



January 2019

**CoM WINTER NEWSLETTER
2018/19**

The Companions – Fighting Isolation 2019

Amazing, what a supreme and wonderful effort by all Companions and our supporters over the Christmas period, thank you very much indeed.

Seven hundred (700) Christmas parcels for the homeless distributed all around the country from Cheltenham to Cambridge, Sussex to Banff thanks to your efforts and the fantastic support of Primark who generously provided us with all the essential winter clothing for the parcels.

Brilliant Christmas parties for our guests in Oxford, Colchester and London and in the OSJCT homes. Over 300 people at our beautiful Carol Service at St.James's raising money for our work and the Holy Family Hospital. And all our projects running right up until the 20/12 and re-opening again on 03/01/19 thanks to Kate and our wonderful Thursday team. Thank you again!

Special mention should also be made of one of our Wednesday volunteers, Ash, who climbed to Everest base camp to raise £2k for our work; it sounded terrifying and others should not feel the need to attempt such feats, but many many congratulations and thanks are owed to her for this incredible effort.

As always a lot more detail follows, including news of key upcoming events such as Companions Day on 11 February and our fundraiser recital on **5 April 2019**, a definite diary date.

Christmas

It is easy to underestimate the scale of what was achieved thanks to the sweat and toil of many Companions, but there is no doubt that Patrick Knollys deserves extra thanks as the QM general and architect of our supplies. It takes months of planning to organise the kit that we provided, the toiletries and clothes. Each bar of soap, soap box, nail clippers (so valued by those on the streets), combs, tooth brushes, toothpaste etc.

Then the meetings and liaison with Primark, identifying again what's needed from socks, long sleeve T-shirts, to gilets and other clothing, then coordinating supplies around the

country. The evenings of packing of thousands of items by dozens of CoM in London, sending the parcels and arranging local collection and then the logistics of distribution in each location, be it Oxford, Cambridge, London, Scotland etc. Suffice to say it is a fabulous testimony to team work and the devotion of all our volunteers; I shall leave it to the photographs to tell the rest of the story.

Packing in London..



Warehoused and ready to go...



Parcels safely delivered and heading for the streets in Cambridge...

So to the Christmas Carol Service and Reception. This year again we were treated to a magnificent service, with the beautiful music led by Iestyn and the resident choir. We are greatly indebted to the clergy of the Parish for their support. Over 300 people attended and we raised over £6,000 from ticket sales, donations and from the raffle organised so marvellously by Anne HP and her two loyal friends.

The Reception after was no less enjoyed, with the crypt transformed thanks to the efforts of Helena, Katrin, Maggie, Sarah, Ruth and others. It is a great event in our calendar and a thousand thanks to all those who work so hard to make it such a success and to all who attended.

Barely pausing for breath, on the following evening we held London's best Christmas party for the homeless. It was fabulous that so many of you were able to help, as you can see from the photo below.



Again, thanks to all the careful planning and hard work, from weeks of collecting presents for the lucky dip to preparation of Christmas food, the evening was a triumph. Thanks also to the incredible brass ensemble that entertained all of us in such festive style.



The Christmas Tea Party

The Christmas period was also blessed with a festive tea party at St. Joseph's Hall, Brompton Oratory. It was though an occasion of mixed emotions as with the sad closing of St. Wilfrid's Care Home, Tite Street many of our regulars had already moved elsewhere and for the few remaining this was to be their last visit.



Still with many cheerful Companions on hand, Francois, Helena, Sarah, Kate, Victoria, Maggie, Veronica and all, Christopher providing his usual uplifting mix of songs and lots of cake a fine time was had by all.



In fact the high spirits soon had everyone singing and some even dancing, led by the irrepressible Connie, aged 97



CoM and OSJCT

Throughout the Winter we have worked also to support the OSJCT homes, primarily in their heartlands of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, but also in Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire where we have other homes (see the regional reports below).

For example, just before Christmas we had an SOS from the Activities Manager of Paternoster House as they realised that they did not have enough money in the Amenity Account to pay for their pantomime. Thanks to your support we are delighted to have provided £200 to meet the cost and keep the show on the road.

On the OSJCT front, Christopher and Max have been working hard in discussions with OSJCT to develop the right model, with which they are happy, to increase the numbers of volunteers in the homes through the Companions. One area where the homes are particularly short of volunteers is around Salisbury, i.e the Avonbourne Care Centre at Old Sarum, Willowcroft and Bemerton Lodge. We need now to do a trial appeal for volunteers in the nearby parishes, if you can help please get in touch (chair.companions@gmail.com, 07798 558109).

By Region:-

London [katemackenzie@btconnect.com (Thursday Café), patrick@knollys.co.uk (Monday Soup Run), helenaletman@gmail.com (Wednesday Breakfast Club) maggihood@yahoo.co.uk (Tea parties)

Over the winter and Christmas we were extremely busy caring for the homeless who attend the weekly activities in London. We have had an increase in numbers of guests and thankfully volunteers attending.

Monday Food distribution at Lincoln's Inn Fields continued to serve the homeless with a consistent number of 75-80 homeless arriving each week. We have a good cohort of volunteers now, and a new driver Ben has joined the team. If you work nearby, please do come along or if you can drive a van, contact Patrick.

The Wednesday Breakfast Club also remains extremely popular with the homeless who come each week for showers and the best breakfast in London. We are delighted to have just reached our second anniversary at the Ordinariate church and thank the Ordinariate for their support. Unfortunately, though we are meeting rather more resistance from the Parish to our proposals to add a shower than we expected. We are trying to work around this, but otherwise we have an alternative option open to us.

All the while also the Companions' Cafe (Thursday soup kitchen) has continued to serve 100 - 120 guests over the Winter. Kate who heads up this operation reports ... Wrap Up London donated 110 coats in December and we have been giving these out each week (see below, kitting out a guest). In addition we have managed to give out new and good quality second hand walking boots and trainers to the many people needing them.



The podiatrists returned and mentioned how some of the guests' feet were greatly improved by the shoes we have given them. The hairdresser is now attending every 5-6 weeks and consistently cuts over 20 people's hair and beards and the manicurist arrived in time for Christmas! Sadly the mobile X-ray unit is unable to come any more, but we have been able to offer a pop up GP clinic. Guests can opt to have their blood pressure taken and discuss their problems with the GP.



In addition to pianists playing and carols singers over the festive season we continued to give out approximately 5 sleeping bags and 5 rucksacks each week and the clothes donated by Primark and second hand clothes from the volunteers.

We have received a fabulous number of books from volunteers and are trying to buy a new book case to store these and put them out on Thursdays. The books are extremely popular and many taken each week.

All these little extras on top of chatting and serving food are greatly appreciated by our guests.

As described above Patrick Knollys, once again, expertly organised all the contents for the 700 Christmas parcels and he and Helena coordinated the packing of these. The 40 - 50 helpers worked incredibly hard throughout the evenings - putting together the parcels, which were subsequently sent to the Regions or kept for London and also managed to still chat and serve our many homeless guests. The new shelving, that the Companions bought for the Parish, was put to use and made it much easier to store all the bags this year. A great achievement from all involved to get the parcels ready in time.

But our volunteers did not let up. They were back to help at the Christmas party for the homeless - the night after the extremely well attended Order of Malta Carol Service and Reception. Tables were decorated, over 150 gifts were brought for the lucky dip - which ran over the last two weeks of the year, and hot water bottles and Christmas parcels were given to each guest as they left. The party went with a swing, the guests chatted with the festive volunteers, Christmasy food was served and we were lucky enough to hear a brass ensemble of students from the Royal College of Music - with Will Thomas (Finalist of BBC Young Musician of the Year this year) playing carols and taking requests from the floor! All absolutely fantastic.

The **Oyster Card Appeal** launched in November has been extremely well supported, thank you to all our donors. To date we have received just over £2700. We will be able to buy the Oyster Cards for the homeless who come to our London activities and load them with £10. This will be wonderful as London Transport is now cashless and many of our guests are without a card. We are regularly asked about Oyster cards in the soup kitchens. We will be giving them out (120 x £15) shortly in January when the light hours are short and Spring seems a long way away. In the light of a number of requests and with the consent of the donors the balance will be used to provide pre-paid Pret/Starbucks coffee cards.

These projects would not run without the many dedicated Companions and volunteers who regularly turn up to the events or work at other times to enhance the different activities for the elderly or homeless. So it was lovely to share an evening together in November at a thank you reception for the volunteers (thank you to Helena, Katrin and Maggie for leading this). We all had a chance to share stories and meet other volunteers. A very jolly evening.

Looking forward, we are in the early stages of a new support service called Companions Assist. Volunteers will be on hand to assist with writing CVs, filling in application forms and advice with job interviews after the breakfast club. We are also liaising with Pret a Manger's service - Rising Stars - which offers homeless people permanent jobs and support when they start the job. An exciting new service. We are also in touch with the Oratory outreach programme and others with a view to opening a new lunchtime service, bring on 2019!

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

Birmingham CoM have devotedly continued their monthly Mass and prayers at the Oratory over the Winter and all in the area are welcome to join them, just be in touch with Adrian.

We also have a number of new potential Companions as well as exciting offers of support in terms of premises etc. Who knows what 2019 will bring, but hopes are high. Thank you to all our BrumCoMs for applying themselves as ever to the cause.

The Midlands Lourdes Reunion will take place at the Church of the Oratory, Hagley Road, Birmingham, B16 8UE on Saturday, 23rd February, 2019, by kind permission of the Provost. We are delighted to be welcoming the Most Reverend Archbishop Mario Conti who will celebrate Solemn Mass at 11.00am, including the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. After Mass luncheon will be provided in the Oratory halls.

A notice will be sent out shortly but for further information please do contact Charles de Rohan charles.derohan@gmail.com

Cambridge: Matthew Schellhorn [mts21@cam.ac.uk 07545 234848]

Cambridge University CoM under Matthew Schellhorn have had a successful Christmas term too. CU Companions distributed the first of the Christmas Parcels at the end of November, as this needed to be done before the end of term.

Matthew reports that Primark were superb over the supplies. Companions helped collect and sort the bags and clothes donated to us and then pack the toiletries received from London. Companions ((Alessandra, Krzysztof, Will and Edmund) then assisted with distribution on the streets. Some also volunteered at the monthly hospitality evening at Wintercomfort where the remainder of the bags were distributed.

We also helped them with a quiz and meeting the homeless. All this meant our winter distribution of 40 parcels was complete – one customer said it was like Christmas come early, which happily was correct!

After some concerns about treading on SVP toes, I am delighted to say Mgr Langham has very kindly reassured us that our ongoing connection with Fisher House will not be in question. Indeed our collaboration, trialled this term, looks set to strengthen for the future. From next term, Matthew proposes to add these Thursday evenings to the diary and build his teaching around them so he can be present, also putting a student in place as a Project Lead.

The management at Wintercomfort are also very keen to have the Companions work with them – they were very warm to us and have written to us with a formal invitation. We have fixed up two events during Lent Term, building on our partnership with Wintercomfort, which are advertised on our CU Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/COMCambridge/events/>.

The other event to mention is a “save the date” for the Day of Recollection on Saturday 2nd March. Details of that will come out in the usual Order-wide way. We also hope to host a dinner again at Jesus College that evening. Do ask friends, children of friends, God children etc to be in touch and support our CU CoM.

Gloucestershire & Wiltshire: [Rumney@mail.com] - 07590 851417]

Our main initiative this year was to provide our Christmas Cribs to those homes without them, to enhance their Christmas celebration. See below, for the presentation of the crib to the OSJCT Grace Care Centre, Thornbury.



And the Crib in situ. Thank you to Antoinette E for organizing the supply of 10 of these from Germany, and to Sarah for arranging their presentation to the different homes.



Wiltshire - the Care Homes in Wiltshire had their popular Christmas party in Devizes on 19 December.

Companions and members of the Order were also very pleased to be able to attend the Visit arranged for us on 19 October 2018; thank you Mark B for stepping in for me. This was an

excellent opportunity to visit some of the homes and extra care housing schemes and gain a deeper understanding of the OSJCT's work and ethos. It is with this very much in mind that we continue our efforts to up our game so speak in terms of work in the homes.

To this end Max and Charles N have just met with the Trust's volunteering manager (Kit Lendon) with the aim of kick-starting the drive for volunteers in Wiltshire. This needs to be a strategy that meets the Trust's needs but also helps build the work of the Companions. Another meeting is due shortly with the Trust's CEO to discuss our strategy and ensure that we are on the right track.

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

Northumberland had a great Christmas tea party (photos to appear in the next newsletter) and continue to hold these monthly. Many thanks to all involved.

This is really something we should be rolling out in every part of the country, so if you want to have a go in your area do give me, or Helena (07798 558109) or Fred a call.

Oxford University CoM: Jamie.wilmore@trinity.ox.ac.uk

In Oxford, we continue to be overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of volunteers. Even in the dark winter nights, soup runs were ever-popular with volunteers happy to brave any weather to serve those exposed to the elements. Our drop-in shower project remains a fantastic activity that is a real treat to be a part of, thanks in no small part to Josh who works tirelessly week in, week out to lead the project.

The Oxford Christmas Party for the homeless which ran just after the end of term was also a great success, thanks to the energy of the students who were prepared to stay on or return for the day to help. It was great also to welcome a good number of members from Oxford too to our Carols and Reception in London.

I was delighted to attend the pre-Christmas term dinner in Oxford in early December and witness for myself the huge support there is for the CoM in Oxford; many thanks to everyone and particularly Jamie for his leadership and John Eidinow for his ever present and careful oversight. As Jamie wrote in the last newsletter, we can be confident that the Oxford Companions will continue from strength to strength with such a great group of fantastic people.

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

It was great to have Jamie join us for the Christmas parcels packing and to collect some of the parcels for distribution in the South East.

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 do be in touch with them direct.

In particular it would be great to visit, 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 their Easter activities in due course.

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

Thanks to Duncan's efforts our relationship with St. Rose School continues. The CoM Council has resolved to continue our support for their 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@holtevens.plus.com]

Georgie reports "this was our best ever Christmas party with a turnout of at least 22 guests. We served them roast turkey, roast potatoes and carrots with gravy and bread sauce and chipolatas and mince pies with cream and Christmas cake (donated) to follow. We were also donated some delicious fresh farm apple juice to accompany it with. The guests adored as before their Primark Gifts.

Please see the photos from our Christmas lunch party; the first is with the Primark delivery team with Adrian Rowley and Caroline Sunnucks, second the Hall all laid up and decorated and the third with the homeless guests sitting down enjoying themselves.





The highlight of the lunch was I think 'John', one of our regular guests who has just been diagnosed with severe liver problems standing up in front of everyone and singing 'What a wonderful world' (Louis Armstrong). It was incredibly moving . He's not well at all.

We can be very proud that Colchester CoM Homeless Soup Kitchen is now feeding an average of 15 guests per week on a Wednesday lunchtime with the help of at least four to six volunteers each week working on a rota basis (12 volunteers in total). We are sadly losing a couple of volunteers but have managed to recruit one more and believe one from the past is returning. We are still serving hot food and take away sandwiches with fruit and biscuits and crisps and thankfully still lots of donated Christmas cake to finish up!!

One rather unfortunate postscript from the Christmas party. One of the homeless was arrested by the police with his Primark bag in town afterwards thinking he had shoplifted!! Luckily Adrian got straight down to the police station and explained all!! (Memo to self, mark up the gifts next year).”

Ed. – this really is a fabulous example of what we can do on a relatively modest scale but with a huge impact, the kind of project that any of us could roll out in our local area, with the expertise we have it can be done .. Birmingham, Andover Speak to me if you are tempted.

Scotland

Companions In Scotland have also been in full swing, joining the effort to distribute Christmas parcels – see the picture of some of the team below.



We continue also to support the Sisters of Mercy's twice-daily soup kitchen with disadvantaged people from across Edinburgh; all Companions who are in town on a Thursday evening are very welcome to get in touch if they wish to help out with the project in St Catharine's Convent on Lauriston Gardens.

In **Coatbridge**, Liam Hackett and Fr Sweeney, the Parish Priest of St. Patrick's Church, and other Companions have also been busy with the special needs project that we are supporting in the parish; Tom was delighted to get along on earlier this month (January) with our cheque for £1,000 to help with their ongoing work.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding remains absolutely central to everything we do. A new unified safeguarding policy has been adopted together with the final suite of policies and protocols to accompany the same. These will shortly be available to view on our website.

In addition we will be promulgating a simple volunteer registration form to meet safeguarding guidance, to be completed by those attending our many activities involving vulnerable adults. In addition that is to our stated aim of systematically obtaining DBS clearance for Companions.

Data Protection

Under new data protection legislation, we are required to have explicit consent from our Companions for the use of their personal data. For your information, we hold your data securely and use it only to contact you either centrally by Annie or by your regional representatives. Occasionally, details will be shared with BASMOM for the purposes of fund-raising. We do not ever give out personal data to a third party.

Plans and Projects – Companions Day

In addition to those plans mentioned above, Companions Assist, our new lunchtime project and Care Homes initiative, most immediately we must make plans for Companions Day of 11 February 2019.

Each year as you know we take this as the opportunity to spread the news about what we do, perhaps reaching out to a relative friend or colleague who might be interested in joining and volunteering. Mindful of course that we depend on subscriptions as our core income.

In addition, Companions Day is a great chance to take our message into our local parishes, asking our Parish priest perhaps to say a Mass or add a bidding prayer for our work. A notice in our parish newsletters along the following lines may work too:

***The Companions of the Order of Malta** – become a Companion and volunteer in the Order's care homes, working to help the homeless and destitute, and join us on our pilgrimages, retreats and special events. Charity No.1003567 Reg Co. No. 050139938. For more information visit <http://orderofmalta.org.uk/companions>*

Overseas

On the international front, I am pleased to say that from the proceeds of the Carols we will be sending £1,000 to the Holy Family Hospital, Bethlehem to support them in their invaluable work.

Going forward we propose to maintain our support for poor Christian families in Bethlehem. This is our contribution to support Christian communities in this part of the world, and continues the work of Fr. Elvin who established this initiative.

Also just arrived in my in-tray is a request from a Jesuit Father in Andhra Pradesh for support for the Jesuit Mission for young people amongst the rural poor of the region. The project is called 'Yes – J', short for **Youth Empowering Services – Jesuits.** It is situated at Andhra

Loyola College Campus (ALC), Vijayawada. It may be something we can support in some way and we will be discussing this in council. Your thoughts would be very welcome.

Website

You will find our new updated website (thank you again Andrew) including all our newsletters and downloadable [application form](#)

I am hoping that with further assistance we might develop this further. You should all also be in receipt of the Order's monthly activities and please do [sign up](#) at

KEY UPCOMING DATES

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| 23 January 2019 | Companions Tea Party, 2-4pm Brompton Oratory |
| 11 February 2019 | Companions Day |
| 23 February 2019 | Midlands Lourdes reunion |
| 02 March 2019 | Day of Recollection/CU CoM dinner |
| 5 April 2019 | Fundraiser Recital, St Mary Moorfields |
| 3-9 May 2019 | Lourdes Pilgrimage |

Many thanks to all Companions for your work over Christmas and for your continued support and prayers in 2019.

Many thanks and God bless,



Paul Letman, CHAIR CoM