



Companions have been asking for clarification about their role. The following is an extract from a talk given this month by the Convener, Henry Lorimer, to students at Newcastle University. It is hoped that this will explain what we do and why we are so important to the Order and to the Church.

What exactly are Companions?

As far as the Order of Malta is concerned, the origin of the name ‘Companions’ came from Scotland when, in 1997 the Scottish Delegation of the Order of Malta formed a small group of volunteers to help the Knights and Dames (many of whom are very ancient) to carry out the Order’s Works of Mercy – This group was called Companions.

On his election, the Hospitaller of the Order, Tim Orchard, who is responsible for organising and overseeing the ‘good works of the Order, felt that there were so many voluntary groups with different names attached to the Order or working in the name of the Order, that what was needed was a single ‘umbrella’ name for all of the Order’s volunteers and helpers. The existing name - Companions of the Order of Malta - fitted the bill perfectly.

In 2008, a Companions Council was formed to oversee a national Society. Statutes were drawn up and a number of policy decisions were made. Our guiding principle is summed up by the Order’s age-old motto *To serve Our Lords the sick and the poor.*

Companions Council Meeting

The Companions Council met for the first time at the end of last year. The most important item on the agenda was to decide the exact role of Companions in the short term while numbers are relatively small and until we are ready to form into regional groups. It was agreed that Companions’ charitable work, other than that done by the auxiliaries, will concentrate initially on supporting the work of the Order by regular visits to care homes, (especially those of the Orders of St John Care Trust) and Hospices (especially St John’s Centre for Palliative Care in London). These Care Homes are located in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire. Companions who live outside these areas should identify their local Care Homes and Hospices and then fulfil the same role.

This fits in well with the Companions fuller role (as confirmed by the Companions Council) to:-

Visit the elderly, the infirm, the sick and the disabled - especially in Care Homes and Hospices.

Support the Order's worldwide relief effort, particularly when major crises occur by donating whatever can be afforded personally, by circulating appeals, setting up fundraising events and the like.

Join the Order's pilgrimages when possible and help to identify the sick who might wish to go with us, particularly to Lourdes and Walsingham.

Join members of the Order for House Masses, religious discussions, retreats and days of recollection.

Encourage the young to join the OMV, to work both at home and overseas.

For the present, however, our main role is to sit and chat to the elderly residents in Care Homes, Hospices and Hospitals and to visit the housebound.

Britain is fast becoming a nation of Pensioners and with age comes sickness, infirmity, poverty and loneliness. Caring for them is part of our calling. And more and more help is needed. Parish priests long for more house visitors to come forward.

Before frightening potential Companions away with an enormous list of good works carried out by a group of saints, it is important to stress that Companions are ordinary people of good will who simply wish to support the Order and its work - who are asked to do only what they can, when they can. It is fully understood that mothers with small children, enormously busy businessmen and women, pre-exam students with no time for anything but their studies and those who are too old or infirm are not able to commit to 'hands on' support. It is therefore enough to support our work by just paying the annual subscription, responding to the odd appeal and, of course, by praying.

Having said this, the Companions run a major Ball in Scotland, organise outings for the disabled, carol services and many other events to do with our work and raise money for our charities. In the name of the Companions of the Order of Malta please feel confident about arranging similar events where you live.

It is true that you don't have to be a Companion to carry out Works of Mercy, but being part of the oldest charity in the world and working with *kindred spirits* who support the work of the Order encourages us all to do more than we might otherwise do by ourselves.

In the long term we plan to have regional Companions teams, include prison visiting as part of our work etc., but we need many more Companions before we can move to this stage. Most people wishing to participate in Works of Mercy find it easier and more enjoyable to be part of a team. Everyone who wishes to help in this work is most welcome.

A word from the Grand Prior

It gives me great pleasure to write a short introduction to this the first Companions Newsletter.

You are aware that the Order of Malta is a religious order of the Church whose purpose is the sanctification of its members through its works of *tuitio fidei et obsequium pauperum* or promotion of the Faith and Care of the Needy. In practice this means both promoting the love of God by our way of life and working to help those in any kind of need. We cannot do this alone and so we need help from the Companions and from other auxiliary bodies throughout the world.

Those we serve we refer to as 'Our Lords the Sick' recognizing that we are to be their servants in our work. An old prayer of the Order, recited in the Hospital of St John and Elizabeth in London at the end of the day, starts "Our Lords the Sick pray for us..."

May Our Lords the Sick continue to pray for us as we do for them and may God bless the work of you, the Companions.

Fra Freddy Crichton-Stuart.
Grand Prior of England

What happens on Induction day

It was decided that it would be a good idea to link the Companions Inductions with the Lourdes Training days that are held annually in April (see your Diary of Events). The morning will start with Holy Mass followed by training session on working with the sick. This will result in an official qualification (a requirement for all those coming to Lourdes on the Order's pilgrimage). It will be followed by lunch. For Companions there will be short talks on the history of the Order, working with the Order today and the Role of the Companions followed by tea and depart.

The Annual Pilgrimage to Lourdes

Each year in May we British join the international Order of Malta pilgrimage to Lourdes. We take 60 sick people, "malades", with us and about 250 helpers to look after them in the hospital, the "Accueil". Helpers are organised into teams and we look after the malades in shifts, getting them up, washed, dressed, taking them to their meals, taking them to the various Masses and religious services, chatting with them over coffees and drinks. The Medical Officer, Doctors and Nurses have the overall responsibility for the care of our malades, of course. It doesn't feel like hard work and it is a wonderful experience. If you are interested in getting more information on the Pilgrimage, or if you are interested in joining it, please contact the Secretary.

Main charities of the Order /Companions

Companions will have read on the Companions leaflet when joining which lists the Order of Malta's main charities. If you would like to know more please visit the Order's websites www.orderofmalta.org and www.orderofmalta.org.uk.

Companions can respond to all international major disasters and send aid to over 120 countries through the Order of Malta's worldwide relief organisation. We can therefore not only contain our donations to one single Christian charity but we can do so knowing that administration costs are minimal.

Companions Annual 'get-together. TBA

There will be arranged, later in the year, at least one annual Companions party - time and place to be announced. The idea is for Companions to meet each other, council members and members of the Order.

Newsletter contributions from Companions

There will be two newsletters a year. Your Council will use them to impart information and Companions are invited to contribute by letter or with short articles on the subject of your work as a Companion. All contributions to the Secretary.

Your help in building the Companions movement

You will have realised that the Companions Society is new in its present form and needs to evolve. You have been most patient thus far which is much appreciated. Please will you now help by recruiting new Companions, by identifying hospitals and hospices in your area and by starting to visit them on a regular basis. You will be aware that your parish priest is always in need of people to visit the housebound. This too is our role as Companions, to support and help our Parish Priests in this way.

May Our Lord bless us in our work.

Information

Should you ever have need of information, help or guidance in your work as a Companion please channel all your enquiries through Shelagh Martell, the Companions Secretary and she will make sure that you get a quick and satisfactory reply.

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