



Chairman's report to AGM 2016

The past twelve months have proved to be times of change throughout the funeral profession and the IOCF Council of Management has worked hard to ensure that the Institute is fit for its purpose of supporting its members and sustaining its highly respected position in the industry.

I am pleased to report once again that all our statistics show growth: newly qualified celebrants are increasingly aware of the value of belonging to a professional organisation, ensuring that, despite established members reaching the end of their careers as celebrants, our membership is steadily increasing in number. In turn, the increase in subscriptions has meant that for another year we are able to report that our financial position is sound and, whilst we are a 'not for profit' organisation, we have been able to pay off all outstanding loans and invest money into administration and upgrading.

As it was only two years ago that I reported that our members had delivered 30,000 ceremonies in total since the IOCF was founded, I am delighted to report that, last month, the 51,000 mark was passed. That increased number in less than two years has not come from the death rate but from a genuine increase in the engaging of our members to deliver civil ceremonies.

Money and time resources have this year been taken up to a great extent by the need to move from our old office into new premises in Burton Latimer. As with any move, there were costs involved – stationery and printing, new licences, mail redirection etc – however, amongst other things we have much better office space with room to expand and a new 'voips' phone system to ensure all calls are answered or redirected to an available council member.

The work of our administrator was also rapidly expanding and, again, on behalf of all the council, I would like to thank Barbara Pearce for her commitment, enthusiasm, dedication and hard work throughout the year.

We were very pleased, therefore, that Barbara was in a position to increase her working hours to take on further management responsibilities and events organisation. Her role was reassessed and her contract upgraded.

A review of the administration process showed that seeking feedback from every funeral ceremony delivered by IOCF members was still costly in terms of postage (even though emailed returns have grown) but especially office time. Mindful that seeking feedback has always been a unique benefit to members and to the Institute in its standing in the profession, it was decided that after the first year of membership, celebrants will only be required to **offer** families the opportunity to inform the Institute of any comments they may wish to make about the funeral. This system will be implemented over the coming months.

The innovation which members have enjoyed the most this year is the establishing of a private Facebook group. Despite the use of it being a steep learning curve for many of them, it has been a resounding success: allowing members to share resources, ask and offer advice about ceremonies and enter into discussions in a secure and empathetic environment.

As technology moves on at an incredible pace, there has been much work to ensure that the IOCF website keeps up with that. The celebrant locator map has been improved and new technology will ensure that the website is mobile and tablet responsive. A new updated and streamlined site is in development and this will be still most cost effectively and efficiently hosted by our current website managers Siserone Ltd.

We continue to have an excellent relationship with Funeralmap which provides every member with an up-to-date listing on its funeral supplies website and offers an enhanced listing to our members at a discounted rate. Council has very recently secured terms to advertise on a national banner on the site which will be seen by every visitor to this increasingly used online resource.

The Institute continues to work closely with our training partner Civil Ceremonies Ltd to ensure that newly qualified and established members remain informed and have the opportunity for professional development.

As ever, the IOCF has been represented at major industry events and seminars throughout the year and continues to enjoy associate membership benefits of the major funeral directors' organisations.

In response to attendance and feedback, the IOCF conference will now only take place every two years (the next one being Autumn 2017). Likewise, Seminar Days will be organised according to the level of support and demand from members.

So, planning ahead: in addition to the new website, we hope to soon be able to offer a CPD website where members can upload, store and certify any CPD activities. We have negotiated, for 2017, a new combined personal liability and professional indemnity insurance policy for members.

Strategic planning (where to best use resources outside of administration and membership support): it is still very important that the IOCF maintains its strong relationship with funeral companies. Regular articles in the trade publications have helped to fulfil that. An ever more urgent need to reach out to the public is very apparent. However, financial restraints still prohibit national advertising or event organisation and so members will be encouraged and supported to do that locally as much as possible.

Having now come to the end of my years of service on the Council, I will leave knowing that the IOCF has gone from strength to strength in recent years. I am very proud of all that has been achieved by us during that time and thank both present and past council members for their help and support to me during my chairmanship.

The IOCF exists for its members but only because of its members. I truly hope it will continue to flourish through their support – I'm sure it will. When I joined the IOCF, eleven years ago, people said, 'What is a civil funeral?' They do still say, 'What is the IOCF?' The question asked of celebrants needs to be 'Are you with the IOCF?' So aim high. To use modern jargon, make the Institute of Civil Funerals the 'go to' association for all that is professional, reliable and up to date in the changing world of funerals.

Christine Ogden, Chair
1st October 2016