

*Annual Address
Of
M.W. Shelton D. Redden
Most Worshipful Grand Master
161st Annual Communication
Ocean City, Maryland
November 15, 2008*

To the Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master Thomas H. Wise, Jr.; to all other Grand Lodge Officers elected and appointed, present and past; to our esteemed visitors from sister jurisdictions; to all of my gracious and beloved brothers of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Maryland.

Greetings: I welcome you to this our 161st Annual Communication.

I approach this auspicious occasion with a profound sense of gratitude, initially for the honor this August body has bestowed upon me, and also for the opportunity you have given me to learn to subdue my passions and improve myself in Masonry. While gathering here today our hearts should be filled with happiness, to have awakened to another day in which we are “Always ready to help each other”. These words can be the watchwords and the mind set for this very formidable purpose. Where we can rejoice in the undeniable fact that our Lord and Savior has blessed us one more time, with an opportunity to give him the praise and do some good for Masonry and especially mankind.

The sand sifts relentlessly through the hourglass as the years pass; the months hurry; the weeks rush; and the days glide, while the moments fly and another span has been added to this magnificent bridge we call the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Maryland, Free and Accepted Masons, Jurisdiction Incorporated.

The very fact that we are entitled to address ourselves as Masons provides us certain rights and demands of us equivalent responsibilities. The year now past, has not been unproductive, for while all goals within the sphere of new ambitions have not been attained; substantial progress has been accomplished during this Masonic year of 2007-2008. It is my good fortune, to have the road in which I am traveling, lighted by unsurpassed leadership, dedication and support flawlessly rendered by the excellent membership of this great jurisdiction. In the most trying of times and certainly by the death of our distinguished Most Worshipful Grand Master Emeritus Samuel T. Daniels who marched before me, and upon whom spiritually I have consulted readily and often. We have come into an inheritance prepared for us by our forefathers, who labored long and hard to make our

fraternity perfect and honorable. We are heirs to the fundamental principals of Freemasonry, as well as its ideals, aspirations and reputation. As Free and Accepted Masons, we are given credit for the possession of certain unique attributes; we are viewed as just and upright men, morally sound and very much respected by those who are familiar with our purpose and reputation. To the uninitiated we are accorded a peculiar respect, which may mean tantrum amounts, depending on the impression, which our demonstration of Masonry has made on the profane world.

To discharge this debt to Masonry, we must realize that people form their conception of the Craft by what they see and hear in us, rather than on what they are exposed to in fraternal documents. We must remain constantly on the alert to preserve the dignity and high importance of Freemasonry. Virtue, morality and brotherly love in its widest sense, are the gratuities for the great and invaluable privileges of Masonry. Masons who get no more out of Masonry than grips, signs and passwords make a poor investment of their time and money. How much Masonry do you know? How much Masonry coupled with the Masonic charges do you practice in your daily life and especially with each other? Do we allow the Cardinal Virtues to forever be our guide? They are Temperance, Prudence, Fortitude and Justice. This fraternity believes in God. Its faith in the Almighty and overruling Savior is expressed and indicated in our prominent emblem. The letter "G" is a living symbol as it relates to Free Masons, and so we invite the guidance and blessings of Deity, to whom we have sworn fidelity and allegiance, as we join in prayer with our Worshipful Grand Chaplain, Right Worshipful Mack C. Thomas.

It would be a travesty, if I failed to extend my sincere appreciation to all of my co-workers in their various stations. The excellence of the elected officers of this Grand Lodge, the District Deputy Grand Masters, Worshipful Masters and Officers of Subordinate lodges. This is inclusive of all members of the Craft throughout this great jurisdiction, who are stained with pride, marked with enthusiasm, and highly recognized for the cooperative spirit they have displayed and for the loyalty that has characterized their every act during the tenure of this administration.

At our 160th Annual Communication held in the city of Hagerstown, Maryland, you said by your ballot that you wished me to continue drawing the plans, specifications and other designs upon our jurisdiction's trestle board for the pursuance of labor for this wonderful Craft. I deeply realize this grave and awesome responsibility is one that taxes one's ability, ingenuity and love for the perpetuation of our Craft. The responsibility of standing pat when everything about you goes wrong; of soothing the angry; of sympathizing with the unfortunate; of adjusting and making right things wrong; of the voluminous and legitimate business correspondence incident to this office. The rendering of all kinds of decisions on many perplexing questions; the granting of or the refusal to grant dispensations; and making appointments to suit everybody; such is the role

of this Grand Master. It is my solemn wish that you permit me to continue the aggressions and accomplishments as Grand Master of this great Maryland Jurisdiction.

I wish to thank you most graciously for this honor and the support you have given me. I give God this glory for directing my steps. I want to thank the members of my staff for their timely advice, direction, thoughts, ideas, tolerance, strength and wisdom that I have been exposed to and have used often and profusely. I wish to thank the District Deputy Grand Masters, who have stood with me and for me and have adjusted to the leadership training, which was alien to many of them in the past and to which I hope they have prospered. I wish to thank my spiritual advisors, logical advisors and academic community in the personages of that great praying layman R.W. Mack C. Thomas who gives us the joy of prayer; and many others who have sustained me. As I have traveled around this jurisdiction, I have done so unafraid, for in the incubation phases of my Masonic training I was taught and I learned the great lessons of FAITH. As I pursued your business, under the very weighty responsibility of this office, I am unafraid, for my trust is in GOD.

NECROLOGY

Prior to beginning the report of the business of this great institution, I would pause to drop a tear and endeavor to pay a fitting tribute to the memory of all the stalwart heroes, who have finished their course and preceded us to that Grand Lodge above. As the sun sets in the west to close the day and herald the approach of night, so, one by one, our comrades fell from our sides to lie down in the darkness of the grave, there to sleep until the last trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.

We miss the warm handclasp and cheery greetings of our departed Brethren. Their acts of kindness and brotherly love will remain with us always and forever. We bow to the will of our Heavenly Father and with the faith of Masons we should look forward to being with them again in the Grand Lodge of the Hereafter in that great edifice not made with hands.

My Brothers as we pause in loving memory, we are reminded of the stern reality of the uncertainty of human life. Let us, therefore, govern our lives accordingly and be prepared to answer the roll when our names are called.

STATE OF THE CRAFT

Despite the fervent zeal of the recently introduced leadership program, the direct interface between Master Mason and the Lodges of Instruction; the membership is still in a declining state. Our District Deputy Grand Masters have never worked harder and been more vigilant as during this administration where a full time agenda was fit into a mostly part time membership. Our per capita tax program

has improved tremendously with the personal attention of its account manager. The Semi-annual Trustee Tax was increased so that we could continue to sustain our Trustee functions throughout the Willard W. Allen Masonic Temple and the Samuel T. Daniels Sanctuary. The accountability and record keeping of the Grand Secretary and the Grand Treasurers' offices has significantly improved and the financial collections are performed with precision and strict accountability. The various account managers are extremely competent and demonstrate a tremendous responsibility in the caring for their individual Grand Lodge accounts. We are almost totally on track with the daily record maintenance of this Grand Lodge. This is due primarily to the diligence of the elected Grand Lodge Officers and the staff of the Grand Secretary and Grand Treasurers office. Our Grand Lodge rental program is finally under review and I can assure you that numerous changes have been implemented. Through a program of energizing dormant and delinquent lodges we are resurrecting and correcting decayed records and attempting to provide continuous education to the membership. This situation is not totally corrected, however we have every reason to be encouraged that progress on this journey will prove fruitful during the next Masonic year.

With the advent of subordinate lodge mergers on the Eastern Shore and lodges overseas that are consistently affected by the war in Iraq, it is quite apparent that this jurisdiction requires a total focused program on increasing our current membership. The European Military reductions and the five-year Department of Defense job contracts have affected our overseas membership in all three locations where the Maryland Jurisdiction is active. Our District Deputies of Districts 12, 13 and 14 have much area to cover if they are to tend to the care and feeding of their areas of responsibility in a manner that is conducive to growth and stability. Because of recent events I am encouraged by the possibility of Maryland Masonic growth in the areas of Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. I am in constant contact with many of our Brothers in those areas and they continue to provide us news with regard to the success of the amnesty program and the return of numerous members desiring to come back to their fraternal order.

We all realize that there are only two ultimate actions in life; growth or decay. It has been the policy of this administration to grow, not at the expense of our fraternal landmarks, traditions and character, but a healthy growth, which will restore to this ancient and honorable fraternity its grandeur and greatness, and make it the society of friends and brothers for which our founder, Prince Hall persisted, our forbearers labored, and for which they provided us the legacy. If we are to survive in light of the declines of fraternalism, we must have a continuing program that is not only viable, but enticing to the members, and respected by those who are charged to administer and train under its precepts.

We have come a long way across the years to merit our present eminence. We have made our contribution to the sum total of human happiness and human welfare. Complete success however, is a journey, not a destination, and so we must continue to pursue the journey, doing good to all mankind and prove

ourselves friendly and charitable, if we should have friends in a world stricken with disorders, discords and chaos. This is our task, our duty and responsibility as Masons.

As we study our history, we find that our forebears foresaw today's problems, and they recommended and implemented steps to correct, modify and/or alleviate impending problems. Our history also indicates that a follow-up program was sorely lacking due to this jurisdiction continually embracing a Grand Master's program rather than Grand Lodge programs.

There are four consequential periods in our journey, as all men, who embark upon a mission inspired by the desire of a better life and a more perfect existence have found:

- a. The first portion of this pilgrimage is the resolve, and will to go forward.*
- b. The second is to beat off doubt and discouragement.*
- c. The third is to go to battle without fear, and to give full reigns to courage.*
- d. The fourth is the end of the pilgrimage, success and victory having been achieved.*

In August 2007, by the unanimous mandate of this Most Worshipful Grand Lodge we embarked upon a journey to promulgate and to promote Grand Lodge Programs that would correct those areas that needed correcting; enhance those worthwhile projects and programs that were viable; and to develop new initiatives where required. We dubbed the effort that was required to accomplish this package, "Always ready to help each other". The office of the Grand Inspector and Grand Lecturer have helped us tremendously in accomplishing these significant goals and although the light may be dim, it continues to brighten in the wake of the urge to remove problems with the implementation of corrective policies and procedures that will give strength and encouragement to those deeply involved.

We decided that there were some areas where our efforts could best be put, to strengthen our order and to begin to address the ever-changing needs of the Craft. In this regard, I conferred with my consultant, called my line Officers, to identify a few problem areas to focus on. In this forum, we decided that the Craft would not accept a "here today, gone tomorrow" scenario. We therefore decided to launch what we call "A Grand Lodge Program of Continuity and Consistency". The elected line Officers immediately enrolled in a continuous program of "Strategic Planning," to identify what we perceived the main focus of the Grand Lodge should be for the next several years. We all agreed to follow a calculated process from beginning to end to address these issues. At each step in the process, we will evaluate our work to see which step is next and when it is time to appropriately add to or subtract, re-work or abandon an issue. This methodology allows the Grand Master to know in advance of his administration, where the Grand Lodge is, where we are going, when we can reasonably expect to arrive and

his own role in the furtherance of these goals. To our way of thinking, the mission of Masonry is to inculcate those fundamental principals upon which character may be built, and to cultivate among its members a spirit of fraternity and brotherhood to the end that we may be of service to our God and to our fellowman.

In order that we may be constantly reminded of our mission, a statement was developed which we should commit to memory, practice and live. With your approval of my address at this session the following mission statement will identify what Prince Hall Masonry in Maryland is about.

“The Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, Maryland and Jurisdiction, Incorporated is a fraternal organization dedicated to the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Our fraternal organization takes good men, builds and develops them, to be better men. We dispense charity, promote good and solid family values and are endeavoring significantly to aid in the uplifting of humanity.”

Our membership is diminishing, aging, and overall, less involved. To be sure, there are a few bright spots where Masonry is healthy at Lodges and Scottish Rite levels. But, for the most part, it is a struggle at all levels to acquire new members, and for that matter, simply keep what we have. With dues most assuredly on the increase, and other costs going up, things will not get better by themselves. Ours is a society that has spent the last twenty years tearing itself apart. We have seen our traditions; morality, spirituality, patriotism, and fabric of life questioned, trampled and shattered – our pride of self and country all but destroyed. But one defense remains. One thing has managed to come through intact. Bruised somewhat, but unsullied. Masonry. It may be all we have, and if so, then the time has arrived to merchandise it that way. To sell the patriotism, the religious faith, the belief in self-that Masonry offers. And sell it not as just another club membership, but as we know it – A WAY OF LIFE. Given the society of today, a way of life just might be a most saleable system.

How to best accomplish this? That’s the overriding question, and prompts the following considerations: It should be remembered that Blue Lodges across the state and nation are going out of business, that debits are increasing in all houses, and that we are at fault. Our action, or inaction, is the cause. The effect is widely published. The resolution rests with us. We need finances to realize our dreams. We need monies to act and to proceed.

What about the stabilizing influence of the Blue Lodge to our communities throughout the land? Our dedication to youth groups? The loyalty and contributions of Masonically oriented women’s groups? The patriotic dedication of so many more Masonic houses? Masonry is a family. We are all brothers, and as such owe ourselves allegiance to one another. I intend to formalize a joint meeting with the presiding leadership of all Masonic bodies in the state to openly

discuss areas of fragmentation, a method to restore the family relationship of one body to another, a return to basics, and a rededication to principles. Not singularly as Lodge Brothers or York Rite companions or Scottish Rite Brothers or Shriners but as good and upright Masons.

Perhaps Masonic education, entertainment and attractiveness are the essential ingredients we need to survive. We are constantly reviewing and making adjustments to the Lodges of Instruction hoping to graduate potential Worshipful Master's that are ready to lead, however, we have not reached the pinnacle of success in this endeavor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That the prepared and referenced Mission Statement be adopted by the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Maryland and Jurisdiction and Incorporated as an addendum to its Constitution.*
- 2. That the Social Action/Leadership program be required to hold at least four (4) seminars a year in phases, for the total Masonic Leadership.*
- 3. That this Grand Lodge establish a standing committee on Finance and Investment pertaining to enhancing our financial posture, utilizing all forms of revenue enhancement legally available, to include corporate donations, government grants, private donations and grants, stocks, mutual funds, CD's, etc. That this committee is comprised of at least ten (10) members of the Grand Lodge. Professional financial investment advisors are preferred to serve.*
- 4. That a rising vote of thanks be extended to the Masonic Family Newspaper staff headed by Right Worshipful Fred Hall. This outstanding product continues to speak for itself.*
- 5. That a rising vote of thanks be extended to the Host Lodge, District and Committee for this successful 161st Grand Lodge Annual Session.*
- 6. That this Grand Lodge continues with its Annual events such as the Emancipation Proclamation observance; Constituent Lodge Workshops; Annual Grand Lodge Raffle; Prince Hall Americanism Day and the Annual Trustee Dinner Dance.*
- 7. That this Grand Lodge sponsor and hosts a basketball tournament in partnership with Coppin State University. Preliminary plans and arrangements have been made and it looks very promising. The committee for this event is appointed by the Grand Master that will work with a "Hoop Dreams" manager to enhance the success of the event. The potential revenue is excellent.*

8. *This Grand Lodge continues with its annual Widow's luncheon. The success of the Widow's luncheon on August 9, 2008 was overwhelming. It is criminal for us to forget the Masonic widows.*

CONCLUSION

My Dear Brothers, the mere name of Freemasonry and its declared principles, tenets and teachings will signify nothing unless we sustain it by our character, our virtues, our portrayal of a full measure of brotherly love, relief and truth, combined in their several spheres to bless the world and lift it to a higher plane of beneficence and good will. What we must have today is a clear and continued vision of the possibilities of a steady and comprehensive program; one that will wrap our lodges as a whole, in a blanket of fraternal zeal for outstanding accomplishments, together with a leadership dedicated to the task of putting over the ideal to the Craft at large. A rethinking and reallocation of our finances, with progress and growth as the watchwords and be "Always ready to help each other".

I am ready and prepared to accept these tasks and responsibilities and I assure you that this administration will accept nothing less than perfection. I will fight tirelessly for the right of this Craft.

I remind you of the Historic Proclamation signing on April 10, 2005. On this day, Most Worshipful Grand Master Ronald G. Belanger of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Maryland, A.F. & A.M. and I signed a proclamation. This proclamation unites the efforts of these two great Masonic entities and legitimized a mutual recognition of history, pride and working together to enhance and support Masonry throughout the world. What does this achievement signify while we fight each other with indignation and malicious intent within the Prince Hall Family? The ornamentation of your preference is insignificant if you do not have the good of the Fraternity in your heart. Keep the strength of this important historic moment alive with enthusiasm and continue to engage in an effort of working and playing together. Thank you for your support, your guidance, you're respect and indulgence. You are my reason for being. God bless you and your families and God bless Masonry.

Fraternally submitted,

*Shelton D. Redden
Most Worshipful Grand Master*

November 15, 2008