

Companions, first of all, may I thank you for your support and patience since I have been installed in May. We are all embarking on a constantly changing playing field within Masonry. The Closure of Chapters, loss of Companions, rise of costs etc. But we can and will overcome these challenges by facing them head on and together. Masonry is far bigger than anyone of us individually, but together as a collective unit, our good work and light will keep shining through.

We all have been busy since our last Convocation and to this I would like to thank those who arranged and participated in the Director of Ceremonies seminars. There has been nothing but positive comments being made and a hope that there will be more in the future. We the Council are listening and have agreed to run them on a Bi-Annual basis, to help and assist in any way we can.

I must emphasize that the DOC seminars, do not, substitute or deviate, the need to attend and support the Classes of Instruction. These are run by Elected members who are very capable in the Instruction of Royal Arch Masonry. They are places of knowledge, where the knowledge is imparted in a friendly and understanding environment. So please Companions, I would encourage those Companions in office or are interested in degree work to attend whatever class is nearest to you.

The Health and Wellbeing day held on the 10th October in Newtownards was a great success. The Committee which embraces the District Grand Chapter and Provincial Grand Lodge put a lot of effort into these events, solely for the benefit of you the members, family and friends. To each and everyone of them, thank you for your hard work, commitment and dedication. The next event will be held in Galwally House Belfast in March 2024. If you check the District website, updates on health matters are posted regularly.

As I mentioned in my last remarks, work has begun in motivating and educating ourselves and the Inspectors. We met as a group on the 24th October, where a very informative and thought provoking Power Point Presentation was hosted by REC Gerry Fleming and the Senior Officers. All those in attendance found it worthwhile and educational. We sincerely hope it has given all of us the tools we require in carrying out our very important roles in a more professional and knowledgeable way. The Inspectors have a crucial role within The District and will receive all the support they require in carrying out their important duties.

I am also glad to inform you that the Task Force has been resurrected under a new name, the Continuous Improvement Team, which is due to meet next

week for the first time. The DDGK will be leading the Team as they plan a roadmap for the future. We look forward to hearing their recommendations and suggestions.

Companions, I have postponed the Notice of Motion which was on the Circular. After some deliberations I have decided to meet with the five Inspection Committee Representatives, to work on an improved, more efficient and coordinated way in running the committees. One, which I hope will lead to an inclusive collaboration between all the Inspection Committees. All matters will be brought to the table, as it is important that everyone has their say on matters pertaining to their respective areas.

Regarding venues for our Convocations, it is with regret that I inform you that the War Memorial Hall in Crossgar proved to be too small for our requirements. So as things presently stand, we are once again indebted to the DGK of Antrim and the Management Committee of the Lisburn Masonic Centre, for agreeing to let us use their premises in March and June next year. We will be in The Village Centre Hall, Royal Hillsborough in September, at the kind invitation from Kilwarlin RAC No 66, who are celebrating their 150th Anniversary and of course we will be in The La Mon House in December for our Installation. We have one invitation for June 2025, so Companions if any Chapter is celebrating an important milestone and would like to host District Chapter, please contact the Office to make suitable arrangements.

We have been blessed over the years with fantastic volunteers who help with the sound equipment. Our present incumbents have been doing a wonderful job for a long period and have sadly indicated their wish to retire in the near future. I am therefore appealing for any volunteers who would be willing and able to carry out this very important duty. If you think you are that person, make yourself known to one of the Senior officers or sound engineers who will only be too glad to explain what is required.

It is the District Grand King's Council intention to resurrect the BBQ and Social evening. So, keep the last Saturday in September 2024 free in your diary.

Venue

yet to be decided. This once again will be an informal meet and greet evening, solely sociable.

I am pleased to announce that the new look District Website is going live today. I hope you find it more user friendly, informative and useful. The best thanks of District Grand Chapter goes to REC Ian Simms, who has put in a tremendous

amount of time and effort into this project. I'm sure when you visit the site you will agree. I am it is greatly appreciated.

While on the subject of thanking people, thank you one and all for your attendance at the Church Service in Ballyward and Armagh. Two wonderful spectacles. Great turn out and well run. Banbridge District Charity Committee will be hosting their Annual Carol Service in Bannside Presbyterian Church on Sunday 10th December. It will be another great occasion, so please come along with your families to begin the festive celebrations.

On the 15th September, the Companions of the South Down Area held their first Golf Competition in Kilkeel Golf Club, for the purpose of raising money for The Daisy Lodge Newcastle. On what turned out to be a miserable day, weather wise, the competition was won by VEC Victor McNeill. (Well done) The real winner on the day was Daisy Lodge. Thanks to the generosity of all concerned the final sum raised was £2530.00. A fantastic achievement by those who worked tirelessly to make the day happen. I have it on good authority that the Masons from The South Down Area have already started to arrange a Charity Golf Competition for July next year. Good luck Companions with all your endeavours.

Companions, in closing may I wish each and every one of you and your families, A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. As we celebrate this Season of Goodwill, let us not forget about those less fortunate than ourselves. Whether they be lonely, destitute or just feeling unwanted. Remember our duties to ourselves and others.

I come across this saying the other week. I close with this thought.

Forgiveness is the key which unlocks the door to resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness.

Thank you Companions and safe journey home.