



**THE FREEMASONS'
GRAND CHARITY**

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Dear Member,

At the November 2014 general meeting in Norfolk, I said that I would be writing further as part of our consultation process to explain and seek your support for the changes proposed to the existing Central Masonic Charities. It is really important to make sure that you, the Members, approve what we are proposing to do. I am happy to respond to any constructive criticism and provide answers to any questions you may have. The consultation period will continue until we seek final approval from you at the Annual General Meeting in Grand Lodge in September 2015.

Charity is one of the three grand principles of Freemasonry and has a history of over 200 years. By now many of you will be aware that over the past four years the four Presidents and Chief Executives of the Central Masonic Charities (CMCs), namely The Grand Charity, The Royal Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys, The Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution and the Masonic Samaritan Fund, have been meeting regularly with a view to making Masonic Charity an even stronger force for good and a more coherent operation. They have been assisted by many CMC staff members and many hundreds of hours have been spent on the task. This has been the most detailed review of Masonic Charity since the Bagnall Report in 1973 and builds on recommendations endorsed by the Provincial Grand Masters' Forum in 2008.

In 1980 The Grand Charity took over the Fund of Benevolence held by Grand Lodge which was for the most part earmarked for the relief of poor and distressed Freemasons. The Grand Charity was also specifically charged to have wide responsibility for non-Masonic grants. In its 35 years of existence The Grand Charity has distributed over £100 million to Freemasons and their families as well as to non-Masonic charitable causes. The Grand Charity is funded not only by Festivals and legacies, but also by the annual contribution, which is a charge levied by Grand Lodge for payment to The Grand Charity. It is generally felt that this annual contribution paid by members of London and Provincial Lodges should be available for all charitable purposes rather than being allocated exclusively to The Grand Charity.

More generally, the present division between the four charities has become illogical and inefficient in the sense that there is now considerable overlap and duplication of function. Over the four year period of the review much has already been achieved. For example: (1) We have a Joint Application Form for Masonic relief grants and other Masonic grants with the same criteria for eligibility. (2) We have the integration of visiting and care advice teams. (3) We have co-ordinated Festival management and administration. (4) There is now a Joint Investment Group monitoring the prudent and

effective management of our investment portfolios. (5) Through Freemasonry Cares, we give support to Provincial Almoners, Lodge Almoners and Charity Stewards. (6) We have the same reporting and accounting years to simplify further consolidation.

There is (remarkably) unanimous agreement between the Presidents and Chief Executives that there is more to be gained and the best way forward for Masonic Charity is to incorporate a new over-arching charity with the widest charitable objects. The objective is to improve access to charitable relief for all potential beneficiaries offering a whole family approach which can draw on the funds as and when needed. These proposals have been approved by the Grand Master's Council, the Grand Master's Council Charity Committee and the Grand Master himself, in his capacity as Grand President of the four CMCs.

The advantages to the proposals are:

1. Optimising the resources of the four existing charities which will ensure an improved service to our masonic and non-masonic beneficiaries.
2. A single over-arching charity will require only one application for the widest range of benefits so that the combined resources are more readily accessible to potential beneficiaries. Cost savings will be achieved.
3. Bringing together the dedicated and experienced staff of the four existing charities will combine the resources and extend the skills of each charity into the integrated whole.
4. This combination will propel the new charity into being one of the top twenty charities in the UK and will show that Masonic Charity truly is a terrific force for good.

Although significant, this change is neither rocket science nor revolutionary. The four existing charities will remain in name and will hold their restricted funds but their functions will be assumed by the new charity administered by a single Trustee Board of 20 members with a single CEO, rather than the four existing Trustee Boards with their separate committees and administrations. The new charity will operate under a single brand name (yet to be decided – the working title is “United Masonic Charity”) which will administer both Masonic giving and non-Masonic giving. The new charity will also manage all fundraising. The improved and enhanced provision of charitable support should be a considerable public relations boost for Freemasonry. It will further demonstrate to the outside world that we are no longer just an inward looking group of people but that we are genuinely dedicated to making a valuable contribution to the community at large. Masonic Charity is an extraordinary, but largely untold, story and truly is a terrific force for good. The four CMCs collectively distribute about £25 million each year and we are expecting to improve on that with the cost savings that will be made.

It is intended to incorporate the new charity in April 2015 and to bring it into full operation on 1 April 2016. It is envisaged that the current Festival system will remain in place until year 2021 and, starting in 2022, the Festivals will support the new charity.

The Council of The Grand Charity (in close co-operation with the Trustees of the other three CMCs) have agreed in principle the changes that are proposed but the

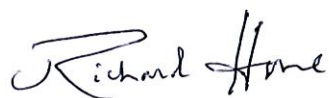
Presidents all appreciate that it is desirable to have a period of consultation first with Provincial Grand Masters (which started on 8 October 2014) and then with members starting now and continuing to the third quarter of 2015. The Presidents all believe that it is vital to have the support of members of the Craft who, after all, raise the money. At the end of the consultation period, a resolution to approve the changes will be put to the Annual General Meeting of The Grand Charity in September 2015 and the Council very much hope to receive the wholehearted approval and support of its members. The other CMCs will follow a similar process within a similar timescale.

When The Grand Charity was established in 1980, as recommended by the Bagnall Report in 1973, its members were restricted to those entitled to attend Grand Lodge. In 2002 the membership was extended to all Master Masons, with a provision that any who did not wish to have membership could opt out. This was because at that time some employers were, and in certain areas still are, discriminating unlawfully against Freemasons.

All Master Masons of London and Provincial Lodges are presently members of the Grand Charity unless they opt out. We estimate that is a membership of approximately 180,000. Under The Grand Charity Constitution members are asked to approve non-Masonic grants and other administrative matters at general meetings. Although this apparently allows all members to participate in the decisions of the Charity, in reality only a small number of members are in attendance. It is proposed that in future the voice of Master Masons at large should be communicated through a new category of Members of the new charity – two from each Province and two from Metropolitan Grand Lodge. These 98 Members and 20 Trustees of the new charity will make the final decisions on non-Masonic grants. Master Masons will be recognised as Supporters of the new charity. It is anticipated under the new regime that if there is dissent, Supporters will make their views known to the Trustees and/or the Members of the new charity so that any issues of principle or dissent (which are rare) can be raised at a general meeting. I hope that you will see these changes as both a sensible move in administrative terms and also a practical route to ensure that views of the Craft can be properly heard. In practical terms it is the case that in 35 years there has been only one occasion of dissent by members of The Grand Charity at a general meeting. On that occasion a minority of members present voted against a particular non-Masonic grant and the President withdrew the grant.

The Council hope that members will appreciate that our proposals will lead to a more joined up, better focussed and more cost effective delivery of all our charitable resources to the advantage of all. Do please let me know if you have any concerns and either I or one of the staff will respond. Alternatively, let your Provincial Grand Almoner or Charity Steward know so that they can pass on any concerns.

Yours most sincerely and fraternally,



Richard Hone QC, President of The Grand Charity