



Welcome to your regular **Almoner's Briefing** produced by the Masonic Charitable Foundation (MCF). Maintaining support and contact with Lodge Members, widows and their families is at the heart of the role of Almoner so we hope this Briefing will assist you and keep you abreast of relevant information.

- ❖ **Loneliness** – loneliness is an issue that can affect anyone and is a deeply personal experience. Loneliness in later life is increasing, with millions of older people reporting that they feel ignored or invisible. In fact, there are over 200,000 older people in the UK who haven't spoken to anybody in the past month alone. But it isn't only older people affected. A survey by Action for Children found that 43% of 17 – 25 year olds who used their service had experienced problems with loneliness. Feelings of loneliness and social isolation can be particularly heightened during the festive season with reports from some organisations that more than 450,000 people aged over 65 years faced the prospect of Christmas alone. There are a number of other factors that can increase a person's risk of loneliness and social isolation:
 - **Big life transitions** - bereavement, retirement, moving area, becoming a carer, having a family, relationship breakdown
 - **Physical health** - disabilities, mobility issues, sight and hearing impairments
 - **Mental health** - anxiety, depression
 - **Financial difficulties**
 - **Lack of support network** - having little or no family or friends nearby, not being able to participate in the local community

- ❖ **How to help** – your role is not just to identify an issue but also to do what you can to support somebody. This is especially important at this time of year where you have the opportunity to make a real difference to a person's life by starting these important conversations. You can begin to understand their situation by asking questions like, when was the last time they left the house and where did they go? Or ask if they belong to any local clubs or groups? During your conversations it's important to offer words of encouragement and support; you might be able to assist them in making new social connections or direct them to suitable local services. For more information download the MCF's factsheet on the topic of loneliness [here](#)

- ❖ **Keeping in touch** – in addition to the above, making regular telephone calls and visits to members, widowed partners or dependents whom you suspect are lonely or isolated is vital, and will help you build trusting relationships and help spot cases of need. Although social activities can tackle loneliness many people need emotional and practical support to reach these services so it is important to keep in touch and see them through their situation. Read more about keeping in touch in our **free** Almoner's Guide on the MCF website - www.mcf.org.uk/almoners-guide

- ❖ **Christmas cards** – sending Christmas cards is a really effective way to build and maintain relationships with members and widows. This year in collaboration between MCF, the United Grand Lodge of England and Isle of Man Post Office, all Lodges have the opportunity to send their Christmas cards using the 300 Years of Freemasonry Stamp collection. Find out more here - www.iompost.com/stamps-coins/collection/300-years-of-freemasonry/a-very-masonic-christmas-card-mailing

Don't forget, when writing your cards you should include your full name and contact details so that the recipients can pass on their thanks directly.

- ❖ **Support** – Your Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner (MetGA/PGA) is a good point of contact for guidance and support if you are unsure what to do next. This may include providing additional signposting to local organisations and agencies who can assist with a person's needs. They may also be able to commission a visit from a trained Visiting Volunteer to help complete an application to the MCF for additional support.
- ❖ **Information to share** – you are encouraged to read the following information out at your next Lodge meeting as part of your Almoner's Report or circulate to members of your Lodge. We will provide you with something suitable to share within each **Almoner's Briefing**. Read on for more information...

Did you know that there are over 200,000 older people in the UK who haven't spoken to anybody in the past month? Financial difficulties and poor physical health are two of the recognised factors that can lead to social isolation and the MCF may be able to assist. If you know someone who may be affected please remember that the MCF can help with daily living expenses, supporting children in full time education and one-off expenses.

It may also be able to help with mobility equipment to assist with getting out and about. If you think somebody is in need of assistance please contact me, your Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner, or the MCF on Freephone 0800 035 60 90 or by email help@mcf.org.uk for advice on starting an application.

We hope you have found our **Almoner's Briefing** useful. To provide any feedback please email masonicsupport@mcf.org.uk

Be the first to receive the latest news about the wider work of the MCF (and get a free MCF lapel pin!) by signing up to receive our regular e-newsletter at www.mcf.org.uk/sign-up. The e-newsletter contains further information, resources and stories about the MCF which may be of additional interest to you as Almoner.

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