Annual Report
The Companions of the Order of Malta

CoM AGM
19 July 2023, 7pm
Golden Sq and Online

The past year has been another positive one for The Companions, in which we have surpassed expectations in delivering on 'our mission to practice our Faith and to practice charity.' From our engagement with the elderly to our work with the poor and homeless, from Arundel to Ayrshire, much has been achieved.

Overview of the Year

Beginning with some of the major events over the course of the year. At Christmas the festivities began with the CoM Brompton Oratory Lunch on 23 November 2022, with 50 guests joyously entertained, whilst, our Christmas card project for the OSJCT Care Homes yielded well over 700 handwritten or personalised cards.

For the Homeless our Christmas parcels this year numbered just over 950; each containing 5 items of Clothing and 11 toiletries. Brilliantly organised by Kate (our London Coordinator) and Patrick (head of supplies), these nearly 20,000 items were packed by a small army of volunteers and then dispatched to 21 different destinations around the England and Scotland.

But the centrepiece of our work at Christmas was surely our many parties for our homeless guests, first in Colchester, then twice at Spanish Place, then East Hill and also celebrations at our Breakfast Clubs.

On the Thursday before Christmas at SP we had over 90 guests, all served a full Christmas dinner with all the trimmings, accompanied by Eddie Pease and his fellow singers. Then again on the Monday we served up another Christmas dinner for dozens more guests at SP with more carols. The evening after, we also had a full-scale festive celebration at East Hill. This project benefits from close collaboration with the Parish and parishioners and it was thanks to them that we were able to provide Christmas boxes to all our guests and provide a dinner of unsurpassed quantity and quality. Further festivities followed at our breakfast clubs at Bayswater and Golden Square on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Even then our seasonal offering was not done, whilst we finished at SP on the Thursday before Christmas, thanks to a devoted group led by Liz were able to reprise our very popular opening at Golden Square in the days between Christmas and New Year. To provide a much needed warm space, lunch and company, when Crisis had already shut and many other homeless projects are closed each year for the holidays.

In addition, in Scotland our Coatbridge Christmas party set the standard with Santa Claus providing the presents. Whilst, our Winter Warmer campaign received an unrivalled response this year, with over £4,000 raised. On top of this many generous personal donations were made. Not least the Irvin family who once again hosted a Christmas drinks party at the RAC for their friends in support of our work, raising more than £2,500 in doing so. Whilst the Carol Service, thanks to more the more than 250 people who attended and other donations raised more this year than ever before.

Mention must also go to our Young Companions, who we are delighted to say our gathering numbers and momentum. At the beginning of December, in support of our work with Nehemiah, the YC's were out in torrential rain and winds at one of the homes to plaint spring bulbs. YC's also visited to carry out some redecorations, delivering CoM Christmas wreaths and gifts.

Easter & The Elderly

Then just a few weeks on, major initiatives were undertaken in the run up to Easter. Although we have had our Easter campaigns before, there is no doubt that this year we did more than ever to spread the joy of Easter, both in our Care Homes and amongst our homeless guests. We got off to a great start, with another hugely well attended and entertaining lunch for the elderly at the Brompton Oratory, thanks to Alex and her team.

This was followed up by a veritable army of Companions arranging and delivering Easter daffodil or primrose plants to over one thousand two hundred residents in 29 Care Homes across England and Scotland, the majority of them OSJCT care homes. Each resident was personally delivered their potted flowers, wrapped in tissue, in a hand tied gift bag and with an individual Easter card. Residents were clearly delighted, one remarking how touched she was as 'she never receives anything, and even more so from someone she did not know before.'

Our plan is to build on this initial contact with further visits and other activities in the homes. Indeed, following a successful joint presentation between the CoM and representatives of the OSJCT at the International Hospitallers' Conference on care of the elderly, discussions are afoot as to how best to develop our involvement with the homes. We will be meeting Dan Hayes (CEO of the OSJCT Care Homes) and Catherine (Head of Volunteering) next Wednesday (here at the Oratory) to discuss how we can build that army of volunteers to which we jointly aspire.

Nonetheless, if you dear listener/reader live near one of the care homes and would like to get involved to brighten up the day of a resident, please contact Helena and Alex for London, Sarah in Gloucestershire or Jamie in Oxford.

For the homeless we were no less busy at Easter packing and distributing 600 parcels to 20 different destinations again across England and Scotland, with over 4000 items of new clothing and kit to set people up for the Spring, including that indispensable mini-egg. All seamlessly purchased, packed and dispatched again by our London volunteers. The Easter celebrations for the homeless culminating in a big party on Thursday for 80 guests at Spanish Place, lovingly arranged again by our SP volunteers.

Birmingham

That brings us to some of our new ventures, first among which must be Birmingham and the recent opening of the refurbished premises at the church of St Catherine of Siena, in which we are a lead partner thanks to the support of Basmom and the significant commitment of Charles de Rohan and Peter Vella, as well as our Deputy Chair.

These wonderful new premises will provide, in this new location, additional and improved facilities for the homeless in the city, for a longstanding programme run by Fr Hudson's Care, the social arm of the Archdiocese, which has a proven track record of successful support and re-integration.

As lead partners we will seek to learn from this, and we plan to use our experience to work with the Community to start a meal service for those in need. For us this is also a unique opportunity to enhance our presence in the area and to work with Fr Hudson's Care and the Archdiocese in identifying further opportunities for collaboration.

Other New Ventures

In addition, and alongside our many existing projects, this year we have launched a number of significant new ventures. We have opened a new breakfast club for the homeless in Bayswater, and established a new drop in café in Cirencester. In Ellesmere Port, Fr Edmund has started a soup kitchen and a food bank with our support (Charles and Kate visiting recently to impart a masterclass on best practice). Attendance is, remarkably, already in excess of 100 people a week.

Ongoing activities continue across Scotland, but notably, we now have a new Companions Group at Aberdeen University. A new monthly tea time get together at Jedburgh. And new Companions in Edinburgh are volunteering with the Bethany Trust Care Van project offering food and support on the streets of the City. Thanks to Tom (our Convener), Angus and Liam for their huge efforts in delivering these brilliant works.

Our Regular Works

All this has taken place against the continuing backdrop of our regular work with the elderly and homeless. The work of the Wiltshire and Gloucestershire CoM in the care homes and with their café, the frequent lunches for the elderly in London, tea parties in Northumberland and more. As well as all our usual homeless projects; in London (East Hill, Golden Square, SP and Bayswater), Oxford (every day) and Colchester (Mondays) and in Scotland in Coatbridge, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, the Borders and the Highlands. Plus of course the great contribution being made by our university CoM, principally Oxford and Cambridge but developing also in Bristol, Aberdeen and elsewhere.

It is really this that I would want to highlight above all in this report, the fabulous teams of volunteers we have at each project. The fantastic food that is provided. All the toil and hard work that goes into each evening, the planning, the ordering, the cooking, the serving, the piano playing. And above all the wonderful relationship that you/our teams have with the guests, the laughs we have, lifting their spirits and ours. These are the downtrodden, the marginalised, the isolated **but not** when they come through the door at any one of our events.

The Business of the Meeting

As to the formal business of our meeting, please refer to items 4 to 6 on the Agenda. As you may know we review our annual subscription at each AGM. Last year we increased our subscription by £10 to £70pa, with concessions offered to students etc and one year's free introductory membership to ex-OMV.

It is not proposed to increase this again this year. However, it remains the case that whilst our works and expenditure have grown considerably over the last few years, our subscription income is a decreasing percentage of the funds need to pay for our works. The answer to this must lie in part in increasing our membership base and we urge everyone to join up and encourage others to do the same.

As regards item 5 and the membership of our Council, the following arises. Firstly, Adrian our Birmingham lead has for various personal reasons indicated he will step down. Adrian de Redman has been a wonderful example of determined effort for many years, arranging events in Birmingham, caring for the sick and HP's in his area and leading our 'powerhouse of prayer' in the Midlands. We are very much indebted to him and thank him sincerely for all he has done. God Bless you Adrian.

In the South East, David Dowden who has also given sterling service for some years is moving to a new home in the West Country. He has indicated a willingness to take a lead in his new region. The plan is for him to take up this appointment when he has settled into his new abode.

In the circumstances, we now have vacancies in 3 regions. Potential candidates are in our sights, but if you would like to be considered please do put your name forward. Otherwise, no requirement for contested elections is understood to arise. Accordingly, may we simply commend to you for the time being the revised composition of the CoM Council set out in the annexed sheet, and thank all of those involved for their continued commitment.

If you have any observations on the above or indeed any other matter raised in this report do please email Annie our secretary at companions@orderofmalta.org.uk; so I can address the matter at the AGM or by email as most appropriate.

The Way Ahead

Amongst our key targets for 2023/24 must be the following:

- To develop our involvement in Birmingham, establishing a new soup kitchen in partnership with Fr Hudson's Care, forging links with the student population and appointing a new area lead.

- To expand our volunteer base and work with OSJCT and the elderly. We have recently had an extremely constructive meeting with Dan Hayes (CEO, OSJCT) and Catherine Semmence (Head of Volunteering, OSJCT) to agree on a joint strategy and will be setting out our plans shortly. Charles and I will be able to say more about this at the AGM.

- To continue to grow our volunteering opportunities with the homeless and elderly, particularly in areas where we currently have little presence and in our target Universities whilst consolidating existing projects.

- To enlarge our membership base and look to improve our fundraising effort.

Some specific dates for your diaries also; **12 October 2023** (target date) Tenth Anniversary Mass and Celebrations for Spanish Place, **6 December 2023**, CoM Carol Service and Christmas Reception, and **11 February 2024** Companions Day.

Vote of Thanks

None of the works mentioned above would be possible without the support, efforts and prayers of all Companions and our great cohort of volunteers (would be Companions, as I like to think of you). Also, that of our many donors, from generous bank staff at Hoare & Co and the team at Vermeer Capital, to some remarkable individuals (including one anonymous donor who has given £30,000 to the cause).

None of this would be possible either without the support we get from the Order Chaplains and Clergy at Spanish Place, Golden Square, Bayswater and East Hill.

But special thanks belong always to our project leaders, Alexandra, Liz, Kate, Helena, Georgie, Anna and JD, Cecily, Verena, Gill, Helene and Sybille, Andrea and Wojtek, Jamie, Krzysztof, and Tom, Liam and Angus in Scotland, as well as our lead cooks Kate and Clare, Patrick our QM in chief and again you our stalwart volunteers.

Each time we say the Companions' Prayer we ask for the Grace we need 'to practise our Faith and to practise charity', wonderfully, as all of the above shows, our prayers are being answered. In 2023/24 we shall keep up our efforts and prayers to continue our mission to aid

the poor, homeless and elderly, both through our existing projects as well as new plans, such as our major new initiative for homeless accommodation and support in Birmingham.

Paul Letman
Chair

Charles Nicholson
Deputy Chair