

ALL HAIL!!! ALL HAIL!!! ALL HAIL!!!

Good Morning!!!

First giving honor to the most high God, the magnificent one that watched over us as we traveled to the great state of California, to our Past National Grand Masters, Hon. Norman Woodard, Hon. Oscar Mack and to the great one Hon. Jefferson D. Tufts, Sr. To my illustrious and supremely capable National Cabinet, to all Grand Masters, to all National Department Heads who I have styled my vice-presidents, to all brothers and especially my sisters who are known throughout the Masonic world for your intelligence, grace and beauty; good morning! I would like to also offer a special greeting to our Comrades of our Youth department. I want to thank each of you for making the commitment to journey in most cases thousands of miles to be here with us. I will forever be in your debt for making this financial sacrifice. Your personal commitment to insure the well being of the National Grand Lodge and its National Departments is certainly appreciated and it is my prayer that all meetings and or workshops that you attend meet your Masonic needs and expectations.

My first 366 days as your National Grand Master have been an exciting yet humbling experience. The magnitude of this lofty position does not affect you until you accept the realization that you have been elected to lead an organization that has been in existence for 156 years and whose Masonic blood line dates back an additional 63 years. Clearly it is a daunting task. However, I believe if I allow God to guide my footsteps and shape my thoughts my service to this unsurpassed Masonic organization will be all right. From the onset, I humbly solicit your thoughts and ideas on how to make our beloved fraternity better. More especially I need the power of your prayers. When you pray ask our Heavenly Father to help me make compassionate decisions that are well grounded in the tenets of freemasonry and firmly rooted in our faith. Additionally from the onset, I ask for your patience and should I make mistakes, I promise I will offer a sincere apology.

In day 366, I have but one caution: Some of what I say and do will not be popular. However let me submit that being National Grand Master is not a popularity contest. I fully understand that at all times there will be at least one member that will not see issues and their conclusions in the same light as I. Brothers and sisters, that does not give me any discomfort! I am going to put my trust in our merciful Father, the Great Grand Master of the Universe, the giver of all good and perfect gifts and stand boldly in a perpendicular fashion while holding on to my convictions. My convictions will at times clash with traditional thinking but I believe this is fine because I have no fear of change and Brothers and Sisters, neither should you. We are all members of a unique organization. Our arms were not twisted nor were we compelled to join. However, once you made the commitment to become a member, you have effectively said that you will govern yourself by the rules and regulations of the National Compact. I trust that we all understand this basic premise: No individual, no lodge, no grand lodge and no National Department is bigger than the National Grand Lodge. If one of your missions is to continually do things your way, it will be my mission to politely but sternly correct

behavior that threatens the fabric of our beloved National Compact. Intimidating statements about “pulling out” of the National Compact will not be tolerated and will be considered contumacy. Brothers and Sisters, I want to see peace and harmony prevail and I promise I won't be looking under those proverbial rocks trying to find trouble but when trouble raises its ugly head, the appropriate response will be made.

Ultimately I have one goal. I want to participate in making a good organization a great organization. Over time I have discovered that “good” is the enemy of “great”. My brothers and sisters, greatness is cumulative, there is never a single moment or breakthrough; those who build greatness think first about who, then about what; it is not leadership per se that matters, but the type of leadership a organization has; those who build great organizations are clock builders and not time tellers; those who build greatness act from understanding and not bravado; those who build great organizations build a culture of discipline and it is not about building a organization that lasts but one worthy of lasting. I believe in my heart that the National Grand Lodge's foundation supports a move to greatness!

My time as National Grand Master will pass quickly. In the three-year period ending July 2005, I hope that I will be able to stand before you and share some modest success. With your support I will work diligently on establishing a lodge and hopefully a chapter in our birthplace, Boston, Mass. I am asking our Pursuivant Sovereign Grand Commander, Hon Robert Wade and the members of the Council of Nine to assist me. With respect to the Council of Nine, I will not be satisfied until these esteemed brethren occupy the pinnacle of our fraternity and offer us the benefit of their unquestioned wisdom. I will not rest until every member, male and female feels comfortable sharing the story of our magnificent organization. Bro. Cedric Lewis is hard at work gathering the facts and I am confident that he will equip us with the sword of truth.

I am proud to be a Shriner. I am a man of Noble birth. In 2004, when we convene in Illinois, the National Grand Lodge will invite its appendix order, Ancient Arabic Order, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine and the Daughters of Isis to join us. While the details have not been finalized, I am excited that the dialogue has started and bringing this issue to fruition is a priority. No longer will you have to choose between attending an Imperial Conclave and your Grand Masters Council and National Department Head Workshop.

Brothers and sisters we are 156 years old. However we do not have a home. My legacy, your legacy will be judged by what we did to rectify this unacceptable situation. If I don't ask you for anything else, I am asking you this: Please search your hearts and find a way to support establishing a National Headquarters. Within the National Compact there are existing properties that can serve as our National Headquarters. It is no longer acceptable that we do not have a central location for storing our records. The minutes that our secretaries take today will be the basis for establishing our history in the future and as we move forward our written history must be safeguarded. Your National Headquarters should not be 2901 Bodine Drive Wilmington, Delaware! Again, search your hearts because this endeavor will take that unpleasant word that's spelled M-O-N-E-Y!!

Brothers and Sisters, that old promise of forty acre's and a mule was a cruel, cruel lie. We must do for self. Over the next year, I am asking everyone to commit to bringing one person worthy of membership into the organization and convince one existing member who has never attended our National Session to meet us in Illinois. This is not a request for money; this is a request for your effort and energy. With regard to new membership we all must admit that we need to do more work. Our fraternity is aging right before our eyes and there doesn't seem to be a plan of action to bring the best and brightest to our family. It would be a gross understatement to say that we need new members but we must constantly be on the lookout for men and women that would make ideal petitioners for our craft. I do know this: saying negative things about the organization in the presence of the uninitiated definitely will not help us! The National Grand Lodge will live on but all of us must participate in its growth.

Finally, in the beginning, middle and the end, prayer changes things. We all pray to the dictates of our own hearts, but no matter what we pray Almighty God has promised to hear our prayers. I read somewhere that Jeremiah stood to pray; Peter knelt to pray; Nehemiah sat down to pray; Abraham prostrated himself to pray; Hannah prayed in silence; Paul sang in the spirit to pray; David prayed in the morning; Anna prayed night and day. When you pray ask almighty God the giver of all good things to bless the National Grand Lodge, its National Departments and members that we receive a small portion of His goodness and mercy.

Remember my battle cry is Execution Not Excuses. I want everyone to adopt those three words also. So mote it be, So mote it be, So mote it be. Let me close by simply saying Fiat Lux or as some would say, "Let There Be Light"! May God Bless and through his everlasting love I wish you peace.

I, Felton N. Ferguson, Most Worshipful National Grand Master of the Most Worshipful National Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Ancient York Masons, Prince Hall Origin – National Compact in and for the United States of America, declare this 146th Grand Masters Council and National Department Head Workshop open for the dispatch of business. Take timely notice and govern yourselves accordingly!

This I declare once, this I declare twice and finally I declare it a third time!

Felton N. Ferguson

M.W. National Grand Master –
146th Grand Masters Council and National Department Head Workshop
Los Angeles, CA. 7/18/03