

NATIONAL OFFICE

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**CIRCULAR**

To: ALL LODGE SECRETARIES
Date: 20th March 2020
Subject: MEMBER UPDATE 3
CORONAVIRUS, COVID – 19

Dear Brethren,

These are unprecedented times as you will be aware of the GM's message earlier this week cancelling all Freemason's New Zealand, Lodge meetings and events until 31 May 2020. Although this may have seemed as a bold step to take, the events over the last few days have supported this decision. This has been borne out as the restrictions on meetings and events announced by the Government are getting stricter as each day goes by.

We are a voluntary organisation assisted by a small National Office with a limited number of resources and systems that are not designed for an emergency as we are currently facing. There will inevitably be glitches in our communications, such as we have experienced over the past week. Rest assured that we are making every effort to fix things at our end. We have however found that it is not possible to achieve 100% coverage and reach. This arises for a variety of reasons, some of which are beyond our control. To overcome this, we are taking the following steps:

- The Grand Master will be providing a weekly message to all brethren by video and this will be published to the Freemasons NZ website as well as the Divisional websites. The first message will have been posted by the time you read this Circular. This will also be available on our YouTube channel. Please take the opportunity to view this.
- The Executive Director will also be posting regular updates and Circulars to the Divisional Websites as well as distributing to Lodge Secretaries. Please maintain regular contact with the Lodge Secretaries as well as regularly visiting the Freemasons NZ website and your Divisional website.
- We will also be emailing and SMS messaging directing people to our websites as and when there is something that need to be communicated

As people start to work from home or self-isolate and social interaction reduces over the next few weeks, it is important that members remain in contact with one another and share information.

Self-isolation does not mean **social** isolation. Before the advent of emails and SMS messages (Txts) we managed to communicate with one another using the phone or made contact in other ways. Now is the time to use all communication channels at our disposal.

It is however also important that we ensure that we maintain consistency in our communications and not be tempted to listen to the rumour mill which at times like this tends to go into overdrive. So, I strongly advise all Brethren to look to the official channels of communication for the source of the truth.

Keeping involved with your Lodges is an important way of ensuring that the organisation is in a good position to move on from the current situation when things start to return to some normality. The Divisional Grand Masters will be working closely with the District Grand Masters and the Lodge Masters to share existing as well as new tools and ideas to help Lodges develop plans and initiatives that will work for them. These will be shared on the Freemason NZ website and the Divisional websites as will any stories that you have of Freemasonry in action. Please feel free to pass these on to your District Grand Masters.

The Deputy Grand Master and the Grand Almoner met this week to make some decisions and provide clear guidance on how to best support the welfare of our Brethren, our widows and our neighbours. People will be naturally anxious.

The clear message is:

- As members make and maintain contact with those who may need help or assistance
- Lodge Masters and Almoners maintain regular contact with the members and widows to ascertain how we might assist them at this time.
- Lodge Secretaries please take the opportunity to update your records and ensure that all updates are sent through to Barbara Pickering at membership@freemasons.nz who will enter them into our database

The Divisional Grand Masters and District Grand Masters will be liaising with and working with the Divisional Almoners to help support this.

The following guidance, as to how we can meet the needs of those requiring our help, has been issued:

Hardship Grants

- District Charity Officers will be able to issue hardship grants up to a maximum of \$500 per grant where they see obvious need. The normal eligibility criteria will continue to apply at the present time
- Multiple grants to an individual of up to a total of \$2000 can be made. This is in place until 31 May 2020, when it will be reviewed. Should more be required then the normal application process will need to be followed.
- Grants are available to masons, widows and non-masons. To be clear, if the Lodge Almoner is assisting Mrs Jones a lodge widow and helping and delivering groceries etc and Mrs Smith next door, needs help, we will support his decision to give assistance there if deemed necessary and meets our normal criteria

Resourcing

- District Charity Officers (DCOs) and Divisional Almoners (DivAlms) will be supported to enlist the resources to assist where required and they should do so immediately.

Expenses incurred in providing assistance

- The Freemasons Charity will reimburse expenses incurred. Lodge Almoners and their assistants will not be discouraged from getting out and picking up groceries or visiting those in need (subject to any advice given by the Ministry of Health (see link below).
- We will reimburse Lodges Almoners and any who they enlist to assist, with any actual and reasonable expenses, fuel etc, on the submission of an expense claim form and receipts to Shelley Newson by emailing to TFCAdmin@freemasons.nz
- DCO's to clearly identify need before proceeding and National Office will monitor this daily.
- This is the first step and the Grand Almoner will monitor this over the next couple of weeks and report back if more assistance is required.

As the Grand Master has suggested in his video message now is the time for Freemasons to StepUp and ShowUp through Lodges taking action to support each other and their communities.

The welfare of our members remains paramount in our decision making. We strongly advise that all members keep-up to date with developments and guidance from the Ministry of Health as they are regularly updated.

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-health-advice-general-public>

Kind regards and best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Cassidy', is centered on a white rectangular background.

Mark Cassidy
Executive Director

Copy to DIVISIONAL GRAND MASTER
DISTRICT GRAND MASTERS
BOARD OF GENERAL PURPOSES