



**The Grand Court
of the
Masonic Order of Athelstan**
in England, Wales and its Provinces
Overseas

**M W Bro Paul W. Johnston, SGM
Grand Master**

Monday, 23rd March 2020

To all members of the Grand Witan, the Grand High Almoner, Provincial Grand Secretaries for onward circulation and unattached Court Secretaries.

Dear Sir and Brother,

Re: Suspension of all Freemasonry

You will by now be fully aware of the current restrictions that of necessity the UK and other Governments have placed upon us all. These restrictions and in particular the restriction of staying indoors, will affect each and every one of us. Over the coming weeks and months, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) will inevitably, in some way or another, touch upon members of our family; and of course, our Order and our wider 'Masonic Family'. Frankly it will change in so many ways how we enjoy our lives, the way we socialise, with so many things that we have accepted as normal no longer applying. Even that which we have taken as the normal may well become just happy memories of a bygone era.

We have a duty to look after our loved ones and it is essential that we do this. With the current restrictions this contact will naturally be by telephone contact or via email or social media. Let us not, however, forget our Masonic family who through various circumstances depend upon our Masonic meetings for not only friendship but as an essential means of contact and socialising.

The qualification for 'Instruction' into our Order is such that the age profile of our members is higher than that of other Orders. This has not been an overriding issue for our Order as we have been able to instruct many experienced Freemasons into our ranks and benefit from their undoubted ability and talents for the furtherance of our common aims. This must not mask the fact, however, that many of our members are over the age of 70 and they together with others who are suffering with underlying health conditions must now remain at home to stop the spread of Coronavirus and to protect themselves.

It is my earnest desire, that Brethren of our Order should not have to worry about those mundane matters that up to a few weeks ago, we all took for granted. We must accept that many folk are naturally concerned about going shopping, having to queue and then finding basic items are not available; they are concerned about not being able to window shop, go to the local pub or have a meal out etc. We must accept that those who live alone worry more about such matters as they are essential to their well-being and may affect their mental health.

We have the Office of Almoner in our Courts, but such is the potential level of assistance now required that they alone cannot do everything themselves. There is only so much gardening that we can do or boxsets that we can watch. Let us make a conscious decision to all become 'Deputy Almoners' and to phone each other on a semi-regular basis. Humans are a social creature and we all like to be thought of now and again. If you live alone and are restricted to not leaving home, then a phone call will mean an awful lot. During this crucial period, we simply cannot have enough Almoners and the reporting of the current welfare of our Members is a fundamental necessity.

As such, and after consultation with my senior advisors, it is my wish that the following matters be implemented Order wide and without delay: -

- That every member of the Order, irrespective of rank, should accept the responsibility of 'Deputy Almoner' and report all his work to the Court Almoner; and of course, act as directed by his Court Almoner.
- The Worshipful Master of every Court will ensure that the Brother designated as 'Court Almoner' is fit, healthy and able to discharge the necessary and essential duties.
- Being practical and earnest I am aware that over the years the Court Secretary may have undertaken the Almoners duties on his behalf. It is therefore paramount that the Court Almoner is able, capable and competent to undertake the duty so designated. The Court Secretary has many other essential duties to perform and he must not therefore also undertake this duty.
- Provincial Grand Masters of Provinces that do not have an active rank of Provincial Grand Almoner Provinces will by my immediate dispensation appoint a suitably qualified Brother to that rank and notify the Grand Secretary accordingly.
- The same comments relating to Court Almoners apply to a Provincial Grand Almoner. The Provincial Grand Almoner will report to the Grand High Almoner and thus to Grand Master.

A brief reminder of an Almoners duties and responsibilities: -

- Any Brother who undertakes the duty of a Court Almoner must be a good listener. Many of our Brethren may just wish to be able talk through their concerns or need some compassion and soothing words. He should remember that a Brother, if he lives alone, may not have spoken to anyone else apart from a shop keeper for many days, so patience and understanding is essential.
- A Court Almoner must use common sense and apply sound judgement.
- The Court Almoner will ensure that all members of the Court, irrespective of age or rank are contacted personally (**which will be by telephone**) on a regular basis. The level of regular basis will be determined after first contact has been made.
- The Court Almoner will inform his Court Master, on a regular basis, that all the Brethren have been contacted. Those Brethren who may be in need will fall into two separate categories. Firstly, those Brethren that have issues or concerns that can be dealt with at Court level (determined by common sense) will be actioned by the Court Master. Those that cannot be actioned (e.g. those who may need urgent financial assistance) will be submitted to the Provincial Grand Almoner. In any case where the Almoner feels that medical assistance is required it will be dealt with by referral to the medical authorities (i.e. using the national telephone number and then acting as so directed).
- The Provincial Grand Almoner will have a working relationship with the Craft Provincial Grand Almoner for each Craft Province within the Masonic Order of Athelstan Province. **All matters that fall within the remit of the Craft (i.e. Financial, Care, etc) should be referred to the appropriate Craft Almoner. The Athelstan Provincial Grand Almoner should follow up on that referral, whilst continuing to maintain contact with the individual who has been referred. This does not mean that we, as an Order, no longer contact our Brother who is in need, it means the opposite that we make more contact.**
- As Freemasons the best assistance that we can give to any Brother is to talk and listen.
- The Provincial Grand Almoner will ensure that the Provincial Grand Master is updated on the welfare of all members of his Province on a regular basis.
- The Provincial Grand Almoner will, on an end of month basis, collate all actions taken by the Court Almoners (and others so deputised) and submit a report to the Grand High Almoner.
- The Grand High Almoner will report to Grand Master on the welfare on any of our Brethren who are having trouble.

We are living in unprecedented times and I hope that you will agree that it is time for us as Freemasons to practice what we so often preach and look after our loved ones and our extended Masonic family. The Coronavirus pandemic will be with us for some months to come and it is essential that we do as much as we can to safeguard one another by maintaining this vital contact. Again, as Freemasons it is our duty to ensure that not only our Fraternity, but also that the world at large is rid of this vicious pandemic.

When the pandemic is over, we can once again meet our loved ones and enjoy the company of our Masonic family. In the meantime, please stay at home, protect your family and let us together break the cycle of infection and assist our fellow mortals.

Yours sincerely & fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul W. Johnston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "P" and "J".

Paul W. Johnston
Grand Master