



the Company of Servers

Chairman General's AGM Report, 24th April 2010

There is an old story of an American woman going into an English cathedral and saying to one of the vergers, 'I just love your Anglican lethargy.' A friend of mine asked if the Company of Servers was something to do with a collection of computers. Or maybe a trade union for restaurant staff and party organisers. When people gathered in Westminster last May they were given the chance to do something very special in the life of the Church - to be there and to be involved when a new organisation was founded. An organisation for those who are servants at the altar and of the liturgy, and one which, they hoped would go on to teach the 'whys' and 'hows' as well as strengthening the bonds of fellowship between lay and ordained men and women in our churches. Well, a year later, here we are. The Company of Servers, a gathering far too energetic to be accused of any Anglican lethargy, is a reality.

This has been a year of getting to know each other, and getting to know this new thing that has been called into life, and is usually known, somewhat dramatically as 'the Company.' The Central Committee have got to know each other and have started the work of directing the life of this organisation. If I may, I would like to begin with the first of many thank yous, and to pay tribute now to all who put themselves forward to serve on the Central Committee, under its very nervous Chairman. Thanks are due to Rhona McEune for her work as Secretary General, and to John Kitchener for his battling with bankers to ensure our finances are safe. Thanks to Charlotte Botham for beginning our plans for what we can do for and with our young people. Mark Charlton has worked tirelessly on our communications, and it's good to see our new website being used by so many to find out about us.

My very sincere thanks go to David Stephenson for taking on the crucial and I'm pleased to say ever-expanding task of managing our membership and liaising with Chapters. I'm also grateful, today especially, to William Varlow for taking on the role of co-ordinating this festival.

No thanks would be complete without saying a huge thank you to Canon Andrew Nunn for his support, encouragement and good humour. I am personally very grateful to Andrew for agreeing to be our Chaplain General. I know that this organisation is one that he and the Society of Catholic Priests have imagined for some time and I hope we are starting to live up to that vision. At this point, we should also place on record our thanks to Andrew for his considerable donation at our foundation and I would ask him to convey our thanks to the Society for the generous underwriting of the costs of our medals.

This has started as less of a report and more a list of 'thank you's' so maybe it is a bit like a wedding speech but I promise there are only a few more to go! We must all thank those who have helped make today so special. To Fr Peter and his congregation here for their welcome and the loan of their beautiful church: to the St Albans Chapter for their involvement in today's services and their efforts to welcome their guests from across the country: to Kwaku Appiah who has led the catering and hospitality: to Richard Botham who is recording these events for posterity (and who is responsible for most of the photographs already on our website!). I would also extend our very great thanks to Mthr Jo for her words and encouragement. I'm sorry if I've forgotten anyone, but to all who have worked to make today a success, and to all of you who have travelled to be here and make the day a real festival, I say with the greatest possible sincerity - thank you.

And now for the report.

The Company of Servers is its members. Or, in the words of our constitution the Company is its Companions. As lay and ordained Christians we are companions together in this organisation, working for friendship, working to support each other in our various ministries and working to further the Kingdom. It was good to hear the words of the newly composed Company prayer used for the first time today and I am pleased to offer greetings to this gathering on behalf of Bishop Stephen.

One of the emerging strengths of the Company is an ability to tailor itself to local needs and I hope you have plans as Chapters to enhance and develop your common life and to meet the needs of your Companions. Whatever our age or experience or background we are Companions together and this organisation offers us a chance to learn from each other, to share our ideas and to support each other, in what we do, and in our life of worship and prayer.

You hopefully won't be surprised to hear that the Central Committee has plans for our future - doesn't that sound scary? Really it just means there's no time to relax! The manual for servers must be completed and issued, and the website can now be expanded with photos of events (like this one!) and an electronic version of the manual. We also hope to see many more Chapter pages on the website - this is your chance to show the world what you're up to!

Looking ahead, we hope to develop training packs and continuing to encourage the very best liturgical standards in all our churches while ensuring that servers of all ages know 'why' they're doing something as well as 'when' and 'how.' We plan to inaugurate new Chapters and to welcome new Companions into our fellowship. More than anything, the Company exists to serve you, nationally and locally, so tell each other what you want to see the Company doing both in your area and more widely and let's use the talents of all our Companions to build on the success we've already enjoyed.

All this success and activity is testament to the many people locally and nationally giving generously and sacrificially of their time and talent to create and assist the Company's common life. However, as you

will appreciate there are considerable costs involved in an organisation such as ours, and this year, as we shall hear, has been one of expenditure rather than income. All that has been achieved centrally so far for the Company has been the result of a single gift, for which we are very grateful. Chapter subscriptions will of course cover many of the expenses incurred from day to day, but events such as this, and the many set-up costs which have been encountered, have taken the majority of our funds. I wouldn't want anyone excluded from involvement with us because of financial issues, but I would urge you all to give as generously as you can to today's collections to ensure the financial stability of the Company and enable us to continue to advance our common life. If there are any people out there who feel they would be able to make a more considerable gift to the Company to safeguard our future, please do speak to me! We have much to achieve, and no end of enthusiasm, but we need the funds to do the job!

I have talked so far mainly to those who are already members of the Company. There are many people here today who aren't members. Yet. You are all very welcome, and we hope today will go some way to making your mind up to join the Company. I know that joining a new organisation can be a scary thing, but please, if you're thinking of joining or would like to find out more, please take the opportunity to speak to anyone here, and we shall be delighted to answer any questions you may have.

The Company of Servers is beginning to take its place in the life of our church as an organisation working to promote fellowship and the highest liturgical standards and education. In these difficult days for our communion we are proud to stand alongside our brothers and sisters in the Society of Catholic Priests and to pray continually for the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury. I am delighted to say that I have received a message of support for our gathering from the Archbishop, and his thanks for our prayers. I'm pleased to say that I have also received a message from the Bishop of St Albans.

So here we are, entering the second year of the Company's life. To be Chairman General of this Company is a joy and a very great privilege and I look forward to reporting at next year's AGM on another year of growth and success. I hope we can work together to develop this organisation to serve all its Companions and to provide the support, education and fellowship which we believe to be a part of our calling as Christians. The Central Committee are all here to support you so if you have an event you'd like us to attend or need advice or assistance, please do get in touch!

This meeting will look at our membership progress, our finances and our constitution as well as other ways in which we regulate our common life to ensure the recognition of all. But today is about more than reports, and being Companions is about more than festival gatherings. Day by day, in our churches and Chapters we gather to praise God and to exercise the extraordinary privilege of assisting others in their worship, and in so doing, we deepen our relationship with each other, and with the God who loves us.

So let us go forward together, praying for the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit. 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