

**Address by the RW Provincial Grand Master
Provincial Grand Lodge - Annual Meeting
Thursday 21 November 2019**

I have three significant thoughts I wish to share with you.

- We are all very proud of the enormous success of the East Lancashire Masonic Charity. For many years, they have supported so many Masonic and Non-Masonic Charitable causes where individuals or groups are struggling.
- We have constantly supported Hewlett Court in one way or another. Nonetheless, we have always faced the challenge of having more demands on our resources than our funds can allow.
- Lodges and Chapters are always so generous in the contributions they give to the ELMC and their excellent Chairman, WBro Chad Northcott and I are truly grateful for that support.
- I am concerned that the regular beneficiaries of ELMC support including widows and those unable to support themselves which totals 730 outnumbers the contributions made by individual Friends of the ELMC, which is a figure of 678.
- There are many in this Province who are still unaware that individual Masons (and indeed their wives) can become “friends of the ELMC” for a minimum contribution by Standing Order or Direct Debit of only £5 a month which could be the cost in some public houses in this Province of East Lancashire of two pints of beer. This is why I am driving this Appeal to all the Masons in the Province to become “Friends”.
- It stands to reason that when we launch our appeal for the next Festival for the Masonic Charitable Foundation in 2021 we will see a dramatic fall in contributions from Lodges, Chapters and individuals to the ELMC as the focus for the Province will be to support our Festival and I am certain that that Festival will be a success.
- It is precisely because of this problem that I recently wrote to all the Brethren in the Province to concentrate on boosting the confers of the ELMC before the Festival begins. Forms are available on the website by following the link in my letter. Alternatively, those of you who are not “friends of ELMC” can speak to their Lodge or District Charity Stewards who will be able to assist. I urge you to consider becoming a friend at this crucial time.

The second matter I want to share with you is this.

- I believe that we are right to be very pleased that over the last twelve months, we have seen a further increase in the number of Initiates joining various Lodges in this Province and becoming Freemasons. This trend maintains the momentum we have achieved year on year since 2015.
- That is no accident. Through the success of the Members Pathway which you have embraced, the sheer hard work which so many of you have employed has resulted in this success and I want to thank you for all your efforts in ensuring that this Province becomes stronger and more vibrant as a result.
- As we all know, the fundamental challenge is to ensure that those who have joined our fraternity remain Masons and play a significant role in their Masonic Journey, enjoy our company and share the important values on which Freemasonry is based. Namely, integrity, friendship, respect and charity.

- They can only achieve this if they feel welcome and appreciated so much depends on them being happy and communicating happiness which is why we should all re-double our efforts into ensuring that they know that they are important to us.
- Some might suggest that the external pressures of work and family on the commitment of a Mason to the Craft in general and his Lodge in particular, have existed for a long time. But I do think that life **has** changed! This is purely my own personal view, but I do believe that it is a very different world to be one we experienced when most of us become Freemasons.
- I do believe that those external pressures I mentioned are now greater in this nations rapidly changing society in what is an increasingly turbulent and fractured world.
- There are lessons to be learned from these changes and we all have had to adjust to accommodate them.
- After all, the United Grand Lodge has changed to meet the high expectations of those who might consider joining our Fraternity. The most dramatic of those changes have been an increased “openness” which certainly did not exist when I became a Mason 51 years ago.
- In a relatively recent survey conducted on behalf of the United Grand Lodge, the results of that survey should be of comfort to us all.
- The survey covered quite a number of Provinces in the country. 55% of the respondent were between the ages of 21 and 40 years of age. 72.6% had attained higher educational standards and their response to the questions as to why they had become Freemasons were illuminating and precise.
- They wished to “belong” (note that word belong) to something that is a force for good. To be part of a movement that has a very long history and continuity of traditional values.
- That Freemasonry would give them safety, harmony and stability in a changing society. It would give them new relationships and family security. The success of new members groups in various Districts has greatly assisted in achieving this. I would encourage those Districts where such a group does not exist to seriously consider forming one; it would be of great benefit.
- If those are their expectations, we must do all we can to ensure that those expectations are realised.
- The “members pathway” teaches us to attract quality candidates. To strengthen the quality of our Lodges and to ensure that all our meetings are of a high standard, comfortable and warming.
- To accept that not everyone is a born ritualist and that Lodges should consider increasing **the sharing of the work** in most if not all of our meetings. To some of our latest initiatives, the ritual can be a daunting challenge and we must ensure that the prospect of “learning by heart” is not in itself a deterrent and cause them to leave us. We must be tolerant. Sharing the work can be an answer.
- As the members pathway encourages us to have only three or four Masons on the interview panel for prospective initiates, contrary to what used to happen when interview panels consisted of a dozen or more Brethren.
- Brethren, how many Masons does it take to scare of a candidate?! If that potential initiate is a relatively young man, it could be a good idea to ensure that one of the interview panel is a young Mason to avoid the impression that the movement he is seeking to join is not completely full of “old fogies” like me.
- These and other challenges are currently being addressed by the newly formed “Membership Working Party” established by Grand Lodge and comprising nine

Provincial Grand Masters, of which, I am one. We are to meet five times a year and I can assure you we take recruitment, retention and retrieval” very seriously.

And lastly, I would wish to refer to Solomon, the online repository of learning materials launched some 12 months ago by the UGLE.

- Whilst many Lodges and Chapters are already using these materials, particularly the ‘nuggets’, during the next year the Provincial Grand Mentor and his active team of District Mentors, in conjunction with the Learning and Development Committee, will be undertaking a series of workshops throughout the Province to roll out this initiative in each District.
- These will commence in January and it is hoped that as many Brethren as possible will attend. The take-up of Solomon will, of course, support our intention of making each meeting interesting, enjoyable and worthwhile.
- One of the significant findings from the survey, I referred to earlier was that new initiates who had recently joined had an “abiding positive impression that they felt genuinely welcome and that their Brethren had genuine interest in them.