



# the Company of Servers

## Chairman General's Report to the AGM 2013

The Company is now 4 years old and it has felt during this first year of my chairmanship that the toddler David Warner mentioned in his Chairman's Report last year and suddenly become rather large and weighty. The months since last year's AGM have been filled with a significant amount of work from a number of groups and individuals associated with the Company resulting in some marvellous achievements and developments and so I make no apology for the length of my report.

Today is a wonderful day. Not only do we meet as companions to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival in the magnificent surroundings of this cathedral church - soon to be even more prestigious as it receives the remains of King Richard III - we meet to reflect on the ministry we have all fulfilled over the last year and to celebrate the mission and work of the company.

We are delighted to be hosted by the Leicester Chapter this year in their Cathedral and offer our thanks to their Chair, Clive Watts, and the members of the Chapter for their hospitality and welcome. We are very grateful, too, to Fr. Johannes and his colleagues on the Cathedral staff and volunteers for their very generous welcome and accommodation here today.

Part of the mission of the Company of Servers is to be evangelists and we fulfil this, in part, by promoting not only the Company wherever we can, but, more importantly, being faithful and visible servants of God at work in the world and the Church. This has been a challenging year for the Church and we have heard throughout it, and today, much about the effects of the vote of General Synod on the question of women bishops but there are further issues and implications about unity between Christians. We must remember, always, that our Company of Servers is an inclusive organisation and this includes those with whom we might not necessarily agree ourselves. If we fail to welcome all, we fail our call to be servants of God. I was heartened this week to receive greetings for our Festival and AGM from fellow servers in the Guild of Servants of the Sanctuary who wish us well for our celebrations today. I hope, and wonder, if there is a connection to be forged between our organisations.

The promotion of the Company has remained at the forefront of the work of the Central Committee this year and I am pleased to report that 2000 postcards have been printed for use by chapters to attract enquiries from those who may be interested in what we are doing. Each postcard has a space for local contact details to be added and also has a QR code which, once read by your mobile telephone, takes you directly to our website. The website continues to be our primary point of contact and reference both for new comers and for those already associated with the Company. Mark Charlton continues to maintain its content and is always delighted to receive reports of meetings, events, calendars and photographs of what is happening in each Chapter. If your Chapter has yet to appear in print or picture on the website

then it is time indeed that it did! Please make it your personal responsibility to send Mark something in the next couple of weeks so that our initial aim to have a page on the site for each Chapter can be fulfilled.

In addition to the postcards and website we have also purchased two pull-up banners which you will have seen by now for use at events. Not only can these be used at national events, including the Festival, Synod, SCP conferences etc., but they can be borrowed by chapters for their own publicity. If your chapter can make use of a banner or two on temporary loan then I am the person to contact.

With a continued push on promotion and recruitment - there are very encouraging figures from the Membership Report - the role of National Membership Officer must be revisited in the coming year. Although this post has always carried with it an enormous workload it is now felt too large for one person to maintain, especially as it is a voluntary post and must be balanced against work and family commitments. When the Central Committee meets this Summer this matter will be on the agenda and I should welcome any offers of support or help with this role from anyone here today. Alex Hobbs has worked hard throughout his first year as National Membership Officer and I am grateful to him for all he has done to ensure the growth of the Company.

The Central Committee is always pleased to hear of projects and developments from individual chapters and a 2<sup>nd</sup> successful Chairs' Day was held at St Matthew's in Westminster earlier this year. Those who were present found it an extremely valuable opportunity to share best practise and ideas as well as getting to know each other a little better. Membership of the Company is about helping servers to be a part of something larger than their own parish experience, but also about being part of a growing national group. I urge you here today to encourage and promote attendance at local and national events to all your companions in your home chapters.

Also during the last year Fr. Andrew has produced for us admission and welcome rites for those who seek to connect with the Company as either Associate or Affiliate Companions. These roles are for those who are ordained and for those who are neither ordained nor servers but who wish to support our aims and objectives. These form of words are now available to download from the website. Please make use of them!

Finally perhaps our biggest achievement since foundation: I am more than delighted to be able to introduce you all today to the Company Handbook, *A Server's Companion*. Many of you will be aware how long this has been coming and to be able to launch it at this year's Festival is both a joy and a privilege - and a relief. This is not a 'how to' guide book and it will not answer all the questions which servers have but it *is* a reference, a glossary, a guide to good practise, a descriptive account and a representation of so much of what we as servers and ministers hold to be dear, important and valuable in our work in the sanctuary and at the altar. This booklet is the result of much consultation, debate, discussion, and sheer hard work and I am personally very grateful to all who have played any part in its creation and production. These handbooks are available to all who are members of the Company as part of the annual subscription and will be made available to Chapters to distribute in the coming weeks. At last year's AGM it was announced that we needed to find £600 to cover the cost of the Handbook production. I have to tell you today that the actual cost for the 1k printed is in the region of £3k. As a result the Company is indebted to the generosity of an anonymous donor who has made an interest free

loan to the Central Committee to cover the cost which is the only reason we have the Handbook with us today. I have always been touched by the generosity of many associated with the Company of Servers who recognise our work and mission as valuable in the Church. We are now actively seeking donations, which can be gift aided, to offset the cost to the Company for the production of the handbook which we recognise as an essential tool in our work. Individual and corporate gifts of money will be acknowledged in some way and will enable the Company, will enable *us*, to continue growing and developing the ministry we all understand as part of our vocation. I ask you to consider whether you are able to make an offering towards this project and if you are able to approach others, individuals, organisations or businesses who may feel sufficient empathy with our aims and objectives to also make an offering either for themselves, in memory of a loved one or anonymously.

I feel, as ever, that I could talk for much longer about the work of the Company of Servers. What we stand for is close to my heart and it is has been a joy to share in its growth over the last 12 months. Members of the Central Committee continue to work hard on your behalf and I should like to take this chance to thank them for what they have done on behalf of the Company this year too. The Company is as strong and successful as its members are faithful and committed. We all go from strength to strength, in the wonderful light of the resurrection and in the name of the God whom we serve. May it ever be so.

David Stephenson  
Chairman General  
13 April 2013