

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020

To: All Preceptory Registrars and Brother Knights of Essex

Eighteen weeks ago not only our daily routine as human beings, but likewise our Masonic lives as Freemasons, was subjected to the commencement of the greatest interruptions to our daily lives and personal existence that the majority of us have ever witnessed during our lifetimes. Between then and now for most it has been a life-changing experience and sadly for others it has been a time when also they have witnessed the passing of loved ones due either to the effects of the terrible Covid-19 pandemic or perhaps a previously underlying health problem that has been exacerbated and led to their untimely demise.

On the initial outbreak of the pandemic some harsh decisions were taken in order to bring the virus under a degree of control to contain the pandemic. Thankfully those reading this can hopefully look forward to a brighter future - in due time. In my original message in March I said: *"In times such as these my wife and I sincerely hope that both you and your families can take comfort in our fundamental beliefs as members of one of the Christian Orders in Freemasonry"*. I hope and trust that has been the case for you all.

As your Provincial Prior I feel that now is perhaps once again an opportune time to address you all on how I personally view the current situation by taking into consideration what we have recently been advised by those in authority.

The Government have now decided to gradually ease the period of "lockdown" and have issued new advice on how the country can start to return to what has interestingly been called a situation - as the "new normal" way of life.

This has led during the last week to our own Masonic authorities at UGLE and Mark Masons Hall issuing their own "Further Guidance" following the announcement of the relaxation of the "General Suspension of Masonic Activity" originally issued last March.

These new Guidelines can be accessed by following the link *"Further Guidance following the announcement of the Relaxation of the General Suspension of Masonic Activity.pdf"* issued by the Grand Secretary, R.W.Bro. Ryan Williams through the Masonic Support Services at Mark Mason's Hall sent to you all on Friday (17<sup>th</sup> July). Whilst the main document covers the general outlines and the main points on how to proceed, the two page attachment of 'FAQs' included with this I hope will also help in answering some of the questions you may feel many will wish to ask.

If there are other points that you might need some guidance upon you can discuss and seek the advice of our new Vice-Chancellor Chris Smith who will be pleased to help out if he can.

The new Guidelines issued must be considered in conjunction with those currently in force as issued by the Government - for example as to the numbers that can be at anyone gathering, coupled with the "social distancing" measures, etc.; and furthermore the availability of our various meeting venues and what their Directors consider is a safe way to proceed under the current restrictions.

Likewise, and perhaps the prime consideration for many of us is that we must consider further important factors as to what are best described as those within "age restriction" and those in the "vulnerability" groups; whether they be in respect of ourselves or our loved ones.

Over the last few days many of you may have heard about the decisions that your local Masonic Centres around the Province have taken as to when they are expecting to once again be “open for business”.

The Sub-Prior, Vice-Chancellor, Chancellor and myself have discussed during the past few days what we believe are other important considerations to take into account, where we have a diversity of a number of factors within the Province, as well as our Order in particular.

These, I have listed under the following bullet points :

- Because of the far reaching consequences, individual Knights must make their own decision whether to attend meetings. There should be no coercion regardless of the office that an individual holds in a Preceptory.
- Each individual and each Preceptory will have different circumstances, which means a *“one for all set of guidelines cannot be given”*. Individuals will be governed by medical considerations, age group, family circumstances, transport arrangements and their own personal judgement of the current situation at any given time. Preceptory officers, such as the Eminent Preceptor and Registrar, need to take into account all the above concerning their members coupled with what work needs to be done.
- As a starting point, at this time, to assist Preceptories as to the viability of meetings it would be a good idea to conduct a poll of a Preceptory’s membership to find out the numbers who would or would not be willing to meet at this particular time. This is of course provided that all safety guide lines are being met by the Masonic Centres and Meetings are being held in accordance with the rules currently in force by Mark Masons Hall and the Government. This will give guidance on the viability for meetings coupled with the fact that these figures would also be useful to give an overall idea of the general situation around the Province.
- Those Knights who would wish to meet - safely and within the guidelines - should be allowed to do so, providing they have sufficient for a quorum and there are the necessary number of the members who have been installed as an Eminent Preceptor. Those wishing to meet should be given every assistance where needed. All senior officers of the Preceptory, such as the Eminent Preceptor, Registrar and Treasurer, should be supportive to whoever is standing in for them by producing a Summons, previous Minutes, etc., as well as advice.
- Everybody has a part to play in the wellbeing and continuance of their Preceptory whether they are in attendance or not. Now is a time for mutual support whether a member wishes to meet or otherwise.
- When carrying out any ceremony the new MMHall guidelines must be adhered to. Regardless of the enthusiasm of those members in once again performing our ritual nothing should be done to lose the dignity or meaning of the occasion for either the new E.P. or a new Knight to the Order.
- Finally, it is necessary to stress, as noted in the FAQs, that if a meeting does take place under the current guidelines from MMHall that they have decided to ban all dining after Masonic Meetings, but that the situation is under constant review.

With kindest regards and may God bless you all ; I remain most sincerely and fraternally and Yours in the Bonds of the Order,

John Helliard,  
Provincial Prior of Essex.