

MEGS Address to Provincial Grand Chapter 5 June 2009

Companions, I am delighted to see you here in such numbers for this very important day in our Masonic year. You are all most welcome and I trust that when you leave this evening you will feel that your time has been well spent.

The Companions who I have had the pleasure of appointing or promoting this afternoon know that they have taken another important step in their Masonic journey. It is a journey of self discovery and a journey where each step brings new challenges and duties. A Masonic honour is not just an expression of reward for the past it is also to encourage you on the way ahead and to realise that with it comes the obligation to serve your Companions to an even greater extent.

I thank each and every one of you who I have had the pleasure of investing for what you have already done and express my appreciation for what you will do in the future.

It is now 12 months since I appointed E Comp Bob King as the first separate Deputy Grand Superintendent, and I am delighted with the way this move has worked out. As you would expect the separation of duties with V W Bro Derek Bearman, my Deputy in the Craft has gone smoothly and happily.

One of the first issues for the team to address was to get to know all the Chapters at first hand. It was decided to ask the Grand Officers who traditionally represent me at the Installation meeting to step aside so that my Deputy, Principals and Assistants could attend to avoid burdening Chapters with two official visits in a year. This has enabled the new team to get around all the Chapters and get to know the Companions and to raise the profile of the Province with each. I am very grateful for the way the Grand Officers accepted this approach and trust that they have had plenty of invitations to attend meetings privately.

The response from the Chapters and Companions to this closer attention from the Executive which has been difficult before has been

well received and has greatly heartened the membership. The increased profile of the Royal Arch will be supported by an increased presence on the website and in the West Kent News.

Recruitment and retention remain the major issue for our attention. Our loss of memberships in the Royal Arch has averaged less than one per Chapter but we do not celebrate loss! Each of you here today is a salesman for the Royal Arch. If each of you can make an effort to secure just one exalte from the Lodges of which you are a member or visit we will be celebrating a substantial increase in our numbers next year.

The relationship of Lodges and Chapter numbers indicates that each Chapter should receive members from 3 Lodges. The Royal Arch representative in each Lodge needs to consider which Chapter is best suited to that particular Brother. He will consider age, interests, occupation, location, and time and date of meeting. It may well be that the Brother will be exalted into the Chapter attached to that Lodge, however, that need not always be the case. The situation of the Brother and what is best for him are essential considerations if he is to thrive. For example a brother with a young family may not wish to join a Chapter that meets on a Saturday. The great advantage of joining a Chapter should be to broaden your network of friends and not just to meet the same faces albeit in different regalia. Widening the network will result in more inter-visiting which is much to be encouraged. The Royal Arch representative is the key to expanding our membership. He has a crucial and vital role in each Lodge to secure the future of the Royal Arch.

The Seminar programme next autumn will include one on the Royal Arch. This is the opportunity to bring along Brethren from your Lodge to help stimulate their interest. I hope that the majority of the audience will not be Royal Arch members.

The revised ritual is now widely adopted in the Province and that is excellent. However, I repeat the plea that I have made on numerous occasions and that is that the Lectures have been changed so that they can be shared. There is great advantage in this approach. There is less to learn, and in many cases, relearn which is much more difficult. Personally I have never had great difficulty in forgetting

ritual but I appreciate that for some the old words are very deeply engraved in their minds.

There is also the advantage that a change of voice can give a different emphasis to the words and make the Lecture more stimulating. Above all it involves more Companions in the meeting and that will increase numbers attending.

Until we start to bring forward our intended increase in membership it is inevitable that there are some weak Chapters. I am most grateful to E Comp Tony Forwell and his Companions on the Chapter Support Team for their work. They give much encouragement to the Companions in those Chapters and I welcome this opportunity to be able to tell them how much we all appreciate what they do.

However, they do not solve the problems of a Chapter. That must come from within the membership. They can encourage and advise but that is futile if the members do not want to listen and respond.

Companions last Saturday we launched the Festival for the Masonic Samaritan Fund. The target for the Province is £2, 250,000 to be raised by the spring of 2015. We embark on this next period in the life of our Province determined to make a success of the Festival. However, Charity Stewards in Chapters must realise that their members are probably also members in a Lodge in the Province and cannot be expected to double their giving!

There will need to be some co-operation between Lodge and Chapter Charity Stewards in this regard and the Charity Committee will be giving guidance in particular to ensure a Brother's or Companion's giving remains confidential.

We have not set a target for Lodges and do not intend to do so for Chapters either. However, it will be appropriate as the Festival develops to reward in some way Lodges and Chapters who make special effort.

During the Festival the Provincial Benevolent Fund will continue to seek suitable Charities for support and I do urge you to come forward with suggestions. Ideally these should be small local charities where our contribution can make a real difference. The Charity Committee is

reviewing the policy of not supporting general running costs and you are free to suggest charities where general support is needed rather than for an item of equipment etc.

Today is the last time that the old design Provincial Tie may be worn at a Masonic meeting. That is the black tie with the provincial crest. This is also the last time that the RMBI 2003 jewel may be worn. I trust that the new Provincial tie and the Masonic Samaritan Fund jewel will be widely worn immediately as a sign of that Companions commitment to the Province and to the Fund.

I am blessed with an excellent Executive and I am particularly grateful to my Deputy, the two Principals and the Assistants for the way they have gone about their important duties. They have worked tirelessly and with great good humour. I know they have your total support and I am grateful to all of you and to them for that.

I express my thanks to the Provincial Grand Scribe Ezra and his team, to the Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies and his team for all the arrangements today. Meetings such as this do not just happen they are the result of much thought and planning and the fact that today has gone so well shows the extent of all their efforts.

Companions, the Royal Arch completes our knowledge of Pure Ancient Freemasonry. In the coming months and years I look to you to join with all of us in the Province in ensuring that every Brother has an opportunity to complete that knowledge. Thereby he will have progressed further on the Masonic journey, have learned more about himself, and I trust made many new and lasting friends.

Companions thank you for your support this afternoon.

