Northern Masonic Jurisdiction
SCOTTISH RITE™

The Grand Almoner's Fund

Help · Aid · Assist

Great Things Together

A MESSAGE FROM THE HEART

A QUESTION I'M OFTEN ASKED IS, *"WHAT'S THE 'BEST' MASONIC OFFICE YOU'VE EVER HELD?"*

I know the expected answer is Sovereign Grand Commander. While I'm proud to serve you in this capacity and am deeply humbled by the opportunity, I still derive a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction from my tenure as Grand Almoner. It was in this position that I saw daily the incredible work of the Grand Almoner's Fund.

Once upon a time, I knelt at our sacred altar and obligated myself to help, aid and assist our distressed worthy Brothers, their widows and orphans, to the best of my ability and within the length of my cable tow.

That was 40 years ago, and I'm still bound to that obligation just as strongly today as I was then. The good news is that, because of your support of the Grand Almoner's Fund, our collective cable tow is infinitely longer and growing every day.

These heartfelt stories and messages of thanks from Brothers experiencing life-threatening health crises will both warm your heart and bring tears to your eyes. We've eased the burden of distress from the shoulders of many, and with your continued support, we'll continue to be the good stewards to our Brothers that we pledged to be.

Mother Teresa once said, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love." I might reverently disagree, because while our individual support for the Grand Almoner's Fund may seem small, our combined efforts can in fact, do great things.

Join me. Let's do great things together!

Peter J. Samiec, 33°
Sovereign Grand Commander

LIVING A MIRACLE

GREG STARNER AND HIS WIFE LEANN BELIEVE IN MIRACLES. THIS SCOTTISH RITE BROTHER HAS BEEN AT DEATH'S DOOR AND BACK, AND HE AND HIS FAMILY ARE CONFIDENT THAT A MIRACLE IS THE ONLY REASON HE'S HERE TODAY.

Brother Greg's health issues started when he went in for a routine hernia surgery. Doctors noticed excess fluid in his abdomen, and they decided to take a closer look at his liver. Initial signs pointed to fatty liver disease, a common ailment among Americans.

A series of further tests revealed the real problem: Brother Greg had liver cancer. The diagnosis was a real blow to the family. Greg and LeAnn had gotten married when they were just teenagers and had been together for more than 40 years. "We have been a couple that has been all about each other. We've worked together all our lives," LeAnn explained.

LeAnn & Greg Starner

Over the next year, Brother Greg began undergoing cancer treatment, but the state of his liver continued to deteriorate. One night he was home watching a NASCAR race when he decided to go to bed. The next thing he remembers was waking up in the hospital next to his crying wife. Three days had passed, and he had gone completely comatose. Brother Starner's liver was failing fast, and he was put on a liver transplant list.

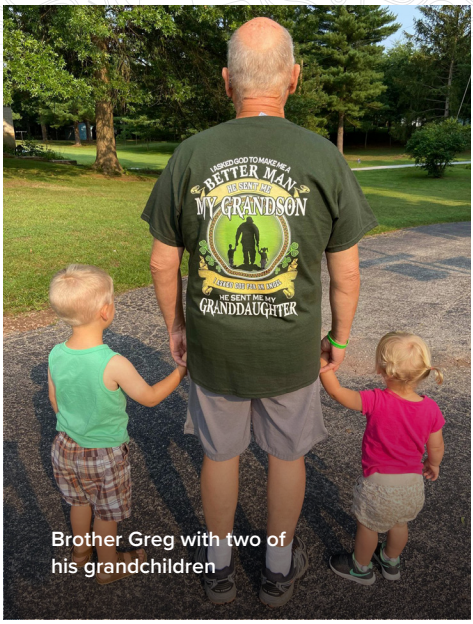
In the midst of these health challenges, the bills began to pile up. "We were going through a real crisis where we had no income," he recalled. "LeAnn couldn't work because she had to be my primary caretaker."

"We had insurance, but when you're talking that we had to pay 20% of these big humongous bills, it was just impossible," LeAnn said.

Freemasonry has been a part of Brother Greg's life for as long as he can remember. His father and grandfather were both Masons, and all three have served as Master of their local lodge. His son has become a fourth generation member of the fraternity. "It's been a great journey. It means a lot to me," he said of his Masonic heritage.

With the family's financial struggles, Brother Greg's father reached out to some fellow Brothers to see if anything could be done to help. "This was right around the holidays, so we didn't have any money to buy anything for anyone for Christmas. We weren't able to pay many, many bills. We were so far behind on so much," LeAnn said.

With the help of the Grand Almoner's Fund, the request was fulfilled quickly. "I want to say



Brother Greg with two of his grandchildren

within a week, we had money," she recalled.

The Starners said they're used to giving to people in need, so it was hard to be on the receiving end. But they were told that the Grand Almoner's Fund exists for situations just like theirs. "We all get in bad times every now and then, and if you don't have your health, you have nothing in the world," Brother Greg said. "They said the Fund is there for our Brothers and their families who need it. They told us, 'We support you, and that's what we're here for.'"

Thanks to the support from the Grand Almoner's Fund, Brother Greg was able to focus on his health. After just weeks on the transplant list, he learned that a match had been found, and he was scheduled for surgery. The transplant came with significant risks – his body could reject the donor organ, and the couple was prepared for a long and brutal recovery.

Brother Greg came out of surgery with flying colors. He was moved to basic care within days because he was up and walking so quickly. "The doctors were just mesmerized. Normal hospital stays for this are anywhere from three to six weeks. I was home in a week," he recalled. "If you don't believe in miracles, you're looking at one."

The Starners credit the prayers and support from family and friends with helping to boost Greg's recovery.

Greg & LeAnn Starner with their three sons and seven grandchildren

He credits the support and prayers of family and friends all over the world with helping accelerate his recovery. The family are also working to spread the word about the importance of becoming an organ donor. It was a stranger who elected to be an organ donor who saved Brother Greg's life.

LeAnn said that she doesn't take her husband's liver transplant and recovery for granted. "I'm in a group with a lot of people who are waiting for organ donors, and so many people that are younger than my husband have passed away. To be able to witness a miracle – a lot of people don't ever get the chance to see that."

When Brother Greg goes in for checkups, his doctors call him Mr. Double Miracle. "Our doctor told us, 'He's one in a million. We don't see them mending this quickly – we don't see them mending this well,'" LeAnn said.

Brother Greg is grateful to be a part of the Scottish Rite family and for the role the fraternity played in his health crisis. "The medical bills are what really kill you in a situation like this," he said. "People need to know what a great organization Scottish Rite is. Without their help, who knows where we'd be? Thank you to the people who made this happen and continue to make it happen."

> *"We are beyond grateful. Beyond grateful. We just can't thank you enough."*

LeAnn echoed her husband's thanks. "We are beyond grateful. Beyond grateful. We just can't thank you enough."

DEAR BRETHREN,

Words of Thanks

I am writing to express my sincere appreciation for the funds that were presented to me by my dear Brother who flew to visit and present this check and gift card to me. I am beyond humbled at the outpouring of support I have seen from our fraternity. My wife and I are the parents of five children, one of whom is special needs, and I was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in January of 2021. Since then, I have been through five different treatments, all of which have failed and now on my sixth treatment plan. This, in and of itself, has been a tremendous challenge for my family.

I am the sole bread winner and insurance provider, so I have maintained working full time through this. In addition to this, an unbelievable number of calamities have happened to us over the course of the past year – including a major surgery for our son, unexpected major home repairs including septic system and HVAC system, among other challenges. I have planned well financially, but to be hit with so many things at the same time has been very difficult to say the least. I half-heartedly joked that I never thought cancer would be the least of my concerns.

To learn of the unbelievably generous level of support from the Grand Almoner's Fund for my family humbles me beyond words. We are facing a very difficult health battle for me. I cannot express how thankful we are for this support.

Fraternally,
A Grateful Brother

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

SCOTTISH RITE BROTHER CJ SOLT LOVES BEING ON THE ROAD. THE TOUR BUS DRIVER SPENDS MONTHS ON END DRIVING ACROSS THE COUNTRY, TOURING WITH OLD-TIME ROCK AND ROLL BANDS AND SOME NEW UP-AND-COMING ARTISTS.

Brother CJ said his line of work is exhausting, but he loves it. He's even been able to put his experience to use in the Masonic community, helping organize buses for Masonic trips.

When the pandemic hit, he was on tour with a metal band that had just wrapped their first show. Like the rest of the world, he thought the tour would be shutting down for just a few weeks. "I waited a whole year trying to get back to work and it never came," he said.

While out of work, Brother CJ developed some eye issues and began visiting a series of specialists. He learned he had developed a virus and needed to start a regular regimen of penicillin to help fight the infection. At the time, the news didn't seem too concerning. "I remember thinking, 'Great. I can get through this and then just go back to trying to find work,'" he said.

When he was admitted to the hospital to begin the regimen, he offhandedly mentioned that he had a heart murmur, leading to another round of tests. What doctors uncovered was something Brother CJ could never have imagined.

"I wasn't in my room five minutes, when the heart surgeon came in to tell me that we needed to talk," he recalled. He learned that the virus attacking his body had been growing for several years, causing extensive damage to his

aortic valve and aorta stem. "They described it as sometimes you see fish tanks that have black algae growing in them, and that's what was happening in my heart. It was really bad."

The damage was so severe that doctors had expected to find someone gasping for air when they entered his room. With no time to process, Brother CJ learned that he would be going in for emergency open heart surgery the next morning. Even talking about the experience months later gets him emotional. "I never imagined something like this could happen," he said.

When he went in for surgery, Brother CJ's body began to shut down. He suffered a collapsed lung and kidney failure. He credits the work of his talented doctors for helping him pull through.

After a 20-day stay in the hospital, Brother CJ was finally able to return home. But the subsequent rehab was long, and he was still out of work, unable to return until he was completely recovered. When Scottish Rite Brothers learned of his situation, they immediately secured assistance from the Grand Almoner's Fund to help cover the debt he was facing while unemployed.

Brother CJ said the support he received from the Almoner's Fund allowed him to focus on his recovery without the stress of hospital bills and living expenses. Even more meaningful to him were the regular visits he received from Ill. Brother Tom Labagh during his recovery.

"Going through a traumatic health experience, the first guest at my home was a fraternal Brother," he recalled. **"WITH A SMILE, A HANDSHAKE, AND THE HELP FROM THE GRAND ALMONER'S FUND, I KNEW I COULD DO MY DIFFICULT REHAB AND NOT WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE. I SINCERELY THANK ALL OF YOU INVOLVED!"**

After some grueling months, Brother CJ is back on his feet. He has finally returned to work and is grateful to be healthy again. "Thanks to the Scottish Rite for all their support and compassion. I truly couldn't be where I am today if not for my fraternal Brothers."

Ill. Brother Tom Labagh visiting Brother CJ Solt

Why We Give

WHY DO I GIVE? I GIVE BECAUSE I MADE A PROMISE WHEN RECITING THE THIRD DEGREE OBLIGATION – SOMETHING EVERY SCOTTISH RITE MASON HAS DONE. I PROMISED TO "AID AND ASSIST" BROTHERS, THEIR WIDOWS AND ORPHANS.

Fulfilling this particular promise can be a struggle, particularly when it comes to Masonic widows. The "aid and assist" concept seems fairly straightforward, but how does one convert this simple concept into practice in 2022, in a COVID world?

I am confident that 100 years ago, it was much easier to provide assistance to Masonic widows. Everyone at the lodge knew exactly where the widow of Brother Jones lived. It was easy to watch over her and provide "aid and assistance" when the need arose. Everyone knew her, and she knew most of the Brothers at the lodge. Unfortunately, the world we live in has changed.

In my lodge, over half of our members don't reside in the town where the lodge is located. Many Brothers reside out of state, and one even lives on another continent. Keeping an eye out for a widow who resides hundreds or thousand of miles away is just about impossible. How do you aid and assist someone from a distance, when you may not even know they need assistance?

This is why my wife and I choose to contribute to the White Flower Society. The folks managing this Fund are able to find the widows who really need help and then provide them with timely assistance – something I certainly couldn't do on my own.

G. Nick Graff, 33°
Active Member

Nick & Marla Graff

Why We Give

WHY DO WE GIVE TO SCOTTISH RITE CHARITIES? IT'S A SIMPLE QUESTION, BUT THERE'S NOT A SIMPLE ANSWER. OUR GIVING WAS INSPIRED BY OUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS. IN MANY CASES THEIR GIVING WASN'T FINANCIAL SUPPORT, BUT HELP WHEN IT WAS NEEDED. THERE WAS ALWAYS A PLACE AT THE TABLE FOR A HUNGRY FRIEND OR RELATIVE, A PLACE TO SLEEP IF YOU NEEDED IT, OR HELP ON A PROJECT WHEN IT BECAME TOO BIG FOR ONE PERSON.

Our decision to become members of the Commander's Circle and the White Flower Society was inspired by several events we witnessed firsthand. The first was the devastation of Hurricane Sandy. The destruction of both life and property was catastrophic, and many residents and businesses lost everything. Almost immediately after the storm, Ill. David Glattly, then Deputy for New Jersey, and MW Dieter Hees, Grand Master of Masons for New Jersey, visited the area to distribute gift cards from the Grand Almoner's Fund to local Masons. The recipients didn't have to be Scottish Rite Masons or even New Jersey Masons – just Brothers in need.

Another instance was a member of my Valley who had fallen on hard times. The Brother had lost his job, and he hadn't been able to find additional employment. His situation was further complicated by two special needs children, so leaving the area wasn't an option. The Grand Almoner's Fund assisted with temporary rent payments and other necessities. Thanks to Scottish Rite, our Brother was able to stay in his home and has now returned to work.

Finally, we give to Scottish Rite Charities because we know our donations are going to our Masonic family: Brothers in need, children at the Dyslexia Centers and Masonic widows.

Bruce C. Golway, 33°

Valley of Southern New Jersey

Bruce & Margie Golway

White Flower Society Members

The White Flower Society was formed through the vision of former First Lady Monica Glattly to ensure that Masonic widows are cared for and never forgotten. Membership in the White Flower Society reflects a $5,000 level of giving, either as a one-time gift or a pledge over ten years.

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WhiteFlowerSociety.org

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The Commander's Circle is a special group of donors who have chosen to honor their commitment to the principles of our fraternity through their generous support of the Grand Almoner's Fund. Their passion and generosity are a true and lasting expression of "Masons caring for Masons."

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Northern Masonic Jurisdiction
SCOTTISH RITE™

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We will strive to be a fraternity that fulfills our Masonic Obligation to care for our members.

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