

Modern knights come to aid of retired priests

By Martin Blake & Stephen de la Bedoyere

The Militia Sanctae Mariae (MSM) was founded in France in 1945 by a young layman, who became a Benedictine monk, Dom Lafond. His aim was to create a new chivalry suitable for our times:

It would be militant, adapted to the needs of the modern world, whose members, consecrated to Mary, are dedicated to the service of the Church and our neighbour, with a view to "enlarging on the earth the frontiers of the Kingdom of God".

The MSM is a regular and militant company of men - young and old, married and unmarried - who, after a period for discernment of vocation, spiritual and doctrinal formation, vow fidelity to the Order and are dubbed according to the mediaeval rite *Benedictio Novi Militis*.

While promoting a deep spiritual and liturgical life among its members, it defends fidelity and obedience to the Church and the Pope.

Its members support whatever activities the Holy Spirit inspires: the right to life, aid to prisoners and the developing world, the Christianising of political and social structures, the retreat movement, the Catholic renewal of the family, ecumenical dialogue, and so on.

The MSM was canonically established as a confraternity in the crypt of Notre Dame de Sous-Terre at Chartres Cathedral by the Bishop Michon in 1964.

It was similarly erected in Germany in 1968, in Switzerland in 1969, in Portugal in 1975, and in Spain in 1984. There are members in other countries: Britain, Austria, Belgium, Lebanon, Canada and a very active new branch in Brazil.

Membership is in two categories: 'Ob-servantia' (men who are knights and squires and their wives) and 'Familia' (servants of Our Lady, men and women, pages and damsels, together with spiritual supporters).

In Britain the first contact was made in 1968 when Martin Blake met some French knights and was dubbed knight in 1975 at Chartres. The British preceptory with its chaplains and associates has an increasing membership.

At a time when Archbishop Peter is asking all of us to support our sick and retired priests, the main group activity of the knights in Britain is visiting ageing and sick priests, either in residential care or in their homes. We have visited St Peter's Residence in Vauxhall and St Mary's Home in Streatham.



The priests we know in their turn take an interest in the development of the knights. When a knight was dubbed at Aylesford in 2004, Fr Norman Brown, a retired priest at St Peter's, reminded us that, in this country, only Her Majesty

the Queen - or her delegate - can dub.

So the sword brought by the Master of the MSM from France was kept well hidden when his car came through passport control at Dover.