

Friday 2nd September 2022

Brother Royal Ark Mariners,

It is both a delight and a pleasure to welcome you to our 9th Provincial Royal Ark Mariner Assembly, but actually the second of this calendar year because, as the Provincial Grand Scribe mentioned in his report, the Provincial Assembly for the last masonic year took place in January 2022, the first time we had held it after Christmas. Almost as if we were anxious to over-compensate, this is the first time that we have held our Provincial Assembly **before** Mark Provincial Grand Lodge! As today is only the 2nd September, I am sure that I am not the only one here for whom this is launching the new masonic year.

Let me start by thanking two 'old', or perhaps I should say 'longstanding', and very dear friends for allowing us to hijack part of their meeting for this Provincial Assembly and they are W Bro Raymond Head and W Bro Mike Sanders, respectively Commander and Scribe of the Wallingford Lodge of RAM. Brethren, thank you for accommodating us this evening.

I would like to congratulate Bro Laurence Riel on being Elevated into this Ancient and Honourable Fraternity and joining this 'beautiful and important degree in Freemasonry' and, of course, on joining the Wallingford Lodge in particular. Laurence, welcome and I trust that you will have many years of enjoyment in our company.

The most important part of this Provincial Assembly is not this address – though thank you for thinking that it might be. If you were. Probably not! It is, of course the opportunity to acknowledge and publicly reward those members of the Province who are receiving ProvRAMGR. Brethren, it is important that you all understand that ProvRAMGR is NOT an automatic promotion that happens a certain number of years after coming out of the chair. Indeed, the number of appointments I am permitted to make is severely restricted depending on the number of members in the Province (note, individual members, not memberships) and does not even equate to one per lodge. It has been a great pleasure today to make THREE awards and I congratulate Seamus, Steve and Vito on their appointments and thank them for their dedicated service to their respective lodges and, of course, it does come with an expectation that they will continue to support those lodges and encourage more members to join our Fraternity – and I am sure that they will. Brethren, you should consider this as an active appointment for your first year and, if you are able to attend Royal Ark

Mariner Installations between now and our next Provincial Assembly, I would be delighted to see you.

The Grand Assembly at Freemasons' Hall, Great Queen Street will, don't forget brethren, be on **Monday** December 12th. Due to the fact that we are holding this Provincial Assembly so much earlier this year, the name of the Berkshire recipient of RAMGR has not yet been announced. However, I do hope that as many of you as possible will be able to attend to see his Investiture and more details regarding timings etc. will be communicated to you all through the Provincial Grand Scribe in due course.

Brethren, let me talk a little about numbers now. I must say that I am absolutely delighted that our overall number of memberships has held steady, but the number that I am always interested in is the number of individual members – and that has actually **increased**! Okay – so it is only an increase of 1, but I'll take that. An increase is an increase. We have welcomed a total of 12 new brethren to the Province of Berkshire. Ten new Elevations and two joining members who were not previously members of a Berkshire RAM lodge. Bearing in mind we have just eight lodges that can carry out new Elevations I think that is a tremendous achievement – especially in the current climate. On the flip side, I am, of course, extremely sorry to have lost a total of 11 individual members. Two, sadly, through deaths and 9 through resignations for very genuine reasons. But I am extremely encouraged that the number of Elevations outweighed the resignations, because that is an important statistic. It is only a start, brethren. But it is, nevertheless, a start and it gives us something to build on.

New members are the life blood of any order and we must ALL work to introduce our Mark brethren into this lovely degree. To be honest, as I mentioned last year, our conversion rate from Mark to Royal Ark Mariner in this Province is not where it really should be with barely ONE THIRD of Mark brethren going on to become a Royal Ark Mariner and is something that I hope to improve on during my tenure as Provincial Grand Master. Of course, I am extremely aware that our task is likely to become a great deal harder over the coming year or two. I shall have more to say on this subject next week, but I really do fear that the 'cost of living crisis' will become a much greater threat to our numbers than the Covid-19 pandemic turned out to be. The rise in the cost of food and, in particular, energy prices is likely to see subscriptions increase sharply at precisely the time when, for the same reasons, households will be forced to take a very critical look at any discretionary expenditure. In such a climate, brethren, it is going to be a

very tough sell for us to persuade masons to take on yet another commitment and, indeed, we will need to work hard to persuade our existing members to keep the Mark and RAM commitments that they have already. However brethren, please ensure that your members ENJOY their Royal Ark Mariner masonry so that they will want to keep it going and do please talk enthusiastically to your MARK brethren about the Royal Ark Mariner degree, and invite them to join. Though, as I say, I do realise what a challenge that is going to be.

The Province will be only too happy to help where we can. We have a leaflet on the Royal Ark Mariner degree which can be downloaded and printed off or sent by e-mail and we also have a Presentation on the RAM degree which I would be very happy to come and deliver in your Mark lodges. As I have often said, brethren, recruitment is a job for ALL of us, not just for one or two.

Of course, meetings like this don't 'just happen' and take a great deal of organising. I thank the Provincial Scribe, WBro Huw Hopkin, for his usual quiet efficiency and organizing powers and for keeping me honest on any matters of administration and to Bro Elwyn Hopkin for taking care of the bookings for today. I also thank the ProvDepGDC, Bro Tim Spriggs for taking care of the ceremonial aspects of today's Assembly and I look forward to formally appointing him as our new ProvGDC next week. On that particular point, it would be very remiss of me not to mention our outgoing ProvGDC, WBro Steve Berkshire, who has looked after the ceremonial aspects of this meeting right from its inception and devised many of the rules and procedures that we are now following, and will continue to follow. Brethren, I thank all of you.

Finally and most importantly brethren, please continue to enjoy your Royal Ark Mariner Masonry and may the Supreme Commander of the Universe grant you health and happiness and keep us all safe within the Ark, that Haven of Rest.

Brethren, thank you for your kind attention.