



UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND

An official communication from the Pro Grand Master

Thursday 19 March 2020

Dear Brethren and Companions,

These are difficult and testing times for us all. First, I wanted to thank each and every one of you for your patience and understanding during this challenging and worrying period.

Coronavirus is going to be with us for some considerable time, and I am certain you are as disappointed as I am that we have, reluctantly, suspended all Masonic activity. I trust that you will agree that it was the right course of action at the right time.

I appreciate the enormous disruption that this will cause all of us, and also the hole left in our lives by the withdrawal of something we hold enormously dear.

To those of you who have been Masons for but a few months, this may seem a little strange, but to those like me, who have been 'bitten by the bug', we cannot help but feel bewilderment and sadness at how quickly something so important has been taken away from us, albeit temporarily.

For the next few months we may not see as much of each other as we have recently; we may be spread throughout the country, or indeed the world and we may have things asked of us which sit outside the ordinary compass of our

experience. From a personal point of view, being over 70 and diabetic I am taking the "lock down" seriously, as I am sure all brethren in the same situation will. There are, of course, a great many in this position and it is not easy with no, even vague, end date in sight. My real sympathies are with those who live alone. I am lucky, I have a wife, as well as our children all of whom are most supportive and our daughter is arranging our shopping needs, where they can't be delivered. I do hope that many of our brethren are in the same boat and over and above that, we all have our large and active masonic community to rely on.

We are luckier than most.

My youngest son is adamant that the best way forward is to try to have some form of structure in our day, as that is what we have been used to most of our lives, albeit in a very different format. I suspect that, in the current times, the structure will take on a rather strange appearance. We live in a reasonably isolated area and can walk for over an hour without seeing anyone, therefore I think the dog is going to get a great deal fitter (and could even become a better ritualist!); my office might become and stay tidy and I can catch up with all those things I have been putting off for far too long. This won't take up 3 months or whatever time is required, but I am sure other activities will develop as time goes by. Anything to keep mind and body active. Of course, at some point in the future, life will return again to normal.

I have already mentioned trying to keep a structure in our lives. Freemasonry is a very well-structured institution. Currently that structure has been disturbed, but rest assured that, whilst The Book of Constitutions is pretty rigid on some subjects, ways will be found to ensure that we get Lodges and Chapters back onto the right format as quickly as possible after the resumption. This difficult period will run its course, and move into history and our Lodges and Chapters will begin to meet again. Candidates will experience the wonder of the initiation ceremony, Bro Treasurers will again chase their profligate Brethren for dues, Grand Officers will, more's the pity, sit 'tutting' on the back rows over some ceremonial sleight, imagined or actual, and the rhythm of our masonic lives will once again return to normal.

Over the last few years we have been trying to stress that Freemasonry must remain relevant to society and I have never been in doubt that this has been the case in many ways. However, it has never been more relevant than it is right now. What we do in the next few months, will be written into our Lodge and Chapter histories and will test us, as an organisation and as people perhaps more than anything in our lifetimes. I think it is fair to say that I cannot

remember a more testing time for the organisation, for society and for the country. We need to step up and do our part, as we have in difficult times past, to help those, our less fortunate Brethren, their families and the communities from which we are drawn.

That is why, we have, today, released a joint statement with the MCF, the Freemasons' Charity, committing to help those in need. Up and down the country, in Provinces large and small, Freemasons are coming together to commit to help those who find themselves at life's lowest ebb. I encourage those of you who feel able to safely commit both time and effort to think on how you might play a very small part in this worthy National effort. There are many great ideas already out there, and we will be sharing these and how successful they are as things develop.

We will need your dedication, flexibility and patience over the coming weeks and months to help each other through these turbulent times. Freemasonry has weathered many storms in its centuries-long history. It will weather this one too, and we will emerge ready for the challenges of, I suspect, a very different world.

Look after yourselves, brethren, and I trust we can get back to normality in the not too distant future. I wish you and your families good health and happiness, and more than your fair share of luck.

Peter Lowndes
Pro Grand Master



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