

Brethren, a very warm welcome to the annual meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge today. This is your meeting, and I am pleased to see so many of you here to support the Province, in particular those receiving acting and first appointments today. I congratulate all of you and, as I always say on these occasions, these appointments are not only a reward for the services rendered by you to Worcestershire freemasonry to date but also for what all of you, particularly those receiving acting rank today, will be doing over the coming months and years.

As you all know the decision to move from Birmingham University to our own premises here at Kings Heath was not an easy one. My one regret is that many of our brethren have not been able to be

accommodated today. I hope that many of them will have the opportunity to attend the separate Promotions meeting in September and that you will also be able to support members of your Lodge receiving their promotions at that meeting. I thank the Board here at Kings Heath Freemasons Hall for their kind cooperation and assistance in making the arrangements for this meeting and my thanks also to the Provincial Grand Secretary Jim Mulligan and his team and all of our hardworking Stewards and volunteers from the Stourbridge group of Lodges for all their hard work in preparing for today's meeting.

I also take this further opportunity to thank our distinguished guests for taking the time and trouble to

be with us today. I and the rest of the Provincial executive are always made welcome at their Provincial meetings and it is always good to be able to reciprocate in some small way. We hope you enjoy the rest of the day with us.

As well as all those receiving their first appointments today, I have, of course, reappointed several brethren to acting Provincial office and I have already thanked them for the tremendous work which they continue to do for us. There are two acting officers, however, who are standing down today and I want to pay tribute to them both.

W Bro David Dey has been our Provincial Grand Charity Steward for some 5 years now. David, you have been an

exemplary Charity Steward. You have always been happy to help and guide Lodge charity stewards and have been a fine ambassador for the Province in developing relationships with those local charities which both we and our individual Lodges have been able to support. Thank you for all that you have done.

Now W Bro Peter Broughton, our Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies for the last ten years, retires today on his 62nd birthday, a birthday and date he shares with our APGM Paul Wong. Peter, you have been a colossus amongst Provincial DCs. The best tribute I can pay to you is that you have been a more than worthy successor to those distinguished DCs who preceded you. All of us in Worcestershire owe you a

huge debt of gratitude for all the work which you have done over those ten years. I know that you will still be on hand to offer advice and support whenever called upon, as you always have been. We wish you and Sue well and send both you and her our love and our very best wishes. Thank you, my friend.

Brethren, we are now two years into the Pro GM's seven year strategy for Freemasonry. That strategy centres around three core priorities, Thriving Membership, Coherent Organisation and Community Engagement and I want to update you on the progress we are making in Worcestershire under all three headings.

You will have seen from the Registrar's report in your report booklet that we are making great strides in terms of our membership challenge which has reduced this year from 101% at the end of 2022 to 37% last year. To translate that into something meaningful it means that if just one in three of our Lodges could initiate one more brother this year or reduce resignations by one brother then our numbers would be on the rise. We are that close to achieving our goal. The statistic I am most proud of is that our losses in the first three years after initiation have fallen from the national average of 20% three year ago to virtually nil now. I pay tribute here to the work of the Cubit Club, our new and young masons club and the mentoring

team led by our Provincial Grand Mentor Simon Rogers for ensuring that our new brethren are properly looked after and enjoy their membership.

I am conscious, however, that we still have several lodges with small memberships where a few dedicated brethren are called upon to fill offices to keep the show on the road. There are several ways in which we as a Province can support you, whether by helping in carrying out ceremonies, organising twinning with other lodges or offering assistance with working through the Members' Pathway. If your lodge has not yet engaged with the Members' Pathway (and there are a small number who have still to do so) then I urge you to take advantage of it at the earliest opportunity.

It will help you to plan and to make your meetings more engaging, efficient and enjoyable. Please contact W Bro Mike Dykes and his membership team who will be very happy to come and talk to you either at your Lodge meeting or your business meeting about the opportunities which the Members' Pathway offers.

Many of our Lodges are already reaping the benefits of the Members' Pathway and I have been pleased to see double and even triple initiations taking place at several of our Lodges with more planned for the new season. UGLE are now very clear that such ceremonies are to be encouraged and I can testify that if done well, such ceremonies can offer candidates an even better experience than single candidate ceremonies as the

candidates tend to form close bonds which survive as they move through their masonic careers. Please contact us if you would like any help in organising or even demonstrating the approved UGLE method of working such ceremonies.

Everything we do at Province is designed to enhance your masonic experience as members. As the Pro GM has rightly said in the past, we are a membership organisation and you have a right to expect that we do all we can to make your experience as enjoyable as possible. Our new Provincial website will be launching soon and will include a new Members area where details of forthcoming meetings can be shared so that you will, for example, be able to see where the next

initiation local to you will be held should you wish to take new members to witness it. The new area will also have an electronic copy of the Yearbook which we now intend to update through the Year to ensure that it is always up to date. A printed edition will still be available in September for those who prefer it but we anticipate that in future the yearbook will increasingly move online. Amongst other things, the members area will also have Provincial forms and guidance to assist Secretaries and Treasurers. I hope that it will meet with your approval and this will allow the Homepage on the site to concentrate on being the outward facing face of the Province and a shop window for prospective members.

Brethren, there is so much good work being done around the Province such as Hall open days, bring a friend evenings and many similar initiatives, all designed to attract new members to our fraternity. I am confident that if we continue to project a modern outward looking face to the world, confident in the contributions which we make to the lives of our members and the communities in which they live, Freemasonry in Worcestershire has a bright future.

I turn next to Coherent Organisation. My installation as MEGS in April presents us with an opportunity, for the first time in many years, in Worcestershire to bring the Craft and the Royal Arch together as one organisation. The Craft and Royal Arch executives are now meeting

together as one body and Royal Arch representatives now sit on the Learning and Development and Membership committees. As I said at my installation as MEGS, we now have a golden opportunity to ensure that all masons in Worcestershire are encouraged to complete their journey in symbolic masonry by joining the Holy Royal Arch to enhance their understanding and enjoyment. Don't just take my word for it though. Listen to what the Pro GM of the Mark degree John Prizeman said at the March quarterly communication of the UGLE: "I would not be where I am today unless, first and foremost, I am a Craft and Royal Arch Mason....It cannot be denied that some Brethren after completing their third degree at first decide to be

Advanced into the Mark Degree, perhaps they consider one must first prepare the Keystone before you can wrench it forth. But we accept without exception that the very spring and fount of all English Freemasonry, the foundation on which it has been built for the last two hundred and ten years, are the Three Craft Degrees and including the Royal Arch.” Our new Provincial tie, which is on sale today, is to be worn in both Craft and Royal Arch meetings, a bargain two for one offer brethren (!) and one which I hope will be a powerful symbol that we are one organisation.

We have always prided ourselves in Worcestershire on the excellent relations which we have always enjoyed with the other Companion Orders in Freemasonry. As

you know, I am a member of many of them and a past ruler in the United Orders. We are extremely pleased to see so many of them here today. I shall continue to support these other orders as much as I possibly can. I look forward to the next Heads of Orders meeting with them which I hope will be early in the next masonic season and to working with them all for the benefit of Freemasonry in Worcestershire generally. I can assure you that my attitude to mutual cooperation has and will always be “yes if” not “no because”.

Lastly, charity and community engagement. Now that the Province is out of Festival we have taken the opportunity to reorganise some of our charities so that they can more effectively focus on grant making to

non-masonic charities and good causes. We have therefore established the new Worcestershire Freemasons charity which will be run by Trustees who will be appointed by the PGM but will operate independently on your behalf in administering the funds raised by you. The unrestricted charitable funds currently sitting in WMCO will be transferred to the new charity. This will leave Ellard Hanson Court , the Heritage fund and the Yorke Brooks fund which we intend to transfer to a new fund of benevolence which ,once established, will be our “inward looking” charity focused on our members and their dependents. I am greatly indebted to W Bro Justin Parker for agreeing to oversee the establishment of these new charities and

to W Bro Alan Robertson for chairing the Trustees of the new WFC. The new charity will be formally launched at the promotions meeting in September where there will be the opportunity to sign up for regular giving. As we all know this is a very effective and relatively painless way of ensuring that we keep up our support for local charities and will assist in giving the next Festival a great start when the time comes.

I encourage all of you to continue to engage with the local community. Many of our halls are now used by a variety of local groups and I am also keen to continue our support of the Royal British Legion's Poppy appeal as we have done so successfully in recent years. Our own Library and Museum chaired by Phillip Serrell have

increased their own engagement with various groups and societies and we should be proud of their work to show off our heritage to the wider public.

The new Masonic season promises much. We have our annual regatta in a few weeks and in the Autumn we will have the launch of our new Real Ale lodge with the rededication of the Lodge of the Desired Haven, the first consecration of a new Lodge for some time with Tenbury Summer lodge and the Centenary of St Edburgha lodge. As well as these special events for you to enjoy, brethren, I also urge you all to get involved in your Lodge and with the Province. By “getting involved” I do not just mean paying your subscription and turning up to meetings. In your own Lodge , for example, I

mean actively taking part in planning your Lodge's future or being willing to assist younger brethren.

At Provincial level, if you have skills that you would be happy to put to our use for even a few hours a month then do please contact the Provincial office and I am sure that we can make good use of them. All the acting officers here will bear testament that the more you put into Freemasonry the more you will get out. Most importantly, however, the more you put in the more enjoyment you will get.

I have been a freemason now for 36 years and have never enjoyed it more so that must mean I am doing quite a lot of it! Let us continue to enjoy our freemasonry, to be happy ourselves and communicate

happiness. As W Bro Michael Dykes is fond of saying,

Freemasonry...it's the best hobby in the world!

Thank you for listening and enjoy the Summer.