

DISTRICT GRAND LODGE OF SOUTH AFRICA, NORTH

Of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of England



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Annual Meeting, District Grand Lodge of South Africa, North

DGM's Address – 1 October 2011

Brethren, welcome to you all to this our 116th Annual Meeting of District Grand Lodge and thank you for your attendance here today. I would particularly like to acknowledge and thank those Brethren of our lodges in Mauritius, Botswana and Swaziland who have travelled far to be with us today. It is also indeed a pleasure to acknowledge the presence of our RW Past District Grand Masters and I thank them for their attendance.

I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guests and I will formally acknowledge them at the end of this address. I trust that you have enjoyed our ceremony and that you will join us at the Festive Board following the meeting.

This is a special occasion for those Brethren who have received District Grand rank today, and I congratulate you all. I also extend my sincere congratulations to those Brethren who received Grand rank earlier this year. First appointments were received by: Bros. Carl Hamel to PAGDC, David Griffiths, to PAsstGSupt.Wks. and Piet Slabbert to PGStB. The following received promotions: VW Bro Iain Fraser, to PGSwdB, Bro Hans Van Gaalen to PSGD and Bros. George Buchanan, Colin Robinson & David Whitfield received promotions to PJGD. I look to them for ongoing commitment to the Order and to this District.

Brethren, earlier this year it was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of RW Bro Merton Freeman, Past DistGM. Merton served the District in various offices over a 30 year period, culminating in his term as District Grand Master from 1989 to 1994. We salute him. We also lost W Bro Dr Phoebus Perdikis who at the time of his death had served a record 25 years on the Board of General Purposes. We will also remember Fifi for his unassuming manner and the unselfish way he assisted many Brethren in need. Recently, we also lost WBro Koos Kotze who made a significant contribution to the Board of Benevolence and will be missed.

Today, we have seen major changes in the Board of General Purposes and Board of Benevolence. First, The President of the Board of General Purposes, W Bro Colin Beggs retired and I would like to thank him most sincerely for the assistance he has given to the District and agreeing to remain as President during my first year as District Grand Master. We wish him well in his retirement. Hans van Gaalen has retired as Assistant District Grand Master and I am delighted he has agreed to take on the office of Third District Grand Principal in the Royal Arch. I do thank him most sincerely for his term as Assistant DistGM, during which he gave an enormous amount of support to the District. W Bro Jace Tennier has retired as Dist Grand Treasurer after some 14 years of service, and again I do thank him for his faithful service to the District. Likewise, W Bro George Buchanan has retired as President of the Board of Benevolence, again after some 13 years of service. I thank him for his pastoral care with the Brethren

and their Families across the District, which is well known to all of us. I am pleased that he has expressed a wish to still be involved with Masonic Services.

I welcome Mike Edy as the new President of the Board of General Purposes, Charles Burn as Treasurer and Brian Kretzschmar as President of the Board of Benevolence. I also welcome Roger Webster District Grand Mentor and Cleve Wiehahn who have joined the Board of General Purposes. In addition, I welcome Eugene Bernhardt, Peter Ewen and Dirk Norton who have joined the Board of Benevolence. I wish them all well in their future endeavours and their service to the District.

Brethren, about a month ago at the briefing dinner for the new District officers, I used the occasion to give a presentation on how I view the way forward for the District. I have been asked for copies of the talk, so I have made it available on the District website. However, I would like to give a summary of some of the salient points and the initiatives which have been put in place.

First, you should realise that Freemasonry in our Constitution has lost 40% of its membership in as little as 30 years. We continue to shrink at a rate between 2-3% every year. Whilst the decline has lessened in the past couple of years from concerted efforts of Brethren, we still need to work hard at recruiting, retrieving and retaining our membership. We are not unique in this decline in Masonic membership, which has also happened in several other Constitutions world-wide. In contrast to this picture of doom and gloom, there are glimmers of hope. For example, there are some Constitutions in continental Europe and, particularly in Latin America, that are showing incredible growth. The question is why?

More locally, this District has declined 33% over the last 10 years. It is clear that doing nothing about this is not an option, but knowing what to do and how to do it is something we should all concentrate on.

In our Constitution, Masonry generally no longer teaches its candidates the meaning of the rituals. It leaves much up to the individual to unravel. A Brother's Masonic journey is very much a personal experience leading from darkness to light and personal improvement and enlightenment. Likewise Brethren join Masonry for a variety of reasons, ranging from social interaction, ritual and ceremonial performance, fund raising for Masonic and Non-Masonic charities, and for some, to delve into the esoteric meanings of the ritual. I am of the opinion that for whatever reason we may have in joining Freemasonry, we must have an understanding of the rituals which underpin the Craft through initial guidance and mentorship. To address this, Masonic education is an absolute priority. If we know what we are doing and what our ceremonies are about, then we will have greater enjoyment and understanding of the Craft and also be able to mentor our Candidates, hopefully with better retention.

Lord Northampton, the Past Pro Grand Master, in 2005 delivered a significant paper to the Cornerstone Society in London in which he reported that a survey carried out by the Province of Buckinghamshire showed that 30% of all Master Masons ceased attending their lodges within 3 years of being raised. Investigations showed that it was mainly because they had not bonded with their peers and that they had no real understanding of the meaning of the ritual. Grand Lodge has clearly decided to address this with the establishment of the offices of Orator and Mentor at both Grand and District levels. Recently, at a meeting of District Grand Masters in Cape Town, the Grand Secretary informed the meeting that a resolution would be taken to the December Communication of Grand Lodge to recommend the establishment of the office of Lodge Mentor. The office of Lodge Mentor is not designed to replace the duties of a Candidate's Proposer or Secunder. On the contrary, it is to establish a coordinator in each Lodge to ensure that each Candidate is properly mentored on an on-going basis. The Lodge Mentor will also have an important role to liaise with regional mentors and the District Grand Mentor.

As well as educating our Members, it is also important that we need to educate the public at large. We need to be able to explain in layman's language, the lessons we are taught in our lodges. Members should be encouraged to talk positively about the ritual in simple English, avoiding Masonic jargon. If we all make an effort in explaining Masonry to laypeople in suitable terms we *can* make a difference in how we are perceived. Above all we must stress how enjoyable our Freemasonry is.

If we inspire our Members to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge and attract men to join us because of its exciting message, we will slowly be able to turn the Craft in the direction which it was founded.

Brethren, as I stated at the District Officers' briefing session, as District Grand Master I have no intention to go down with a slowly sinking ship. So the following initiatives have been put in place:

First, with the new appointment of District Grand Mentor, W Bro Roger Webster has had an extremely busy first year visiting over 60 Lodges in several identified Masonic areas, delivering a motivational presentation on the first Degree. He has also addressed non-masons at several functions and he is actively involved with Masonic education. I thank him for the work that he carried out.

Secondly, I am grateful that members of Lyceum Lodge of Research, in addition to their research activities, have agreed to assist in Masonic education in collaboration with the District Grand Mentor. A series of seminars are being set-up to be delivered at Park Lane. The first seminar is **The prospective mason:** A seminar designed for the prospective candidate and will also be open to the members of the general public. The District Grand Mentor and members of Lyceum have already presented a very successful seminar to members of the Philosophical Society of the University of Johannesburg, which also included a tour of Freemasons' Hall. The second seminar is **The new-made mason:** This seminar is primarily for the Entered Apprentice, although all Masons are welcome. The first seminar was held recently, and no doubt this will be developed further and in time other seminars will be developed for the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason. The third seminar is **Masters in the Making:** This seminar is being developed to assist Wardens and other prospective Masters to assist in planning for their year in the Master's Chair.

Thirdly, following discussions with the W Master and Brethren of Transvaal District Grand Stewards' Lodge I am pleased to announce that they have agreed to introduce, in addition to their regular demonstrations, a narrated demonstration working, initially in the first degree, to take to various Lodges. I am hopeful that the demonstration can be suitably managed by the DC and Preceptor of DG Stewards Lodge and the walk-through script produced by the District Grand Mentor. Having personally put in place a narrated demonstration in my own lodge some ten years ago, I am aware that this is an extremely powerful way of teaching and exemplifying ritual.

Two other initiatives are in an advanced stage of implementation. The first is the establishment of a Connaught Club, modeled on the original set-up under the Metropolitan Grand Lodge in London. This is a Masonic club for Freemasons under the age of 35 who are members of lodges in our District. I have appointed W Bro Colin Robinson, Asst DGM to act as the liaison between myself and the Club. It is already making enormous strides and gaining momentum and giving young Masons a suitable vehicle to interact and network with one another. They have already held several ice-breaker functions, whilst the official launch will be in December at Park Lane. I had the pleasure to meet with Bro Philip Smedmor who will chair the Club and several of the founder members recently and was impressed with their energy and enthusiasm. It is on the shoulders of these young Masons that much of our future lies.

Connaught members have also asked to adopt an ailing Lodge, similar to the practice in London to allow the Connaught Members to expand their Masonic experience. I have facilitated their adoption of Denver Lodge, which in the last few months had dwindled to 5 active members and which also happens to be my own Lodge. I have already been approached by several Brethren to start a Kent Club for those 36 to 50 year-old Masons, again following the style of the Kent Club in London. Once the Connaught Club is firmly established, I'm sure the Kent Club will follow.

The next initiative that is being put in place is for young prospective members with the establishment of a University Scheme Lodge. President Lodge will be moving from Klerksdorp to Park Lane for its installation ceremony on 22 October and will then become a Lodge dedicated to admitting University Undergraduates and Graduates, similar to University Scheme Lodges in England. I have asked W Bro Chris van Gaalen, Asst DGM to act as the liaison between the lodge and myself. Several Past Masters: W Bros Chris van Gaalen, Bernie Krone, Chris Adams, Mustapha Adamjee, Dirk Norton, David Taylor, Roland Dunstan, Philip Venn and Andries Butzbach have joined and are prepared to take this Lodge forward within the University Scheme. I am confident that the Lodge will be able to follow the scheme rules and qualify to sign-up as part of the University Scheme under the president, RW Bro David Williamson, Asst Grand Master. The lodge is being formed because there is a clear recognizable pool of University graduates waiting to be initiated. I might add that Connaught Club members are also extremely keen to assist in this initiative.

Brethren, it is a fact that only 30% of our Craft members are Royal Arch Masons. I am adamant that this position must be improved. Every Master Mason should be a member of the Royal Arch and there should be a seamless progression from the Third degree into Royal Arch Masonry. The Royal Arch completes the teachings of Craft Freemasonry, emphasizing our duties to the Supreme Being and our fellow Brethren. In the Royal Arch Convocation earlier today, I announced that petitions are being completed to consecrate two new Royal Arch Chapters. These will be attached to the Fidelity Lodge in Volksrust and the Lodge of Friendship in Mauritius. I'm not sure if the Brethren realize that in each case, a resolution has to be put in open lodge and if acceptable the petition is signed by the Master and Wardens that the Lodge accepts the formation and responsibility for that Chapter. I intend that throughout the District, Masters are reminded of their responsibility to ensure that Chapters attached to their lodges continue to receive their full support. This includes the fact that every Master Mason must be encouraged to be a Royal Arch Mason.

As I mentioned at the last Annual meeting, the Pro Grand Master has established an initiative called "Freemasonry Cares" which is a portal that gives access to the Grand Charities. Of particular interest to our District at this stage, is the Grand Samaritan Fund, which is open to all Freemasons and their families where there exists a real need, whether in Provinces or Districts overseas.

We are aware that from past experience, this District cannot afford to run its own independent Samaritan Fund, the claims on which, especially when dealing with medical matters and surgery could be substantial. In consultation with, and encouragement of, the President and Director of the Grand Samaritan Fund in London, I am confident that we will be able to access the Grand Samaritan Fund which is geared to take large financial risks and which will act as an umbrella fund to us. The initial fundamental criteria for a successful applicant, is that there has to be demonstrable financial and medical need. To manage applications, it is imperative to have effective Lodge Almoners in place to be able to assist applicants, an effective Board to undertake investigations and control submissions to the Grand Samaritan Fund and a local fund to enable preliminary medical consultations to be undertaken, if necessary. All medical procedures would be carried out in South Africa. The President of the District

Board of Benevolence, W Bro Brian Kretzschmar and his Board members will shortly be driving this initiative forward.

Our District Charity and general funds are in good shape. Thank you once again for your unstinting support and generosity. In February this year, we donated a R1 Million to the Hamlet to enable a skills centre to be developed as a capital project which will bear fruit for the next 25 years.. You will be pleased to know that building renovations to establish the new training centre are making rapid progress towards completion.

I envisage that we will again donate a R 1 Million to non-Masonic charities at the end of this year. The District Board of General Purposes has yet to decide on the recipient or recipients, but the presentation will be held at our Annual Banquet at the Country Club Johannesburg, on Saturday 5th March, 2011. Please diarise this gala event.

It is also my intention, subject to final approval of the Board, to allocate R100 K from our District Charity to initiate the formation of a District Samaritan Support Fund to facilitate and enable access to the Grand Samaritan Fund.

Brethren, you will be delighted to learn that our roving ambassador to New Zealand and Australia, Rodney Grosskopff and his wife Eileen have had a very successful Masonic lecture tour and have kept us fully informed with regular newsy dispatches.

Finally Brethren, I would like to express my thanks to the District Grand Secretary, W Bro Stanley Elms and Mrs Fern Rowles and the staff at Freemasons' Hall who are involved in the administration of our District. They together with W Bro Colin Lewis, Chairman of the Organising Committee and members of his committee together with W Bros Chris van Gaalen and Graeme MacKenzie and the DC team, have contributed to the success of this Annual meeting. I wish you all a safe journey home.

RW Bro Prof. E Guy Charlesworth
District Grand Master

1 October 2011
Johannesburg

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