31 July 2016

Dear Companion,

SUMMER 2016 NEWSLETTER

The Companions – Mercy in Action 2016

It may seem only a few moments ago since my Annual Report in May, but there's been so much going on, I just wanted to catch you before the Summer holidays for a quick update.

Firstly, Lourdes. We had another great turnout on the pilgrimage, complete with a successful AGM and reception on the Tuesday, and our usual dinner afterwards at the Terrace (thanks to one very generous donor). In fact there were a record number of Companions present, particularly from the Accueil, which was fantastic. So sorry if you couldn't make it this year, but who knows what 2017 may bring?

In terms of the formal business of the AGM, the annual report was presented and accounts approved. In particular we welcomed Charles James as our Treasurer with special thanks again to Maggie for all she's done for us. The elected council members were unanimously reappointed, the current subscription maintained (with thanks), the budget (attached again for your information) approved and the Lourdes levy abolished, which will be a great boon to our finances.

Since then Companions have been very busy, as the photos (above) of our London Oratory Tea Party on 29 June show – I hope you enjoy the rest below, or at least the photos. Do spot the Dates for Your Diary at the end. God Bless!

Safeguarding

I should report also that we have just managed to finalize the unified policy, for use by all elements of the Order, and we look forward to working closely with the new safeguarding coordinator appointed by BASMOM, in post from 01/08. At the time of writing I have had some difficulty ensuring we have the right data protection policy to accompany this, but expect to receive a template shortly from the OMV (with the permission of the original authors) so this can be approved and made available as soon as possible.

CoM Organization & Expansion

At our most recent (19/7) CoM Council meeting we took stock of how we are doing. We have strong regions, where fantastic leadership coincides with good numbers of Companions and ample volunteering opportunities. Some of our regions though do not have that critical mass of Companions, but nevertheless there are opportunities such as in the SE the upcoming St Wilfrid's celebration on 22/7 (2pm-4pm).

The Council are in no doubt, however, that perseverance is the key, and through our different activities, particularly 'recruiting sargeants' such as the Companions Café and Companions Day initiatives we are confident of continuing to increase our strength across the board, including the SE and SW and other regions such as Wales or Lincolnshire where currently we only have a limited presence.

We are also seeking to develop our relationship and cooperation with the OMV, so that we can support each other and to ensure the CoM is seen as the destination for older and ex-OMV as always envisaged.

To this end, Annie and I had a very positive meeting a few days ago with the Head of the OMV Eddie Pease and Victoria Schutzer-Weissmann of the OMV, and made concrete progress on this front. Indeed the OMV have agreed brilliantly to add University and current place of work to their registration, so that they will have the information base to direct their members and alumni to local CoM Leaders and projects. All good news.

So to the Regions:-

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

This year's Newman Pilgrimage on Saturday 04 June 2016 at the Birmingham Oratory attended by the Archbishop of Birmingham and representatives of Birmingham City Council was a great success – thank you Adrian. It was good to see so many Companions, including the ever-loyal Anne T and her mother. The formal lunch after

was also well attended and good fun. This was plainly a very important occasion for our BrumComs and we are most grateful to the Archbishop for his kind words at lunch, prayers and support for our work.

Other exciting news from the Region (which in Archdiocesan terms I now appreciate includes Oxford and our OU CoM, which the Archbishop was very pleased to hear about) is that our BrumComs are trying to expand their operations with a non-metropolitan group lead locally by Fr Anthony and James Arbuthnot, whilst another group is getting started near Leicester – good luck.

Meanwhile The 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***). You would very be welcome, so do get along if you can and of course contact Adrian if you need help getting there.

Gloucestershire & Wiltshire: Sarah Cornell [sarahcornell@sky.com – 07817 499 829]

So on to our spectacular G&W Com, who undoubtedly merit a newsletter all of their own. Its impossible to do justice to all that has been going on in a few lines. But to begin, since our last newsletter the G&W turned out in great numbers to support the

Gloucestershire Homes' Party – many thanks to Louise, Lavinia, Max, Pat, and Anna amongst others for their efforts.

We have also had a delightful and much appreciated visit for Athelstan residents to the house of local Companion Anna Longbridge (see left) , and of course many thanks too for another home visit to Sydenhams with Mass, hosted as in previous years so wonderfully by Julia & Peter Barton at the end of June.

Still further, Companions also supported the Wiltshire Homes' Party which was a great event (below) – not the best picture, sorry, but you get the impression!

These are just such perfect days for us to be involved in, even if you have to travel a bit to get there, do keep in touch with Sarah for the next (probably Christmas now, I will have the dates for you next time) so we can always be there in good numbers and help things go with a swing.

Since then, as Sarah write, 'wonderful Companions visiting, arranging tea parties, helping art classes, bingo, movement mornings, poetry sessions, gardening, taking in dogs and grandchildren. All low key things but giving pleasure to the residents in the OSJ Care Homes. Many are also helping the homeless and marginalised on a Monday night in Cirencester.

Next up on 17 August 2016 from 10.30am to noon is the coffee/bring and buy at Vanessa Arbuthnott's Bothy, beside her shop in Ashcroft Rd, Cirencester to raise money and awareness for the Signpost homeless project which we are helping.

Please bring anything that might sell particularly garden produce, cakes. All non-consumable unsold items will go to our OSJCT Paternoster Care Home for their next sale.

Then on 07 September 2016 from 11am to 1.45pm is the Harvest Festival at at Churchdown Community Centre, Churchdown. Gloucester. GL3 2J A. (plenty parking). Our help would be appreciated for this event which is for the PSJCT Gloucestershire Care Homes. Sarah will be going and hopes to take a car full, do let her know if you can make it.

Finally, for now that is, on 22 September 2016 from 2pm to 4pm is the OSJCT Gloucester Volunteer Appreciation, at Bishop's Cleeve Tythe Barn, for all OSJ Gloucestershire Volunteers. Companions are of course most welcome. The G&W are also at the forefront of our 'Cribs for Christmas' campaign, but more of that next time. Thank you again, and keep up the amazing work.

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

Georgie reports that our Colchester Soup Kitchen is going well thanks to Adrian and the team. It is good to hear that toasted sandwiches are back on the menu. Another great thing about this initiative is that it actually has some of the local homeless helping in the setting up and organization required for the Wednesday lunch. This gives our guests an enhanced stake in the project which is beneficial all round. As with all our projects we will be continuing in action over the Summer vacation period, but helper numbers can be down, so if you are able to lend a hand do be in touch.

To help any Wednesday lunchtime if you can, just give Georgie a call/drop her an email. Thanks again to Adrian Rowley, our devoted group of CoM helpers (Tina, Nick, Marie, Caidie (in her lunch hour), Chrissie and Miranda and others) for their invaluable support.

Scotland (and Dial a Ride): Liam Devlin [liam@liamdevlin.co.uk – 07968 119 895]

Many congratulations to Liam Hackett for his much deserved award at St.John's day, for all his efforts in supporting the work of the Companions in Scotland including his work assisting with the Companions Centre, up until its recent closure after our role in the neighbourhood was overtaken by the development of the new Salvation Army centre nearby. Thanks also to all those such as Caroline Paul who helped make the Centre such a valuable asset during its useful lifetime.

Yet happily as one door closes, another opens. Liam with the help of a revitalized group including David McClure, the Scottish Delegate, and Tim Hall, Ian Southward, Marc Morris and I hope others, are planning to expand our operations in the university towns of St.Andrews and Edinburgh. An inaugural drinks is being arranged

for the start of term at St.Andrews and Marc will be taking a lead in the university setting up a group there, and organizing the first projects focusing primarily on the care of the elderly. Please give them all the support you can.

Angus Hay has kindly provided photographs of two recent events which took place earlier in the summer.

On 5 June 2016, a day of recollection took place at Duns Castle:

On 12 June 2016, the St Margaret's Pilgrimage took place in Dunfermline:

Oxford University CoM: Simon Whittle [simon.whittle@stb.ox.ac.uk]

A heartfelt thank you to Simon Whittle for all his work as head of the OU CoM, as he steps down with the end of his studies at Oxford. Welcome though to Daniel Mullins, who is taking over. It was good to have them both as our guests at St.John's Day, and to hear from Dan at our recent council meeting.

OU CoM continues to be a shining example of what can be achieved with youth and enthusiasm, and is a fantastic model for our plans to establish ourselves in other Universities such as in Scotland and in Cambridge. A glance at the most recent Term Card from Oxford (attached hereto) really tells the story, and we look forward to the start of the new term and hopefully a strong contingent of new recruits.

If you know of anyone going up to Oxford in the Autumn do let them know about the CoM at the University and put them in touch with Dan.

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

Well done Jamie, Sean and all the team (see the star studded line up below) who supported the SE CoM in celebrating the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the St. Wilfrid's OSJCT Home, Arundel on 22 July 2016.

It was a marvellous effort by all concerned, and much appreciated by the residents and staff of the home alike. We were very pleased to help fund the celebrations with a £200 donation to home also. It is great that we have in this way been able to rekindle our good relationship with the home, after various changes in personnel, and hope that we can continue to support them over Christmas events as we have before. Jamie will keep us posted, but if you would like to know more about the opportunities for helping at the home do get in touch with him direct.

Please be in touch with Jamie, to help with his plans, including such care home visits. It would be terrific too if the South East were to lead the way with the Companions Car Club, building at least a small group of regulars in Arundel or elsewhere to get elderly residents to Mass of a Sunday or in the week.

The Northern Marches: Fred Wyrley-Birch [f.wyrley-birch@andersonandgarland.com – 07790 132 834]

Northumberland continue to hold their highly successful tea parties. Thank you especially to Roddy for hosting the last. There is always a great turn out of helpers, a bit of a sing-along, a very jolly game of bingo and other attractions. This is such a wonderful thing, and has of course inspired the CoM in London to do the same.

If you are tempted to do the same in your area, it is not difficult really. Do give Alice Murphy or me a call or drop us an email to discuss how it's done. Getting started is always the real challenge, but with a few simple preparations it can be done. Starting small is good and building from there. This takes a bit of time but its amazing how these things gain traction, slowly but surely.

London: Alice Hinds [aahind91@gmail.com 07528917226 & Patrick Knollys [9atrick@knollys.co.uk]

As you can see from the first page above, inspired by the achievements in Northumberland, Companions in London hosted another 'Oratory Tea Party' for the elderly and lonely on 29 June 2016. Again we had a good number of guests from St.Wilfrid's, Chelsea and from the RHC, with delicious sandwiches, cakes and again our wonderful pianist from the Oratory School. Thank you to everyone who helped

on the day. The challenge is to reach more lonely people, those that fall through the cracks as it were, please if you can help with this, be in touch with Laura on laurasavo2006@googlemail.com.

Of course in London our key work with the homeless has continued and is continuing throughout the Summer. On Thursdays, as well as food and companionship, our guests say we are the most cheery and welcoming soup kitchen around, we are typically handing out half a dozen rucksacks and a similar number of sleeping bags. **Thank you for making it possible through you subscriptions for us to keep on giving in this way each week to Our Lords the poor. As you know we have little if any overhead, and this is where our subscriptions are going, straight in to helping those on the street each week every week.**

The kit is all sourced competitively by Patrick our QM in Chief, and we absolutely do our best to make sure that it gets to the most deserving, and those who have not received them before. Some recipients are really good, like Maurice our elderly Frenchman who is still faithfully clutching the same now rather worn out bag we gave him last year, some are inevitably a bit more hopeless. But the reality is that kit gets stolen and lost on the streets so there is a limit to how exacting we can be. Moreover, of course there can be no doubt these are folk with very little, and Mercy is what we are about.

Also just a word about numbers over the Summer if I may. Whilst our numbers of guests go up, with the closure of other provides for the holidays, and although we had a great turnout of volunteers last Monday at LIF, we are fewer on Thursdays at the moment with people away. Do get in touch with Anthony or me (Thursday) or Patrick (Monday) if you can help out over this time. Thanks.

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 writes:

'.. 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.'

With your continued support we would hope to be in a position to repeat our our commitment to the school next year. These heavily disabled youngsters would simply not get this opportunity without you.

Further, as mentioned above under the Northern Marches, it may be that our tea parties for the lonely and elderly (now held in Northumberland and London) are the ideal scaleable project, where an area is not blessed with an OSJCT Home within easy reach. It only takes 2 or 3 Companions to get this off the ground, its good to start small, so if your tempted do get in touch with Duncan and give it a go in your region.

Overseas

On the international front, I am pleased to say that council reconfirmed our commitment to provide funds to continue to support poor Christian families in Bethlehem, as we have before. This as you know 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.

We will also seek 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 and the Lebanon Camp (from which a contingent of Companions has just returned, a fuller report to follow next time).

Future Projects

Our next venture I am pleased to report is our Breakfast Club plan for the Ordinariate Church, near Piccadilly. We had hoped to model this on the Brussels Shower Project, and provide multiple showers, but the costs of this (£25k for 2 additional showers) is we think prohibitive, so we mean to start up in the Autumn with just breakfast, laundry facilities and the one shower. Our 'market research' with our homeless indicates this would be very popular, but nonetheless we shall look elsewhere to pursue the shower project in London (possibly even St.James's).

We are also firmly committed to supporting the BASMOM 'Nehemiah' project, and are delighted to learn that this is making progress. The key is presumably accommodation, which may present other opportunities as well. We would also like to assist OMDAJ further if we can.

Meanwhile we are making good progress reorganizing ourselves in Scotland with a view to establishing a presence at St.Andrews (see under Scotland above) and are working on Cambridge University as well. As to Overseas projects, as noted above we are committed to continuing support for the Bethlehem Christian families, and the Order's work in Lebanon through our support for the Holy Family Hospital and the Lebanon Camp. I might also mention the Order's International Youth Camp that BASMOM is hosting in the UK in August 2018, another date for the diary.

Website

Our website content needs some rewriting and we need to make greater use of our posts system and social media – this is on the agenda. We'd rather not have to pay for this, so if anyone who has the kind of computer and social media skills necessary would like to volunteer, do phone me on 07730 070403, to be greeted with open arms.

Key Dates

Most immediately as referred to above on 17 August (10.30-12.00) G&W CoM are participating in a local coffee morning to help the homeless and marginalized locally in Cirencester.

We also have Walsingham coming up on 09-11 September – contemporaneous with the reprised Chairman's Cycle, which this year will happen in 2 legs, Westminster to Bishop's Stortford or thereabouts on the Friday evening, and on to Walsingham on the Saturday. Funds raised will go to our **Christmas Parcels Appeal 2016**.

Any one who would like to join me & Duncan for any part of the journey, please text CoM TdW with your name and number to 07730 0704030 and I'll get back to you.

The dates for our next London Tea Parties are: Wednesdays 12th October (Toni-Chelsea Pensioner's birthday), 11th January 2017 (Epiphany party with gifts), 22nd March 2017 (Easter party) and 28th June 2017 (Summer party).

AND..

07 December 2016 Carol Service 7.30pm, with our Christmas Party to follow.

Many thanks and God bless, see you in September,

Paul Letman
CHAIR CoM