

*Address*  
*of*  
**THE MOST WORSHIPFUL**  
**RICHARD J. KESSLER**  
**GRAND MASTER**  
*of*  
**MASONS**  
*in the*  
**STATE OF NEW YORK**



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Richard T. Schulz  
Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge  
of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York

**ADDRESS OF THE MOST WORSHIPFUL  
RICHARD J. KESSLER, Grand Master of Masons in  
the State of New York, presented at the 239th Annual  
Communication of the Grand Lodge of Free and  
Accepted Masons of the State of New York on Saturday,  
October 23, 2021.**

**ADDRESS OF THE GRAND MASTER**

To all of my Brothers, Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!  
Thank you for your trust, support and confidence.

**MEMBERSHIP:**

The Grand Lodge of New York is at a crossroads. The direction we now take will greatly determine our future for generations to come. There is a new found interest in Freemasonry that is unparalleled in recent history. Gentleman of exceptional character, high moral fiber, unshakeable integrity and motivated to make a contribution to our world are knocking on our doors in unprecedented numbers. We must be prepared to open our doors!

We have hundreds of men in our membership pipeline waiting to become active Freemasons. Our lodges are in desperate need of these additional assets. Through the **Guarding the West Gate Program** and the Scottish Rite's, *Path Forward Program*, Freemasonry has been thrust into the mainstream consciousness of the general public. Now we have to follow through on our promise to each of those interested men.

A successful membership program needs to be a two-prong effort. Recruitment and Retention. We often complain about the hurdles in attracting membership, but that is the easy part. Immersing these men fully into our lodges requires a lot more effort. We have to be cognizant that we are competing against an endless number of organizations for the same quality men. These gentlemen are also very selfish with their time and want to make sure their leisure time is spent prudently.

Recruitment must be honest and forthright. We need to be direct and concise in our message. Above all we must be consistent and timely in all our communications with the public. All means of communication need to be coordinated from face-to-face through the various social media platforms. **One Message One Mission!** The divisiveness in society cries out for a sane, well established platform that accepts upright men from various walks of experiences. **Freemasonry is that organization!** Our Principles and Tenets direct us to not only accept, but to embrace diversity.

Retaining those Brothers that we have successfully raised is a different and much more critical function. We need to create lodges that are well run, fiscally sound, ritualistically proficient, and esoterically expansive. If not, we risk losing those members we worked so hard to recruit. Not only will we lose them, but we will forfeit any chance of attracting those in their immediate circle. In an attempt to assist every lodge in becoming a lodge of excellence, I am asking for your enthusiastic support of our Vision and Mission.

## **OUR VISION IS TO:**

Successfully move our Fraternity into the 21st century and beyond and to establish a Fraternity grounded in education, spiritual development, and Fraternal bonding. The following steps will help establish Our Mission:

1. Establish a learning culture
2. Promote our core values: Reverence for God, Love of country, Integrity, Justice, philanthropy, and tolerance
3. Effective mentoring
4. Officer sponsorship
5. Enriched ritualistic environment
6. Inspirational and thought provoking programs
7. Sound business practices; short and long term plans
8. Sound leadership
9. Enhanced membership involvement
10. Accountability
11. Transparency

## **MASONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

This statement has always been our guiding force. But never has it been thrown into the forefront in our communities. During the past 18 months each of you have showed the world how much we really care. You have taken your obligations to heart and in some cases put it in overdrive. Not only did you take care of our distressed members, widows, and children, but you included the entirety of our neighborhoods. You organized food and clothing drives. You checked on the vulnerable and frail. You cut grass, shoveled snow, made house repairs, provided taxi service, and sometime you just sat and listened. And why did you do it.

## **WHY! BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WE DO!**

The good press that we received was greatly deserved and has increased our visibility. Our lodges have to be ready for the increased public curiosity of our Craft. Grand Lodge will provide you with the tools, programs, and support in creating a positive and educational atmosphere to help you succeed. All of the educational and leadership material and courses that are available to district leadership will be extended to the individual lodges. Only by establishing a strong base can the upper levels of any organization thrive. My pledge to you is that we build from the bottom up.

## **THEODORE ROOSEVELT AWARD**

In this vane we are establishing a new award for Exemplary Police Service honors members of the Police and Law Enforcement Departments, inclusive of all local Village, Municipality, County, State and Federal Organizations, to which the Grand Lodge and the Masonic Fraternity wish to express tangibly gratitude for the officers' good character and his or her long and meritorious service, particularly in the fields of endeavor involving potential risk or adverse working conditions. The award recognizes much more than mere tenure and will be awarded where outstanding service has been performed and no other suitable form of official recognition has been made available. This award can be presented to Masonic and Non-Masonic members of Law Enforcement. Brother Theodore Roosevelt proudly and diligently served as the President of the Board of the New York City Police Commission in 1895. He was a member in good standing of Matinick Lodge No. 806 located near his residence of Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay, New York. During his tenure with the New York City Police Commission, Theodore Roosevelt established the Meritorious Service Medal for worthy and deserving Police Officers on the beat. Theodore Roosevelt was well known amongst the rank and file for his early morning and late night habit of walking the very same beat that his officers walked. In his own words, Roosevelt said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

## **LEADERSHIP & EDUCATION**

As we entered the Covid crisis and we were forced to isolate, MW William Sardone gave permission to jump start my new Leadership and Education Initiative. From the beginning of the zoom sessions it was apparent that there was a thirst for educational opportunities and a need to disperse these principals and strategies throughout the jurisdiction.

A core group of Brothers from the Leadership and Education Committee stepped forward to fill the void. We knew from surveys of the incoming district officers that they desired and needed a systematic process of education. A speakers program and leadership seminars were instantly set up. The speaker program covered both Masonic and non-Masonic topics and attracted Masonic leaders from across the country on a limitless number of topics. Something for everyone was the mission. Our Grand Lecturer presented a fifteen part leadership seminar that was extremely well received. The overwhelming response to these programs re-enforced our belief that educational, ritualistic, and leadership workshops had to be a part of our continued philosophy.

With the assistance of the Trustees of the Masonic Hall and Home your Grand Lodge will undertake the financing of the world renowned Maxwell Leadership model. This will be offered through a structured roll out of Train the Trainer symposiums. The plan is to grow our future leaders. The Maxwell Program will help us transform the way we conduct business. Many of the district leaders and many of the L&E team participated in the initial seminars.



In addition many of the projects will lay the foundation for future educational programs. Courses will be held virtually, regionally and on a local basis. For the convenience of our members, they will be in modular form and will only require membership to participate.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

There is a need for Freemasonry in the world today. Society is more divided and polarized then at any time over the past one hundred years. Our Principles and Tenets set us up as a uniting force. We view comprise and diversity as a strength not as a weakness. We must not give in to the divisive rhetoric that permeates our society. These are challenging times. The world is too small and our time is too short. Our wisdom is too limited and the philosophy of winning at someone else's expense is destructive. We must all triumph together. Let's all resolve to make life gentle. We must concentrate on what unites us, not what divides. That is our strength. All we need to do is follow our teachings and not give in to temptation. The edict of M.:W.:Jeffrey Williamson will be strictly adhered to.

### **WEB SITE**

The Grand Lodge of New York is a multi-million dollar organization. It is time that we have a website that truly reflects our history, our assets, our mission, as well as our core values. Although our current site has an abundance of useful information, it does not present a uniform presence. The website must reflect all that we are and why we are a worthwhile organization where men of status can accurately research us.

I am currently involved in negotiations to develop a world class site that we can all be proud of. The first objective of a website is to firmly establish the branding of the organization. Visitors and members visiting our site must always be aware that they are at the official Grand Lodge of New York's website. The message has to be concise and consistent. The website has to efficiently communicate with our audience. It must be easily updated and look visually pleasing. It requires a whole range of skills, most of which are beyond our comfort zone.

Successful branding just doesn't happen, it is created. Like any creative process, there is a methodology to building a successful brand. While our brand is known, the public does not know what it stands for. We need to develop a platform that is solid with messaging and structure with long-term stability. We need a messaging program that is clear and relevant.

Each component of our platform must be interconnected so that it reflects Freemasonry's life and personality. We must design a product that not only conveys our assets but distinguishes us from competitors. We need to design our website so that the public feels exactly about Masonry as we want them to.

### **GRAND MASTER'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

An Executive Committee composed of the Deputy Grand Master, Senior Grand Warden, Junior Grand Warden, Grand Treasurer, Grand Secretary, Judge Advocate, Proctor, and any other Brother that the Grand Master deems necessary will be established.

The purpose of this committee is to consult with the Grand Master and share any concerns, observations, or make suggestions that are pertinent to the governance of the Grand Lodge of New York. This committee will also serve in an advisory capacity at the behest of the Grand Master. The committee will meet electronically or in person throughout the year as needed with the ultimate goal of keeping the leadership of Grand Lodge well informed, on the same page and on target.

### **BATTLE WITHIN**

In the past 40+ years, since the end of the Vietnam War, we have lost more American heroes due to suicide than all foreign wars and conflicts in that time period combined. Despite the very best efforts of family, friends, the VA, and scores of highly dedicated veteran's based organizations, approximately 20 veterans each day are lost to us due to complications from wounds and injuries we cannot see.

That's 7,200 brave men and women a year who volunteered and swore an oath to God to protect and defend our country. They proved this commitment, many seeing and experiencing the unimaginable in our name. Unfortunately, they made it through one war, only to come home to fight another. The Battle Within Project Foundation was set up to raise awareness of this unacceptable statistic. Please join our cause. Support this project in your lodges and districts. Build a Memorial Garden; sponsor a "Let's Talk" bench. Consider purchasing one or more of my wife Joanne's Battle Within Pins.

## **MASONIC BROTHERHOOD FUND**

The Masonic Brotherhood Fund is the Charity arm of our Fraternity. The Fund provides a much needed vehicle for raising and collecting moneys that augment and sustain our various Masonic Projects and Entities, such as the Masonic Care Community, the Masonic Medical Research Institute, the Chancellor Robert R Livingston Masonic Library, Camp Turk, Disaster Relief, the M.:W.:Carl J. Smith Tompkins Chapel Organ Restoration, to name a few. But of paramount importance, the Masonic Brotherhood Fund provides much needed funds for our indigent and financially distressed Brothers, their Families, and Widows and Orphans.

At this time I would like to offer my genuine thanks and appreciation to each of you for your continued and generous support. The purpose of this Fund is to assist our Masonic families with those unforeseen and sometime catastrophic tragedies that can destroy a family unit. While we hope and pray that no one needs to be a recipient of our charitable donations, history and the Holy Bible teaches us that we have a moral duty and promise to be our brother's keeper. Thankfully, the Masonic Brotherhood Fund allows us to fulfill that promise.

In addition to our established funds, we will also concentrate on the Veteran and Military Outreach Projects. It has previously been mentioned that we will be offering “The Battle Within” ladies' pins and as also Special Cufflinks for the Brethren in a concerted effort to raise funds for this most important program. I am very pleased to incorporate as part of the Masonic Brotherhood Fund the “Teddy Bears for Vets” Program hosted by the Masonic War Veterans.

Research has proven that many of our hospitalized veterans feel isolated and have very few visitors. They are in need of some joy and company. With your kind donation, you can donate a Teddy Bear to a deserving veteran and make his or her life a little brighter. The advent of the Teddy Bear began when Brother Teddy Roosevelt in an act of chivalry and charity declined to harm a small bear while on a hunting trip. This episode in history led to the creation of the Teddy Bear popular among children.


In closing, I want to thank each of you for all you have done and will continue to do on behalf of our beloved Freemasonry. Please remember that this is your Grand Lodge. The elected and appointed officers are here to serve you. Please do not hesitate to contact any of us with your thoughts, concerns, questions and requests. As Brothers we accomplish a lot, but together we can accomplish most anything.

**FREEMASONRY YESTERDAY,  
FREEMASONRY TODAY,  
FREEMASONRY FOREVER!!**

Sincerely and Fraternally,

  
M.:W.:Richard J. Kessler  
Grand Master



  
R.:W.:Richard T. Schulz  
Grand Secretary

