

CFSMA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2011

Lord Mayor of Manchester, Reverend Hutchinson, Immediate Past President Steve, Past Presidents, members, delegates and guests, good afternoon.

I'm sure I'm not the first National President to have stood before conference and say how quickly my year in office has passed, but it truly has. And it has been a complete pleasure and privilege to have served as National President, having been supported by the National Executive, NACO Office, my own Midland Division and particularly my own Employing Society Lincolnshire Co-operative. We heard earlier from Ursula that Lincolnshire Society is this year celebrating its 150th birthday, and it is one of those pleasing coincidences that my Presidential year ran concurrent to this celebration. As I have travelled the length and breadth of the country during the year, I have been justifiably proud of both the Association and the Society I have represented, a pride borne out of the success and excellence of both organisations.

Representing the Association, Helen and I have attended all the various kindred association conferences we have been invited to and been made most welcome at them without exception. I was privileged to be asked to attend the official opening and dedication of Funeralcare's new service centre at the Mayfields Woodland Remembrance Park on the Wirral and it is great to see Funeralcare delivering on its ethical policy by investing in such a highly valued community facility. I heartily recommend a visit to the park if you are able.

Sadly, during my term in office, two of our members died, both after the bravest of fights with illness, and I was able to represent the Association at both their funerals. Charles Ward, a fellow Midland Division member and friend died on the 12th of April and just last month, Paul Connery – our most recent member to have received honorary life membership of CFSMA, also died. Whilst CFSMA members will be remembering Charles and Paul in the course of our AGM tomorrow morning, I would just like to spend a moment paying tribute to these two members not least because they are more than worthy of a few moments of our time. Charles had been a member of CFSMA (Midlands Division) for just over 20 years, attending regularly and contributing to meetings and conferences alike. He was not well enough to attend last year's conference to receive his long service award and it was hoped that he would have received this at a Divisional meeting. Unfortunately he was not well enough due to the timings of his treatment and his condition in general. Whilst it was a sad occasion, I was privileged to have been able to present Charles' long service award posthumously to his two sons Marcus and Matthew who were both grateful and very proud to have received the award. Like Charles, Paul Connery had been a long time supporter of CFSMA and was a highly regarded member of the North West/North East Division. He was such an easy chap to get on with, such was his friendly disposition and great sense of humour – qualities he shared with Charles. Paul received his honorary life membership of

CFSMA at last year's conference and it is a great shame that he was not gifted more time to enjoy this most deserved of privileges. The high regard and popularity in which Paul was held was evident by the turn out at his funeral. Both Charles and Paul will be missed and fondly remembered as two dedicated CFSMA members. A further sad occasion I was able to represent the association at during the year was the funeral of Peter Wilcox. Peter died in May following a long illness. For many years, Peter and the Wilcox family have been willing and generous supporters of our CFSMA conferences and it was right and fitting that this association be represented at his funeral.

Anyone who has been involved in organising conference, who sits or has sat on the National Executive, or has had any dealings with NACO will know Nicola Schofield. Nicola is the main CFSMA contact at NACO Office. Nic is in our thoughts at this time due to the very tragic death of her 21 year old son David on Monday following an incident here in the City of Manchester. As professionals in our field, we are regularly called upon to provide a service following such tragedies, but when someone we know and care about is affected, it is a harsh reminder of the devastation such tragic loss causes.

And so, our thoughts, prayers and condolences go to the families of Charles, Paul and Peter, and to Nicola and her family at this most difficult time.

Now hopefully you will all be aware that my chosen theme for this year's conference is "Developing and Maintaining Excellence". I chose this theme because it provides us with many opportunities to explore how the individual manager can impact positively on establishing and developing the very highest of standards in funeral service provision. I hope that many of you will take part in our education sessions tomorrow which are designed to stimulate thought and discussion on the future direction and actions of us as individual managers and of our employing Societies. However they are branded, Co-operative Funeral Services enjoy a very dominant position in the market place and this is well deserved. However well deserved though, there is no god given right for us to occupy this dominant position, and so we are bound by a duty to our respective Societies' members to ensure that we remain ahead of our competitors in standards of service, professionalism and care. Whilst we owe this duty to our employing Societies and members, in turn our employing Societies are duty bound to ensure that the necessary support and recognition is given in return. The role CFSMA has to play in achieving this is manifold:

- CFSMA members have indicated that education and CPD are regarded as the key benefits of membership and this issue was discussed at length at the strategic review meeting held by the National Executive back in November last year. Given that only a percentage of members are funded to attend conference each year, the Executive would be misguided in believing that education sessions held at conference are enough to satisfy members' needs in terms of CPD. I believe strongly that the key to delivering CPD to members lies in our divisional meetings. This would encourage

members to attend regularly thereby increasing the cross fertilisation of views, opinion and ideas throughout the association. Additionally, a training day could be co-ordinated and held annually at some time other than conference. To save the non CFSMA members present having to sit through too much detail on this, I will discuss my proposed mechanics for this at our AGM tomorrow morning.

- One year ago, moments after being installed as National President, I made a commitment to focus on the disengaged membership within CFSMA. Being the lifeblood of the Association, our divisional meetings provide an excellent opportunity to share problems, issues, ideas and experiences with fellow managers. Regardless of whom the employing Society of a manager is, or at what level a manager is working at, the challenges encountered in respect of strategic, operational and people management remain fairly constant and recurrent, although the scale may differ dramatically. I can say with hand on heart that attendance at divisional meetings has made me a better manager, due to the discussions, ideas shared by other managers at meetings, the relationships established whereby help or advice is only a phone call away, and by CPD sessions delivered so far at meetings. All that said, it is such a shame that this time last year, two of our six divisions were not meeting. Historic problems including a then obstructive senior management within Funeralcare had led to a sustained period of dormancy of our Southern Division. I am pleased to say that with those problems some way behind us the division has met twice this year and enjoyed two productive and informative meetings. Non CFSMA members eligible for membership were invited and some new members have been recruited as a result. It would be remiss of me not to express my sincere thanks to Paul Rowden, Jim Golding and Barbara Binding for their support and efforts in ensuring this resurgence of the Southern Division. Our West South West Division had not met since June 2009 and possibly due to the merger of Plymouth Society with Co-operative Group, it had also become inactive. This is a great shame since having read the minutes of that last meeting held, it is obvious the division had much to contribute to the Association with some strong opinions and lively debate having taken place. I'm pleased to report that within the past three weeks, the division has met, and better still; the Division has agreed to meet again in November for their AGM. I hope that with the support of the National Executive, NACO and of course the divisional members themselves, they will continue to meet and contribute to the Association in as effective a manner as they have done in recent years.
- As with any organisation, the future of CFSMA lies in the hands of the National Executive, but further ahead and more importantly - it lies in the hands of our new members and our future members. It is incumbent on each CFSMA member to add strength to the organisation by encouraging their fellow managers who aren't members of NACO or CFSMA to join and enjoy the benefits both organisations have to offer, and further to encourage **active** participation in the affairs of the

Association. To this end, together with the National Executive, we have produced a document which introduces CFSMA and outlines the various Roles and Responsibilities. It is hoped that this will serve as an aid to encourage membership and also as a clear explanation of what each role within the Association involves. This will be circulated to members electronically ahead of the November Divisional AGMs in the hope that members will feel comfortable putting themselves forward for any active positions available either at Divisional or National level. In order to stimulate new membership there has to be a clearly identifiable benefit to joining and as I alluded to previously, the key benefit of this organisation has to be that of personal development. Whilst we need to work hard to ensure that CFSMA remains the highly regarded organisation it has been for many years, this does not mean we have to dig our heels in. It is essential we are able to embrace whatever change is necessary to reflect the needs of our members and the environment around us – including our employing Societies. It is fair to expect that in the wake of a co-operative resurgence in general terms, our competitors will be looking to react, and since such reactions will not be ethically guided, as managers we need to position ourselves to lead our people in ensuring our co-operative difference is clear for all to see. I believe strongly that if a group of managers is capable of achieving this, that group of managers is the CFSMA membership.

Since this conference marks the end of my year in office, I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt thanks to a number of people and organisations at this appropriate moment:

- Firstly, to Ursula and Barbara who today represent my employing Society Lincolnshire Co-operative. I am most grateful for the support given to me by the Society in serving my term in office. Lincolnshire Co-operative is always a great place to be, but this year in particular really has been special, so I thank you most sincerely.
- To our Sponsors and Exhibitors. I am conscious that you are called on constantly to support numerous organisations by sponsoring and exhibiting. Your support is not taken for granted and is greatly appreciated especially in these challenging times. Please also be assured that besides appreciating your support and generosity, your company and friendship is equally valued and appreciated, and I know I speak for all the membership when I say that. I hope our members and delegates will show their appreciation to you by taking time to visit your stands throughout the course of conference. Further, I hope you all enjoy your time with CFSMA this weekend – you are all most welcome.
- To Neil and the team at NACO Office. I am most grateful for their support which has always been available, and for the sound advice given whenever it has been needed. I want to pay particular tribute to Nicola Schofield for the tireless effort she put in to organising our conference before the dreadful events of last weekend unfolded. Since that moment and under difficult circumstances, the whole of the NACO team

has pulled together and done sterling work to ensure that insofar as is possible, there was continuity. Special thanks to Lynne Higginbottom for standing in for Nic.

- To the National Executive for their support. Whilst I still have a year to serve as Immediate Past President, now is a good time to say how much I have enjoyed working with the National Executive. I have made some great friends since becoming Midland Division representative and scaling to the dizzy heights of Presidency.
- To the conference team led superbly by Mark Adams. It almost seems a shame that conference is over in two days when so much time and hard work has gone into its planning. I'm extremely fortunate to have such a competent team to ensure our conference goes as planned and I hope you will all in the course of the weekend enjoy the fruits of their labours.
- To my long suffering family. With three children and two dogs, babysitting for weekends at a time whilst Helen and I have attended conferences is quite some ask. My parents, who will be joining us tomorrow evening, have obliged on every occasion we have asked, and so Helen and I are indebted to them for everything they have done for us in the past year.
- Finally to my manager and wife Helen – I have thoroughly enjoyed the weekends away with you (and without the kids) – the peace and quiet was nice whilst it lasted wasn't it! Since there's little else to do after this weekend, I suppose we might as well move house or something!

Ladies and Gentlemen, do enjoy the conference, and many thanks for listening to me.