



# the Company of Servers

## Chairman General's AGM Report, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Today we come together to mark the Company of Servers second birthday. This festival has thankfully not begun with panic over whether the participants would be able to be here as a result of an ash cloud, and it is wonderful to see you all here. I begin, as I did last year with some very necessary and very sincere thank yous.

Thank you to Mother Francis, Sharon Brown and the Ripon and Leeds Chapter who are hosting us today. It's wonderful that this festival is able to travel and I'm sure we'd all like to express our appreciation for the today's hospitality... We are indebted to Fr David Peat and all at St Michael's for giving us a home this year... thanks also to Mother Catherine Macpherson for being with us today. Particular thanks to David Walls, Alex Hobbs and the choir of St Michael's for being with us today.

My continued thanks go to the members of the Central Committee: Rhona McEune, John Kitchener, William Varlow, Mark Charlton and David Stephenson. Tremendous time and effort is given in the cause of the Company and I'm very grateful to them and for them. Work and vocation mean that David and I have relocated (David to Burnley and me to the College of the Resurrection at Mirfield) and we hope this geographical spread will help to encourage the growth of the Company across the country. Unfortunately in the course of the year Charlotte Botham resigned due to changed circumstances. In order to continue our work with young people, the Central Committee unanimously co-opted Jack Harding as Youth Officer at the November meeting (more on that later) and it's good to see the progress made being continued.

Special thanks, as ever to our Chaplain General, Fr Andrew. Andrew has been present at the launch of several chapters this year as well as at our committee meetings, and his encouragement and good humour are constant. Following the untimely death of Fr Colin Slee, the Dean of Southwark, (a fearless warrior for an inclusive church) we are even more grateful for Andrew's time as he leads that community as Acting Dean.

It is particularly wonderful today to have Bishop Stephen with us. Father, thank you for your presence and words today, for your great enthusiasm for the Company and, somewhat belatedly, please accept our congratulations for your appointment as Bishop of Ely...

This has been a busy year - Chapters have been founded and membership increased. More and more people are finding what we have to offer attractive, and it is good to be aware of our increasing presence and to hear of the diverse events being held by all our Chapters. I was delighted (and not a little nervous) to address the SCP national conference in Nottingham and our fruitful relationship continues with the Society. The Society webpage continues to pass on our news, and I have been pleased to write for the quarterly review to keep our priests and supporters abreast of developments. Our own website is as useful a tool as ever and is continuing to be an accurate and informative visible presence. Having said that, a website is only ever as good or useful as the information on it and there is always room for more news and more events, so please, please pass on details of what you're doing to Mark Charlton so that he can tell the world. We also now have a Facebook group. It was a joy to be present at the foundation of the London Chapter in January and I am encouraged by news of meetings to be held in Chelmsford and Worcester in June, which will hopefully lead to Chapters being founded in those places. We also plan a presence with SCP at the July meeting of the General Synod in York from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> July and it would be helpful if anyone who could assist with facilitating that would contact me.

You will have noticed from the agenda that there are various constitutional amendments and additions proposed today. We very much hope you will be enthused by our wish to continue to engage with all who wish to support us, and to put the necessary mechanisms in place to do this. More on those later.

On a rather less positive note, it has come to our attention that members of the Company have recently received letters from another organisation for servers stating that *"they are not able to become members of both groups."* It has apparently been assumed that the individuals concerned no longer wish to be members of other organisations. I am aware of and deeply regret the significant pain caused to those who have been affected in this way, but I would take this opportunity to restate the Company position that we are an inclusive organisation, and this commitment to inclusion is very clearly defined by our constitution and by the reality of our common life. The Company of Servers is not a campaigning society but is an organisation founded on and sustained by the faith and tradition we hold in common, not driven by the negativity of disagreement. We remain open to all who wish to be Companions with us on their journey of faith.

A successful photo shoot at St Saviour's Church (the venue of last year's festival) took place during the year for the production of our handbook. We are grateful to Phil Gray for his photographic expertise (for the handbook, and here today) and to Kathryn Beecroft for the design and production of this important project. We hope the handbook will be able to reach the production stage very soon.

At this point I must report with sadness the loss of a Companion: Harry Pedlow, a member of the St Albans Chapter and faithful servant at the altar for over 50 years passed away shortly after being involved in the photo shoot for our handbook. Harry was deeply supportive of our aims and we send our prayers and condolences to Mary and all the family. All who knew Harry remain grateful for the example

of Christian love and fortitude with which he lived and faced his illness, and then prepared to go to his God. As the Company becomes older, the office hymn 'In our day of thanksgiving' at Evensong will doubtless become more poignant as we give thanks for those who have completed their earthly service.

After last year's festival I was approached by a charitable partner and we are grateful to the management of A Life with a View Ltd for their support. Finance of course remains an issue, but it is good that the Company is for the moment financially secure in its own right. We have made considerable progress in paying off the loan from SCP which financed our badges and medals and we hope to be able to complete this as soon as is practical. This festival remains our largest single expense, and the collections taken today are very important to our being able to meet these costs: please give to these collections as generously as you are able. If there are any sponsors, individual or corporate whom you may know or have links with, I'm always delighted to hear from you! It should also be said quite clearly that the Central Committee holds funds for the benefit of the whole Company, and though those funds are not limitless, we are eager to give financial assistance where possible to Chapters and events that would benefit from it.

One of the greatest joys, and the greatest trials of an organisation like ours is the accurate management of membership. David Stephenson works tirelessly, (and mostly cheerfully) to maintain contact with all Chapters but we have become aware that some Chapters operate in a slightly isolated way and may be missing out on some of the opportunities that are available. We are, after all, volunteers, but it is vital that contact is maintained, and this may just involve a quick email or phone-call. David is always pleased to hear from you. We would like to propose the idea of regional meetings of Chapter Chair people, and we hope that this may become an opportunity for the sharing of best practise between Chapters and will enable groups to work together, to attend eachother's meetings and events and hopefully to gain on a corporate and individual level.

Looking ahead to our third birthday, I'm pleased to announce that Festival 2012 (Olympic year, Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee year, Prince William and Princess Catherine's first anniversary year and all) will be held at...

So our growth is continuing and the offering of companionship, support, evangelism, education, friendship and a welcome for all is becoming visible in the life of our church. The next few years promise to be challenging ones for all of us and we continue to pray for all our brothers and sisters, especially those who lead us, throughout the communion.

For everything that has been, and for everything that lies ahead for this Company of Servers: Thanks be to God. Alleluia.

**David Warner, Chairman General**