



The

*Almoners* Almanac

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# The unsung role of the Visiting Brother

**In the present austerity climate there are those in Freemasonry who through no fault of their own, find themselves and their family in dire financial difficulty. Loss of job, bereavement, mental distress and debt are just a few of the reasons why in their hour of desperate need Brethren will turn to the Masonic Charities for help.**

The procedure for obtaining help from the Masonic Charities is reasonably well known - a Joint Application Form (JAF) is completed by the Lodge Almoner or Visiting Brother, proof of need is shown in the documentary evidence and the JAF along with the documentary evidence is then submitted to the Charities. The application is then considered by the relevant committee and a decision is made.

What is not quite so well known, but regrettably prevalent particularly amongst the older Brethren is loneliness. Loneliness brings on an almost unbearable feeling of isolation and the feeling that no one cares. It can start with the loss of a loved one or as age catches up a Brother is unable to make it to his Lodge meeting due to infirmity or financial constraints.

It would be nice to think that in these circumstances the Lodge would make a special effort to make sure that regular contact with the elderly Brother is maintained. He maybe on the Country List, he maybe excluded or he may live far from where the Lodge meets. None of these reasons is justification for not keeping in contact with someone who would really benefit from a visit or phone call from someone who really cares - *Freemasonry Cares, doesn't it?*

Now to the heading 'The unsung Role of the Visiting Brother'. Everyone of my team of Visiting Brothers do an excellent job when called upon. There are those who are able to and wish to go that 'extra mile' in ensuring that elderly and/or lonely brothers are made to feel that they are appreciated. It is not

always a case of financial support, in many cases it is pastoral support that is required. I have VB's who have kindly taken out lonely Freemasons to lunch or have put them in touch with a local Lodge and made arrangements for them to be taken to a meeting and brought back home again.

Loneliness kills, spiritually, mentally and physically! It should never happen, but it does.

Many Lodges are proactive in keeping in touch with elderly and lonely Brethren, regrettably there are many who don't!

*Freemasonry Cares, doesn't it?*

Patrick Gray

# A message from the Met. Grand Almoner



Dear Fellow Almoner,

Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, in more modern parlance, Kindness, Charity and Generosity, three great pillars of our fraternity, are the characteristic of a good Almoner and I thank you for the time you give up to help others in our community.

Please keep up the good work, keep reaching out. Remember most of your work will not be amongst regular attending members of your Lodge or Chapter, it will be with members no longer attending, resigned members and their dependants.

*Please keep making those phone calls.*

WBro Peter Huddleston  
MetGAlm PAGDC

#### Are you aware of MAF?

**MAF is the Metropolitan Almoners Fund. It can be used to support a brother in times of an emergency. Initially, the member's Lodge or Chapter will be at the forefront of any help provided. MAF will support an application and where appropriate provide supplementary assistance.**

**Have you joined the Almoners Lodge - Florence Nightingale No. 706?**

**If the answer is no and you are interested interested please contact Don Foster at:  
donfoster@btinternet.com**

# An Almoner's Guide to requests for Assistance with Funeral Costs

There are consistent and understandable requests from Lodge members for assistance with funeral costs. The costs can vary greatly and can be much more expensive than at first thought. It is worthy to mention that our inevitable destiny is a matter of fact and therefore to be ultimately expected. This being so, it is not unreasonable to expect that some planning had previously taken place, so that the burden of cost was not incumbent on a surviving family member.

Initially the cost of a funeral would expect to come from the estate of the deceased, or from a previously arranged prepaid funeral plan, but this unfortunately is not always the case or possible and the next of kin is left with the responsibility of payment, hence the requests for assistance.

The government is prepared to assist

providing certain criteria are met, details of this can be found at:

[www.gov.uk/funeral-payments/overview](http://www.gov.uk/funeral-payments/overview)

Providing all other means have been applied, including the government assistance, then an application can be made to the Grand Charity, who will consider each case individually on an eligibility basis. It might be that the Lodge is prepared to assist financially and where this is the case, providing an application has also been submitted to the MRGC, the Metropolitan Almoner's Fund would consider 'match funding' the Lodge's contribution.

Each case must of course be initially considered on its own merits by the Lodge Almoner before any Masonic application is made, and if necessary he is also able to consult with his Lodge Almoner Liaison Officer (ALO).

## Recommended Reading From The Metropolitan Grand Almoner

It always seems as if the Spirit of the River was speaking to me, and telling me how, in its rapid, continuous course, it is setting an example to man how he can most wisely and happily regulate his life. The water is so wise; when it comes to little banks and uneven places in its bed, it gently flows over them without making any bother about it, and this, says the river, is just the way in which men should treat the little unpleasantness and smaller misfortunes of life instead of allowing such things to distract and worry them, and perhaps even to alter their whole course of existence. Then, when huge boulders of rock stand out into the stream, the river glides round them, accepting them as necessary evils which must be endured, since they cannot be cured, which is the way in which men should treat the greater difficulties and hardships of their lives, instead of fuming and fretting, or sitting down in despair. These are things that rivers never do, says the Spirit, and moreover, as they constantly move forward, they explore with their water every hole and corner within their reach, neglecting nothing, giving a kindly wash to everything that comes in their way, and holding a pleasant conversation with all objects, living or inanimate, with which they come in contact. So a wise man, and one who desires to make his life useful and pleasant to himself and to others, will always seek for information as he goes along through the world, will have a cheery word for his fellow-travellers, and be ready to do a kind and friendly action to any that require it. And, if he does so, just as the river grows broader and wider as it nears the ocean in which it finally loses itself, and merges its water in the infinite space of the sea, so the man's life will become grander and more noble as it approaches its close, and he will have gained the affection and respect of all whose respect and affection are worth gaining, before the stream of his life, too, floats out upon the ocean of eternity.

*Extract from Legend of St Dderfel, Edward Knatchbull-Hugesson 1829-1893*

# Brother Almoner - Are you on top of your game or struggling and left in the dark?



As an Almoner are you really doing a good job? How do you know you are doing a good job? Do you have the latest information to assist you in role? Do you have records of your activities and members to assist you in your role? Have you been on an Almoner workshop and aware of what the charities can offer including the facilities and service provided by Freemasonry Cares?

These are just some of the questions you should constantly ask yourself to ensure that you are fully up to speed and doing a good job and equipped to respond when the need arise. Remember the majority of the work of the almoner goes undetected by other lodge members as it is often carried out away from the meetings and at any time day or night.

Couple the above with are you aware of your Lodge or Chapter members current circumstances – are they regular attenders at meetings, in good health, still employed, unemployed, on benefits, retired, have families that you are aware of any medical conditions that may need to be known about for future support.

I guess the real measure of success is when you are confident that you are on top of things where you can confidently say I'm pro-active in my role and not just reactive when the need arises. You go about your duties diligently mindful of the need for individuals confidentially and can respond quickly and delicately when assisting a brother or dependant in a time of need. Do you liaise on a regular basis with your Almoner Liaison Officer (ALO) and keep him abreast of the work you are doing and where required to seek advice and support from the ALO or the Assistant to the Metropolitan Grand Almoner or the Metropolitan Welfare Officer. Remember as Almoner you are not alone the team around you have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can help you especially if you are new to the role and want to sound someone out for advice to ensure you are doing the right things for your members.

Lastly, do not forget to look at those in your Lodge or Chapter who may be able to assist you with your duties, you may find that you have a natural successor in waiting who has had some exposure and experience before taking on the mantle when the role becomes available. We need to avoid giving the collar to someone who is keen to have a job but does not really understand the complexity of the role and more importantly that the bulk of the role happens outside of the meetings. Freemasonry is a wonderful thing; it opens doors to a number of opportunities and is paved with the steps that generally bring happiness to those involved. Having considered the points covered above are you properly prepared in the role, if not get your skates on and ensure you are or think seriously to hanging up your boots and handing the mantle to someone who can.

## A Change of Step for help with debts

StepChange is the UK's leading debt advice charity and they have been helping people break free from problem debt for 20 years.

They can offer useful advice such as:

- Considering a Payday Loan
- Consolidating your debts
- Credit Card debt
- Debt collection agencies
- Debt management companies
- Baliffs at your door
- Received a CCJ
- Housing debts

They can offer solutions to help deal with debt including:

- Debt Management Plans
- Bankruptcy
- Individual Voluntary Arrangements
- Debt Relief Orders
- Equity Release

By raising awareness of the issues surrounding debt in the UK and building on the vital work that StepChange have done over the last 20 years, they aim to help overcome the massive problems that debt presents in the 21st century.

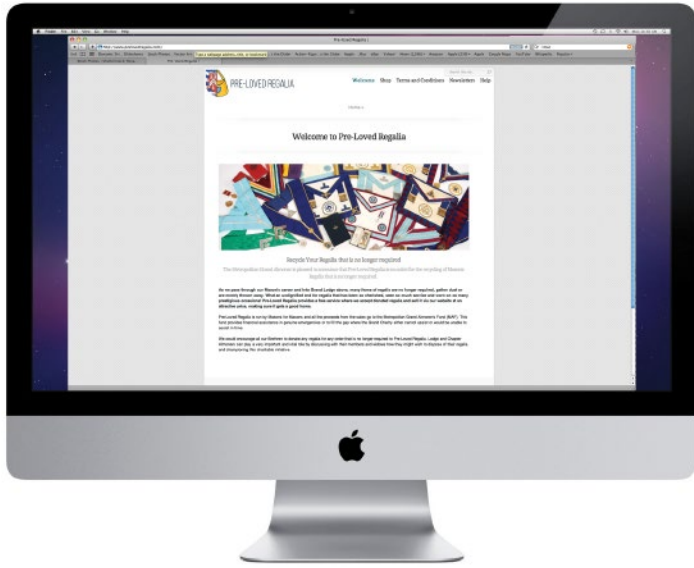
Over the last two decades their service has grown massively. From the introduction of debt management plans, to the pioneering use of cognitive behavioural therapy to help with debt-related stress their our Wellbeing tool, StepChange have shown the quality of client care that sets the standard.

Recognised as the most trusted provider of free debt advice and solutions StepChange will continue to be the champion of all that is best in debt advice and debt management. The value of what they do can never be underestimated. Problem debt causes untold distress to individuals, but the damage goes much further – ruining homes, wrecking families and affecting whole communities.

Their expert advice is free, confidential and impartial and they offer continued and ongoing support. StepChange is a charity and conduct themselves according to the rules and governing principles of the Charity Commission of England and Wales and the Scottish Charity Commission.

**For more information go to: [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)**

# The new Pre-Loved Regalia website



Pre-Loved Regalia working via a dedicated eBay site has now been going for just under a year and has raised over £2,500 for the Metropolitan Almoner's Fund (MAF).

As we all appreciate, eBay is not provided free and therefore take approximately 8% of the sale price and postage combined as a charge on every item sold, plus a monthly fee of £19.99 for use of their site. In view of the Project's success we have built a new Website dedicated to the sale of new, nearly new and worn regalia at very attractive prices to Freemasons. It also results in more of the money raised going straight to the MAF as we no longer have eBay charges.

You can access the new web site:

- As previously, through Porchway (*Just click on the Pre-loved Regalia icon and you will be taken directly to the new site.*)
- Directly via the link [www.prelovedregalia.com](http://www.prelovedregalia.com).

The site works slightly different to that of eBay in that:

- When you see an item on the new site, that is interesting, you have to hover on the picture with the mouse pointer, then click the little square that becomes visible, then all the details including Pricing & Postage, Payment by Paypal etc are revealed.
- The site works with all platforms such as PCs, Mac, iPhone, iPad, Smart phones and Browsers such as Edge, Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox and Safari.

We will continue with our policy of fixed pricing but are always open to best offers. Our objective is always to raise as much money for charity as possible whilst providing an excellent and advantageous service to Masons. Payment methods remain the same i.e. Paypal or Cheque (payable to Metropolitan Masonic Charity).

If there is an item you require which is not shown on the site or require further information please contact [colin@prelovedregalia.com](mailto:colin@prelovedregalia.com) or [darrel@prelovedregalia.com](mailto:darrel@prelovedregalia.com)

We would ask you as the Lodge/Chapter Almoner to communicate the above information to all the members and honorary members of your Lodge/Chapter. We look forward to your continued support in this enterprise of converting pre-loved regalia to funds for the MAF.

## Look After Your Lodge Widows - This Almoner showed he Cared

Last year, I was concerned that one of our widows Doris hadn't cashed her cashed her gift cheque from the Lodge and couldn't be contacted by phone at the last address and information that I had for her. The Lodge had received no correspondence and were concerned about her whereabouts and wellbeing.

On a long shot I contacted the police through the 101 call-out system informing them of her last known address. Doris lived in Lewisham and the police immediately sent a car round to the address and found out that Doris was well, but due to her needs had now been placed in a Care Home by her daughter and not realising her husbands Masonic Connections, hadn't any idea to contact the Lodge and give details of where she was now living. On top of that her brother had thrown away the Christmas Card, not realising there was a cheque in the envelope.

The Metropolitan Police provided a fantastic service by finding out where Doris now lived and even phoned me back to check that I had all the

information I needed as did the call centre lady. The result was that I was able to make contact with Doris again and send her a very large bunch of her favourite flowers and let her know the Lodge hadn't forgotten her. You hear bad reports about the Police these days, but I really cannot thank them enough for service over and above the call of duty. I know that Doris was overjoyed.

The Moral of this story is to look after the widows of your lodge and ensure the families of lodge members have details of the Lodge Almoner and explain to them what his role is within the Lodge and how he can really make a difference with support to a Freemason's family. On an aside Doris's husband was not only an important member of Macaulay Lodge but was "One of the few" having flown fighter aircraft during the Second World War... he looked after us then, it's only right we should look after his widow now.

**Greg Hall, Almoner Macaulay Lodge No. 5010**

## *the Metropolitan Grand Almoner and his team:*

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