

The Grand Master then addressed Grand Lodge as follows:

*"Brethren, change is often desirable, frequently necessary but always inevitable and in the wake of the recent pandemic our Order, like so many others, has had to adapt not just to the post-pandemic world in which we now live but also to meet the needs of our Brethren in the twenty-first century.*

*I am greatly encouraged to learn from the Grand Secretary that stability has returned to the Orders administered from Mark Masons' Hall. Headcount and membership numbers are rising steadily; there is an increasing confidence among the Brethren and a renewed enthusiasm to resume our labours as Freemasons.*

*If evidence of this recovery was required, we need look no further than the Grand Temple today. That so many of you have made the effort to attend this meeting is very gratifying indeed and serves to underline the value we all place on our Brotherhood and sharing in the joys of Mark Masonry.*

*Brethren, each of the mainstream Masonic Orders is separate and distinct with its own story and teachings, but they all share a set of common values. Those values bind us together in the worldwide family of freemasonry and encourage us to work together for the good of all.*

*This has become a resoundingly strong theme of the renewed focus to bring the Craft and Companion Orders closer together which Most Worshipful Brother Jonathan Spence, Pro Grand Master and Pro First Grand Principal, spoke about when he addressed Grand Mark Lodge in March and I encourage you all to actively embrace the opportunities this will undoubtedly create.*

*During the last year I have enjoyed exceptional support from the Pro Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master, and Assistant Grand Master all of whom have travelled extensively in England & Wales and overseas. In each case, their reappointment today is an acknowledgement of their commitment to our Order, and I thank them for all that they are doing to develop Mark Masonry at home and abroad.*

*This afternoon I have been pleased to invest over two hundred Brethren with Grand Rank and to each of our worthy recipients, I offer my warmest congratulations.*

*The award of Grand Rank is not something that is given without careful consideration. It is a positive reflection of, and reward for, the work that each of today's recipients has carried out and I have no doubt that their preferment will stimulate them still further to promote the Order at every opportunity.*

*Brethren, I have always been impressed by the support you give to the Mark Benevolent Fund which has conscientiously distributed funds to worthy causes in our communities and supported Brethren and their families in times of hardship.*

*It speaks volumes about the Order and its members that even after making these grants, the Fund continues to grow and is now more financially stable than at any time in its history.*

*During my visit to Romania late last year, I was able to meet a group of Ukrainian refugee families for whom the Mark Benevolent Fund has been a lifeline providing food, shelter, clothing, and education via an initiative run by Mrs Diana Constantin-Tiglar. Those of you present at the March Communication will have heard her speak passionately about the work she is only able to do with our support and although the size of the Ukrainian refugee population in Romania far exceeds our capacity, the impact on those families we are able to assist is life changing.*

*Today sees the retirement of Right Worshipful Brother John Bell after nine years as a Trustee of the Mark Benevolent Fund, the last three years of which he served as President of the Fund. Brother Bell has been a great advocate for the Mark Benevolent Fund, working diligently to foster strong relations with various grant recipient charities, most notably Hope for Tomorrow. I am most grateful to Brother Bell for all his efforts on our behalf and wish him well in his retirement from active office.*

*Also retiring as a Trustee today is Right Worshipful Brother David Ashbolt who was first appointed to the Board of the Mark Benevolent Fund in 2017. He too has displayed a deep commitment to the Fund achieving success with the new Provincial Festival Jewel Scheme raising a significant sum in a relatively short time. I extend to him my personal thanks for his all that he has achieved in the last six years, particularly as Deputy President since 2020."*