



23 January 2015

Dear Companion,

### **WINTER 2015 NEWSLETTER**

'By their fruits ye shall know them' Mat 7:20

#### **CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE**

Huge heartfelt thanks to all Companions for supporting our Christmas activities. It was an amazing effort and surpassed previous years on every front:

- 400 Christmas parcels (100 more than last year) packed and distributed to the homeless and destitute across London (300), Oxford (50) and Gloucestershire (50), each bag brimming with essentials like wash kits, gloves and thermals (cost £7,393),
- The Big Christmas Party for the homeless at St.James's attended by over 60 of our regulars and not so regulars, with 30+ Companions to help - carols, a brilliant free raffle and Christmas crackers (for our guests) organised by Anthony (annual cost to date £2,567)
- Dozens of good quality sleeping bags handed out to those in most need on the street from the beginning of December 2014 and continuing now in 2015 (cost approx £21 each), with 3 more urgently requested for this week.
- The Northern Marches Christmas tea party for the elderly thanks to Alice Murphy and other Companions and members of the Order (total costs for all tea parties so far £195).
- Invaluable support provided to all the OSJCT care homes (in Lincolnshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire) for their Christmas parties and entertainments, Lee Palmer reports below (cost £11,245).
- The wonderful Carol Service at St.James's attended by 250+ Companions, OMV, Members of the Order and guests, enabling us to contribute £2,500 to the Holy Family Hospital, Bethlehem and raising £2,229 for our work with the homeless.



As always see below for more detail of all these fantastic things and much much more, both at home and overseas. Thank you for your continued support, I hope to see you all in 2015 ... and don't forget Companions Day on 11 February 2015!

### ***'Working Together'* – the CoM and OSJCT Care Homes**

We have been inundated with letters of thanks from the Care Homes for the Christmas funds we were able to provide, most letters including wonderful photos of their party, tree or decorations.

Val Taylor and the residents and staff at Appletrees, Grantham sent a whole newsletter, which begins 'Thanks to the generosity of our Companions, and the support of our residents families, staff and friends, we were able to dress our new home for Christmas ...'. Esther Thomas, manager at Brookside sent photos and a covering letter which asks 'Please pass on our grateful thanks to the Companions for their generous donation which helped to make [the Christmas Nativity event and carols] that bit more special for everyone...'

The response from the Care Homes has been so enthusiastic that Lee Palmer, head of volunteering at the OSJCT, has kindly compiled some of the messages and photos. The compilation accompanies this newsletter. I have also added some of the letters received. Do please look at these, to see just what a difference we can make.

To assist in the development of our involvement in the Care Homes, Lee has also prepared a graphic showing the geographic spread of Companions (green pins) and Homes (brown stars). As you will see, we do not entirely match, but there is ample cross over. It will certainly help you spot your nearest Care Home.

Further, to improve our skill sets and confidence to help in the Homes, we will be holding a series of entry level talks on dementia for Companions. These will take place over the next few months in each area where there are Homes, and Lee who is setting these up for us will announce the dates shortly. Out thanks to him for all the help he is giving in working with us, particularly with Sarah in Gloucestershire and Max in Oxford.

## **Safeguarding**

As you know Safeguarding is central to our every activity. I am pleased to say, therefore, that Paola Fudakowski is getting to grips with her role as 'Safeguarding Tsar' for the Companions, to ensure we are compliant with the Order Safeguarding Policy.

In particular, for every CoM activity she will ensure adequate DBS cover and an appropriate Risk Assessment is in place. She will report directly to the Chairman of the CoM and feed all information to BASMOM, which has oversight of all DBS data for itself, CoM and OMV.

If you regularly volunteer with the CoM or are involved in any activity for the CoM where you have or may have responsibility for vulnerable adults or children you must be DBS'd first. If you have any queries you can contact Paola on [telephone] or me.

## **Companions Day – 11 February 2015**

Coinciding with the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, please say a special prayer for the work of the CoM. There will be a special mailshot following this newsletter to include a new CoM poster and [..]. Please do ask you Parish Priest to say Mass for the intentions of the CoM on the day or as near as possible. You might also ask that the following words are included in the February or March Parish Bulletin:

*'The Companions of the Order of Malta: Our mission, 'To practise our faith, and to practise charity.' You are invited to join us in our work around the country helping the elderly, poor, and marginalised, from feeding the homeless to volunteering in the Orders many care homes. Just visit [www.orderofmalta.org.uk/companions/](http://www.orderofmalta.org.uk/companions/) or email [your regional leader].'*

If you can, when speaking to you Parish Priest or local Care Home manager, don't forget the Companions Car Club, and to enquire whether there are any elderly in the Parish or residents who need a lift to and from Mass.

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

Meetings continue after the 11.00am Pilgrims Mass at the Birmingham Oratory on the first Saturday of each month except August, you would very be welcome so do get along if you can and of course contact Adrian if you need help getting there.

As for diary dates, the Birmingham Lourdes Reunion is now set for 28 February 2015. To help with preparations for the Reunion, please call Adrian. Thanks as always to our lovely BrumCoMs, for their continuing efforts, masses, meetings and prayers.

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

I am pleased to confirm that as discussed at our AGM the Companions have been able to send a grant of £10,000 to our own Order of Malta Dial-a-Journey Ltd (OMDAJ), towards the cost of a new minibus for our door-to-door service.

Meanwhile the Companions Centre in Glasgow works on - with special thanks to Liam Hackett for his enthusiasm and sterling efforts. We have followed through on our plan for a Mother and Toddler play group. We have invested nearly £600 on improved furnishings and toys for the centre. The take up though has not continued quite as we would like it.

Indeed despite the valiant efforts of the Liams and Caroline and many others the current take up at the Centre is not quite as we would wish it. We are looking nonetheless at other projects and ideas to add momentum and develop the use of the Centre, with though a watchful eye on the cost/benefits of doing so.

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

Following the success of the first Northumberland Tea Party on 8th October 2014, we held another in November and our Christmas Tea Party in December. These have been very jolly events with plenty of chat, cakes and tea.

The Tea Parties will take place regularly on the second Wednesday of each month and we are very hopeful that the numbers will grow as word spreads. Indeed London CoM have been so inspired by our efforts, that they are looking to roll out something similar. Good luck.

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

Sarah writes... The Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Companions have been busy over the Christmas period. To name a few activities, they have judged Christmas Decoration Competitions, taught wreath making, put on a residents' art exhibition, helped at Christmas Bingo sessions, assisted with the making of Christmas Cards and attended Christmas parties, sing songs and outings. All done with smiling enthusiastic faces.

Thank you to London Companions who packed the boxes that we received for Signpost in Cirencester. They were given to the needy and marginalised and very well received, as have the generous cheques received by the OSJ Care Homes from the Companions.

Lee Palmer living in Wiltshire, Head of OSJ Volunteers and one of our newest Companions, shares our vision and is keen to help us forge ever closer links with the Care Homes. He is already proving to be a great asset.

**Oxford University CoM: Michael Brendan Brett [[Michael.brett@some.ox.ac.uk](mailto:Michael.brett@some.ox.ac.uk)] or John Eidinow OM [[john.eidinow@stb.ox.ac.uk](mailto:john.eidinow@stb.ox.ac.uk)]**

In Oxford our OU Companions were also extremely busy over Christmas helping with the Gateway shelter, on their soup runs and in distributing the 50 Christmas parcels to the homeless on the streets.

Brendan reports that ... everything's taking off again here now term has started ... we're doing a lot more with the OSJCT as of this term (thanks to Max), and our work with the special educational needs schools is starting up in earnest as well.

Please see the next OU CoM Newsletter for more info, and a term card is on its way! If you have any children, nephews/ nieces, Godchildren at Oxford, please point them in the right direction...

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

Please be in touch with Jamie to help with our Companions Day and Easter plans (its never too early) at St.Wilfrids OSJCT Care Home, Arundel. Jamie is thinking in terms of another Garden Party when the Spring weather arrives.

It is never easy for the SE's, as our geographical spread seems to be at its thinnest in Jamie's part of the country, so all the help and support you can offer would be very gratefully received.

**London: Alice Hinds [[aahind91@gmail.com](mailto:aahind91@gmail.com)] 07528917226 & Patrick Knollys [[Patrick@knollys.co.uk](mailto:Patrick@knollys.co.uk)]**

It may not have been mentioned in the Evening Standard Best Parties of 2014 list, but it should have been. On 18 December 2014 instead of our usual Thursday evening offering at the Companions Café (wonderful though it is), we hosted a wonderful Christmas party for our homeless guests. Christmas fayre was in abundance, including Christmas cake and pudding.

Everyone enjoyed the carols led by Gwillam, but the biggest roar was saved for each winner in the free raffle. Thank you to Anthony, Jude, Richard, Alice, Maggie, Victoria, Clarence, Michael, Bea, Anton, Carlos, Ben (the list of Companions goes on, with apologies to those I have not mentioned) for all their preparation and work. The laughter and joy amongst all those present said it all.

The report would not be complete without mention, though, of the beautiful Carol Service held the week before. It was a fantastic turnout of nearly 300 and the hall was brilliantly decked out for the fabulous reception that followed – for the first time we barely fitted into the hall. Thank you to everyone on the Committee - it was a triumph.



Finally, thank you to the clergy at St.James's for all their support. In recognition of the free use of the hall and church, I am pleased to report that we donated £500 to the parish fund to purchase a new PA system for the church, which all those who did not hear my few words at the beginning of the Carols will be pleased to know (or perhaps not as the case may be).

If you live in or are just visiting London and have the chance do come and help any Monday or Thursday evening contact Patrick or Alice respectively. Or if you have a spare moment of a Monday afternoon and would like to join in playing Bridge with residents at a Battersea Care Home, please give Helena a call on 07798 558109.

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

The dates for the St. Rose School summer camp are 18-21 May 2015. Now is the time to start planning to attend, as we will need to ensure that you have the necessary DBS cover and sort out your accommodation, so do let Duncan know asap.

The school is under great financial pressure these days and without our 50% funding (£2,429) would be in difficulty booking this trip, which is a fabulous break for some of the severely handicapped children at the school and their carers.

**East Anglia: Georgie Holtevens [[Georgie@holtevens.plus.com](mailto:Georgie@holtevens.plus.com)]**

More exciting news, after much careful planning In East Anglia our newest CoM region headed by Georgie Holtevens we are poised to launch a lunchtime project in Colchester along the lines of the Companions Café, with Adrian Rowley, who many will know from

Lourdes, helping at the helm to take this forward. Thank you Anthony for the mugs to help on this.

The CoM Colchester Café will be located in a local RC parish hall, and will provide hot soup and drinks and sandwiches, but above all a warm refuge and companionship.

## **Overseas**

You will recall from the Autumn Newsletter the details provided by our local contact (Anton) of a number of poor Christian families living in and around Bethlehem in very distressed circumstances. I am delighted to announce that with approval of the CoM Council we have sent a first £1,000 to Anton to distribute amongst the most need of these families for the purpose of meeting their food or medical bills.

The money is on its way and we await to hear back from Anton as regards its precise allocation and application on the ground. The plan is to send further monies say quarterly, provided we are satisfied in terms of transparency and accountability. I have an old friend who is nun in Bethlehem, and the intention is that either she or another contact of mine will be able to visit and verify.

Meanwhile, Sam Mattock a Companion in Kenya is busy working on a CoM project to provide medical aid in Somalia. This has made real progress as set out in the attached Update from Sam. Congratulations to him and all those donors who have contributed directly to this project to make it possible.

## **Key Dates**

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|--------------------------|--|
| <b>11 February 2015</b>  | <b>Companions Day</b>  |
| <b>28 February 2015</b>  | <b>Birmingham Reunion</b>                                      |
| <b>27 March 2015</b>     | <b>The Edinburgh Ball</b>                                      |
| <b>04 April 2015</b>     | <b>Easter (a schedule of OSJCT Easter parties will follow)</b> |
| <b>01 to 07 May 2015</b> | <b>Lourdes Pilgrimage including the CoM AGM</b>                |
| <b>18 to 21 May 2015</b> | <b>St.Rose Activity Camp</b>                                   |

## **Our Website**

[www.orderofmalta.org.uk/companions/](http://www.orderofmalta.org.uk/companions/)

For more detail on the above and more, please visit the website. Our regional leaders are continually posting dates and events; so do check regularly so as not to miss something near you! Any queries about membership, please contact Alice Murphy, our super-efficient secretary on 01434 689387 & 07968 396938 & companions.secretary@gmail.com

**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