

Dear Brethren,

Having had a number of representations and comments made to me regarding the increase in Grand Lodge dues i.e. £5 + VAT (£6 total) due in September 2011 and the levy of £5 (ex VAT) due in January 2011, I would like to try and clarify the situation, Grand Lodge dues are normally collected in September of each year (in arrears) but the financial situation at Grand Lodge requires a levy to be paid in January 2011 in order to inject cash flow immediately.

The following statement from the board is an extract from the minutes of the meeting held at Grand Lodge on Tuesday 7th June 2010.

INCREASE IN ANNUAL DUES

A statement was made by the President of the General Board as follows:

Shortly the Grand Treasurer will propose an increase in the annual dues payable 1st September 2011 and a levy payable during the financial year commencing 1st September 2010.

During the last fifteen years, the cost of operating from Mark Masons Hall has risen at the very least in line with inflation. Our annual dues have not.

It has been an expensive exercise to fund certain areas within our organisation and to take the necessary remedial action to make them good. Our catering company has suffered particularly badly as it became essential that we refurbish our kitchens to put them in a legally healthy state. An equally expensive staff reorganisation was also necessary to remove bad practices and to bring us in line with normal administration that prevails in a modern catering company. This, we have now done.

Changing Government regulations has also meant that further considerable sums of money have had to be allocated to correctly fund our final staff salary pension scheme. This is a situation that has affected many other major companies in the land.

We are aware that for a prosperous future, we must match our income with our expenditure. To that end, your Board has taken some difficult decisions in the past few months. Changing in staffing levels and our method of employment in the catering company will mean that we shall be saving the significant sum of £300,000 per year on our catering salary bill from this moment forward. Very recent changes in staffing levels in the administration of MMH will also mean a further annual saving on the salary bill of £80,000. Long haul overseas travel has also been curtailed until, at the very earliest, September 2011, again making a major saving. Looking at these figures together, we would expect our annual saving on expenditure across the spectrum to be in the region of half a million pounds.

Your Board is very aware of the necessity to balance our books and although we concede that the past decision to keep annual dues to their lowest possible level was a laudable one, the time has now come for us to move on and to charge what we believe to be a fair and equitable price for the privilege of being a Mark Mason.

Your Board and the Grand Masters of the Orders administered from Mark Masons Hall believe these increases to be absolutely necessary to bring back our income in line with inflation. I urge you to support the motion.

Following notice of motion given at the meeting of Mark Grand Lodge on 9th March 2010, the Treasurer made the following proposals:

1. The annual dues to be increased by £5 to £21 (plus VAT); such increase to take effect from 1st September 2010 for the year ending 31st August 2011 and become payable on 1st September 2011.

2. Installed Masters Lodges dues will be £10 (plus VAT); such decrease to take effect from 1st September 2010 for the year ending 31st August 2011 and become payable on 1st September 2011.

3. There will be a levy of £5 (exempt of VAT) on subscribing members of all Lodges with the exception of Installed Masters Lodges, such levy to be collected on 1st January 2011.

The proposition was seconded by the Grand Registrar, put to Grand Lodge and carried.

Brethren it must be conceded that there has been some complacency at Grand Lodge regarding, the annual dues not being kept in line with inflation for the last 15 years. In hindsight this was possibly an error and has partly resulted in the depletion in Grand Lodge reserves. This has led Grand Lodge to being exposed to the dramatic effects of the recession and downturn in the investment markets.

There has also been many and varied stories regarding the running of the catering division at 86 St. James's and in particular there was clearly a lack of careful stock control and inefficient working practices. The PGM's have been assured that Mark Catering is now being run efficiently with proper supervision, full time staffing levels being kept to a minimum and the use of agency staff when required.

All of us, including the PGM's forum, have been upset and extremely disappointed that the finances have been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent. However we are where we are and now have to deal with the situation in a positive manner.

The statement by the President of the General Board makes it clear that decisions have been made in order to cut the overheads at Grand Lodge as well as requiring the fee increases and levy to correct the situation. I can assure you that the PGM's will be keeping a close eye on the finances of Grand Mark over the next few months and years.

I trust that this letter goes some way in clarifying the situation and that you will all continue to support and enjoy this happy Mark degree for many years to come.

Yours sincerely & fraternally,

Peter J Sands
Provincial Grand Master