

It is with humility that I first give honor to the Most High God, the great "I Am", the Great Grand Master of the Universe, who is the divine Leader of our lives. I also offer recognition to our Past National Grand Masters whose giant footsteps I have been granted the opportunity to walk in, to my National Cabinet, to all Grand Masters, to our National Department Heads, to all of my Sisters, to all of my Brothers and to all of my Comrades, good morning! Our York-Rite family has been truly blessed. To those assembled here this morning, you are to be commended again for putting aside all pleasure and business once more to be here with me. As I move on to other Masonic challenges, it is your support that I will look back on with fond memories. We continue to exist as an organization, because of your faithfulness and dedication. To that end, on behalf of my National Cabinet

*and myself, welcome to the great state of South Carolina!
In October 2007, I met with Grand Master David
Thompson and the leaders of his various committees. The
energy and excitement on display was unprecedented. The
smiling faces that greeted me, assured me that we would
be in for an unforgettable Triennial. As each committee
chairperson made his or her presentation, it became
apparent why, that time tested phrase “Nothing can be
finer, than to be from South Carolina” has been repeated
so many times over the years. South Carolina, I thank you
for your preparation, hospitality and hard work to insure
that our stay will be a great one.*

*Well Brothers and Sisters, in the past, my preparation for
our National Joint Session was relatively easy. I sat and
wrote as my pen moved across the paper effortlessly.*

Brothers and Sisters, this year has been different. Over the last few months, my National Secretary and National Legal Advisor would ask me if I had written my Annual Address. Unfortunately, my reply each time they inquired was no. I never shared with Brothers Singleton and Williams that I was struggling internally as to what to say. Sisters and Brothers, this was my dilemma; what does one say after being elected to lead an organization that is 161 years old? What does one say when you realize that the lineage of National Grand Masters only numbers twenty-one? Well, about two weeks ago, while driving home from my office, that inner voice that we all have, spoke to me. Now my drive to and from work is not a normal one. It takes me one hour and forty-five minutes each way, so I have a lot of time to think! That inner voice told me to simply say thank you for the privilege to have been your

Servant. That is it, Brothers and Sisters. My goal has been to serve the National Grand Lodge and you. If there has been a measure of success in this role, then I walk away happy. Over time, only history will determine if we affected the goals and objectives that we sat out to accomplish in 2002.

Over the last eight years, the National Grand Lodge has experienced some troubling moments. However, this morning, we won't dwell on the perception of bad times. Thus, I do pray, that our humble accomplishments will outweigh the mistakes that were made during my watch. It is my pleasure to submit the following: We established a Grand Lodge in Arkansas. Grand Master Christopher Graham and his craft embody the essence of the term York-Rite Warriors. Thank you Brother Graham! The

devastation of Hurricane Katrina gave birth to Operation Cable Tow. There were so many members that gave money willingly, to the National Grand Lodge to assist those members that were affected. Thank you Brothers and Sisters for your sacrificial offering. With the leadership of Brother Clyde Bouknight and Sister Sheila Jordan, we established our National Building Fund. Thank you Brother Bouknight and Sister Jordan. On that topic, I am certain that we will have a National Headquarters. I solicit your prayers so that this project can be brought to fruition. A wise person told me that if I trust in God, there is nothing or nobody that can prevent us from achieving this goal! The Jefferson D. Tufts, Sr. Scholarship Fund continues to build momentum fueled by our Gala and your contributions. Thank you Brother Daniels and Sisters Gantt, Cain and Thomas for your

service. Extensive headway has been made in documenting and sharing the illustrious history of the National Grand Lodge. Additionally, detailed records of the National Grand Lodge and Grand Lodges are being archived and preserved. Our contribution as the vehicle that propelled Freemasonry among people of color, is being shared with the world as we speak. Thank you, Grand Master Cedric Lewis. Brothers and Sisters, I am proud to report that on May 17, 2008, the state of Texas met in solemn convocation and reestablished a Grand Lodge! It was a long journey but with blessing of the Most High God and the assistance of National Deputy Grand Master, Clyde Shepard and our National Historian, Grand Master Cedric Lewis, our prayers were answered. Congratulations to Grand Master Rodney Sparks and his craft. On Monday, we will officially

welcome the great state of Texas back home. I am equally proud to announce that we have a Grand Chapter in Texas. To our National Grand Worthy Matron Sister Mattie Baker, those who assisted her and the beautiful Sisters of Texas, we congratulate you for seeing your work through to conclusion. Brothers and Sisters, obviously there was more that needed to be accomplished, but, on my honor, it was not due to a lack of effort.

Again, Brothers and Sisters, I say to you as the sun sets in the west to close the day, my decent as your National Grand Master has been completed. To my National Cabinet, I love and respect each one of you. Bro. Shepard, who without hesitation, traveled to any place on my behalf, that I asked him to go; Brother Mackie, who from day one established himself as our spiritual rock; Brother

*Bass, who was never afraid to ask the tough questions;
Brother Singleton, my confidant and sounding board
during those times when I needed someone to listen to my
frustrations; Brother Hespeth, who always made certain
that there was integrity in the numbers; Brothers
Lawrence, Jordan and Tipton, who worked tirelessly at
every session and never complained; Brother Williams,
who has given of his legal services freely to our
organization, has always been candid, thought provoking
and of course has been my unofficial bodyguard!
Brother Foxhall, whom I called upon to help me think
through troubling Masonic issues; To my National
Department Heads, it has been my pleasure to work with
you, but more importantly, for you; Finally, to Hon.
Norman A. Woodard, I was privileged to have served in
your cabinet for six years. During those years, when I was*

ready to shoot from the proverbial “hip”, you quietly calmed me down and by your example, prepared me to be National Grand Master.

*Brothers and Sisters, I have made it a tradition to share a Biblical passage with you. While searching for shall I say the perfect passage, I remembered that three years ago, I reflected on one of my favorites. If you were in Ohio in 2005, you will recall that the passage spoke on the Most High God’s promises, and it remains true in 2008. The following is recorded in Psalm 91: “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him will I trust. Never forget, that our Heavenly Father made us the following promises: God has promised us **His Presence,***

so that we will not be lonely at the top. God has promised us His Protection, so that when we take risks, He will keep us safe. God has promised us Peace, so that we will not be insecure in unknown territory. God has promised us Perspective, so that our eternal view of life remains steady. God has promised us His Provisions, so that no matter what our needs are, He will meet them. And God has promised us His Power, so that in adversity he will deliver us and help us meet our goals.

Brothers and Sisters, as I close, I would like to share a Japanese proverb pronounced Kai Zhen. Interpreted, it means to leave it better than you found it. I hope that my stewardship as your National Grand Master can be paralleled with this proverb. I will always call myself your servant, which is a simple noun for the word Steward and

Brothers, most of you know that some of our rituals also speak to stewardship in never leaving your post. Our dear Brother Adoniram is remembered to this present day because another Brother fell asleep at his post. I am certain our National Eminent Commander, Matthew Jamison, can tell this story well!!

My prayer in departing my post is that none will view me as having done this, and it is my sincere desire that our sacred Order will continue in its tracks of service, civility and support. While the sun has set on my term as your National Grand Master, the sun has not set on the service that I will continue to offer the National Grand Lodge. I will remain available to offer counsel for our betterment. In addition to my former obligations, today, I make this promise to you: Sisters, you will see a radiant smile, as I

have enjoyed being your servant. Brothers, you will see me walk the plumb line as a Master Mason until I enter the Celestial Lodge above where the Great Grand Master of the Universe presides forever and All Masons will know that I am “Traveling Man” before they ask me the question.

This is a tall order, and I make this promise to you today because I have kneeled prostrate before the Most High God and asked for his countenance in doing these things, and as our National Grand Lodge has a Compact with Masons, I have a Compact with Him.

As always, Execution, Not Excuses. Peace be with you, and thank God for allowing us to assemble again!

*Brothers, Sisters and Comrades, 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 these United States on the continent of
North America, declare this 54th Triennial Session open
for the dispatch of business that shall come before it.
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 °