

# Remarks of the Grand Master

George Bernard Dungan, Jr.

Virginia Research Royal Arch Chapter No. 1753

July 14, 2007

Most Excellent High Priest, King, and Scribe; Most Excellent Grand High Priest, Right Eminent Grand Commander, Most Eminent Grand Master of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar Excellent Companions, Eminent Sir Knights, my Brethren, Companions, and Sir Knights all:

Most Excellent High Priest, I want to thank you for the kind invitation to be here today, and for the introduction that was made just now, and to express my sincere thanks to all of you for the warm, friendly greetings, and genuine hospitality that I have been given here this morning.

It's great to greet and see so many of you here today for this somewhat unusual, but special, convocation of Virginia Research Chapter. With different travel schedules and itineraries, it's not too very often that we have events where the current heads of all three of the main bodies of the York Rite are together in one place at the same time, so I think that fact alone makes this convocation, quite special, indeed.

One could, perhaps, make a pretty good case for the fact that the purpose of this meeting really meant to celebrate the unity and the commitment to Freemasonry's ideals within all three of the primary York Rite Bodies in Virginia. With that thought in mind, let me say how personally proud I am to be here today with so many energetic and enthusiastic

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Master Masons; Brethren who have long and faithfully served as the "workers and leaders in the quarries" for our gentle Craft.

As I have traveled about our great Commonwealth during this Masonic year as the 162nd Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, I have spent a good deal of time talking about my chosen theme and my several Grand Lodge "programs of emphasis" and as I look around the room, I see many familiar faces from those official visits to your home lodges and districts.

In fact, the theme I chose this year is taken from words that are found in our Masonic ritual, "Charity towards all Mankind." The word "Charity" actually has many, different, potential definitions, and what I have been doing as I have traveled around the state this year, is to explain to Masonic audiences what I think the word truly means. To me, the practice of Charity is not simply reaching into our wallets or purses to give money to someone whom we think may be in need. That may be one form of Charity, but it isn't always the one that I think that Master Masons, Royal Arch Masons, and Knights Templar should be focusing all their attention upon. Clearly, we need to do much more.

To me, extending Charity to others is all about LOVE the love we should have for other human beings, and caring about what happens to them. It's giving them some of our precious time to show them that we truly do care about them. I know that all of us have our targeted and specific charitable activities that we share together through our subordinate lodges, our chapters, and our Commanderies; but it has been my feeling that we can also help others simply by doing some little things all by ourselves. If we will ever remember the several obligations that we each have taken as York Rite Masons, to "help, aid, and assist" our Brethren, their widows and orphans; I feel that we will eventually

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come to better understand what our Masonic teachings are truly all about: living our daily lives by the Golden Rule: *"Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you"*.

So where are we with York Rite Masonry in 2007? As you know, we are only as strong as our weakest links, and with that fact laid before us, one can truthfully say that our strengths and weaknesses continue to vary considerably from place to place. Some of our lodges, chapters, and commanderies are doing pretty well; especially those within our cities and more populated areas. Others, especially those located in many of the rural areas of our Commonwealth, continue to struggle. What seems to separate the two, different conditions or situations? Quite simply, it's people: finding and keeping enough good men and Master Masons with an interest in York Rite Masonry.

What I think tends to differentiate between these two different ends of the spectrum is groups of Brethren who are endeavoring to do more than simply showing up faithfully each month for meetings, and valiantly trying to keep the doors of our lodges, chapters, and asylums open and the lights on. Are they keeping our subordinate entities alive by doing so? Yes, they are most certainly doing that, and their efforts are very much appreciated by all of us. However, do we know why some of these same groups are not growing; not even growing slowly?

Not to oversimplify what is admittedly a complex problem, but my Brethren, let me urge upon you this simple observation as food for thought . . . *there is a HUGE difference between merely keeping the lights on, and letting the Light of Freemasonry shine forth from within*. Many Masonic leaders in other Grand Lodges that I sometimes talk with seem to be cautiously thinking that American Masonry may (and let me emphasize the word "may") be on the verge of turning the corner on our more than three decades of membership declines. They think that we may be seeing positive signs that the young

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men of this generation are starting to seek the doors of Masonry for something that they are not finding elsewhere. The main question for us seems to be: are we ready, willing, or even able to help them find it in York Rite Masonry?

While I realize that I may be "preaching to the choir" here, I just want to close my remarks today by urging each one of you Brethren, Companions, and Sir Knights to continue to work hard in your lodges, chapters, and commanderies; to put more emphasis than you have in the past to teach, mentor, and educate the new men who are seeking "Yet More Light in Masonry" to find what it is, in the form of fellowship and spiritual enrichment, that they are obviously looking for within the York Rite Bodies. To do so, we'll need to be salesmen, to be sure; but above all we truly need to know ourselves what all of it means; and how to best teach and mentor those Brethren to whom we will one day have to pass on the torch of Masonic Light. If we can rise to this great Masonic challenge of our time by spreading the true Light of Freemasonry, and letting it shine forth from within our local lodges, chapters, and commanderies; then I believe that good men will see it for what it is, and they will knock on our doors in greater numbers in search of Truth, and all else that we have to offer to them. It will only be then that I feel we can be more certain than we currently are today that we won't have to eventually turn out the lights of our lodge buildings forever. My Brethren, we truly hold our own destiny within our hands.

Once again, it is a great pleasure to be with all of you here today, and I certainly hope that the Great Architect of the Universe will continue to bless and sustain you in all that you're doing for our Craft, and in the many different ways that you, as York Rite Masons, show "Charity towards all Mankind." Thank you!

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Mt. Wor. George Bernard Dungan, Jr. served as Grand Master of Masons in Virginia in 2007

Member, Rose of Sharon Priory No. 2, Knights of the York Grand Cross of Honour [KYGCH]

He served several terms as High Priest of Westmoreland Royal Arch Chapter No. 41.

A member of Richmond Scottish Rite Bodies, he was coroneted a 33° I.G.H. in August 2007