GZ ADDRESS to the SGRACNZ ANNUAL CONVOCATION

Copthorne Solway Resort, Masterton

Saturday 13th March 2021

Companions

In less than one year, Covid-19 has changed our world and completely transformed the way we live, work and spend our leisure time. The former stability of our work-life balance has a new face – one where people are increasingly working remotely from home, and telecommuting has emerged as one of the most prevalent consequences of this pandemic.

Words such as: *Covid-19*, *lock-down,* and *community transmission* – practically unheard of when this Grand Chapter met in Nelson twelve months ago, are now familiar additions to our everyday vocabulary.

I am conscious that everyone at this Convocation carefully weighed up the risks before choosing to attend. Thank you for doing so. We extend a very warm welcome to all our Companions, the Grand Master, Heads of Orders, partners and friends. We deeply appreciate that you have braved the odds to share this occasion and show your support.

Freemasonry is the oldest and most prominent of all the world’s charitable institutions – but a distinguished history offers no protection or immunity against evolving societal values, new and diverse offerings for younger people, work demand pressures, or recognition that a significant number of our members form part of the increasing sector of our aging society; who suddenly find themselves particularly vulnerable through the unwelcome encroachment of Corona virus into their lives.

We cannot avoid the reality that many within this group may now opt for the comfort and security of home in preference to venturing out and possibly inviting health risks into their personal and private lives.

While the progressive roll-out of vaccines this year will afford some degree of protection for our susceptible brethren, it is reasonable to assume it may be some time yet before they can consider themselves safe.

Freemasonry has faced many challenges in the past and always found strategies to address these, but the potential fallout from this Covid-19 epidemic has compelled Grand Lodge to revisit, reappraise and revise former plans to render them fit for purpose under these vastly changed circumstances.

Doom and gloom? Not at all! Freemasons have a positive philosophy on life; honed by more than three hundred years of experience, and this translates into our belief that as something draws to a close, we are offered an opportunity to embrace change, effect improvement and achieve modern-day relevance.

And this opportunity is being openly embraced. The Grand Master has launched a series of well-attended Road shows that are currently touring the country and which focus primarily upon one key objective – to re-energize and rebuild New Zealand Freemasonry, driven by the catchphrase “One Vision, One Goal, One Team”.

And that one team is our New Zealand Fraternity; brethren who adhere to a proven system based upon values such as Charity, principles such as Equality and ideals such as Compassion, Empathy and Kindness – all human fundamentals which will never become obsolete because they form the framework of a civilized society.

And this legacy; passed down through the years and now entrusted to our care; has never been more vital than in today’s Covid-driven society, where our future will be defined by our ability to keep pace with daily change.

Socrates decreed, “The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

The Grand Master’s message is similar: “To re-energize and rebuild: One vision, one goal, one team.”

It can be done. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern shepherded five million Kiwis into one team unified by a common purpose. Within that team, there were innumerable and fine examples of people’s generosity in helping others, who through age and circumstance were less able to cope.

Simultaneously; Freemasonry, which had traditionally worked quietly and diligently in the background, suddenly came to the fore. Lodge Almoners rang and kept in contact with their ‘charges’, looking to assist where they could, while communication between members spiraled – personal emails, funnies, quizzes, and memes all contributing towards brethren keeping and staying in touch.

The emergence of Zoom meetings began, and masons took to this medium as ducks do to water – to such extent that Zoom has now been adopted as an alternative means of conducting some of our Masonic business. It also generated renewed interest in educational opportunities and interactive feedback – a forum in which our own Grand Lecturers excelled. Our elderly brethren and companions living alone at home suddenly had company, support and entertainment. It was Freemasonry working at its best.

We have always been a brotherhood – an organization of men united by a common fraternal and communal purpose. But Covid-19 brought us even closer together and reminded us; that whatever other Order we may also cherish; it is membership of the Craft which is the prerequisite for all.

And here in New Zealand, no Order has a closer relationship with the Craft than our Order of the Holy Royal Arch.

Over recent years especially, the Craft and Royal Arch have increasingly worked harmoniously together to progressively strengthen this relationship for the mutual benefit of both.

While we function as completely separate entities, we remain inextricably tied together through the Royal Arch’s authority to confer the final three of six degrees recognized as Antient, Free and Accepted Masonry within our New Zealand Freemasons’ Constitution.

And as First Grand Principal, I can think of no task more important for Royal Arch Companions, and indeed all Freemasons at this time, than to support the Grand Master and embrace his campaign; because Craft Freemasonry is the foundation stone upon which all other Masonic activity is reliant.

And the first priority for us all must be to reset and consolidate the position of this stone to ensure our benevolent culture continues to be a force for good well into the future.

I encourage all Royal Arch Companions to support the Grand Master’s drive, by becoming an active part of it. We are Freemasons first and foremost, but your additional knowledge and experience make you an invaluable asset within your Lodges. If you are an active Lodge member, please continue with vigour. If your attendance at Lodge has become a little sporadic of late, please make a special effort to involve yourself once more.

Covid-19 will undoubtedly exact a toll upon our membership, so the first task before us must be to minimize this loss, and then secure the future of the Craft through the co-operation of all Freemasons. We are now living in a different world and it is important that we catch this wave of change. Companions - your support is crucial to this success and I urge you all to become an integral part of the rebuild and consolidation.

We then place ourselves in a position where we feel confident that we too are building a legacy to pass on to our successors, just as we ourselves were beneficiaries of that legacy bequeathed to us when we first stood at the portal of our Mother Lodge.

To envision a better future is surely sufficient motivation for us to take the steps necessary to secure that outcome.

Companions, we have much work to attend to in our own Order, but for the present, while we place the interests of the Craft to the fore, we are best serving the future of Royal Arch Masonry.

Thank you, Companions.