership of the Royal Arch has increased over the last year and now stands with 43% of our Craft membership being members of the Royal Arch. I appreciate, and thank our Deputy Grand Superintendent Paul Renton, the two Principals and my Assistants, together with all our Royal Arch leads in our lodges for their efforts. We still have many brethren in our lodges, who are yet to complete their Masonic journey. So, to those companions present this afternoon, when you attend your next Craft lodge meeting, at the festive board please sit next to a brother who has yet to join the Royal Arch and tell them about the HRA and let them know just what they are missing.

The 2021 Festival for the Masonic Charitable Foundation, which I launched here at the Winter Gardens last year is doing very well indeed and I thank you wholeheartedly for your tremendous support. We still have a long way to go and we now only have three years left. Some 2,700 brethren have already pledged their support, which is not quite a third of our membership, so brethren if you have yet to become a Steward of the Festival, please consider doing so as soon as you possibly can.

The MCF continues to support our Province with huge donations. Only last month they made grants of £19,400 each to both Willowbrook Hospice in Prescott and St.Mary's Hospice in Ulverston to provide for further special facilities.

Whilst I mention charity it would be wrong of me not to mention the continuing good work of our own WLFC. It never ceases to amaze me just how much financial support they provide throughout the Province and on occasions, further afield. During our time in Festival the WLFC have legislated for our charitable donations to be made to the MCF and they do not expect normal contributions to be made to them. Only a fortnight ago they gave some £38,000 to purchase two Blood Bikes which I am pleased to say are exhibited here today and I trust that they will be in continuous use for the benefit of all who live in West Lancashire. In connection with this, I commend those Freemasons who give of their own time as volunteer Blood Bike riders for the invaluable work they do.

I would like to take this occasion to reaffirm my continued support of our Masonic halls. If we don't have our halls to practise our Freemasonry in, then we cannot enjoy our Freemasonry.

Some years ago, Masonic halls were part of the fabric of a town and in many instances, well known landmarks. I wonder how many people today can identify Masonic halls when giving directions? Because I can tell you, they used to. Let's see if, today, we can make our Masonic Halls more recognisable, because in doing so we are also making people aware that we are still here, doing what we do, for the benefit of so many.

No doubt some of you here today will be part of the team running your respective Masonic halls and I would invite you to consider availing yourselves of the offices of Tony Hough and the Masonic hall's committee, who are there to advise on related matters. A seminar for those brethren responsible for the management of Masonic Centres is being held this year at Preston on Monday October 29th and I hope to see as many of you there as possible.

This meeting today marks the retirement of two brethren, Harold Sutcliffe and Norman Mitchell who have been on hand at our annual meeting for some 20 years to ensure that we are in good hands, should we fall ill. Grateful thanks to them both for their unstinting commitment to our well-being.

There are many brethren, all around the Province, who work tirelessly for the betterment of Freemasonry. The group officers, the almoners, the care officers, the communications, publicity and website team, membership and mentoring officers and of course, the charity team. Also representatives together with those grand officers who represent me at lodge installation meetings, I offer them my own and the Provinces' grateful thanks for all they do.

Today we have been under the stewardship, of the Leyland Group of Lodges and my thanks go to their Group Chairman Chris Blackwell and the Captain of Stewards John Waring, together with the other brethren of the Leyland Group for the stewardship they have provided to ensure the smooth running of today's meeting.

As always, my thanks go to the Provincial GDC Keith Kemp and his deputies for the management of the ceremonial which, once again has been first class and a credit to West Lancashire. I also thank our Provincial Organist, Stephen Derringer, for his musical arrangements during this meeting.

I must make a special mention to the Provincial Grand Secretary Peter and his team, Andrew, Diana and Violet together with the many volunteers, for the enormous amount of work involved in the administration and arrangements for this meeting and for all the work carried out during the year. Peter, you and all your staff are to be congratulated for all that you do.

To all those I have had the pleasure to appoint to their first Provincial grand rank, heartiest congratulations and to those I am about to promote, well done! Your appointments and promotions are just reward for the effort and commitment you have made throughout your Masonic journey, but your commitment does not stop here, and I ask you to continue supporting the Province, your group and your lodges in the future. We all look forward to seeing you enjoying your new rank for many years to come.

I can assure you all that it really does mean a great deal to me to see so many of you here enjoying yourselves because, after all, that is what Freemasonry is all about. I thank you for supporting your lodges & chapters as you do and for supporting Provincial Grand Lodge here today.

Brethren, this afternoon you have attended my Lodge, so in the coming weeks and months, I look forward to visiting yours.

Please continue to enjoy your Freemasonry. God bless you all