

Companions, as we approach the end of the Installation season, I would like to personally thank all those who were involved in the organizing and degree giving at these Convocations. Their time, effort and skills need to be recognised and hence praised for their endeavours. Most of us, turn up, to enjoy the ritual and festivities afterwards, not realizing or forgetting, the amount of work that has gone into the preparations. So, to all, Registrars, Installing Officers, Ex Kings and not forgetting the Class leaders, thank you for your tireless work, commitment and dedication to your Chapters and R. A Masonry in general. Companions it is greatly appreciated.

The District Team have also been very busy since the last Convocation. As Senior officers we have had the pleasure of accompanying Chapter Officers when presenting 50 and 60 year jewels and certificates to those Companions who are unable to attend their Chapter due to aging profile or mobility issues. It is indeed, a humbling experience to listen to the stories they have to tell, both personal and Masonic. It is truly an honour to carry on in their footprints in maintaining the virtues of this fantastic Order. Companions remember and never neglect those who have given so much of their life to this Order. We have a duty of care to all our Companions. This point brings me on to the next Health and Wellbeing event. It will be held on Tuesday 12th March 2024 in Galwally House Belfast between 12.00 and 3.00 pm. I would again appeal to all who may have concerns regarding their health, mentally or physically to go along and seek out the help and advice that is being offered. Please be assured everything is confidential. Bring family, friends and neighbours. These events are open to all. Further details can be found on both the District and Provincial Grand Lodge websites. Our Health and Wellbeing strategy, for both parties will be a continuous project. We are

committed to helping our Brethren and Companions the best we can.

As was mentioned at our last Convocation we met with the five Inspection Committees to work on an improved, more efficient and co-ordinated way in running the committees. An open and constructive discussion was held with a lot of positive ideas being brought to the table. Another meeting is planned to take place on the 19 March in Hillsborough, when a draft of the changes to the District By-laws will be presented to the Committees so they can return to their respective areas and discuss in full. At this next meeting they will also be informed of those Chapters, who sadly, are not eligible to be considered for District Office. The relevant Inspectors have also been made aware. By not affixing your signature to the signing in sheets, renders you as a non-attendance. This sadly effects all within the Chapter for elective Offices.

The Senior Management Team, have also organised Revision and Familiarization Seminars for Registrars, Treasurers and Almoners. These will be held on Tuesday 7 May in Galwally House, Belfast, Thursday 9 May in Banbridge and Thursday 16 May in Newtownards. For all those concerned, please come along. They are for your benefit, which in turn will benefit your Chapters. Help, advice and guidance will be given to all at these events. They will not be boring, I can assure you.

We hope that all attendees will go away much more confident in doing their duties in their respective offices.

I am glad to inform you that the Continuous Improvement Team met for the first time in December. They have set out their Terms of Reference and will be meeting again soon. We wish them well as they look at making RA Masonry in Down more efficient and

hopefully enjoyable. Their remit is of course, advisory, as not all suggestions are feasible or obtainable.

We have received an invitation from Cottown RAC 430, for them to host District in March 2025 in The Queens Hall Newtownards, to help celebrate their 75th Anniversary. This we have gladly accepted and are looking forward to their hospitality. We are also open for invitations for the rest of 2025 onwards. So, if any Chapter is celebrating an anniversary or other special event, and would like to host District, please do not hesitate to contact the office regarding arranging the same.

Once again, a big thank you to all who attended the Carol Service in Bannside Presbyterian Church. What a wonderful afternoon and a truly outstanding charity collection. Well done Banbridge District Charity Committee.

As was mentioned in December we are on the outlook for volunteers to operate the sound system. At present one Companion has come forward offering his services, to which we are greatly thankful. I again appeal for any other Companion who wishes to take a more practical part in District Chapter to speak to one of the Senior Officers or sound engineers who will only be too glad to explain what is required.

The New Look District website is now fully operational. I hope you all have had a chance to browse it. If not, I would highly recommend it. REC Ian Simms has done a tremendous job and we are thoroughly grateful for his efforts. If any Chapter or Companion have any photos or news, regarding Installations, presentations etc, we would encourage you to send them into the office so we can input them onto the site. As the saying goes "Yesterday's news is history" So we need to keep one step ahead in the game.

In closing I leave you with a thought. A quote I came across from Helen Keller. Undeterred by deafness and blindness, she rose to become a major twentieth century, humanitarian, educator and writer.

Her quote “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”

I wish each one of you and your families, God’s Richest Blessings, health and happiness and have a safe journey home.