

8 April 2020

Dear Brothers,

The Covid 19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc on societies, economies and household livelihoods globally. This is a global crisis of a scale and nature that most people alive have never experienced. Country after country has responded by imposing lock-downs, business restrictions and other limitations on the freedoms in our daily lives that even a short few months ago we never could have imagined. I am afraid, unfortunately, that we are still a long way out from any return to normalcy.

Even as we face continuing uncertainty in our lives and the world around us, I am now, just as much as ever, happy that am a part of Freemasonry. Freemasonry, after all, is about building. While operative masons build buildings and physical structures, we as free and accepted masons have used the analogies of masonry to focus on building social, moral, and spiritual structures that enrich ourselves and society. These structures that we build as Freemasons are never more in need than in times like these.

When thinking of how we Freemasons should behave in this time of crisis, we need to look no further than to the three principal tenets of Masonry: Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

Brotherly Love reminds us to regard the whole human species as one family, and as such we are to aid, support and protect each other. Relief reminds us that it is our incumbent duty to relieve the distress of all people, and especially our brother Masons. And Truth, reminds us that the first lesson that we are taught in Masonry is to be good and true, leading us to distinguish ourselves through sincerity and plain dealing and rejecting hypocrisy and deceit. If ever there was a time when these principals are needed in the world, it is now.

You have inevitably seen reports of individuals, or even state actors behaving on either side these principals. It seems that for every story that we read of benevolence and self sacrificing acts of love and mercy, we also read stories of hoarding, profiteering or nationalistic hate mongering.

Life, of course, is checkered with good and evil. In these uncertain times, there is certainty in the need for Freemasons to distinguish themselves by meeting on the level, acting on the plumb and departing on the square.

Although our lodge meetings are curtailed by the necessity of "hunkering down", "sheltering-in-place", and "self-isolation", there are a myriad of things that we can do to support our brothers, the fraternity and the community during these trying times. Some of the things that I would like to see are:

1. **Charity Committees:** Our constitution requires each lodge to have a Charity Committee as one of its standing committees. I encourage each lodge master to ensure that their Charity Committees continue to stay active. Unlike lodge meetings, committee meetings can be held virtually using technologies such as Skype, FaceTime, FB Messenger, Line,

et cetera. Please take advantage of these technologies to meet and explore opportunities for extending masonic charity to those in need (both in and out of the fraternity). Any initiatives that are decided on should then be communicated to the brethren of your lodge to encourage participation among a variety of brothers (even if the numbers attending any single event need to be limited for health and safety concerns).

2. **Reach-out Campaigns:** Each Master should take this opportunity to contact all of the lodge members individually to check in on them. Since most lodges will be dark this month and likely next, you all will have time that you can dedicate to this effort. The reach out campaign can and should be done together with the other pillars of the lodge, the Secretary or other individuals selected by the Master. The contact may be by mail or phone, however, it should in all cases be direct and personal. This will give you all the opportunity to engage with brothers whose attendance may be less regular, or dormant, as well as ensuring that we keep abreast of the safety and well-being of our brotherhood. If you find brothers in need of support, please share that information in a discreet manner with the Grand Lodge or other brothers in your lodge who may be able to provide support.
3. **Education:** As we all find ourselves spending more time indoors, now is the perfect time for both the lodge masters and Education Committees to provide education topics for discussion amongst the brethren. There are a tremendous amount of online and in print resources available to us all and that provide a good basis for discussion and education. Of course not everything that you read is true, but even so, they can make good starting points for discussions and conversations. Again, online communication tools provide great ways for lodges to host study and education sessions. I would encourage each lodge's Education Committee to select topics for discussion, and then set up and hold online study sessions.
4. **Communication:** Lastly and most importantly, please continue to communicate with each other. Any of the above activities that you or your lodges do should be communicated to both your lodges as well as the Grand Lodge. In times when we are isolated from each other and constantly being bombarded with dark and depressing news of sickness and death, it is important that we encourage and support each other by reporting and sharing the positive things that we are doing through Freemasonry. Strong communication helps to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood, and helps us become better brothers.

There are of course, many things other than those I have suggested here that you can do both individually, through your committees, and as a lodge. Please let us know what good ideas you have and let us know where you have been successful. All of us in the Grand Lodge would like to know what the successes our lodges are having, as well as where they are struggling.

I will ask our Grand Lodge pillars, the Sr Grand Lecturer and the Sr Grand Orator to each provide a short message to you all over the coming weeks highlighting their thoughts importance of Freemasonry in this time and to share some of the feedback we receive from the lodges. You

can expect about one a week so that we do not overwhelm your in-boxes. I hope that you will find the variety of opinions useful and encouraging.

In conclusion, the relevance of Freemasonry in modern society is defined by its response to times like these. I want you all to stay safe and protect yourselves and loved ones; and I also want to encourage you to take this opportunity to deepen your understanding of our fraternity. I hope that you can utilise the benefits of Freemasonry to help yourselves and others get through this storm together.

Sincerely and fraternally yours,

Jeremy C.R. Entwisle
Grand Master
Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Japan