23 January 2016

Dear Companion,

WINTER 2016 NEWSLETTER

The Companions – Mercy in Action 2016

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Happy New Year to everyone. What a great 2015 we had and thanks to you for all your support. I am sure we can all look forward to 2016 with renewed enthusiasm and verve, striving to improve the lives of all those we mean to help still further.

Thank you particularly for the fantastic efforts in the run up to Christmas. As a result of your generosity and hard work we were able to pack and distribute 500 Christmas parcels (more than ever before) around the country at a total cost of £8,367.

The London CoM Café Christmas party was also huge success with 105 guests and over 30 helpers, as were the Christmas lunches for our homeless guests in Oxford and Colchester (as you will read further below).

The Carol Service (as shown) was again wonderfully well attended, grossing the increased sum of £5,726.06, which will enable us to send funds to the Holy Family Hospital and to the Lebanese Association to aid their refugee work.

Whilst, our Migrant Crisis Appeal raised a brilliant £3,715, with a further £500 to be added from gift aid.

Companions were also hard at work in the OSJCT Care Homes over the festive season, and we have been able again to help fund a multitude of Christmas events to brighten the season for the residents, providing total funding of £7,110.

In addition a small group of 4 volunteers under the banner of the Companions travelled to Germany in December 2015 to care for children (see the photos below) in one of the main Berlin refugee reception centres run by the German Association; see the graphic blog written by the youngest of our group (attached).

Much else is reported below, and we have big plans for 2016…. None of which can be achieved without your continued support and prayers – for which thank you. Indeed most immediately see the plans for COMPANIONS DAY on 11 February 2016 detailed below and our 'shower project' plans as well.

CoM & OSJCT Care Homes 'Working together'

I am pleased to report that with the assistance of Lee (OSJCT Head of Volunteering) we received bids for various Christmas projects, and awarded funds to many of the homes in response. A full list of the awards made is attached, and thank you letters with full reports and photographs are already being received (a few of which are also attached).

Conscious, however, that we would all wish to see CoM funds produce the maximum good, we will be seeking to ensure going forward that our donations are dedicated to the more permanent and tangible, fixtures and fittings that will enhance the lives of residents and produce a lasting CoM legacy.

For further details of events and how to get involved, please see the specific CoM/OSJCT events and activities highlighted under the regions below.

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

Brilliant news, the Archbishop of Birmingham has agreed to officiate at this year's Newman Pilgrimage on Saturday 04 June 2015 at the Birmingham Oratory. We will need to plan for a big attendance of both Order and CoM for this important event, including the lunch. This is a very worthwhile endeavour bringing together many of our BrumComs for both spiritual and temporal refreshment!

Other exciting news from Birmingham is that our BrumComs are expanding their operations with a non-metropolitan group lead locally by Fr Anthony and James Arbuthnot. Whilst back in the City there is plainly a desire to increase our activities, and Adrian aided by other Companions and members of the Order are looking at the possibilities.

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.

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

Georgie reports that our Colchester Soup Kitchen, Christmas party was attended by some 25-30 people, including a good number of helpers and the local parish priest. We served roast turkey, roast potatoes, parsnips, sprouts, sausages, stuffing and gravy. Pudding was Christmas pudding, mince pies, cheesecake and cream and teas, coffees and soft drinks to drink. We then handed out the 'goodie bags' and some donated new sleeping bags. Our guests were very grateful, saying politely (but poignantly) that these were the only presents they would receive this Christmas. It was a very happy occasion.

Do get along 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]

The Christmas parcels for the homeless were delivered to the Mercy Project in Edinburgh by Ian Southward and his team, and to the Glasgow Companions' Centre by Caroline Paul, Anne Hey, and Liam Hackett. All were hugely grateful and a few of our Kagoules have been spotted around the city. The Companions' Centre also had a Christmas Lunch for the local community which was well-received.

The sad news is that 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. However, both Liams are still looking at the possibilities, particularly with a view to using the Centre to help refugees.

Otherwise we are working to develop our work in Scotland, primarily through our group of Companions at Edinburgh Uni. If you are in Scotland and have ideas on how we can develop and expand north of the border do please get in touch.

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

Your Chairman was delighted to join the Oxford University Companions at their termly mass and dinner in December 2015. As one of the priests of the Oratory commented over dinner, it is amazing how the Order has sprung into life in the City. He was right, the OU CoM are a terrific group of dedicated and active volunteers, and a great example across to us all. With some 900 undergraduates signing up at Freshers' Fair, we can look forward to continued expansion and development of our activities in and around Oxford.

Again this term has a packed schedule of activities and events, the details of which can be found in the OU Termcard (just out), together with the contact details of our Oxford Committee. Simon very much hopes any Companion will think about coming up to Oxford to visit them, whether to participate in their outreach, or to support them at one of their social and spiritual events.

If you would like any hard copies of either publication for friends/congregations please let Simon know, or feel free to use the attached pdfs to print some off.

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

The main focus for the SE Companions this year is already the 40th Anniversary celebrations at St. Wilfrid's OSJCT Home, Arundel. Jamie with the help of Sean Armstrong and Francesca will be taking a lead in supporting the events at St. Wilfrid's and helping at their party on 22 July 2016.

As noted previously the number of Companions locally is small, which makes providing assistance more challenging, so it would be great if say a group from London or elsewhere could get together and head down to Arundel to help in due course.

Please be in touch with Jamie, to help with his plans, including care home visits over the coming weeks. 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 to get the elderly to Mass of a Sunday or in the week.

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

Northumberland held yet another wonderful tea party in December, as you will see from the photo below. There was a great turn out of helpers, including Alice Bryant's husband, Marc, who played old Christmas favourites on the piano for a very jolly sing-along led by Fr Bede Rowe. Delicious mince pies, brandy butter, sausages, cakes and endless mugs of tea made for a great fun afternoon.

Andrew Martell, Fr Bede and Peter Loyd sang a jolly rendition of 'We Three Kings of Orient Are' with the rest of us joining in heartily with the chorus! Two of the ladies brought crackers for everyone and another of the ladies made and decorated the most beautiful Christmas Cake – so kind and generous and they really do appreciate what everyone does for them to make the teas possible.

It really is the case that in these parties we have found the ideal scaleable project for reaching out to the lonely and elderly in the community. Why not give it a try in your region too, give Alice Murphy or me a call if you need any help or guidance.

The Tea Parties take place regularly on the second Wednesday of each month from 2pm-4pm and the number of attendees is growing as word spreads.

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

Companions were marvellous at the run up to Christmas. Susan Rooker took residents from Paternoster House for sherry and mince pies ; Julia Barton had her annual Christmas Party this time for residents of two Stroud Homes. Anna Longridge helped Athelstan House residents make Christmas wreaths which were then sold for their amenity fund. Huge thanks to all those who contributed generous gifts to the homes for raffles and tombolas, and to those who judged trees and decorations.

Companions also turned out in force at the Gloucestershire OSJ Party (see the picture below). It was great to have such a good turn out, particularly given that a few of us couldn't make it on the day (for a variety of good reasons). And Father Izzy started the afternoon off with prayers and carols. In future it will be better to encourage Companions to go to the County parties rather than the individual parties. It is the first time it has been done this year and it worked well (as you can see below).

Meanwhile Signpost were most grateful to the Companions for the Christmas parcels that they have been able to distribute to the homeless and marginalised.

London: Alice Hinds [aahind91@gmail.com 07528917226 & Patrick Knollys [6atrick@knollys.co.uk]

Inspired by the achievements in Northumberland, Companions in London hosted another 'Oratory Tea Party' for the elderly and lonely on 18 November 2015. We had a good number of guests from St.Wilfrid's 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.

The London CoM also held a very successful get together at the Holy Redeemer Church for all its Monday and Thursday volunteers in November; a highly informative talk from a dedicated housing solicitor at Oliver Fisher solicitors, was followed by a very enjoyable supper together, with the different groups finally getting to meet. Thanks to Sarah and Sophia for their great help on this.

Special thanks to all those London Companions who spent their Thursday evenings in November and December packing our amazing Christmas parcels. As noted above we packed and distributed 500 of these to the homeless. Even if you say it quickly that's a lot of parcels, each containing, a comprehensive wash kit and permanent wash bag, notebook and pen, gloves, Thinsulate beanie, winter warmer longjohns and T-shirt and more. 200 were handed out in about 8 minutes just before Christmas at Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The London CoM Café Christmas party was also fantastic again this year, with 105 guests and some 40 helpers all having a great time together. With the tables suitably decked, lots of Christmas treats, another amazing raffle (thanks to all who donated the incredible prizes) and music from our resident busker David, it could not have been better. Thank you one and all.

Now into the New Year we have already seen a good turnout of Companions on Monday evenings, with our first Thursday Companions Café attended by over 50 guests and some 30 helpers! If you want to help do drop a line to Patrick or Alice;

meet LIF 7.30pm on Mondays or setting up at St.James' from 5.30pm, prayers at 7.15pm and guests admitted at 7.30pm.

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

We are presently looking at ways in which we might offer greater support to the St. Rose School, whose funding is apparently under threat. At the very least we are committed to repeating our support for this year's activity holiday at the Exmoor Calvert Trust.

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 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 our funds have finally (on New Year's day) been received in Bethlehem, after much toing and froing with Western Union. This will be distributed meticulously amongst need 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.

So to the current migrant crisis and what we have been able to do to help. As you will have read in the introduction above, we have raised over £5,000 to support the work of the Order in the Holy Land and Lebanon, and will follow up on the use of these funds also.

Our volunteers also had a remarkable time in Germany, and were immediately put to work looking after the children in the Berlin reception centre run by the Order (see the attached account). The opportunity to repeat such visits still exists, and if you would still like to take up on this do phone Helena on 07798 558109. Thank you also to our devoted Dorset Companion who knitted and sent lots of warm clothing, hats gloves and scarfs, mostly forwarded to Germany for distribution to the refugees (though some have been kept for our Thursday guests).

Looking Forward (Showers!)

As mentioned previously, BASMOM is investigating different proposals for a more permanent 'flagship' project in the UK, and the CoM have promoted the idea, mooted at our AGM, of replicating something along the lines of the Belgian Association shower project.

To take this forward on Wednesday 23 September 2015 Mark B and I visited a project run by the Order in Brussels. This is a brilliant day centre, with showers, a laundry service, nurse and chiropodist.

A potential opportunity has now arisen for us to replicate this project in London – please see the separate report attached (below). Let me know your views, positive or negative.

I am pleased to report also that there is new interest in establishing CoM groups at Cambridge and Edinburgh universities, populated particularly by ex-OMV. This would be a hugely positive development I think, particularly since in another exciting development, we are beginning to see ex-OU CoM volunteering on our projects in London as they graduate and move to the capital for work.

COMPANIONS DAY – 11 February 2016

First and foremost please pray for the work of the CoM; if possible please speak to your parish priest and ask for a Mass or bidding prayer to be said on or as near to the day as possible.

As part of our planned membership drive for the day, everyone should receive in the post, one of our posters to put up in your parish, 2x CoM wristbands emblazoned with our 2016 mission 'Mercy in Action 2016' (thanks to Patrick Knollys as ever), and 1x membership application forms (or if we run out, this can be downloaded from the website). Please keep one band yourself but give the other one to a friend or colleague who you think would like to join our work….with the membership application form.

The key is to get the message out there, via our parishes, workplaces and friends – be brave and thank you.

Treasurer

Last but by no means …..After many years of extraordinary effort and devotion as Treasurer of the CoM, Maggie Hood has stepped down from her post. The CoM would like to record its huge debt to her for the unstinting support that she has given to the CoM and its Chair. This short paragraph does little justice to her endless, unfailing and reliable work behind the scenes and at our meetings, but we offer our sincerest thanks here nonetheless.

I am delighted though in the same breath to announce that with the approval of the CoM Charity Trustees Charles James KM has agreed to take over the post.

Key Dates

And some key dates….

31 January 2016	**Sunday Evening (20.30pm) meeting Cambridge University, CoM Launch**
11 February 2016	**Companions Day (see above)**
12-14 February 2016	**Walsingham Retreat – contact Isobel Mostyn at isobelmostyn@hotmail.co.uk**
16 April 2016	**Knights Ball, Edinburgh**
29 April – 04 May 2016	**BASMOM Lourdes Pilgrimage**
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!

Thank you for all your support and prayers

Yours as ever,

Paul Letman
CHAIR CoM

HAVE YOU EVER MET SOMEONE WHO WAS SHOT IN THE LEG?

What did I do in the first week of my Christmas holidays, shop, lie in and sleep… no, I went as a Companion to volunteer in a refugee reception centre in Berlin, Germany run by the German Association of the Order of Malta.

We helped the children who had come to Germany with their parents, or even travelled alone. They were mostly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. They had all come with nothing, making the dangerous journey from their homelands. It was an eye opening experience for me. The children now lived in a large hall with only a bunk bed for their whole family. The largest family had 8 children; would you like to be in their shoes? Almost lost in a new country, homeless and destitute, dreaming of a safe new life.

We tried to help them. The children had nothing to do, so every day, in the morning we tried to help them, doing Arts & Crafts with the children, and in the afternoon we would play outside, their ages ranged from babies to a 14 year old boy. Everyone got stuck in. We tried to teach them a bit of German, they did their best to learn, so they could one day lead a normal life again.

By the end of our 4 days volunteering the children could already speak better German. Sometimes I forgot that they were Refugees, as they were all so normal, just like us. The children were all clever and it was so hard to know the life they have had, it was very difficult, many had lost their fathers in war and that they did not have the chance to go to school.

The most shocking thing was that one boy named Ali I got to know had been shot in the leg when leaving Afghanistan. I made friends with many of the children especially Hussaien, Muhim and Ali, the children were all so kind. When we did Arts & Crafts with the kids, they constantly said 'Hallo', 'Kleber' and 'Schere', for some the only words they knew, which was really sweet.

How can this have happened to them, why were they in this place and not me, they have so little and we have so much, we should share what we can, they can be our friends and the world would be a better place.

December 2015

Camilla (aged 15 years)
Aus London

The CoM London Shower Project
Initial Proposal

The Brussels Experience

On 23 September 2015 PL and MB visited the Belgian Association shower project to discover more about this much lauded venture.

The basic idea of the centre is that half a dozen homeless persons are received into the house at a time to shower themselves, have their clothes washed and returned to them or get new clothes, receive basic medical care as required and a quick meal before heading back on to the street, duly cared for and cleaner.

The project has been based for many years now in a typical very narrow terraced 4 storey Brussels house in a non-descript street in what is now a rather notorious predominantly Arab district of the city near one of the main stations.

The manuscript note above the door bell referring to the Order was the only clue to identifying the address. The front door opened to tidy but old premises, with a small reception desk off the hall where guests are all registered so as to keep track of when and how often they visit.

Beyond the desk on the ground floor was a small waiting area leading to a room with 4 built in shower cubicles. A small front room housed the resident (paid) nurse (and sometimes the podiatrist) who provides basic first aid and triage services.

The front room on the first floor was turned over to a refectory area where a basic soup and sandwich lunchtime meal is offered, the smaller rear room housed a couple of washing machines and industrial sized dryers, where guests clothes can be washed and dried while they wait.

The other 2 floors comprised on one floor a very well ordered store of clothes and shoes (all categorized, small, medium or large) and on the other an office and common room for the volunteers.

We were welcomed by a member of the Order, who together with his wife and a handful of others form the backbone of the project by volunteering almost daily. Other helpers are rota'd and commit to a certain number of days a month. The guests queue each day and are allocated entry times.

There is no doubt from what we saw that this is a welcome and essential service for the homeless population.

The Perceived Need

Our experience in London, talking to our Thursday guests at St.James', is that whilst many already have their own ways of obtaining like services (existing

hostels, mainline stations with pay showers, Heathrow airport), there would still be a space in Central London for additional provision, especially with the companionship the CoM can offer.

The Oxford Uni CoM have already established a successful Saturday morning shower project on a similar scale to that proposed for London, confirming thereby the ready demand that exists in the homeless population for such services.

The Initial Proposal

The Ordinariate Church, Warwick Street is in the throes of redeveloping and refurbishing its near derelict basement. At the instigation of ADL I recently met Fr Mark briefly one December lunchtime, and he is extremely keen that his Church might host a 'shower project.'

Without wanting to be overly ambitious and bearing in mind particularly the demands upon volunteers, I have intimated on behalf of the Companions that if showers were to added into his refurbishment plans we might replicate the Brussels project one morning a week. Establishing what we might brand as the Companions Breakfast Club, so that Companions might be able to volunteer before work.

Discussions are at a preliminary stage. I have spoken to the church's architect, who has quickly produced an outline plan of how 4 showers might be included in the churches plans, albeit subject to investigating drainage and ensuring viability (see attached).

An indicative cost has yet to be determined even (though I would expect this to be in the thousands rather than tens of thousands).

At this stage, therefore, broad approval for such a proposal is sought from Council with permission to take these discussions forward to a more detailed stage including costs, which will be submitted for approval if the current proposal proves viable in due course.

04 January 2016

PAUL LETMAN
Chair, CoM