**Grand Masters Address 2016**

Distinguished guests, ladies, and brethren all – I extend greetings to each one of you and thank you most sincerely for your support of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand.

I am humbled by the honour bestowed upon me today and I thank the Freemasons of New Zealand for having the confidence to allow me to lead our great and noble organisation for the next three years.

Your numbers attending today have considerably exceeded expectations. Our early estimations were soon outstripped and larger venues were needed for several of our events, which have expanded to meet the wonderful level of support shown by you all. Your enthusiasm has delighted us.

So to all the members of our Masonic family I extend a very warm welcome to our triennial Grand Installation.

May I send a sincere and very special greeting to those members of the Australian Grand Lodges who are with us today. Over the past few years MW Bro Litton and I have thoroughly enjoyed the hospitality and comradeship of our Australian brethren, and now we have the opportunity to reciprocate. We extend to our Australian Brothers and their partners a rousing Kiwi welcome and we look forward to sharing your company at our banquet tonight.

I am also delighted to acknowledge and welcome our guests from the United Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and the Grand Lodge of Ireland. On the groundwork of the Coat of Arms of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand – *(show on screen)* beneath the shield - are emblems representing the rose of England, the shamrock of Ireland, the thistle of Scotland, with the fern of New Zealand - symbolic of our long ties and close warm relationships with all of our three sister constitutions within New Zealand. After an absence of a few years, our New Zealand family are all with us again, complete.

Thank you for being with us - we are glad you are back and we are committed to building on our relationship over the coming years.

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Last year as we celebrated our 125th anniversary of the birth of our constitution in 1890, the question was asked of me whether the principles of Freemasonry were as relevant today as they were 125 years ago.

Well I ask you, is Mozart’s music any less beautiful and inspiring simply because it is 225 years old? Do Shakespeare’s works lose any of their drama or power merely because they are 425 years old? No.

The principles upon which Freemasonry is based are entrenched in the fabric of civilised society, and those principles are as important today as they were 125 years ago.

Freemasonry has appealed throughout its history, to enlightened men of high integrity and personal values, who have sympathy and understanding for those in need - and who aspire to improve the society in which they live.

Like the works of Mozart and Shakespeare, the tenets upon which our institution is based are timeless but considering the challenges of today’s world, Freemasonry is even more relevant.

So, if Freemasonry *is still* so relevant, why do we face challenges in attracting men of calibre to join our organisation? And how can we act to stop the long, slow decline we have endured for many years? What do we have to do to change so that we thrive again?

I’m not prepared to wait to let time alone decide our future. Wishing and waiting for today’s society to recognise the value of our noble and magnificent organisation, will not help us. We have to catch up!

I believe I have a way forward.

So let me talk about Communication. We need to communicate with those who don’t know us, who may have heard of us but know nothing of our ways, our convictions and our principles – and not only that but we need to communicate *directly* face to face, man to man. We must explain Freemasonry in open, easy, plain English – just how we make good men better men, what we are doing for our communities and the power of good we bring with us – the fun and enjoyment we derive from our Masonic meetings and the camaraderie and fellowship we build. We must communicate all this. At the moment, the public, especially the younger men, have little or no idea of these things.

We know most of our candidates are only drawn to take the first step through direct, one-on-one discussion with a Freemason. Only then can a convincing impression be made of our ancient and honourable institution. And that will invite further enquiry.

My goal in my term of office is to see the long slow decline in membership come to an end. We will do this by communicating. By speaking openly and plainly about Freemasonry. That is my challenge and with your support, all of us working for the same goal, I am confident the turn-around can be made.

So my starting point on this issue is for **every Freemason to start talking**! We have thousands of members spread across the country who must start communicating. I am convinced this is a powerful weapon we are not using. My personal experience tells me it works. Many of you tell me it works. I am convinced it can reverse our problem of membership.

You know - far too many of us will not talk about Freemasonry openly, in public. Even to families, friends, colleagues …. why not? Do we believe we are not allowed? Is it *all* secret? Can’t we talk about all the good that we do? Are we embarrassed and uncomfortable? Is it a lack of knowledge… a lack of understanding?

Of course we can explain Freemasonry. Yes, some discretion is required - we are all taught that. But a beautiful picture of the Craft *can* be drawn – what it is and what it stands for. The question that then remains is - how many of us can do that - draw the picture?

To make our communication work we have to be able to answer the fundamental questions the man in the street is very likely to ask -

* What is Freemasonry?
* What do Freemasons do?
* Why should I join the Freemasons?
* What’s in it for me?

I want every Freemason to be armed with the answers - clear, plain and simple answers. The sort of answers that that will provoke the first step!

I believe it’s time for us all to **speak up** - and from Monday I will start urging all Freemasons, every one of us – and our ladies, to talk about our wonderful Craft. To speak to lay people about Freemasonry – every week speak to at least one lay person. Yes, just to **speak up** at every opportunity.

And that’s the name we’re giving to a new campaign we are beginning today –

**Speak Up For Freemasonry**. *(show logo onscreen)*

Our many thousands of members all over the country – can spread the message. We don’t need the media. It is a word of mouth campaign and what is more convincing than face-to-face enthusiasm. The task is to explain Freemasonry in simple direct language one-on-one.

I want every Freemason to be talking to non-masons about Freemasonry, clearly, with pride, to raise the awareness of the force for good that Freemasonry represents – our charitable activities; the fellowship and friendship within our lodges; the kindness and respect we show to one another, the fun and enjoyment we derive from our meetings.

Each one of us will use different words, give priority to different aspects of Freemasonry, but the message I will be delivering to you all is “**Speak Up For Freemasonry**“ – talk to non-masons about our organisation – raise the topic with them.

Be ready to drop our name and what we do into your conversations. At home, at work, at the Club, on the course, in the café, at the party. I have no doubt you will be delighted and surprised with the response it will receive. Experience says it almost always does.

And I make the point that this is not recruitment advertising. We don’t do that and we are not starting now. I am asking you to create a positive awareness of Freemasonry so that good men will **HEAR** about us, like what they hear and want to join us.

The District Grand Masters invested today are all aware of this project and are 100% behind it – they will be actively encouraging Brethren to **Speak Up For Freemasonry** – guiding their Lodges, creating opportunities, what to say, how to say it, and how other lodges are doing it.

MW Bro John Litton started this journey when he and Diana produced that wonderful booklet ‘Plain English Guide to Freemasonry’. It was designed for this very purpose – to help Freemasons understand what they can say when asked about Freemasonry. This and other materials will be issued as we develop the project and study reactions. Lodges will not be left to work it out for themselves. Guidance and support is part of the programme.

If ever we needed perseverance this is the time. But we must start telling our story to the world. We will gather momentum, we will raise our profile. And the rewards will follow.

I will play my part. I will be personally involved at the front line, at Lodge level, to carry the Speak Up story and to hear your thoughts and ideas, and to hear of your progress in Speaking up.

So today we launch the **Speak Up for Freemasonry** project and we will continue the campaign during my tenure as Grand Master. I have confidence in its ability to achieve my membership objective. But King Solomon’s Temple wasn’t built in a day – and to build Freemasonry will take time, effort and industry. Success will be directly related to effort. Every Lodge should bear that in mind. The success of Speaking Up can only emerge from the effort and action of the brethren in our Lodges.

Ladies – you too are encouraged to be part of the **Speak Up for Freemasonry** campaign – you are already some of our best communicators. While I thank you for all your support in the past - we need you now even more!

From today, you will see the **Speak Up For Freemasonry** image on all our communications to remind you to *speak to at least one layperson a week about freemasonry*. Be positive and proud of Freemasonry, and let’s put our organisation back on the pedestal where it belongs.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Brethren, - thank you for being here today. Enjoy the rest of our proceedings and your stay in Wellington and don’t forget to …. **Speak Up for Freemasonry.**