



UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND

From The Grand Chaplain

My Brethren, when asked what makes Freemasonry so important to me, I respond: it is a fellowship that brings out the best in people regardless of their religious or political convictions. In 1939, King George VI said in his address when installing his younger brother as Grand Master: *One of the fundamental principles of Freemasonry is service, not only to members of the Order, but to the nation. While the opinions of brethren may differ in politics and religion, Freemasonry provides the means whereby brethren of all parties and sects are bound together by those virtues which are common to all who desire to serve their fellow men. (The Times 20/7/1939)*

Our country – indeed, the whole world – is experiencing a crisis which threatens the health, lives and livelihoods of all. The current lock-down and isolation precautions affect our daily lives and put us all under great stress, physically, mentally and spiritually. How are we to deal with this?

As Freemasons, the first working tool we are presented with is the 24-inch gauge. It is worth taking time to reflect on its symbolism: the 24 hours of the day, part to be spent in prayer to Almighty God, part in labour and refreshment, and part in helping a friend or brother in time of need. We are thus reminded of our relationships with and responsibilities toward God, ourselves and our neighbour.

Prayer to Almighty God is not an opportunity to nag, but rather to give Him space to speak to us, and for us to listen to Him. You would be surprised how many clergy and religious professionals admit that as their lives have become filled with countless meetings, emails and bureaucracy, it is their prayer life that has diminished. So, find time in your day to pray for your family and friends, for those who are sick, anxious or depressed, for those who are lonely or grieving, and for those working in our hospitals and care homes.

Managing our time in labour and refreshment is a special challenge at present. Some people have been made redundant or furloughed; some are adapting to working from home; some are unwell or self-isolating. And there are many who are working longer shifts, and in more demanding circumstances as key workers, to keep the rest of us safe and well. However we are occupied, we must remember to look after ourselves by exercising, resting and eating healthily.

Finally, we are charged to help our neighbour in time of need without detriment to ourselves or connections. We often call this ‘charity’. The Greek word used in the Bible is *agape*, meaning love. It is the unselfish sort of love that does not expect anything in return which – our ritual reminds us, drawing on Shakespeare – blesses him who gives as well as him who receives. As Proverbs 22:9 says: *He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.* If we look outward from ourselves and show God’s love towards other people, we are doing His will.

UGLE has constituted a COVID-19 response group to coordinate and support projects through which Freemasons will be able to bring relief to the most vulnerable and needy during the pandemic crisis. Each of us can participate, not just through individual acts of kindness, but together through our charity, companionship and generosity.

The Lord bless you and keep you:

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you:

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (*Numbers 6:24-26*)