



Chairman General's Report to the AGM 2014

Each year, as the Chair makes the annual report to the AGM, we hear that *this is a wonderful day*. I know that this year is no different as there is a year of work, worship, prayer and ministry behind and, God-willing, another in front. However, to meet here today in celebration of the Resurrection, of our ministry as servers and in excited expectation of the national celebration which is to follow, praising God for 20 years of women being able to fulfil their vocation to serve as priests in God's holy Church, is surely a wonderful thing.

For the Central Committee Southwark Cathedral feels a bit like our natural habitat as, again, during the past year we have met here, generously hosted, to reflect and discuss and plan the work of the Company. We are very aware that across the country similar groups, faithful and committed, have also met and planned events for our growing number of Companions, Associates and Affiliates. One of the most enjoyable aspects of Central Committee meetings is hearing from our different Chapters: reports, photographs - when we get them - questions and queries. Since we met in Leicester last year the Chapter of Newcastle, Australia has been formally launched and a shipment of handbooks, postcards, badges and medals have been sent to them. Other Chapters have re-launched, stabilised and developed and through this there are a number of very solid Chapters coordinated by dedicated people. Alongside this, as ever, some areas of the country prove more of a challenge but with determined and realistic strategy in-roads continue to be made. Following several months of discussions and planning, on Easter Day, with a new diocese formed from the former dioceses of Wakefield, Bradford, Ripon and Leeds, the Company of Servers Chapter of West Yorkshire and the Dales came into being, covering an enormous geographical area and with equally enormous potential for reaching servers and clergy across that region. The Chapter Committee plan to begin outreach into the new, larger diocese, almost immediately and have planned events to entice and draw in those who have yet to experience our companionship.

Since we launched *A Server's Companion* last April the response has been incredibly positive. I hope that it is a reference point for you all and helps the process of training those new to serving and reminding those of us who have been at it a little longer. We were delighted to receive a number of financial donations towards the cost of producing the handbook and are grateful to those who felt able to contribute in this way.

Maintaining a positive profile of the Company is, I believe, essential and so it has been really good to have opportunities to be visibly present at meetings of the General Synod, as well as the SCP conference. Our website continues to be well-used and it's always good to see CoS Porch Cards and postcards on show and available in churches.

During the last year there has been further significant work on membership protocols and we have been able to move to a revised returns policy which is now completed electronically enabling more efficient and useful record-keeping. Although this may not appear as a huge stride forward it has meant that, for the first time, we have begun to critique and revise the Company's original policies and procedures, adapting to need and a change from what was originally perceived as how the company might operate.

Renewal is, I believe, an important and positive tool in any organisation, including the Church and, of course, our Company of Servers. It has been the desire of the Central Committee to continue adapting and adjusting to suit the needs and expectations of companions. Further change is ahead in the coming year as today 3 positions on the Central Committee become vacant. Since our last AGM Jack Harding felt it necessary to offer his resignation from Central Committee so that he might offer his full attention to his medical studies. We are very grateful for all that Jack offered to the Company and wish him every success in his studies and ensuing career.

Alex Hobbs, our National Membership Officer, also stands down today after 2 years of service on the Central Committee. Alex has made some very positive contributions to the role and not least in revising the returns procedure and beginning to build our membership database.

And, today, is my turn to stand down as Chairman General, having served for 2 years, and indeed, like other Central Committee colleagues, since the foundation of the Company 5 years ago. I genuinely feel it has been a privilege to be part of the Company of Servers and to see it grow, develop and flourish. At its heart is the desire to offer the very best worship and service to God and responding to God's call to ministry and discipleship.

So, where might the Company of Servers see itself in the coming years? I hope that it will continue to be visibly present in the ministry of servers at the altar and in the teaching and learning of skills and knowledge. I hope that its presence will permeate a wider geography and that it will retain and encourage a genuine godly commitment from companions to always offer to God only what God is worthy to receive. Any, above all, this year, I hope that at Festival Eucharist in the not too distant future, our Companions will serve at the altar as the Eucharist is celebrated by a bishop - another bishop -one who just happens to be a woman.

I close with some words I used last year,

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 and we may well fail to welcome Christ into our midst.

David Stephenson
Chairman General
3 May 2014