

Companions, I thank you all for your attendance here this afternoon. It's great to see such a good turn out and the room so well filled.

I would especially like to congratulate all those who have been installed and invested this afternoon and wish them an enjoyable and productive two years as serving officers. Again, to those who have served their just and lawful time, thank you once again for your professionalism and dedication over the last two years. It has been gratefully appreciated. But more importantly don't be strangers at District Grand Chapter Convocations.

While on the theme of congratulations, I wish to congratulate V.E.Comp Craig Wilson, one of our District Representatives to the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Instruction who has recently been elected a member of that Grand body and has subsequently been approved by Supreme Grand Chapter. Craig does a tremendous amount of Degree work throughout the District and beyond, and this is recognition of those efforts and a well deserved honour.

On behalf of District Chapter I extend to you Craig our heartiest congratulations on your promotion and we wish you well.

Since our last convocation, we have hosted The Supreme Grand RAC in The Mourne Country Hotel, Newry. This is now going to be a bi-annual event, hosted between ourselves and Antrim, which ensures that at least one Supreme Grand Chapter Convocation will be held in the Northern Districts. Before the stated convocation, a

Health and Well Being event was held, to showcase to the rest of the Island what we in District, along with Provincial Grand Lodge, are doing to invest in the health of our members, families and friends. Since the event, I have received nothing but positive comments and sentiments from the length and breadth of Ireland, congratulating us on our positive and forward thinking. We are once again indebted to R.E.Comp Gerry Fleming and his team for the wonderful work they carry out on our behalf. Of course, ably assisted and pointed in the right direction by Mr Brian Fraser, Men's Health Manager, South Eastern Health and Social Care trust. Companions, we look forward to more events in the near future.

On the subject of thanks, I would like to thank all those Companions who gave of their time to support Dundrum ML 488 at their church service in Newcastle on the 8<sup>th</sup> September. A very uplifting and inspiring afternoon.

Also, thank you to those who came along and supported the BBQ in Newry Masonic Hall. A great evening of food, entertainment and craic. Thanks go to all in Newry Masonic Hall Committee who organised the event. Well done.

Unfortunately, another Chapter has closed since we last met. But, thankfully all the Companions have affiliated to other Chapters. Companions, I would again remind every Chapter that if you are experiencing difficulties with numbers, administration etc please do not hesitate to contact the Office or your Inspector immediately. We are here to help and assist you to the best of our abilities

Over the last year the Senior officers have been meeting with the Representatives of the five Inspection Committees, working through a road map to make the Committees more efficient and streamlined. The introduction of a one-off fee for all Chapters regarding new candidates, affiliations etc to be paid with their returns, has been passed. This will enable the Registrars of the committees to concentrate on their role as administrators, not treasurers. Also, the introduction of the use of an electronic media service to hold meetings if they so wish. These are a few of the strides which have been taken.

Next on the agenda has been a discussion regarding the possibility of reducing the number of Inspection Committees from five to three. This will incorporate the committees being formed into regional areas instead of local Districts. The proposed three new areas to be known as North Down, Mid Down and South Down. Each area will have an increase in the number of Chapters, roughly, 19, 17, 21. We envisage that by reducing the number of committees, it will also reduce the number of enquiries that are currently required. Also, for future nominations for District office, it will be proposed that a round robin system be used, so that every Chapter will have the opportunity to nominate a District officer, providing that the Chapter meets all the recommendations set out in the District By-Laws. A paper will shortly be sent to the Committees for consultation.

The Continuous Improvement Group has been reconstructed, with all the Senior Officers, bar the

District Deputy Grand King, who is the Chairman, stepping aside. This is to facilitate the group to be used more as an advisory group, with the Senior officers making the final decision. Already some benefits are materialising, with head way being made on the emails, and with the cooperation of Provincial Grand Lodge, a new recruitment drive will soon take place, entailing an information stall at Provincial Grand Lodge Communications. We all look forward to seeing the results.

Ongoing training and development within the Office and especially with our dedicated team of Inspectors is ongoing, and I must personally thank the DAGK for all his efforts and hard work, in facilitating these training sessions. Everyone is reaping the benefits as we become better equipped to meet any challenges which might lie ahead.

Again, I would like to remind everyone of the importance of attending a Class of Instruction.

We all benefit from attending classes, as do our Chapters. Not only do we learn the correct ritual, we also gain in confidence. I would urge all Companions to support the Classes of Instruction for the benefit of us all. Details of when they meet can be found on the District website.

While mentioning the District website, I would encourage as many Chapters as possible to send in articles, along with photographs into the office so they can be put on the website. It's your website, so let's make the most of it.

Companions, may I on Behalf of the Senior Officers in District thank each and every one of you for your continued support, it really is much appreciated. As the words of Henry Ford remind us:

“Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, Working together is success”

May you, your family and friends enjoy the Blessings of this Season. But may we all be ever mindful of those who are suffering this year, through illness, bereavement, loneliness or hardship. This can also be a very hard time for some amongst us.

Companions, I thank you for your attention and when you leave here this afternoon, have a safe journey home.