

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

Good Afternoon!!!

First giving honor to the Most High God, the one who sustains all that is good, to our Past National Grand Masters, to my National Cabinet, to Grand Masters, to our National Department Heads, to all my Brothers, Sisters and Comrades good afternoon! Brothers and Sisters, it is important that you understand that I could never thank you enough for committing your valuable time, energy and money in our quest to up lift and improve our beloved National Compact. To that end, on behalf of the National Cabinet and myself welcome to the great state of Illinois. I am also taking this time to thank Grand Master Pettaway and all the members from Illinois for hosting our annual session. Hosting an annual session for any organization can be difficult. It requires focus and if you're not careful it can strain relationships. I am certain that the Illinois delegation has worked extremely hard to make this session a memorable one, and I am excited to be here!

To my National cabinet, I am blessed to have men of your caliber to work with, and whatever we accomplish during our three-year term will be testaments to our ability to provide the leadership necessary to move our Masonic family forward. It has been most pleasurable working with these brothers. Why? We have formed a bond that has allowed us to stay focused on the important issues and develop, I believe, lasting friendships. We come from different parts of this great country and we each bring a unique talent "to the table" which has enabled us to serve you. We speak candidly, to each other and at times the dialogue gets spirited, but it never clouds our ability to come out of a meeting with consensus on any issue. Yes, I speak of our friendship, but let me assure everyone that it

does not cloud our decision making, because we have never forgotten the statement by Past National Grand Master, Hon. Norman A. Woodard: “Friendship For Leadership Is A Sinking Ship”!

You will note that my address will not be as long as last year. I openly admit that my oratory skills are not world class and as a result I will only ask for your attention for just a few minutes. Now, I could stand before you and attempt to dazzle you with fancy and prosaic words. I could attempt to solicit your thunderous applause (well, actually I would like a little of that!). I could even try raising the emotions in this room to a feverish level but at the end of the day I run the risk of having you leave this place asking, “ what was the National Grand Master talking about?” So, Brothers and Sisters I am going to talk to you about what I said that I was going to do. Recently, a Brother said to me something very simple: set your goals, measure your success and report out! As a result, I’m going to follow the Brother’s advice. Again, I ask for your attention for just a few minutes.

Last year, we started on a journey to accomplish several goals that had been placed on our tressle board. Since I am a person who believes “the glass is half full versus half empty”, I thought these goals would be achieved and we would be on our way to setting and measuring the success of new challenges. Well, Brothers and Sisters, I was a little too ambitious and as a result, I will have to work harder and smarter in the ensuing year. You will note, that I said, that I would have to work harder, because I believe that it is my role to set the tone. The Great Grand Master of the Universe has blessed me, and he has allowed me to be in a position to steer our Masonic ship. As a result, I demand no less of

myself than to keep our ship on course. Our tressle board has not been cleared, however, I am pleased to report that with the help of our National Cabinet and other members of this Masonic family who are dedicated to excellence, we do have good news!

The state of Texas is once again on the road to becoming a Grand Lodge. Under the leadership of Hon. Jefferson D. Tufts, Jr. – Grand Master of the state of Ohio, we now have a lodge in Houston as well as Dallas. The diligent work of our brethren in Dallas has also given rise to a new Order of Eastern Star Chapter. Our Chapter had fallen but with the help of Almighty God, it is working again! At this very moment our Houston lodge is hard at work and I believe when we convene in 2005, there will be an Order of Eastern Star Chapter working with them also!

In March of this year, several members of my National Cabinet and myself, along with Hon. Allen Martin – Grand Master of Alabama, Hon. Charlie Morris - Grand Master of Louisiana and a contingent of York Rite warriors from the state of Mississippi led by our National Historian Bro. Cedric Lewis convened an occasional lodge in the state of Arkansas for the express purpose of welcoming Nubian Prince Lodge and Cleopatra Chapter into our Masonic family. It was a wonderful Saturday afternoon, displayed with passion by these new members. I expect great things to happen in the state of Arkansas. I must note that I am eternally grateful to our National Grand Worthy Matron, Sister Doris Tipton and our National Associate Matron, Sister Mattie Baker for taking a leadership role with our endeavors in Arkansas.

I will take this time to also thank Hon. Charles Barlow, Jr. – Past Grand Master of Virginia and Hon. John Jordan – Grand Master of Maryland for leading our efforts to assist the Brethren in our nation’s capital. Our Grand Lodge in Washington, D.C. is struggling to survive, Brothers and Sisters. This we cannot accept, because it is imperative, that we preserve a strong Masonic presence in our nation’s capital. I must say, while some of us are doing quite well maintaining our memberships, some of us are not. There’s a school of thought that says, the National Compact at times can only be as strong as its member lodges that are struggling.

To date, we have not been successful in Boston – yet!! However, our work continues and I am confident that our members who represent our interests in Boston will eventually complete their mission. I commented last year that having a lodge in Boston was imperative, and if you are called on to assist, please lend your support.

With regard to a National Headquarters, Grand Master Tufts, Jr. has graciously offered archive space in Ohio. As we take a long-term view of this initiative, a building remains the goal and it is important that we start working with the available space that is offered.

To that end, I am asking every Grand Master and National Department Head to forward a copy of the minutes from your annual communication within sixty days to our National Secretary, Hon. Lee Singleton. This will insure that we begin the preservation of our history going forward. Other Masonic jurisdictions seem to derive pleasure from researching our history. From my prospective, this is unacceptable and this practice must

come to an end, immediately. One small caution: I cannot accept excuses for non-compliance. The generations that follow us will want to know who we were, and exactly what did we achieve. We have historically passed large portions of our story by word of mouth; however compiling the minutes of our proceedings will be a major step forward to insure that the differences between facts and fiction are clear.

Well, as I stated earlier our agenda was aggressive and there are still more goals that needs to be accomplished. Additionally, we can no longer afford to do things that do not test traditions. While our traditions may be dear to us, they must be examined continually to insure that these traditions make sense today. To my Brothers and Sisters with Masonic tenure, never forget that our new members need our guidance and expertise. They depend on us to teach them our history and ritualism. To our new members: Always practice patience. What may appear to be confusing becomes clearer as you increase your participation at all levels of our organization.

Finally, I would like to leave you with some excerpts from a book that I am currently reading. This book is titled "Leadership – Promises For Everyday". The author is a person that some of us are familiar with – John C. Maxwell. The excerpt is entitled Wise Words From A Leader. "Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding, but a rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding. Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction. In the multitude of words sin

is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom”. I am sure we all recognize that this is from the book of Proverbs. Pastor Maxwell comments that many verses in Proverbs speak of the tongue and how to use it as a positive influence. Leaders who use words skillfully increase their influence. Leaders who understand the power of their words accomplish the following: They proclaim justice and are blessed. They speak hope for the future, becoming a fountain of life for others. They speak forth wisdom and save others from ruin. They know when silence is more powerful than words and their words feed and nourish others. All of us assembled this afternoon are leaders, be it formal or informal. The words we use could affect the direction of our beloved National Compact. I am asking everyone to keep me in your prayers and I will keep you in mine also. As always, Execution not Excuses. God Bless and peace be with you!

Brothers and Sisters 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 147th 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 this I declare a third and final time.

Hon. Felton N. Ferguson, 33°

M.W. National Grand Master

147th Grand Masters Council and National Department Head Workshop

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