**Provincial Grand Almoner's Annual Report**

**Provincial Grand Lodge of East Lancashire**

The role of the Almoner is central to the principles of Freemasonry, ensuring that care, compassion and support are available to Brethren, their families and widows whenever it is needed. Across East Lancashire, Lodge Almoners continue to provide an invaluable service through regular contact, pastoral support and the identification of those who may benefit from assistance from the Masonic Charitable Foundation (MCF), now the Freemasons Charity (FC) or from our own charity, the East Lancashire Masonic Charity (ELMC).

Our Lodge Almoners are supported by the Area Almoners and our Visiting Volunteers.

**Pastoral Care and Welfare**

Throughout the year, Lodge Almoners have continued to offer practical and emotional support to members experiencing ill health, bereavement, loneliness, financial hardship and other challenges. Their dedication ensures that no Brother or family member is left feeling isolated and that assistance is available when circumstances change.

Particular emphasis has been placed on maintaining regular contact with widows and vulnerable members, recognising that welfare support often extends beyond active membership.

**The Freemasons Charity (FC)**

Over the Summer, the MCF rebranded and the public facing name of the charity is now the Freemasons' Charity.

The FC will continue to provide life-changing assistance to Freemasons, former Freemasons and their families throughout England and Wales. During the year, many East Lancashire beneficiaries have received support through the Foundation's extensive range of programmes, including -

- Financial assistance for individuals and families experiencing hardship.
- Health and mobility grants.
- Support for care needs and independent living.
- Counselling and mental health services.
- Educational grants and support for young people.
- Assistance following unexpected life events and crises.

The close relationship between Provincial Almoners, the ELMC and the Freemasons' Charity ensures that Brethren can access appropriate support quickly and effectively, regardless of the nature or scale of their need.

**East Lancashire Masonic Charity (ELMC)**

The ELMC continues to play an increasingly important role in supporting Freemasons and their families across the Province. During the year, the charity has provided grants and assistance to individuals facing hardship and responded to a range of welfare needs identified by Lodge and Area Almoners.

**Raising Awareness**

One of the continuing priorities has been increasing awareness of the support available through both the FC and the ELMC. Some Brethren remain unaware of the breadth of assistance that can be accessed.

In the new year there will be a series of combined Almoner and Charity Steward 'Roadshows' at halls in all the Areas. I hope this will build on the efforts already made to promote welfare services and encourage early referrals. It remains a clear objective: to ensure that every Brother understands that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness, and that support is available confidentially and without judgement.

**Thanks**

I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to my team of Area Almoners and Visiting Volunteers and to all the Lodge Almoners throughout the Province. Their commitment, discretion and compassion are often exercised quietly and without recognition, yet their work has a profound impact upon the lives of many.

**W Bro Tony Stephenson – Provincial Grand Almoner.**

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