

PGM Address – 12.5.2020

Brethren and Companions,

Following my last video message two weeks ago, we have continued to be busier Masonically than ever before and in these challenging times, we must continue to safeguard the welfare of our members – above all else.

Today, I want to focus on delivering good news – firstly, I can confirm that 80 of our members will shortly be receiving letters of appointment or promotion in Provincial Grand Rank from me, as a consequence of the comprehensive Provincial review we conducted last year – my hearty congratulations go to the recipients, and their new ranks will apply as from 1 July.

There will also be some unexpected good news shortly for existing and future Invicta Award holders, following a review of the terms of reference for this prestigious award.

I also want to acknowledge the excellent work being undertaken at all levels – by United Grand Lodge of England and the Masonic Charitable Foundation, in particular by our West Kent Emergency Fund, our Lodges, Chapters and Members.

United Grand Lodge of England has been working closely with the Masonic Charitable Foundation and has set up a COVID-19 working group which is coordinating matters at a National level – as a consequence, many of our activities have received recognition in the National and Local press.

In addition to its ongoing activities, the Masonic Charitable Foundation has committed £1 Mio in a strategic partnership with Age UK, created a £1 Mio COVID-19 Relief Chest to match-fund local initiatives, and pledged £100k to each of the nine Regional Communication Groups in the UK.

The Provinces in Group 8 – East and West Kent, Surrey and Sussex – meet bi-weekly and we have collaborated on the optimum way to use our £100k to support local initiatives. We have purchased 25,000 visors and 200 tablets, being distributed to Hospitals, Hospices, Care Homes and Charities throughout the region and have reserves to support projects for the medium and longer term.

In our Province, we have a number of key teams managing our Community activities –

Bob Order and his team have been managing the need of Hospitals, Hospices and Charities, and we have already supplied PPE to a number of these where stocks were badly needed. We have also supplied tablets to Darenth Valley Hospital, Elenor Hospice and Hospice in the Weald, so that residents in isolation can keep in touch with loved ones who are unable to visit them.

Peter Brooker has liaised with our local Food Banks and we have already contributed some £5,000 to the first tranche of foodbanks in Bexley, Swanley, Bromley and Tunbridge Wells, with more funding to follow elsewhere.

The real highlight for me – the star performer – has been the performance of our West Kent Emergency Fund, which, in a very short time, has already made grants of over £20,000 in response to 26 applications for funding it has received.

I've recently written to you all again – through your Secretary & Scribe E – to encourage those who may be experiencing financial hardship to apply to the West Kent Emergency Fund for assistance and urge those who need assistance – now or in the future – to do so. Application forms are on the Website should you wish to apply in confidence, or your Lodge Almoner will be able to assist.

Those applicants who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves in financial hardship, have already received support from the West Kent Emergency Fund. I want to ensure that no member in financial distress feels unsupported or, worse still, disposed to resign from his Lodge or Chapter and withdraw from a pastime that we all cherish so much.

Our West Kent Emergency Fund has been able to provide financial support for:-

- Heart of Kent Hospice
- Greenwich & Bexley Hospice
- Elenor Hospice – providing funding for much needed services given the cancellation of their fund-raising events
- Lifelites – with assistive technology packages at Demelza and Elenor Hospices
- Bexley Snap – providing specialist toys for disabled children
- BAPS
- We are Beams – to cover COVID 19 costs
- Crossroads Care in Erith – to fund shopping essentials for the vulnerable
- Personal items needed by NHS front line staff
- Cakes for over 150 Ward Staff at Oxleas NHS Trust
- Crafting for Carers – for materials to produce protective clothing for Carers
- Absolute Care Home – for Face Masks
- Biggin Hill Men in Sheds Club – who are making visors

In addition, we have made sizeable donations to support the activities put forward by our members:-

- By Fred Hiley – to provide scrubs, gowns for NHS Trust for 400 people
- Tom Weaver – to provide materials to produce Facemasks
- Andrew Staples – on behalf of North Kent 3D face shields
- Don Barnes – whose grandson, Oliver, is making PPE
- Grant Allen – on behalf of Taking the Pixels – who produce PPE
- PPE donations to Darenth Grange Residential Home

Our members have also been hugely active in supporting the community, and I cannot thank you enough for what you have done so far. Over 35 of you responded to my call for volunteers to make or donating PPE – these offers ranged from 6 pairs of gloves to 1,000 masks, each and every donation being highly valued irrespective of its size.

I also want to congratulate our members for their unselfish actions to support the community Amongst many others:-

- Garry Bassom and members from Heart of Oak Lodge – who funded PPE for St Christopher’s Hospice
- The donors of food vouchers, treats and other items to staff at RMBI Home at Prince George Duke of Kent Court
- Jamie Newman – Bromley Invicta – who is supplying 180 meals a week to NHS staff from his pub George & Dragon in Downe,
- Kingsley Hamilton – for delivering stocks of PPE, and
- John Field, Alan Dobson, Sean Stone, Niloy Karia, David Stock, Chee Liu, Glen Townsend, John Field, Stephen Russell – all of whom generously offered to supply PPE
- Phil Clare – who undertook a 12-hour virtual cycle ride and raised thousands for the COVID-19 relief chest

And most importantly, to thank the West Kent Emergency Fund for supporting those members who needed short term financial assistance to meet pressing demands.

Brethren, we know that we won’t be gathering at our meetings again for some time but I would like us to continue to do what Freemasons do best – and what we have been doing for last 300 years.

We can either take this opportunity to “Make Progress” or “Make Excuses”, but I’m convinced that with our unity of purpose and your ongoing enthusiasm during these challenging times, the outside world will increasingly see us as a supportive and highly relevant organisation, and will have made us a more caring, compassionate and benevolent organisation than ever before.

In the meantime – “stay alert, stay safe” and I wish you and your families well.