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### PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION

#### **Freemasons are inviting the whole country to toast 'absent friends, and those working on the frontline in the NHS' at 9pm tonight**

Freemasons are calling for the whole community to ensure no one feels alone, even if they are physically self-isolating, to be remembered in a toast at 9pm tonight.

The 200,000 strong membership organisation traditionally toasts 'absent Brethren' to remember those who are unable to attend their meetings in person at the dinner that takes place afterwards.

The organisation is adapting the usual 9pm toast it makes during its dinners and inviting everyone to join in to toast 'absent friends, and those working on the frontline in the NHS'.

Dr David Staples, Chief Executive of the United Grand Lodge of England, has called for the Freemasons' regular toast to be a 'virtual' toast – using **#TimetoToast** online – and extended to all those we cannot meet with, yet remain close in our thoughts.

He said: "We want everyone to join in at 9pm tonight and raise a glass to those we cannot be with in person due to the huge challenges facing the country. Stay safe, self-isolate but know that you are not alone.

"We are all unable to do those things we previously took for granted, that are so precious to us all – meeting with friends at the pub or for a coffee, enjoying each other's company. Being social, in its small way, is something we can still all share. We invite everyone to raise a glass to help raise spirits."

Christine Chapman, Head of Freemasonry for Women, added: 'We must combat loneliness by ensuring that, even if we are all in our own homes, we are still connecting across the country. Dr Staples and I urge everyone to charge their glass at 9pm and say a toast to absent friends, and those working on the frontline of the NHS.'

**ENDS**

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

- J *The Nine O'clock Toast* is a tradition that has been observed for centuries by Freemasons, from contemporary members meeting in London pubs, to those convening at the height of two world wars. During the meal that follows their meetings, at 9pm, the room falls silent.
- J Those present raise a glass to 'Absent Brethren' – those members who they have known and shared their lives with over the years, yet who are unable to be there. This includes those working late shifts or living in far flung corners of the globe; as well as those who are no longer with them.
- J Freemasonry in England and Wales contributed more than £48m to charity in 2019 and Freemasons annually give 18 million hours of their time towards unpaid voluntary work in their communities.
- J They also own and operate the RMBI, (Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution) which has 33 nursing homes for both Freemasons and non-Freemasons. Freemasons also make substantial donations across the country to local air ambulances, blood bikes and also provide a number of emergency response vehicles.
- J Freemasonry also does a huge amount for medical research into treatments for cancer, diabetes, heart disease and a whole range of other conditions, including Alzheimer's, by funding UK medical scientists to make ground breaking discoveries. Freemasonry also makes donations to support those affected by overseas disasters as well as those at home, such as the Grenfell Tower disaster.
- J The Freemasons' Fund for Surgical Research was created as a registered charity in 1967 to mark the 250th Anniversary of the foundation of Grand Lodge. It was always the aim to support the work of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and since 1967 more than £5.4 million has been given in grants to the College. The funds are sufficient to support four or five Fellows each year, who are members of the College, and publicly acknowledged as supported by the Fund.
- J In March, London Freemasons presented three new cars to the London Ambulance Service. The vehicles, complete with their equipment, will be used as 'Rapid Response Vehicles and are in addition to five similar vehicles previously donated.

#### **About the United Grand Lodge of England:**

- J The Premier Grand Lodge was founded at the Goose and Gridiron Pub in London in 1717. By 1751, a rival Grand Lodge had appeared. They dubbed themselves the first Grand Lodge as the Moderns and called themselves the Antients. In 1813, after four years of negotiation, the two Grand Lodges in England united to form the United Grand Lodge of England.
- J It has 48 Provinces across the country and more than 7,000 Lodges, with students over 18 able to join one of the 85 University Scheme Lodges. It has 200,000 members in total, including Districts overseas.

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- ) Freemasons use four important guiding principles to help define their path through life: integrity, friendship, respect and charity.
- ) One of the oldest social and charitable organisations in the world, Freemasonry's roots lie in the traditions of the medieval stonemasons who built our cathedrals and castles.
- ) Freemasonry is one of the largest charitable givers in the country, contributing more than £48m to deserving causes in 2018 alone. Freemasons don't only donate money – more than 18 million hours of volunteer work was undertaken by Freemasons in 2018.

**Female Freemasonry:**

- ) There are two female-only Grand Lodges, Freemasonry for Women and the Order of Women Freemasons. They both follow exactly the same ritual and wear the same regalia as male Freemasons – and they often work closely with community and charity projects.