



February 2018

WINTER 2018 NEWSLETTER

The Companions – Fighting Isolation 2018

Dear Companion,

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter. 2018 promises to be another great year for the CoM, continuing our extensive work with the homeless and poor, working in our OSJCT (and other) Care Homes and expanding our efforts around the country and even abroad – Fighting Isolation on all fronts!

Thank you for all your great support and for helping us to spread the word and get ever more people involved in what we do; to which end do please see the video link below (under Companions Day).

Christmas Round-Up

First, let me begin with a quick round-up on Christmas. I am pleased to report that our Christmas plans went extremely well, thanks to many Companions and volunteers we managed the following (and much else besides):-

- Another wonderful *London tea party* on 29/11 for RHC and St. Wilfrid's, thanks to Helena & Katrin and the team (the next one is coming up on 7/2/18)
- Our wonderful *Carol Service* (thanks to Fr. David and all at St. James's) beautifully sung by St.J's Choir once again, and brilliantly well attended after party raising in the order of £4k
- A hugely successful offering for all our *Homeless with 600 parcels* distributed nationally, inc. Colchester, Cirencester, Cambridge, London, Oxford, St. Andrews, Dundee, Aberdeen and Edinburgh.
- *Fantastic Christmas parties for the Homeless* in London (it was so wonderful, thank you Kate and everybody who helped), Oxford, Colchester, and with Signpost in Cirencester.
- Our *Monday soup runs, Wednesday Breakfast Club and Thursday Soup Kitchen* right up to Christmas (all now in full swing again into 2018).

Our partnership with *Primark* also got off to a good start with brand new clothing and kit provided around the country. Happily, they are very keen to continue to support us through the year. And we thank them very much for that.

All told it was a fabulous effort. The London Christmas party for the Homeless really captured the spirit of Christmas (see below!), there was a real sense of delight, sharing and love as our guests opened their parcels, joined in the singing and tucked into the pudding, thanks to Kate and an army of cheerful Companions. Already looking forward to next Christmas!



OSJCT Care Homes & Elderly

Christmas also proved a great opportunity for us to support the OSJCT Homes. Companions helping at the county parties, and a dozen beautiful cribs donated to different homes; see the photos below of the presentations to the Buckland and Seymour Homes in Wiltshire.



We are now ready to launch our planned initiative to get more Companions and other volunteers (would-be Companions) into the OSJCT homes as part of our 2018 Fighting Isolation campaign. Thanks to Philippa we have now printed our small poster/handbill. With assistance from Max and Sarah we will start by targeting parishes close to 3 specific Homes in Wiltshire that are short of volunteers.

In London we have been invited to increase our involvement with St. Wilfrid's, and our next tea party at the Oratory is from 2pm on 7/2/18. Our bridge club continues on Monday afternoons every week as well (contact London.companions@gamil.com). In Cambridge we are getting going with a local care home, visiting those residents most in need (contact Mathew).

Funding

Just a word on funding, I am delighted to say that we have received a number of significant donations recently, both in terms of money and the 30 sleeping bags received at St. James's. This is fabulous news for us and will enable us to continue with our existing projects and expand our work. Thank you very much indeed to all those concerned. We are extremely grateful to all our donors and all our subscribers without whom we could not operate.

Upcoming Events

Companions Day: you should have received our usual call to prayer and to recruit new Companions. If not and just in case the said missive is attached to this newsletter. In preparation the CoM council approved production of our 2018 wristband, this year to be black with white print and keeping with our 'Fighting Isolation -2018' mission statement. These will be available shortly (thanks to Patrick) but supplies are limited so get your requests in early.

Additionally, we have produced (thanks entirely to Hannah Palmer) a short video presentation <https://vimeo.com/242711730> on our work with the homeless in London (see the link below), which can be viewed and shared...it provides a great snapshot of what we do!

The International Holiday Camp 2018: the CoM are to be responsible for the transport. We are liaising with the OMV to prepare our launch in February to engage Companions for specific tasks. Our involvement is being coordinated primarily by Mathew Doran. If you would like to know more then do contact me (chair.companions@gmail.com).

Nehemiah: This fantastic project in South London concerned with the rehabilitation of drug users (particularly ex-offenders), has managed after much effort to secure new premises, so that roles for Companions should now develop. I have promised a list of 20 women volunteers to add to the men already nominated, if you would like to put your name forward do let me know. I have also agreed to mention the project each Thursday to encourage participation.

St. Rose Holiday Camp: Happily with our injection of funds we have been able to continue with our support for this annual holiday to the Calvert Trust, Exmoor for the severely disabled youngsters at the school. There can be no doubt that this is a wonderful and important project, and without our support in providing 50% funding it is almost certain that it would not take place.

Overseas we are continuing our support of the Christian Families in Palestine, Robert Atwater is closely involved, and can provide further detail.

Plans

We are working to find successors for some of our Regional leaders who have been in post for some years and deserve a break, as well as new members for the CoM Council, which all needs to be planned for our AGM in Lourdes. I am keen also to appoint a Communications Officer, new Safeguarding Officer, OSJCT liaison, and lead for the IHC (see above) – please email me if you are interested (or would like to nominate your best friend).

Brainstorming – we are also looking at other regions and universities e.g Edinburgh, and new projects such as a charity shop and even providing accommodation, at least say at Christmas or Easter. Greater involvement in Lebanon, and/or our own mini-pilgrimage to Compostella, Rome, Kevelar or the Holy Land.

More immediately, Cambridge University Companions are planning to launch a specific fundraiser to provide a CoM Defibrillator in Cambridge City centre (cost £3k), and we are examining whether this can be rolled out on a wider scale (Walsingham, London, Oxford.. every City, town and village in the UK ... well, may be not quite yet).

Meanwhile the International Orders of St. John Committee in London are organising a dinner on 23 February 2018 to support our work with the homeless, Nicolas Reuttner is helping coordinate and can give you the detail if you would like to attend.

Regional Updates:-

London (Contact Kate McKenzie (Thursday Café), Patrick Knollys (Monday Soup Run), Helena Letman (Wednesday Breakfast Club)

After all the wonderful efforts over Christmas, Kate reports that things continue to be busy with around 80 - 95 guests visiting on a Thursday evening. Food comes from 15 different outlets throughout the area - all picked up by volunteers. We have a fabulous group of volunteers of all ages who come each week to chat to the guests (45 of them last week, maybe another evening project Ed.?). The Burns Night celebrations and mountains of Haggis was a great hit!

We offer sleeping bags, rucksacks and a variety of different items of clothing and toiletries including winter kit from long-johns to coats. Last week, the NHS mobile unit visited enabling guests to have a Chest X-ray and instant treatment. We have also had an amazing team of hairdressers visit, delivering some 30 haircuts for our guests, and the chiropodist is booked to come again soon.

It is fantastic that our London Facebook page (Companions of Malta – London) is followed by 206 people, with some posts reaching 700-800 people. This enables us to appeal effectively for support when most needed. Certainly, all donations are greatly welcome - books for the soup kitchen library, shoes, belts, trousers and shirts - amongst other things.

Our next Tea Party at the Oratory (for our guests from St. Wilfrid's and the Royal Hospital) is on Wednesday 07 February 2018. We also run a weekly bridge club for residents at a Care Home in Battersea, contact London.companions@gmail.com or Helena on 07798 558109 for details of these activities.

Birmingham & West Midlands: Adrian de Redman [blue.candle2@hotmail.com – 07799 188 628]

Brumcoms will be supporting the Birmingham Lourdes Reunion at Church of the Oratory, Hagley Road, Birmingham, B16 8UE on Saturday 24 February 2018 and it would be great if as many of us as possible could attend Mass and lend a hand with the lunch and raffle etc. afterwards. (Charles de Rohan is organising charles.derohan@gmail.com)

As always, also our BrumComs continue with their monthly decade of the Rosary for the good of the Order and Companions after the 11.00am Pilgrims Mass at the Birmingham Oratory (*on the first Saturday of each month*). All are welcome, so if you are in the area do get along if you can. Please contact Adrian if you need help getting there.

Richard Fynes continues with his efforts on our behalf in Leicester, and would also be keen to hear from you if you are local.

Gloucestershire & Wiltshire: Max Rumney [rumney@mail.com] (and Sarah Cornell still helping with Gloucestershire– 07817 499 829)

Companions helped at the Christmas Party in Gloucester for residents of the OSJ homes and Angela Jones took her grandchildren to provide an excellent concert at Paternoster House.

Paternoster House is also fortunate to have regular visits from Companions. Sue Rooker is always found on a Tuesday helping with the very popular bingo session while Margaret Macdonald and Louise Smail are doing a fantastic job with the art class. Meanwhile Angela Jones is a regular visitor to those that are unable to take part in activities and are confined to their rooms.



In addition, Anna Kate Fuller runs her after school French Club each Wednesday. Residents enjoy the singing and remembering their French vocab! Everyone loves seeing the kids on a regular basis (see picture above). Wonderfully Anna also took her holiday club to the new Lakes Care Centre where residents assisted the young children with their craft and cooking.

Meanwhile the Companions are continuing their commitment on a Monday night to work with Signpost in Cirencester, when about 40 or 50 people of all ages gather for a hot meal and support. Thank you to Swindon Branch of PRIMARK. This month they have continued their support by generously giving us some thermal long johns and vests for women, which will be well received in the coming weeks.

The Northern Marches: Fred Wyrley-Birch
f.wyrleybirch@andersonandgarland.com – 07790 132 834

Northumberland continue to hold their highly successful tea parties and had a brilliant Christmas doo. Thank you especially to Alice for all her work in organising these, and thanks to everyone who devotes their Wednesday afternoons to help. This is a real highlight for our guests, with a sing-along, a very jolly game of bingo and other attractions.

This is such a wonderful project, and has inspired the CoM in London to do the same. It is something we could roll out in every part of the country, so if you want to have a go in your area please do give me, or Helena (07798 558109) or Alice a call.

Scotland [liam@liamdevlin.co.uk – 07968 119 895] and **Marc Morris** [marc_morris@outlook.com - 07961 206436]

Companions activities continued apace in St Andrews over the Martinmas semester, aided by an excellent contingent of incoming undergraduates. Our newly weekly Soup Kitchen project in Dundee has been ably led by Andrew Kelly assisted by our growing team of volunteers. It has also been wonderful to have several members of the Order, and their family members, come up to work with students on the project.

In St Andrews itself, Companions helped organize and serve a pre-Christmas tea party for the elderly and homebound of the town. The event concluded with impromptu entertainment from incoming President Henry Kirk on the piano. Towards the end of the semester Companions visited locations across Fife, and Perth and Dundee, to distribute Christmas parcels.

Several new projects are in the pipeline for the year ahead, please do let us know if you can contribute.

Oxford University CoM: Hamish Hiscock (Hamish.hiscock@lmh.ox.ac.uk)

Since the last update [Hamish writes], we held our annual Christmas lunch which was a fantastic event with 40 guests all treated to a carol-accompanied three course Christmas dinner. There was a wonderful atmosphere and we're very much looking forward to repeating the occasion with our Easter lunch.

Elsewhere, our term time activities are back up and running: a total of 12 weekly activities in all including homeless outreach, Companions Cafes and our museum project for children and young adults with special educational needs. Even in the dreary winter months, volunteers are still very generous with their time, and it seems the enthusiasm in Oxford to help with the Companions' work is undiminished.'

Many thanks to Hamish, Sina and all the OU CoM for their amazing efforts (including keeping the accounts). Do encourage everyone you know at Oxford to sign up and help.

South East: Jamie O'Meara [jamie.omeara@btinternet.com – 07771 566 100]

Having re-established our relationship with St. Wilfrid's OSJCT Home, Arundel, after various changes in personnel, we would very much hope to continue to support them. Unfortunately, we lack critical mass in the SE but if you can help Jamie and Sean Armstrong, please do be in touch with them direct. In particular it would be great to arrange visits, offer lifts to Mass, and get involved in the many activities at the home. Certainly, we will be aiming to take an active part in the Advent and Christmas celebrations when they come.

South West: Duncan McKechnie, [dajmck@tiscali.co.uk- 07990 594 441]

Duncan reports that the St. Rose School, holiday camp visit to the Calvert Trust, Exmoor was again a huge success and much appreciated. Jackie, the principal of St. Rose wrote:

*'.. a great big thank you for supporting us once again ,what a fantastic trip it was !
We all really do appreciate your support! Thank you.'*

The CoM Council at its last meeting on 18 July 2017 resolved to continue our support for this annual trip, and I hope you approve. These severely disabled youngsters would simply not get this opportunity without you.

East Anglia: Georgie Holt-Evans (georgie@holtevans.plus.com)

At Christmas we entertained 27 guests and served them roast turkey, roast potatoes, peas, carrots and mince pies and cream for pudding. They were also given all the wonderful Primark goodie bags which were extremely well received. Our wonderful volunteers (now almost too many to mention!) mingled and sat with them and a good time was had by all.



Last week (January 3) saw the first lunch of the New Year with a visit from the local Colchester MP, Will Quince (pictured here with Mark and Paul). He stayed for a good half an hour chatting to everyone in a wonderfully relaxed way.



You are welcome to come along and join the group any Wednesday lunchtime if you can, just drop Georgie a line.

Cambridge University CoM, Mathew Schellhorn (mts21@cam.ac.uk)

The recent Companions' event in Cambridge on 21/1/18 was a great success. Reflections from Prof Brett and Fr Aidan Nichols op were most stimulating. The afternoon saw a soup run and the dinner at Jesus College was most convivial.

Danielle, the CU CoM Secretary, gave a brilliant presentation on CPR during the dinner (saving the guests the VAT); we will be offering this training to Companions in London and we hope elsewhere in the coming months. In all, we raised £200 for the Companions.

We have started volunteering at Addenbrooke's Hospital and we are currently finalizing plans to launch the CU CoM care home visiting scheme. Do get in touch if this is your area.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding remains absolutely central to everything we do. The unified safeguarding policy adopted last year continues to be our governing document. In addition, I am delighted to announce that after much hard work (and with grateful acknowledgments to the efforts of the OMV) the final suite of policies and protocols to accompany the same are now completed and approved by BASMOM and will be duly posted on our website forthwith.

Given the current developments in data protection law and procedure, however, the Data Protection policy will remain under review and will be revisited in line with the commencement of the new legislation at the end of May.

In addition, we now have a simple volunteer registration form to meet safeguarding guidance, to be completed by those attending our many activities involving vulnerable adults.

Overseas

I am pleased to say that we are maintaining our support for poor Christian families in Bethlehem. 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.

Robert Atwater has visited the project a number of times now and has been extremely moved by the plight of these families. He is full of praise for Anton Mousallam who heads this up locally, and who is punctilious in providing details of the families helped and the destination of our grants. In the light of this we have decided to continue our support for this work.

We have also been able to continue our support for the Order's work generally for the relief of the refugee crisis, and the work of the Order in Lebanon through our support for the Holy Family Hospital (£1,000 donated from the proceeds of our Christmas Carols) and the Lebanon Camp.

Website

We are continuing to update our website: <http://orderofmalta.org.uk/companions>

If you would like to assist I can be reached as you know on 07730 070403 or at chair.companions@gmail.com or via Annie, our uber-efficient secretary on secretary.companions@gmail.com.

KEY DATES

07 February 2018	Oratory Tea Party, contact Helena on 07798 558109
11 February 2018	Companions Day (everywhere)
23 February 2018	Johanniter Dinner (in aid of CoM Homeless Projects)
24 February 2018	Birmingham Lourdes Reunion, contact Adrian
04-10 May 2018	Lourdes Pilgrimage (inc our AGM)

Many thanks and God bless,



Paul Letman
CHAIR CoM