Year End 2024 Report
The Companions of the Order of Malta

December 2024/Updated January 2025

Dear Companion,

*** Thank you for your phenomenal efforts over Christmas ***

The past year has been another positive one for The Companions 'in our mission to practice our Faith and to practice charity' (as our prayer says) and in doing so to deliver the works of the Order. From our engagement with the elderly to our work with the poor and homeless, from Arundel to Ayrshire, much has been achieved. Excitingly, also this year we welcomed Fr Edmund as our dedicated chaplain; not only doing great work in his own parish in Ellesmere Port but providing inspiration and added spiritual direction to our work.

Our Regular Works

Central to any report on the year just past is of course our regular and extensive work with the elderly and homeless. From the loyal work of the Wiltshire and Gloucestershire CoM in the OSJCT care homes, , thanks to the leadership of Sarah and Vron, including their regular café, to the hugely well attended, bi-monthly musical lunches for the elderly in London organised by Alex and her devoted team, as well as our inspirational monthly tea parties in Northumberland.

In addition, there are our many weekly projects for the homeless and marginalised; in London at Spanish Place (on Monday and Thursday evenings), East Hill (Tuesday evenings), Bayswater and Golden Square (Tuesday and Wednesday breakfast clubs), Oxford (every day), 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 and Aberdeen.

No report on our activities would be complete without paying tribute to the fabulous teams of volunteers we have at each project. All the hard work that goes into every evening or event, the planning, the ordering, the serving, the piano playing. The healthy food that is provided by our many cooks or so kindly donated by Hoare & Co. and the Felix Project amongst others. Above all though, the wonderful relationship that our teams have with the guests,

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 projects.

Yet further, the past twelve month have seen a variety of volunteering activities for Companions at the Nehemiah Project, through the efforts of Coco, Martha and others. These have ranged from healthy eating workshops at both the Croydon and Streatham Houses, IT drop-in sessions at our Croydon House, dyslexia and literacy one-to-one support with their Residents, conducting research into local activities and opportunities for Residents and of course, garden work alongside Residents to beautify the gardens of the Nehemiah houses.

To augment and better manage our projects, 2024 saw the launch of our dedicated Volunteero App. Thanks to Duncan's leadership on this and Kate's tireless efforts, it has been successfully rolled out to some 800 (eight hundred) Companions and volunteers across many of our projects. Enabling people to sign up easily for each project, simplifying the task of organising each project as well as other specific events, whilst improving our communications and connection with our membership and supporters.

Easter

Looking back over the year, special mention also needs to be made of Companions' efforts over 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, working with Dan Hayes (CEO of the OSJCT Care Homes) and Catherine (Head of Volunteering), we are intent on making 2025 our 'Year of the Care Homes', doubling down on our efforts to build that army of volunteers to which we jointly aspire.

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 for 80 guests at Spanish Place, lovingly arranged again by our SP volunteers.

New Ventures

That brings us to some of our new ventures, first among which must be Birmingham and the newly opened 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.

In addition, and alongside our many existing projects, this year we have launched a number of significant new ventures. In Ellesmere Port, Fr Edmund has started a soup kitchen and a food bank with our support (Charles and Kate assisting with advice 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 Angus and Liam for their huge efforts in delivering these works. Thanks also to Tom, who has paused his contribution but who we look forward to welcoming back in due course.

Christmas Events

When first we wrote this report, we were already in the throes of our other busiest season of the year, Christmas. The Christmas festivities began with another hugely enjoyable CoM Brompton Oratory Lunch at the end of November 2024, with 65 guests lovingly entertained. We looked forward too to a festive Northumberland tea party, thanks to Peter and his team. Whilst, our Christmas card project for the OSJCT Care Homes, through the efforts of Companions in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, as well as enthusiastic teams at Spanish Place and Golden Square again yielded hundreds of handwritten and personalised cards.

For the Homeless our Christmas parcels this year numbered some 1100; each containing clothing and toiletries. Brilliantly organised by Kate (our London Coordinator) and Patrick (head of supplies), these over 18,000 items were packed by a small army of volunteers and then dispatched to over 20 different destinations around England and Scotland.

This was followed by our many Christmas lunches, dinners and breakfasts hosted for our homeless guests. Nowadays, almost too numerous to mention. These began with a festive lunch in Colchester, thanks to Georgie and Julia and the whole team. To be closely followed by Christmas dinner with all the trimmings for 90 guests at Spanish Place, with carols and presents. Then the week before Christmas saw further festive celebrations; dinner at East Hill

with presents very kindly donated by the parishes of St.Mary Magdalen and The Holy Ghost; festive breakfasts at Bayswater and Golden Square, including generous gifts sponsored again by our friends at Corten Capital.

Whilst Companions also gathered at the Nehemiah house in Tooting for a festive Saturday lunch, including making mince pies, decorating gingerbread men and socialising. Thanks to Alex for making us so welcome, and to Coco for the chocolates and snacks. Special thanks to the Residents as well for their efforts in writing Christmas cards for the OSJCT Care Homes.

In addition, in Scotland Companions were busy distributing our Christmas parcels, hosting their own celebrations, all concluding with Christmas lunch in Inverness. Even then though our seasonal offering was not be over. At Golden Square on 3rd and 4th January 2025, thanks to a devoted group led by Liz we are opening for brunch and showers. Providing a much needed warm space and company, in that gap each year when Crisis has shut and many other homeless projects are closed for the holidays.

On top of this we have seen once again a great response to our Winter Warmer campaign as well as many generous personal donations and fund raising efforts. 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 a fabulous £4,800. Whilst the Carol Service looks set again to make a huge contribution, with over 300 tickets sold thanks to the energy and efforts of Marie Christina and Maggie and all those involved in its organisation.

Last but by no means least, our Christmas offering was topped by Alex's mission to the Royal Hospital Chelsea, delivering wonderful decorated mini-Christmas trees to cheer up the rooms and common rooms of the MTI; all hugely well received by the Commandant and above all the In-pensioners.

Vote of Thanks

None of the works mentioned above would have been or be possible without the support, efforts and prayers of all Companions and our great cohort of volunteers. We owe a particular debt of gratitude also to all the Order Chaplains and the Clergy at Spanish Place, Golden Square, Bayswater and East Hill who give us such tremendous support. In this regard, we offer our special thanks to Mgr Newton and Gill who worked so closely with us at Golden Square; we wish them well in their retirement. Also to Mgr Armitage who led our Lenten Reflections so beautifully; we hope this inspiring initiative will become an annual fixture.

Special thanks belong also to our project leaders, Kate, Alexandra, Liz, Helena, Georgie, Anna and JD, Cecily, Verena, 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. We thank also all members of the CoM Council, particularly Maggie and Annie who do so much behind the scenes.

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 2025 we shall keep up our efforts and prayers to continue our mission to aid the poor, homeless and elderly, both through our existing projects and we hope many new initiatives and projects.

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. Please also visit our website at for further insights and information about the work of the Companions.

Wishing you a Happy and Blessed New Year. We look forward to seeing you soon in 2025, renewed by the Christmas break and ready to continue our work to help those in need.

Paul Letman M.B.E.
Chair

Sir Charles Nicholson
Deputy Chair

N.B. Date for your diary, Companions Day on 11 February 2025; events include 7. pm. Mass at the RAU (Royal Agricultural University) Cirencester, with further and other details to follow.