

Companions, I thank you all for your attendance and support this afternoon, which is our first District Convocation in Bannside Presbyterian Church, a place we are all very familiar with. A welcoming place. We are once again indebted and thankful to RAC 124 for their kind invitation to host us here today.

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. Representatives were present from 33 Chapters equating to a 58% turnout. It was pleasing to note that we had representation from both Antrim and Armagh. Which was very positive to see, further cementing our bonds of friendship and togetherness with our friends and neighbours. There has been nothing but positive comments being made regarding the seminars and a hope that there will be more in the future. An Aide Memoir has been produced to aid Director of Ceremonies with their duties and has been met with great enthusiasm by all the attendees. I am glad to inform you that the Registrar for Instruction has approved the content of these Aide Memoir's and they are available for collection after this convocation. One per Chapter at present.

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 21st October in Galwally House, Belfast was a great success. Again, with a great turnout from Brethren, family and friends. Following on from the Health and Wellbeing day, two further presentations were given by Catherine Downey on Winter Nutrition and Exercise which were both greatly received. Two illuminating evenings given in a friendly and knowledgeable manner. The Committee which comprises of the District Grand Chapter and Provincial Grand Lodge put a lot of effort into these events, solely for the benefit of you the members, your family and friends. To each and every one of them, thank you for your hard work, commitment and dedication. Planning for more activities next year have already commenced. If you check the District website, updates on health and wellbeing matters are posted regularly.

I am pleased to announce that the three Regional Inspection Committees are up and running. The new Chairmen, Registrars and Officers have been elected and installed and we wish them well in their future endeavours. District Grand Chapter will keep in regular contact with the committees ensuring that any early teething problems will be dealt with, quickly and efficiently. The changes in the District Bye- Laws have been updated, and passed by Supreme Grand Chapter, as per the previous notice of motions and will be available to each Chapter in print very shortly. They will also be available on the District website. Once again thank you to all who have participated in the setting up of these committees. A job well done.

Regarding venues for next year's Convocations, we will be in The Mourne Country Hotel, Newry in March, Lisburn Masonic Centre in June, Newforge in September and The La Mon Country Club in December for our Installation Convocation. 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 June next year. We have received a kind invitation from RAC 77, who will be celebrating their 150th Anniversary in 2027, to host the December

Convocation in the Mourne Country Hotel. An invitation we have graciously accepted. Companions if any Chapter is celebrating an important milestone and would like to host District Chapter, please contact the Office to make suitable arrangements.

While on the subject of thanking people, thank you one and all for your attendance at the Church Service in Royal Hillsborough Presbyterian Church in September. A wonderful spectacle with 240 in attendance. Lets keep it up.

North Down United Masonic Charity Committees will be hosting a Family Carol Service in Comber Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church on Sunday 7th December at 3 .00 pm. We wish them well on their new venture. Banbridge District Charity Committee will be hosting their Annual Carol Service in Bannside Presbyterian Church on Sunday 14th December. Both these will be great occasions, so please come along with your families to begin your festive celebrations.

On the 19th September, the Companions of the South Down Area held a Golf Competition in Kilkeel Golf Club, for the purpose of raising money for Cancer Research. On what turned out to be a pleasant Autumnal day, weather wise, the competition was won by VEC Martin Lawther, DGC of Antrim. (Well done) The real winner on the day, of course, was Cancer Research and with thanks to the generosity of all concerned the final sum raised was £1200.00. A fantastic achievement by those who worked tirelessly to make the day happen.

Companions, with your concurrence, I will be investing at our March Convocation, Ex Comp Ronald (Ronnie) Malcolmson, Moat RAC 546, who has held the post of Registrar for 16 years (still serving) as Honorary Past District Grand Steward. This is in recognition of his continuing valuable work to Royal Arch Masonry in the Donaghadee area.

After careful consideration, Companions, I am appointing another Medical Steward, in line with current guidelines. As you know Companions, at least two people should be in attendance with anyone who has been taken ill or injured. To this post I have appointed V Ex Comp Richard Wade PK Crossgar RAC 379, District Grand Medical Steward.

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

I close with a thought.

“Christmas is a necessity. There has to be at least one day of the year to remind us that we’re here for something else besides ourselves.”

Thank you, Companions for your attendance and have a safe journey home.