



2023 GRAND MASTER'S ALLOCUTION
The Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge of Florida, Belize Central
America and Its Jurisdiction, Inc.
Prince Hall Affiliated

The Honorable Jeffery G. Jones
Most Worshipful Grand Master
April 15, 2023

First Giving Honor to my Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ... The one who gave his life that we may be redeemed.

To the greatest cadre of MWPGM any Grand Master could hope for in a single Jurisdiction:

our 15th Most Worshipful Grand Master, Bishop Dr. Michael R. Moore

our 17th Most Worshipful Grand Master, Dr. Anthony T. Stafford

and our 18th Most Worshipful Grand Master, Walter Gulley, Jr.

I take my hat off to these three Gentlemen. Three great leaders in their own right; all of which have left lasting legacies that will not be easily matched by any other Grand Master to follow them. Each have shown great humility and support of this MWGM as I set my own path for this Most Worshipful Jurisdiction.

To the Honorable Gardner M. Torrance, Most Worshipful Past Grand Master, Prince Hall Jurisdiction of Florida in his abstention.

To the Honorable Timothy Seay, Most Worshipful Grand Master, Prince Hall Jurisdiction of Arizona.

To the Honorable L. Lamont Banks, Most Worshipful Grand Master, Prince Hall Jurisdiction of Tennessee.

To the Honorable David San Juan, Most Worshipful Grand Master Prince Hall Jurisdiction of California

To the Honorable Victor Major, Most Worshipful Grand Master, Prince Hall Jurisdiction of South Carolina.

To the Honorable Robert J. Lambert, Most Worshipful Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Florida F&AM.

To The Honorable Raffy Timonian, Most Worshipful Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Lebanon F&AM.

To the Honorable Terrence Jackson, Most Worshipful Past Grand Master, Prince Hall Jurisdiction of Colorado, Wyoming, & Utah, Representing the Honorable Stefon Atmore Most Worshipful Grand Master.

To Right Worshipful Senior Grand Warden Big-Bryce Harden, Prince Hall Jurisdiction of Texas Representing the Honorable Wilbert M Curtis, Most Worshipful Grand Master.

To Right Worshipful Senior Grand Warden Woodie Pugh, Jr. Prince Hall Jurisdiction of Alabama, Representing the Honorable Corey D. Hawkins, Most Worshipful Grand Master.

To the Honorable Samuel T. King, Most Worshipful Past Grand Master, Prince Hall Jurisdiction of California.

To the greatest line of Elected Grand Lodge officers ever assembled.

RW Deputy Grand Master Gus Harris, Jr.

RW Senior Grand Warden Kendall T. Moore

RW Junior Grand Warden Dr. Marlon S. Honeywell

RW Grand Treasurer Melvin F. Wright

RW Grand Secretary Tommie Wright.

To each of our Department Heads: MEGHP Elton Lewis, MIGTIM Reginald Hardee, REGC Byron Willis, Eminent Prior Lynwood Loper, Deputy of the Orient Chris Terrell

To our elected board of Grand Trustees, most notable, RW Henry B. Parker, Trustee Board Chairman.

To the Chaplains and Clergy of this Great Jurisdiction most notable our Worshipful Grand Chaplain Rev. Ernest Powell

To all of Visiting Guests Delegations in their respective places. To all other distinguished Dignitaries.

To all Appointed Grand Lodge officers, To All Past Masters, Worshipful Masters, Wardens, Brothers all,

GOOD AFTERNOON!!!!

We have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord, Trusting in His holy Word, He's never failed us yet.

As I stand before you on this third opportunity of my tenure as your 19th Most Worshipful Grand Master, I am overwhelmed with the joy that comes from knowing that our God is with us. We have placed a great deal of faith in Him and He has never left nor forsaken us. This afternoon I present to you the current state of our nation, and my view of its impact on our organization as well as my stewardship over the year since our last communication in April of 2022.

Not unlike the several years past, last year we faced many challenges. But through it all, God has sustained us. We have risen to each occasion and through faith in God, we continue to grow stronger in spite of that which could potentially have destroyed us.

Joshua 1:9 Says:

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

It is because of this; I am encouraged and convinced that in spite of the challenges; In spite of the obstacles, all of our actions as an organization have been ordered and blessed by our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. It is because of Joshua chapter 1 verse 9, I feel comfort in saying: God has shown us both His favor and His Grace. This is our season and It is Working!!!!

With that sentiment, I humbly ask Asst. Grand Chaplain Rev. Dr. Darrien K. Bolden to take us to the throne of grace as the Choir sings softly the gospel rendition of "It's Working"

(Song https://youtu.be/8nIE_HjqACk & Prayer)

Brothers, I once again greet you in the matchless name of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. It is with great pride and privilege that I welcome you to this 153rd Grand Communication of the Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge of Florida.

As I begin this address, I reflect briefly on the successes that we as a jurisdiction have achieved in spite of all we have faced. In 2020 during the heart of one of the world's worst pandemics; when most Masonic Jurisdictions made a sound decision to cancel their 2020 Grand Communications, we here in Florida found ourselves in the precarious position of a transition year. We equally were in the year of our 150th anniversary. This was a time when we all felt we should be celebrating. After a 4-month delay, the leadership of this great jurisdiction, began to work tirelessly to develop a plan to move forward with our celebrations as well as the transition of leadership. It was a risky proposition to say the least. But through ingenuity, careful planning, and a little bit of "Out of the Box" thinking, we found a way. And, with God by our side, we have not looked back since that time. Through the most challenging and risky moments of the Covid Pandemic, the Jurisdiction of Florida moved forward in faith. And with the proper education of its members, a solid jurisdictional Health and Safety Plan, a dedicated health professional committee made up our male and female membership, with trust in each other, and a 90+% membership vaccination rate, we made it safer for us to congregate together. We not only maintained our membership; we grew our membership in all houses. We celebrated our 150th year anniversary in the form of a Souvenir Journal, we burned a mortgage; making our Grand East facility free and clear of mortgage debt, we found ways to successfully and safely perform masonic degree work, we held workshops, and even moved forward with our annual Charitable Golf Tournament. Each of these presented us with a level of risk that may have brought great harm to others. But through our great planning and the grace of God, we accomplished these things with little to no sickness. Through it all, we have suffered no life-threatening illness or hospitalizations that were the result of infections from one of our events. Because of this I feel confident in Saying: **This is our Season, to reap what we have sown.**

NECROLOGY

***John 5:24** Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

The bible reminds us on multiple occasion throughout its pages that he that believe in the father will one day leave this land of the dying, but will once again rise to have every lasting life in the land of the living. Each year we attend this Grand Communication to meet, greet and fellowship; there are some who were here with us the year before that is not here with us in the present. They now answer a higher calling. They no longer answer to the proclamation of the Most Worshipful Grand Master, they have answered their final call from the Grand Architect of the Universe. This year the Jurisdiction sustained 37 losses to the angel of death. But if we are true to the word of God, and maintain our faith in Him, then we know that we are to celebrate the life they lived. Cry not for them; for they have reaped the greatest reward that life on this side of heaven can offer. And if we remain faithful, we shall one day see them again.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance... —Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

As we mourn for our dearly departed. We will remain faithful to our God, and steadfast in our passion for Prince Hall Masonry. **This is our Season, to reap what we have sown.**

STATE OF THE NATION

Three years ago, when I first took office, no one could have convinced me that in April of 2023, we would have completed three solid years of the Covid Pandemic. With no real end in sight, we now head into the 4th year of this infectious disease. And even with so many devastating affects Covid has had on this country and the world alike, there are still those among us who spew the rhetoric of conspiracy theories in our national media, and those who continue to use the Pandemic as a political weapon against political opponents. All the while our latest numbers indicate that in the United States alone there have been a total of 103 million total cases and 1.2 million deaths. Florida ranks number 3 in the number of total cases in the country behind California and Texas; but the good news is Florida is slowing on its number of new cases and currently ranks 4th in the number of people having been vaccinated; coming in behind California, Texas, and New York.

RSM International, a global network of independent audit and tax consulting firms has indicated that the Economic policies put in place to address the pandemic will go down in history alongside those of the Great Depression and the global financial crisis as some of the most controversial and effective government responses ever implemented during a crisis. They further state that the American economy was facing an abyss in March 2020 as millions lost their jobs and the economy came to a virtual halt—but because of forceful action by the fiscal and monetary authorities, it rebounded faster than expected. But sadly, the country remains divided on the political scene. This division in my opinion is the only thing stopping us from a complete and full recovery. Personal agendas and political pride are what continue to choke the life out of the American economy as well as the lives of the American People.

Lastly, The United States of America is often referred to as the Greatest country on earth. In many aspects; her greatness is undenied. But she equally has many short comings. Fashioned a melting pot of cultures and ethnic backgrounds, America has found little empathy for many of her citizens, never able to truly live up to her reputation. The racial divide in our nation is at an all-time high. The homeless live in tent cities on the street corners of every major metropolitan city, and women and minorities remain unequally paid for equal work. Crimes of hate go unpunished when committed against people of color as well as members of the LGBTQ communities, and many law enforcement officers have developed a code of conduct that protects and serve themselves as opposed to the communities, they have sworn themselves to protect.

As an organization, we have no political agenda, nor can we as a non-profit organization have a collective political voice. But as a member of this great order, we come from a culture that takes good men and makes them better. We come from a culture that teaches us to give wise council, to be diligent, prudent, temperate and discrete. We come from a culture that teaches us to remind others of their errors, and if possible, to aid them in a reformation. I firmly believe; that The

Mason, true to his obligation and a Master of his tools; is the best among all American Citizen. The key to a greater American society can be found between the points of our compass and on the angle of the square. We may not have a collective political voice, but we do have the tools to make a collective difference - if we simply act as individuals on one accord with a collective mind and a collective spirit. The Master Mason, has the power to set the example and make a difference. **This is our Season, to reap what we have sown.**

STATE OF THE CRAFT

The Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge Prince Hall Affiliated Jurisdiction of Florida is alive, is well, and is thriving. God has been good to us. We continue to remain strong not only in the U.S., we remain strong in both the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, we are equally strong in the Yucatan Peninsula, with one of our largest lodges being in Belize City, Belize Central America. Finally, we remain strong on the Western coast of the African continent in the Country of Côte d'Ivoire; with three thriving Lodges ready to expand Prince Hall Masonry deeper into the West African territory. We ended the 2022 year with 3500 members. Through the 2023 Annual return period we retained about 3200. We currently have several new candidates within the pipeline; and I have no doubt through the 2023 intake period our numbers will surpass that of 2022. But even as we continue to show a steady trend of growth and success, Prince Hall Masonry is under attack. The usual suspects with their personal agendas continue to encroach on our Jurisdiction and others. But in typical Florida fashion we move forward unhindered and unbothered by those with no real love for the order. The policies and constitutional amendments we have worked together to put in place will protect us from these forces that seek to divide us with no regard for the integrity and/or the survival of PHA masonry within this Jurisdiction.

As your 19th Most Worshipful Grand Master, I made a promise to you that I would never intentionally do anything that would be detrimental to the survival of our Great Jurisdiction. I stand firm on that commitment and remain steadfast in that vein. I am indebted to the leadership of my predecessors. Our 15th MWGM Bishop Dr. Michael R. Moore, bravely began a million-dollar renovation of our Grand East in a time when we were on the verge of losing our facility to the lack of action and attention to building codes. Our 17th MWGM Dr. Anthony T. Stafford, uplifted the morale of a Jurisdiction that was in financial struggle and improved its financial standing along the way. Our 18th MWGM, completed the repayment of the million-dollar loan relieving us of a significant heavy burden. Today I stand on their shoulders. Reaping the benefit of their leadership. Serving a Jurisdiction that is stronger and more motivated than it has been in two decades. Since I was elected as your Grand Master, I have purposefully and intentionally avoided placing any additional financial burdens on the membership beyond that of regular dues and or registrations. To date, we have not had a single assessment, nor have you been asked to sell a single ticket. And yet, we remain in a better financial position today than we have been in many years. As I continue to lay out plans for the future of this Jurisdiction. I must now come to you the men and the women alike of this great Jurisdiction to raise funds for our foreseeable future. During this session, I will be instituting a one-year capital campaign to raise funds for a project that will be presented to you in detail immediately following this address. The campaign will consist of a very large marble cornerstone to be placed upon the Grand East. This cornerstone will become a part of the historical building to remain in perpetuity; leaving a legacy for our

children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Donors will be categorized by their giving amounts. Bronze Donors will cost \$500, Silver donors will cost \$1000, Gold or Corporate donors will cost \$5000. Let us unite together now not in giving, but together let us invest in our own future. **This is our Season, to reap what we have sown.**

FRATERNAL RELATIONS

The Grand Chancellor and his committee continue to receive and carefully review any and all request seeking amity, fraternal relations, and/or mutual recognition. To date, our most successful agreement is that we have made with our mainstream counterparts. The MWGL of Florida has been gracious in their invitations to us and we have tried to do the same. Last year I approved a social gathering with our mainstream counterparts in the park in Dade County for a celebration of Prince Hall Day. The event was a great success and an enjoyable time was had by all who attended. We were also petitioned and have equally signed amity agreements with Lebanon and Greece. Greece has not yet returned a final signed document. But I am proud to say that Lebanon is here with us today. Please give a round of applause to the MW Grand Lodges of Florida and Lebanon for being here with us today in honor of our agreements. **This is our Season, to reap what we have sown.**

THE GRAND EAST

In 1912, our masonic forefathers had the vision and foresight to build a 48,000sf six (6) story edifice in downtown Jacksonville after the Great Fire of 1901 that destroyed our original Grand East. Today that facility still stands and is the oldest building in the city of Jacksonville; still owned by its original owner and held for its original use. Outside of you the members who love this fraternity, The building is our greatest asset and treasure. Today, our facility is estimated to be worth approximately \$2.5 - \$3 million, but time has taken its toll and she is in disrepair. Unfortunately for us, we are the generation (111 years since the building's erection) that a great decision has fallen upon to determine what do we do with our great Historical edifice. Our options are few:

1. We can do nothing significant. Make little repairs here and there as we have in the past.
2. We can seek loans and grants to enter into a major overhaul and renovation of the facility.
3. We can seek a development partner and move into a major overhaul and renovation of the facility to create a revenue stream for our future.

Doing nothing in my opinion is our most dangerous option. We cannot afford to sit idle and do nothing for too long. The building will soon become an eye-sore within the community as the massive LaVilla redevelopment project moves forward over the next few years. Once this happens, we can expect the city to place pressure on us to make changes at a pace we will not be prepared to meet. This option puts us in the greatest danger of losing our building due to inaction and dereliction of property.

We already know that the repairs needed to bring our building back to her original splendor are beyond that which is financially feasible for us as an organization alone. Currently the renovation

budget for the Grand East is anticipated to be in the \$3 - \$5 million range. The last major loan we embarked upon at just \$1million cause much of our membership to leave us because of the heavy burden placed upon the membership to pay the loan back. Even if we could afford to take on this lofty goal alone, and were able to complete the renovation, we would have no real use for the building as a Grand Lodge. We have out grown the facility.

The special committee's due diligence research which was done at the behest of the 152nd Grand Body in 2022, is showing great promise of success if we were to move into a Joint Venture project. The proposal that will be presented to you immediately after this address; allows us to maintain controlling interest in the property, allows us to maintain the history of the facility through the showcasing of an onsite Historical Masonic Museum, and finally it creates a significant revenue stream for us that could potentially make us one of the most financially sound Masonic Jurisdictions within all of Prince Hall Masonry. I believe so much so that this is our best course of action that upon the recommendation of the special committee, I have retained legal counsel with Akerman Law firm one of the best law firms in the country to further complete an analysis looking at the project from a legal perspective that would protect us and our facility by mitigating as much risk as possible. There is a very small window of opportunity for us to make this decision. Another opportunity like this will not come along in this generation. I truly believe God is with us and we have His favor. **This is our Season, to reap what we have sown.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Go into a Capital Campaign over the next year to better position ourselves for any future building project endeavor. Our goal would be to raise \$500,000 - \$750,000
2. Continue our due diligence efforts to include the hiring of consultants in the Legal, Construction, and Operational fields to better align us with a forward move into a Joint Venture project with JWB Real Estate Capital to renovate 410 Broad Street.
3. Authorize the Grand Master to move forward with the Joint Venture project with JWB Real Estate Capital if all hired consultants give positive reports.

The Story of The Carrot, The Egg, and The Coffee Bean

A young girl went to her grandmother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. Her grandmother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to a boil. In the first, she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil, 20 minutes later she turns off the burners. The Grand Mother then removed each item from the pots and placed them in a bowl. The Grand Mother then ask the daughter what did she see. The grand-daughter replied Carrots, Eggs, and Coffee.

The grandmother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. She then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, she asked her to sip the coffee. The granddaughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The granddaughter then asked, "What does it mean, grandmother?" Her grandmother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity - boiling water -

but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. But, after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened! The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water. "Which are you?" the grandmother asked her granddaughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?" I ask each of you now to think of this from a Jurisdiction's perspective; with the adversity being a very difficult choice to make as the city of Jacksonville plans a major city transformation. Which are we? Are we the carrot that seems strong but, with pain and adversity, do we wilt and become soft and lose our strength? Are we the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Do we have a fluid spirit but, after a death, a breakup, or a financial hardship, does our shell look the same, but on the inside are we bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and a hardened heart? Or are we like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, do you get better and change the situation around you. When the hours are the darkest and trials are their greatest, do you elevate to another level?

This is our Season, for Grace, for Favor, this is our Season to Reap what we have Sown.

I AM,



The Honorable Jeffery G. Jones
19th Most Worshipful Grand Master, MWUGL of Florida

GOD SAVE THE CRAFT – GOD SAVE THE JURISDICTION OF FLORIDA

Stewardship & Actions

(Some Virtual Items may have been omitted)

- Emerald Lodge Visitation weekend in Dade County
- Last Rite Ceremonies for Sollie Mitchell, Jax
- MWGL of Florida Grand Session
- KOP Youth Board Meeting, Melbourne
- MWPHGL of Georgia Grand Session
- HOJ Zone 2 Visitation, Ft. Pierce
- Department Head Meeting, West Palm Beach
- Leadership Lyceum and Golf Tournament, Orlando
- United Supreme Council, Jax
- OES Workshop, Orlando
- Zone 2 MWGM Visitation, Tampa
- FCOD annual session, Jax
- Zone 1 MWGM Visitation, Ft. Walton
- Zone 3 MWGM Visitation, Stuart
- York Rite Weekend, Orlando
- SERCOGM, Atlanta
- Department Head Meeting, Cocoa Beach
- MWPHGL Arkansas Grand Session

