

# SMTF The Society for the Maintenance of the Faith

**Presidential Address**  
*by Dr Colin Podmore MBE*  
**15 June 2024**

Rather surprisingly, to me at least, this is my fourth AGM as President of our Society. The first was held in our parish of Notting Hill. Had *force majeure* not intervened, this would have been the third to be held at St Magnus the Martyr, London Bridge, where I am a member of the congregation and one of the parish clerks. May I begin by expressing my heartfelt thanks to Fr Luke Miller for coming to the rescue by allowing us to hold our Festival and AGM here at St Andrew's? We're very grateful to the churchwardens, Martin Woods and Tom Ormond, for all the work that they have done this week to make this occasion possible, and especially to Tom for coming to look after us today. Huge thanks too, to Fr Philip Warner and all his team for our Eucharist, and for the additional work they have done to make it happen here. We are especially indebted to our preacher, Bishop John Ford, for a powerful sermon that was very relevant to our work. Thank you to Ben Almond, for coming down from St Stephen's House to serve at the mass: it is always encouraging to see young men preparing for ordination as the priests of the future. Thank you to the St Magnus director of music, Ed Walters, and the choir for giving us a Stanford communion service in this, the centenary year of Stanford's death. Thanks also to St Magnus, and principally to the St Magnus chef de cuisine Professor Frank Keating, for the lunch that we are about to enjoy: if the last two years are anything to go by, it will be excellent.

You will no doubt have been relieved that we haven't had to consider yet more amendments to our Constitution this year: the work of updating it is complete for now. The Council will be undertaking a light-touch review of our policies in the autumn. What we have done this year is to simplify our accounts by returning funds that were held for the benefit of three named parishes to those parishes. We therefore now have no restricted or designated funds, just a general fund, which will make our financial position much easier for everyone to understand in future.

Our efforts to rationalize and simplify our patronage continue. Last year, I reported that we had been able to make a patronage exchange with the Bishop of Sheffield, exchanging a parish that no longer had a church and was about to be absorbed into a neighbouring non-resolution parish for the benefice of Edlington and Hexthorpe (two resolution parishes). Last autumn we transferred our minority shares in the patronage of four non-catholic multi-parish benefices in Devon to the Bishop of Exeter and received from him in exchange the sole

patronage of the benefice of All Saints Torre and St John the Apostle Torquay – two resolution parishes. Bishop Robert Atwell was proud that his signing the necessary document was his last act as Bishop of Exeter. We are in discussion with three other dioceses about exchanges of patronage, so I hope to be able to give you more good news on that front next year. All of this is with a view to making our patronage serve the Object of this Charity: *‘to promote and maintain catholic teaching and practice within the Church of England’*.

I said last year that I hoped that we could turn our attention more to building up our relationship with the catholic parishes that are in our patronage, their bishops and their priests and people. To that end, I wrote to the parish priests of our resolution benefices last Christmas, with a Christmas card and a cycle of prayer, asking them to pray for each other and for the Council, as the Council members would for them. There are some copies of that cycle of prayer available today, if you would like to join us in those prayers.

Last year I reported that we had elected eighteen to people to membership, bringing the total to 110. Since then, one member has resigned and Mr Andrew Woodd has died, but we have elected five new members, bringing the total to 113. Members must fully support our Object, *‘to promote and maintain catholic teaching and practice within the Church of England’*. Membership doesn’t cost anything (though we’re always grateful for donations), but we do ask members to pray for our work and to come to our Festival and AGM. If you aren’t a member but would like to be considered for membership, please speak to Fr Corbett.

In concluding this brief address, I want to thank all the members of the Council for their support and their important contributions to discussions at our meetings and between meetings. Most of the work is done by the officers, but all the Council members make valuable contributions by scrutinizing that work, asking questions and making suggestions. Several have also given up time to sitting on appointment panels in different parts of the country.

Today two very longstanding members of the Council were not eligible to stand again, and I want to thank them on your behalf.

- Fr André Hart has served for no fewer than 18 years – man and boy, I almost want to say. He has been a very faithful attender at Council meetings. Thank you very much for all those years of service, Father!
- And secondly, Andrew Carter, our indefatigable Treasurer has served as such for no fewer than twelve years, and has left our finances in very good order for his successor. Andrew is also a solicitor, a husband and a father – all, I imagine, very demanding roles in terms of the time that they take up, so we are enormously grateful for all the time you have given to the SMF. Thank you so much!

I have also expressed my thanks to Fr Philip Corbett for the huge amount of work that he does for us as General Secretary. Administering the patronage of 96 benefices is an enormous task. I am tremendously grateful that he is willing to continue for a second three-year term, especially at a time when he is about to move to a new parish.

The Council has co-opted Tom Middleton, my successor as Director of Forward in Faith and Secretary of the Council of Bishops of The Society, for a second three-year term. For us to be able to draw on his knowledge of how things stand in the Catholic Movement and in the Church of England more generally is a great blessing, and I am very grateful to him for his willingness to serve the SMF in this way.

Finally, here's a 'thank you' to all of you. Thank you for coming to support us and worship with us today, and thank you for praying for us. Please continue to do so!