

Brethren and Companions,

Following my last video message, can I begin by saying how pleased I am to see that the West Kent Emergency Fund is continuing its excellent work and that an ever-increasing number of members are being supported with financial assistance at this very difficult time.

Regarding our community engagement, in addition to the wealth of voluntary activities you continue to undertake for those who need our assistance, I've been personally involved in the presentations – on your behalf – to executives at NHS Trusts and their front line staff, who could not have been more grateful for the support we have shown them at a time when they need it most – you are all truly making a difference.

I've been humbled at the correspondence and emails I have received from members who unexpectedly received letters of appointments and promotions during the last week or so. It serves to demonstrate that the eyes of the Province are on each and every one of you and whilst the Provincial Honours system is – at best – an imperfect science, we continue to strive to do all we can to recognise the talent we have within our ranks.

It is now more than 60 days since the lockdown has been in place and those of us who live alone and have been self-isolating have certainly noticed the impact this has had on our lives.

I'm most certainly missing the opportunity of seeing many of you at our meetings and have deeply felt the void created by the suspension in Masonic activity – something which is such an important part of our lives – whether we are in our twenties or seventies – the end to which may currently seem at best uncertain.

What meetings do continue, have become virtual – and terms such as WhatsApp and Zoom are now so much more familiar to us, as has the use of all forms of Social Media. During the lockdown, many of us have taken on new pastimes and activities, or have finally accomplished that list of tasks we had set aside ages ago.

One concern I do have is the effect that enforced long-term isolation is having on our mental wellbeing – whether it be those whose work arrangements have been adversely affected or those who are living alone and are isolated. I want to ensure that every member is feeling the full benefits of membership of our Province – especially our newer and younger members – and that this pandemic has as little adverse effect as possible on member retention.

A priority for me during this period of gloom has been to connect with people – either virtually or physically – especially with those in similar situations – or those who are long term friends. I've found that a friendly brotherly chat over the phone – or more than 2 metres apart if in person – is a boost to anyone in isolation and talking to others has proved to be a great release. None of us should forget or hesitate to ask for help, if it is needed.

Keeping mind and body active is a must – self isolation can definitely reduce activity - which we all need to avoid - and what better a way than by enjoying this incredible weather and enjoying the garden, sunlight and fresh as much as possible.

Feeling stressed in a highly unusual situation such as this is normal – however, stress levels can be magnified by social isolation so we need to put our worries into perspective and remain calm and positive. Anxiety is unhelpful at the best of times and can adversely affect our mental wellbeing, which is very much unwanted at this time.

I've certainly benefitted by getting regular sleep, focussing on an established routine, scheduling activities at set times, developing a healthier diet and tuning out from the "bad" news being broadcast.

It's also been a good time to have a physical and digital clear-out – decluttering from unwanted possessions and deleting old files and phone apps I no longer use, updating outstanding Masonic records and administration, and clearing out redundant email inboxes.

More importantly, it's been a good time to catch up with outstanding letters I should have written or calls I should have made. Like many of you, I've also made a point of keeping up to date with current events, but have been equally careful to avoid the relentless wave of negative news which abounds.

Although many of you – like me – are socially isolated, one benefit to arise from this pandemic – if I can refer to it as that – is that it has made us so much more aware and supportive of each other, which has been displayed in ample measure by so many of your actions and deeds to date.

I've spoken to many of you by phone or by video conference facilities and it is evidently clear to me that – although our meetings may have been suspended – our membership of this cherished brotherhood has not. We are all just as much Freemasons as we ever were, and as we will once again be once this pandemic is behind us.

We will have demonstrated new ways to be brotherly towards each other, an opportunity to think of others, to put to good use those actions and deeds which have benefitted those less fortunate than ourselves, and aid the mental wellbeing of those that need our care and support now more than ever.

Brethren, lets continue to stay positive and do what we can to support each other through this difficult time – I know that our Provincial Almoner and his team, as well as the West Kent Emergency Fund, are standing by to assist, and look forward to seeing you all again as soon as our meetings can reconvene Let's stay alert, continue to take care of ourselves, and each other.