



PROVINCE OF EAST KENT

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Neil H. Johnstone

Provincial Grand Master

27th May 2020

Dear Brethren and Companions

It remains very apparent to us all that the difficult and challenging times we face will continue to disrupt our normal lives for some time to come. We have been subjected to demands that have turned upside down those lifestyles and freedoms that we have always taken for granted. I am also very conscious of the loss of loved ones during this time and my thoughts and prayers, and those of every member of the Craft and Royal Arch Executives, are with the families of all our Brethren in Freemasonry who have passed to the Grand Lodge above.

But amongst all of that sadness and during these times of concern and worry for us all, I cannot stress enough that, faced with such challenges, we see Freemasonry at its best. I have been hugely impressed by the enthusiasm and determination of so many members who are giving such impressive help to not only our Masonic family but also to the wider community. And not because they have to, but because they want to and can see the positive outcomes for so many. I am so grateful for, and proud of, everything that is being done in the name of Freemasonry in our Province and I thank everyone for the part they are playing.

I cannot list all of the individual activities that have been, are and will continue to be undertaken including food preparation for the vulnerable and hospital staff, financial assistance to local charities, PPE production, joining the NHS volunteer scheme and so much more. I am equally delighted to see on-line social meetings, Lodges of Instruction, quizzes, and many other opportunities being devised so that we are able to keep in touch with each other. That is vitally important at the present time and I am sure we are all grateful to Secretaries, Almoners and in several cases their new-found "assistants" in making sure that all is well with our members who really appreciate hearing a familiar voice at the end of the line and know that they are being thought about.

I am delighted that the PGMs of the Provinces of East and West Kent, Surrey and Sussex, have come together in a co-ordinated regional approach to utilising a £100,000 grant from the MCF. Two significant projects have already been set in motion and others are still being planned. Our five main hospitals in East Kent have each received ten Samsung Tablets for their isolation wards enabling families and patients to communicate more easily, and they will remain a great asset for the hospitals after this pandemic has ended. The four Provinces have also arranged the import of a large shipment of much needed PPE to assist organisations we know to be in need. For the near future we are looking at what more can be done to help domestic violence and mental health charities in the coming weeks, areas where, unfortunately, the consequences of isolation are showing there is a need.

Within our Province I am genuinely impressed by the constant hard work and integration within our 8 Groups every one of which is doing such a terrific job in identifying where local attention needs to be and then responding to that need. I was immensely grateful to the Cornwallis East Kent Freemasons Charity, and in particular its Trustees, for their very prompt and effective distribution of grants to our 8 East Kent Groups and food banks within the Province. As a result we have directly helped, on a local basis, those who have been further disadvantaged by the effects of this pandemic.

At the 'national' level a joint UGLE and MCF group is concentrating on the bigger picture and a corporate approach to large charity grants. At the same time as reacting to the effects of the pandemic the MCF continue to provide all the normal services to our members and their families and a new relief chest for further Covid-19 related projects is now well in place and growing. I am sure that no-one can be any doubt about the positive impact that our MCF has had and how vital that our 2025 Festival is to enable it to continue to operate so immediately and effectively in the future.

We have of course not been able to hold a Provincial Grand Lodge meeting and Provincial Grand Chapter Convocation so far this year. As a consequence many Brethren and Companions have not enjoyed receiving their Provincial Grand Ranks in the customary way. Nevertheless they have taken up those appointments with effect from the dates of the respective meetings and I do congratulate them all and hope that they take some comfort in the fact that although we could not celebrate in the usual manner, they are all well deserved appointments and the new ranks are to be enjoyed.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say that we will all miss the enthusiasm, drive and energy of three senior members of the Provincial Executives who stood down this year and I am so disappointed have ended their distinguished service to the Province without being acknowledged in the usual surroundings of Margate. E.Comp. David Kershaw has served as Deputy Grand Superintendent for 7 years, E.Comp Clave Manuel as a Provincial Grand Principal for 4 years and W.Bro. David Graeme as an APGM for 5 years. All have made enormous contributions to the Craft and Royal Arch Province which everyone will recognise and be grateful for. I am sure you would wish to join me in thanking them on all our behalves for their commitment, personal effort and invaluable service to our Province.

Brethren, what I have attempted to do in this circulation is mention some of the tremendous work that Freemasonry is engaged in locally, Provincially and nationally, to compliment members of the Province for their commitment, to express great sympathy for those who have missed their investitures at Provincial meetings, to thank retiring senior Executive members for their service and to underline that Freemasonry's response to Covid-19 is both co-ordinated and very effective, and that our Masonic response to the pandemic is far more than distributing money, as important as that may be. This is a most unusual communication from me and only underlines the unexpected and unwanted circumstances in which we find ourselves. We are going through a very testing time but we will without doubt get through it and Masonry will come out the other side of all of this as strong as ever with our members having exhibited the selflessness, fortitude, and often the ingenuity required to get us there. I thank you for supporting your Lodges, Masonic Centres, your Brethren, Companions, their families and our communities in the way that you are and I reiterate what I have said on several occasions of late - our meetings may be suspended, but our Freemasonry is not.

Please stay safe, stay in touch and stay doing what Freemasonry has been doing best for 300 years. And remember, it is important not only to give help to others, but also to ask for it ourselves should life get tough.

With my very best wishes to you and your families,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Neil H. Murray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Provincial Grand Master / Grand Superintendent