



3<sup>rd</sup> May 2016

## CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CoM AGM 2016

### *The Companions – Mercy in Action 2016*

Welcome to our 2016 AGM (in Lourdes). Please find below my Chairman's report to the AGM, providing a round up of the past year's work, an update on notable recent events and activities, and details of some of our exciting plans for the coming year.

#### **Thank You**

Firstly, thank you one and all for all your efforts, work and prayers over the year 2015/16. It has been another great year for the CoM, with more members, more projects, more work, and more of your generosity and love delivered to the poor, elderly and marginalized than ever before.

Particular thanks if I may to the Officers of the CoM and our Secretary, and to our regional leaders who have worked tirelessly over the last year. Special thanks also to our retiring Treasurer, Maggie, for her many years of unstinting and devoted service. The CoM owes her a huge debt of gratitude for all her efforts, ensuring that our finances were properly and reliably run and reported.

In the same breath though I am delighted to welcome as Maggie's successor Charles James KoM. Thank you both for working together on a smooth handover, to Maggie for remaining in the wings to help as necessary and to Charles for diligently taking up this task.

#### **Round Up of the Year**

We have had many highlights, but if I may extract from our Newsletters a few of the major successes of the year:-

- The Lincoln's Inn CoM Soup Run, costs **£5,612** to provide over 3,000 EAT meals, fruit, water and kit-kats off our (hired) van in the North East corner of LIF to queues of hungry and homeless (70+ per week) every Monday rain or shine.

- Companions Café, London **£10,393**, continuing unfailingly every Thursday to provide soup and sandwich meals, companionship and care to 60+ homeless or marginalised guests (that is 3000+ meals over the last year) as well as dozens of sleeping bags, rucksacks, clothing, socks and even the odd pair of shoes
- The Colchester Café, spend **£1,460**, thanks to Georgie, Adrian Rowley, and our devoted group of CoM helpers more than another 500 meals over the last year plus still more wonderful care and companionship to the local homeless,
- BrumComs, hosting on Saturday 06 June 2015 the Lord-Lieutenant of West Midlands, Paul Sabapathy, at our Newman Pilgrimage at the Birmingham Oratory followed by lunch - spiritual and temporal refreshment all round.
- Fantastic Companions Christmas Parcels, **£8,184**, to supply pack and distribute an amazing 500 Christmas parcels with warm clothing, wash things, even some presents to the homeless on the streets of London, Glasgow, Oxford, and Colchester. Not to mention a fabulous Christmas Party, still spoken about by our guests.
- Our brilliant Oxford Uni Companions **£5,323** converting college showers, and running Saturday Open House for the homeless in Oxford providing yet more meals and supplies, with hundreds of freshers signed up to help.
- An incredible **£18,728** in aid to the OSJCT Homes, helping to fund their hugely enjoyable Easter and Christmas entertainments, garden projects and Home improvements all as detailed in our quarterly newsletters throughout the year.
- Some wonderful Northumberland and London Tea Parties for the elderly, **£1,000** approx. lots of fun for our elderly guests in each locality (including RHC In-pensioners and St.Wilfrid's residents in London) from bingo to great sing-a-longs.
- Our impressive response to the Refugee Crisis, **£3145** raised from our migrant appeal, **£5,000** sent to the Lebanese Association to support their work, thousands more to the Holy Family Hospital, and of course our own volunteers working in a Berlin reception centre at Christmas time (remember the touching piece in our Winter newsletter)

All figures covering the period to year end 31/12/15, but nonetheless capturing our major and regular spend in the year preceding this AGM. Its a hugely impressive list, without even including many other activities, your attendance in Lourdes for one, or the recent events below, thank you again for all your efforts.

### **Recent Events**

In addition Companions Day on 11 February 2016 and the accompanying mailshot including our CoM wristbands was well supported and popular (less so perhaps, with

those who helped with the packing and sending, and with a few recipients who had to pay postage to collect). As a recruitment drive its impact will take time to work out, but in terms of connecting with the existing membership and profile raising its effect appears generally to have been positive.

Further, following on from the success of our Christmas activities, Companions were out in force over Easter. London CoM held another successful tea party for the elderly on Wednesday 23 March 2016, at Brompton Oratory's St. Joseph's hall (see below). Our next is on 29 June 2016, when through contacts with local Age Concern, Social Services and Parishes we hope to have even more elderly guests.



On 24 March 2016 Companions in Gloucestershire led by Sarah Cornell supported the combined party for all OSJCT homes of the county, with the CoM providing funding for this in the sum of £800. Indeed in order to secure best use of our funds, with Easter coming so soon after our Christmas donations, we have supported the county wide parties in preference to any separate events or activities, which has been very well received.

The Birmingham reunion, wonderfully organized as always by James Arbuthnot and others, a few weeks ago again saw a good turnout of Companions. These included our very own Ann Tomlinson and many of our BrummCom ladies, helping and joining in the fun.

### **CoM & OSJCT Care Homes 'Working together'**

As well as supporting the Easter tea parties, efforts continue to expand our involvement and extent of volunteering in the Homes. Bit by bit progress is being made, thanks very much to the efforts of Sarah C and the G&W CoM. With the recent departure of Lee Palmer, who was head of volunteering at OSJCT, and working closely with Sarah and supporting our efforts to develop our work in the Homes, we are redoubling our efforts with the County and Home specific activity managers, to forge closer links.

Meanwhile brilliantly the Oxford U CoM are also visiting Isis House (one of the Order's care homes in Oxford) and run their cafe on Monday afternoons (which they set up last year). They have also started a new cafe at the Marston Rd home and pairs of volunteers go on 'home visits' to housebound and elderly parishioners.

Another great step is that there seems to be an increased take up of Lourdes places with residents from the Homes. We have been trying to advance this for some time, so that the introductions made in Lourdes can be followed through on our return to the UK, and it is wonderful to see this happening. Also a big date on the Homes front is 22 July 2016, for the celebration of the founding 35 years ago of St. Wilfred's OSJCT Home, Arundel. Jamie, Sean and SE CoM are on the case.

### **Other News form the Regions**

In Glasgow though the Companions' Centre is struggling, not least because the Salvation Army has now built a multi-million pound building right beside us that duplicates a lot of our work. Whilst, still looking at the possibilities, particularly with a view to using the Centre to help refugees or something similar, it seems increasingly likely, therefore, that we will have to close and move on to other projects.

On that note, in particular there seems to be real potential to develop an Edinburgh University CoM, and whilst Liam is doing a sterling job, we are of course looking to expand our student leadership and numbers along the same lines as in Oxford. It would be great if we could replicate their trail blazing achievements.

Likewise in Cambridge, after our launch meeting on Sunday 31 January 2016, a small group of students headed by Johanna Roessner (who has worked with the Order in Austria), supported by tutor Mathew Schellborn, are trying to establish a CU CoM, starting with visits to a local care home, and we are working on getting that critical mass as in Oxford.

Another exciting piece of news from the Regions is that the Archbishop of Birmingham has agreed to officiate at this year's Newman Pilgrimage on Saturday 06 June 2016 at the Birmingham Oratory. So we will need to plan for a big attendance of both Order and CoM for this important event, including the lunch.

### **Our Work with the Homeless**

As for our work with Our Lords the Poor, I am delighted to say that our operations continued unabated over the Easter period. The take up in Mondays at LIF is at least 80 with hundreds of sandwiches, fruit and water being distributed each week. All credit to Patrick Knollys and his teams.

On Thursdays also demand only increases, matched happily with continued growth in our volunteer numbers. We consistently have some 60+ guests with 20+ helpers. We are also handing out weekly at least half a dozen sleeping bags, and have branched out to provide rucksacks, shoes and clothing. All credit here to Anthony, Richard, Jude, Bob, Raphael, Carlos, Victoria, Maggie, Kate, Mary, Albert, ..... and the many others who attend almost every week. Well done also on the recent terrific St.Patrick's Day party, and Easter Party!

In Colchester as mentioned above Georgie and Adrian and the team are also now a regular and popular fixture, providing lunch on Wednesdays for a dozen plus guests. Well done to them also for keeping going over Easter and each week.

Whilst Oxford reports that over the course of last term we had 100 different people come and volunteer and as a result were able to start another lunchtime sandwich run. Further, that over Easter in collaboration with the Oxford Oratory they held a special Easter lunch, serving roast lamb and Easter eggs, and were able to keep the weekly soup runs going, as well as the Saturday shower project which is now busier than ever (due it seems to local cuts in social services).

### **Safeguarding**

Good progress is being made in the drafting of a new revised and expanded Safeguarding Policy that will be acceptable to and signed by all of BASMOM, CoM and the OMV. Work is now in hand also to draft allied confidentiality and data protection policies that again can be signed off by each of the above.

We are continuing to improve I hope our practice on the ground also, learning from any events and developing the advice being given to volunteers. For example, we have recently improved advice being given to Monday helpers, warning them to be vigilant and in so far as possible to work in pairs and stay close at hand to the van.

### **Overseas**

On the international front, I am pleased to say that our latest donation (of £800) was finally (on New Year's day) received in Bethlehem, after much toing and froing with Western Union. This was been distributed meticulously amongst needy Christian families as before, and a full report will be available for the next newsletter.

This is our contribution to support the increasingly threatened Christian communities in this part of the world, and continues the work of Fr. Elvin who established this initiative. Detailed feedback on our £5,000 donation to the Lebanese Association for their work in helping with the refugee crisis is also being sought.

In Somalia, you will recall that having got to an 80% completion of the renovation of the Merka hospital, we had to suspend the project because fighting returned to the city. In the circumstances we decided instead to redirect the balance of funds and all the equipment, happily still held in Mogadishu) to the renovation of the hospital in Brava, Somalia, a Caritas-Italy project. Sam is currently in negotiation with the African Union force commander to see if they will ship the equipment from Mogadishu to Brava free of charge to complete on this project.

### **New 'Capital' Projects**

Firstly, I should mention our plan to replicate in London the very successful Brussels shower project (thanks to Mark B for joining me in October on a visit to Brussels to see the project in action). We have the full support of Fr Mark at the Ordinariate church, off Regents Street, who is confident the architects will find the space for 3 shower units as part of the basement refurbishment, which should be just enough for our purposes.

Having canvassed London volunteers there appears to be a good level of support for the project, and on this basis it is proposed we commit to say £15,000 or even £20,000 towards this.

Additionally, we are invited to become involved in the BASMOM/Nehemiah Project joint venture currently the subject of discussion with the Bishops' Conference of E&W. This is a highly effective residential project for the reintegration of young offenders, each committed to staying away from drugs and to turning their lives around. Potentially Companions could play a key role in this as mentors, to assist in the rehabilitation process.

The project is looking for premises, and this may present a real opportunity for us, to secure premises that might also double as a hostel for homeless and include additional shower provision. Obviously, though, we would not go it alone on a development of this kind, but would require the involvement of a major donor or the support of say the Global Fund, as well no doubt as fund raising ourselves (see the budget below). All exciting stuff!

### **The Formal Business**

Under this heading I should firstly confirm that we are now properly part of the newly formed limited liability charitable corporation that is BASMOM. As resolved at last year's AGM, therefore, our Rules now comprise (and are essentially replicated) by the Terms of Reference (attached).

In accordance with the ToR the formal business of the AGM comprises the following matters, upon which a vote will be taken as appropriate:

- 1) Review of the annual subscription (£60 ppa, £10 student and concession). Strictly this now forms part of the budget approval (see below), but is raised as a separate item to gauge opinion. It is not proposed that this should change. We want to encourage as many Companions as possible. It remains a significant amount for some, and obviously those who can give more can and many do.
- 2) Removal of the Lourdes levy. Presently, by concession Companions attending Lourdes as hotel pilgrims are not obliged to pay the Lourdes levy of £50 to register for the pilgrimage. Obviously most CoM do not benefit from this, and many who attend in fact pay the levy in any event. The result is a major administrative headache for the Hospitaller in working out what refund is due from the CoM and of course an unhelpful loss of funds to us. This measure was introduced when the CoM were first founded a few years ago now as an initial incentive to members, it is submitted that it has served its purpose and now would be an appropriate time to consign it to the past, particularly as we look forward to the exciting plans above, all of which will need as many pennies as we can raise.
- 3) Budget approval. A proposed budget is attached. This has been initially accepted by the CoM Council as part of the new financial controls under the ToR, but any comments are very welcome. It is based as will be seen largely on historic expenditure. It will be noted that spend is some £10k greater than projected income. This is thought acceptable for our first budget, both because (a) the income projection is set lower than previous years, a cautious view being taken of gift income and whether it will be repeated, and (b) for the moment at least we have the comfort of a current account balance of some £30,000.
- 4) Election of 6 elected council members. It is not proposed at this stage to change the membership of the CoM Council comprising as it does Peter Loyd as a founding member, and most of our regional leaders (Sarah, Adrian, Georgie, Jamie and Duncan). I hope that all Companions will join with me in endorsing their fantastic efforts by approving their continued membership of our Council.

### **Key Dates**

**And some key dates....**

<b>11 May 2016</b>	<b>Northumberland Tea Party (and every 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month)</b>
<b>14 May 2016</b>	<b>Oxford Garden Party</b>
<b>04 June 2016</b>	<b>Birmingham Newman Pilgrimage</b>
<b>29 June 2016</b>	<b>London CoM Oratory Tea Party</b>

22 July 2016

St. Wilfred's Anniversary Celebration 2-4pm

07 December 2016

Carol Service 7.30pm (for the diary!)

See also the Scotland dates on the website. And every Monday and Thursday evening in London, Wednesday lunchtime in Colchester, Saturday morning in Oxford in term time and every day in the Care Homes!

**AND FINALLY ONCE AGAIN**  
**Thank you for all your support and prayers**

Yours as ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Letman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul Letman  
CHAIR CoM