

## **PGM's speech at the launch of the 2015 Festival**

This evening is a very special one in the history of our Province. In the centres across West Kent, Freemasons are gathered to mark, and to celebrate, the launch of our 2015 Festival for the Masonic Samaritan Fund.

In Tunbridge Wells, in Sevenoaks, in Dartford, in Welling, onboard ship on the Thames and here in Bromley we are joined by representatives of the Masonic Samaritan Fund and I am delighted that their President Very Worshipful Brother Hugh Stubbs is here this evening with us. This speech is being shown at each centre and on board, and at the conclusion of these remarks my colleagues who are hosting the event at each centre will, in their own words, propose the health of the Fund and the representative attending at that event.

The launch of a Festival is an important and vital moment for any Province. We launch this Appeal in what is probably the worst economic climate any of us can recall, and I am acutely aware of the financial pressure faced by almost every member. We are all financially worse off than we were a year ago. However, tonight and for the coming years, our focus is not about ME or US but about our Brethren and their dependents who would rejoice if all they had to concern them was their financial health.

The Fund concerns itself with bringing assistance to our Brethren and their dependents where the National Health Service cannot, or will not, assist or where the delay results in hardship and distress. Increasingly funding is also being provided to provide respite care so that a carer can have a short break from the heavy burden that role places on them. Is there a better cause for us to support?

I particularly want to thank Richard Douglas, the Chief Executive of the Fund, who has been a tremendous support to us in the planning of the Festival and in particular for the excellent awareness talks he and colleagues have given around the Province. Richard is at Welling this evening and I trust he is being well looked after and having an enjoyable time. Richard - thank you so much for your time and contribution.

You will soon be receiving Calendars for the next 12 months which will serve as an ongoing reminder of the Festival and the work of the Fund. For each month there is a brief story of how the Fund has helped our members and dependents.

In his last report our Provincial Grand Almoner, Ray Larkin, told us that 14 brethren had been assisted during the last six months for a cost of over £65,000. That money has been raised by the other Provinces currently in Festival for the Fund and it is now our turn to step forward and ensure that those in need of assistance in the future are properly supported. I hope that this Festival will remind all the Brethren that help is available and we shall see more applications for those in need in the Province.

There is of course one matter that is at the forefront of all your minds. "What is the target to be"? It is important that it should be one that is attainable, with effort, but is also realistically attainable. I have always made clear that I will not set a figure that does not take account of our current numbers and the economic climate today. Equally I know of the wonderful support you are going to give to prove what West Kent Freemasons can do.

I must be the luckiest PGM to have Brethren such as you, determined to make this Festival a wonderful success and to have much happiness and enjoyment in the process. My colleagues and I have discussed the target several times in recent months and we have decided on £2.25 million as our preliminary objective. I know that together we can achieve that figure and go beyond it. We will have a competition to guess the date when that figure will be reached - details will be announced shortly.

That is a substantial sum to raise in the next six years. I hope as many of you as possible will complete a Direct Debit form and include Gift Aid declarations with your donations. With interest rates so low we cannot expect much contribution from that source during the Festival and it is vital that we ensure the full use of Gift Aid to boost our contributions.

I have authorised the immediate issue of our Festival jewel and I expect to see them being worn with pride around the Province to demonstrate the commitment of each of the members to our Festival. The entry level is a donation or commitment of £50 and the cost of the Jewel is an additional £10. There are the usual bars for higher levels of donation. The Provincial Convocation in June will be the last day when the RMBI 2003 Festival jewel can be worn.

At this stage we are not setting targets for each Lodge and Chapter, nor are we asking for a target to be volunteered by a Lodge or Chapter. You can all do the mathematics and work out a rough figure for you and your Lodge and Chapter. As the Festival progresses we will review how we best acknowledge special effort by a Lodge or Chapter.

I want this Festival not to become all consuming and a subject of constant pressure. Once you are satisfied that you are on track to meet your obligation to the Festival you may well wish to support other Charities and I will encourage you to do that. The Provincial Benevolent Fund will continue to seek suggestions from you for major donations as has been the case in the past. The more that you can quietly do by Direct Debit and Gift Aid the more relaxed the Province can be as we discharge our responsibility to the Masonic Samaritan Fund.

On behalf of all us attending the various functions tonight I wish to thank all those who have worked so hard in making the arrangements and ensuring the success of each. The catering staff at each centre, and on board, the entertainers, musicians, croupiers, etc. - everyone has worked so hard and their effort is really appreciated and sets us on our way determined to repay that effort with a magnificent result when we have our Festival in 2015.

Thank you all for supporting the various events and for all that you do in the Province to make it such a happy and successful one. God Bless you all.