



Christmas 2024

Dear members and friends

The end of 2024 marks the end of an era for me. I have been on the Trustee Board of Mothers' Union in our Diocese of Lichfield since January 2010, having been Gift Aid Secretary for a couple of years when Ann Hodkinson was both Treasurer and Finance & Admin Coordinator. I served first as F & A Coordinator for two terms then Lichfield Archdeaconry Leader in 2016 through to 2020 when I became Interim Diocesan President following the untimely death of our dear friend Sue. That role then became 'official' when elections were held in 2021 and you very kindly gave me your support to carry on. I owe a great deal to all those I have served with as fellow trustees, as well as learning from past diocesan presidents Joan and Liz as well as Sue, not forgetting Jean and Rosemary who presided before I was a trustee.

There have been many changes over the years and many challenges, especially over recent years. Membership has fallen and branches closed although, in many cases, members still meet informally without the constraints of the branch structure, although that brings its own challenges. In 2010 membership in the diocese was around 2,000 with Great Britain and Ireland around 100,000. Our membership therefore 2% of the GB & I. There are now around 38,000 in GB & I of which around 750 are in this diocese, just under 2%. We are just about holding our own, but our universal problem in this country is attracting members who are the age we were when most of us became Mothers' Union members! We have to accept that life for families has changed in the intervening years and must adapt to attract and recruit the members of the future. With the 150th Anniversary of Mothers' Union coming up in 2026 some ambitious targets have been issued by central MU, more of which will be circulated in due course.

As you know, Deb is taking up the baton as your new Diocesan President and new trustees Kate, Adie, Jo, Sue and Megan are joining her on the Board of Trustees. Please keep them all in your prayers. I give thanks to Celia, Julia and Katherine for their hard work and support as trustees over recent years.

But it may not be a total goodbye as all of us are hoping that we may be able to continue with some aspect of MU work, with the agreement of the new board and your support! Celia has offered to retain the role of treasurer for another year, with Adrian continuing to carry out all day-to-day matters of finance.

It has been a privilege to serve Mothers' Union in this Diocese, first as a trustee, then your Diocesan President. As I said there have been challenges - and still some to come - but we have been a good team and worked together to overcome them. But none of it would have been possible without the support of you, our members and friends, and your hard work, not forgetting that essential support, your prayers.

Thank you for everything. I wish you all a blessed Christmas, stay warm, stay safe.
My love and prayers to you all

Helen

Provincial Conference



In November Deb and I attended the Canterbury Province Conference at High Leigh Conference Centre in Hertfordshire, a sister venue to Swanwick. There were more attendees than usual as many existing diocesan presidents were coming to the end of their term of office and were accompanied by successors. It was full programme with dissemination of lots of information but more relaxed times as well, Sheran Harper, retiring WWP gave a presentation and we also were addressed by Bev

Jullien, CEO of Mothers' Union, Moira Murray, Safeguarding Lead and Maggie Woods of the Methodist Women's organisation. Kathleen Snow WWP elect spoke over Zoom from her home in Canada. Goodbyes were said to Rev Emma Ham- Riche, Provincial Chaplain and Kathryn Anderon, Provincial President, both of whom are stepping down from their roles. Julia Jamieson has been elected for a second term as Zonal Trustee sitting on the Worldwide Board of Trustees, representing Canterbury Province. All three in the photo have spoken at our diocesan meetings (Kathryn by Zoom). It is good to meet in person now and then -it does make it easier when on a Zoom meeting as all you see are head and shoulders! I shall miss meeting up but not the M6, M1 and M25 experience!!



Christmas Cards for Prisons, Woolly Hats, Stamps

The response from members has been fantastic. First of all, thank you so much for the Christmas cards for prisoners. More than enough cards for prisoners were received, with even a small stock in hand to start off the collection for 2025! Around 3000 cards were delivered to the prisons by Julia and Deb towards the end of November Thank you too for used stamps. In a time when postage charges are rising and the volume of mail is falling, it is wonderful that there is still a huge number of stamps coming to the office. And the woolly hats just keep coming in!!

Autumn Gathering

On Saturday 2nd November over 50 members gathered at Doxey for the Autumn Gathering. The business of the meeting was conducted after opening worship led by our Chaplain Rev Jassica. After a splendid buffet lunch Bishop Matthew spoke about wellbeing, not just for us and those around us, but, with references to Bible passages, for creation as well. The meeting ended with thanks and presentations to the trustees who were finishing their term of office. Quite an emotional time!

A farewell Christmas message from our outgoing Worldwide President



Dear Friends,

The wonderful season of Christmas is upon us again and this is my final letter to you as your Worldwide President 2019-2024. The time has rolled by so quickly and instead of saying farewell, I would rather this to be a time of thanksgiving for the blessing that you are to so many, and a celebration of all we have accomplished together as Mothers' Union.

In a changing world with its many complexities, I am so much stronger and taller now, having been inspired by you and leading our life-giving movement through different phases, although sometimes it did stretch my understanding. Thank you for your love and prayers which gave me confidence and helped me to recognize that it has been all about God's plan and purpose for Mothers' Union.

This incredible journey has been one where I have seen the hand of God move mountains in difficult situations and reach beyond borders to give hope to so many members and communities. I have encountered the goodness of Jesus Christ when our sisters, their families and communities are lifted out of poverty and shame. The multitudes that benefit from our prayers and acts of kindness continue to testify to the Christ-light that radiates from us, and a faith that transcends all understanding. Blessed are we who fellowship together in this ministry! Blessed are we who believe in doing our little bit to make a difference.

As I reflect on the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel during this Christmas Novena, I am reminded of the announcement of the most marvellous event that ever happened in this world — the incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. This good news was delivered to the Blessed Virgin Mary by the Angel Gabriel declaring, "*You are blessed and highly favoured.*"

As Christians we believe this to mean that God is giving us the grace to fulfil a special assignment. We know for sure that as members, this assignment is the work of Mothers' Union, and our mission is to share the love of Jesus with the world. Although a tall task, we have no fear because just as the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, he also spreads his wings and covers us with the assurance that God's Grace is sufficient.

Mary knew that she was going to give birth to Jesus, the light of the world, and through him the course of history would be changed. What is it that will be birthed from us as Mothers' Union in the new triennium that will transform the Church and the world to reflect Christ's Kingdom?

As we look forward to a new triennium, with the peace, hope, and love that the Christ Child brings, my fervent prayer is that we will build on all that has been achieved and move forward together with the vision of our founder Mary Elizabeth Sumner. May her legacy live on in our hearts, homes, and communities for generations to come. May others experience and share the amazing love of Jesus in the same way that we do in Mothers' Union.

I leave the **Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila** with you.

*Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.*

*Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Yours are the hands through which He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours. St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)*

As we celebrate this joyful season with family and friends, may our prayers and God's love reach all those who are having a very different Christmas this year.

A Happy and Blessed Christmas from my family to yours!
With my love and prayers as always,
Sheran x

Reflection December 2024



My Dear Friends, December 2024, and as the end of the year approaches so does the end of an era. As the year comes to a close it brings with it the end of the Triennium and the end of my term of office as a Zonal Trustee. From 2025 a new board will be in place with different people taking up new challenges. Those of us leaving the board, having completed our six years in office, will also be taking up different challenges, moving on to pastures new. When people ask me what I am going to do I tell them, at 82 I am going to retire, do you know what they do? They laugh! I tell them, "Let's see what God says" and that is what I will do. I will place the future into his hands for I trust him and I know he won't let me down. Jesus our Saviour placed all his trust in his Father, turning to him every time he needed guidance. I am thinking now of the night of the Last supper and afterwards on the Mount of Olives when we find him in agony as he wrestles with his emotions, and later as he hangs on the cross thinking his father has abandoned him. But all through his struggles he knows this is not true and that his father would never let him down. God our Father, Jesus our Saviour and our mainstay The Holy Spirit are always there for us and we will be wise indeed if we continue to put our trust in them. I wonder what the New Year holds for you? Perhaps you will move on to doing new things, meeting new people or taking up a new hobby. Whatever we do we need to keep moving forward because as I always tell people God doesn't stand still but moves through our world with love in his heart encouraging, supporting and upholding all our efforts. So let us pray to our Heavenly Father, asking him to lead us, giving us strength and courage as we go forward into the future with joy in our hearts. remembering the past with affection not forgetting both the good and bad bits, not dwelling on them but giving them the right place in our hearts. As I have been writing two hymns have been going through my mind and I want to share some parts of them with you.



The first is: -

- 1] *Father, I place into your hands the things that I can't do.
Father, I place into your hands the times that I've been through. Father, I place into your hands the way that I should go, for I know I always can trust You.*
- 4] *Father, I want to be with you and do the things You do, Father, I want to speak the words the You are speaking too. Father, I want to love the ones that You will draw to you. For I know that I am one with You.*

The second is: -

1] *Lead us heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea; guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us – for we have no help but Thee, yet possessing every blessing if our God our Father be.*

2] *Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us: all our weakness Thou dost know:*

3] *Spirit of our God, descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy, love with every passion blending, pleasure that can never cloy: thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy. Thank you for allowing me to share this time with you.*

May these words guide us as we journey on
Love & Prayers
Jenny (Barton, Outgoing Zonal Trustee for the Province of Wales)

Let us pray

Father, as we come to the end of our time together, we give you thanks and praise for the privilege of serving you through words and sharing the things which are important to us. Our love for our family and friends and our love for the Mothers' Union and all that we are able to do to further the work done in your name by our members around the world. We thank you for those who have served on the worldwide board and are now taking up new challenges. We ask you to bless those who will serve you as board members for the next three years. We pray too for the staff at Mary Sumner House as they continue to support and uphold the aim and objects of the charity which enable us to move forward and change lives as we encourage other to **Join us and Join in. We ask in the name of Jesus our Saviour.**

AMEN

16 days of Activism

This period of concentrated prayer and action has recently come to an end. I am sure that many of you will have held services or prayer times to remember those women and girls who have suffered abuse at the hands of those who should have kept them safe. The photo shows trees decorated with the Rise up! doves and white and purple hearts made by Coven members, on display at one of their events.



On Monday 25th November members of Berkswich branch joined Stafford Women's Aid for a vigil in market Square, Stafford.

Royal Patron

As many of you will remember the Royal Patron of Mothers' Union was the late Queen, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The announcement of her successor as Royal Patron was to be made at the end of November but was delayed for several reasons and is expected to be made public soon. Watch this space!!

Christmas Tree Festivals

It has become a popular occurrence to hold a Christmas Tree Festival and I hope that if your parish is hosting such an event that you may be able to showcase some of the work done by Mothers' Union locally, nationally and worldwide.



Here is a photograph of the tree decorated by Berkswich Branch at St. Mary's Church, Stafford.

Christine Gilson writes 'With the exception of the baubles, all the items are crafted by our ladies. We used doves for the "Rise Up" Campaign logo, hats knitted for the Farming Community Network, parcels representing the grocery boxes we have sent to community food banks (including Staffordshire Women's Aid, and baubles containing MU logos. We also put a supply of leaflets at the base and a "key" explaining what each item represented. All agreed it looks lovely.'

Other Events



Members of Tettenhall Wood branch with a collection of preloved kitchen items donated by MU members and the congregation at Christ Church Tettenhall Wood, to the Chaplaincy at the University of Wolverhampton for students beginning their course in September.



Coven members held a fundraising event including 'Name the bear' and 'Blind Date with a Book' totalling over £700 in support of local and Mothers' Union projects.



Future Newsletters

The newsletter will continue so please continue to send your news, information about events and photos for inclusion to the office until the new trustee board decide who will compile it.

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Diocesan Chaplain

As you are aware, Rev Jassica is our only Diocesan Chaplain. As a busy parish priest Rev Jassica has a limited amount of time to fulfil the role of chaplain and the trustees are seeking someone who might be interested in joining Rev Jassica as she continues in the role for a second term. Please get in touch with the office if you have any thoughts on this matter and, just as important, please keep Rev Jassica in your prayers.

Rev Jassica Castillo-Burley stoswald.minister@gmail.com

Please remember that the Chaplain is there for every member, in every part of the Diocese.

Prayers



The prayer link continues:
using Email, phone, WhatsApp.
Just say how you want to be included.
To offer to be a 'pray-er' or request prayers for yourself,
someone else or any situation, please contact Deb or the office.
Details are below.

Let's share. Many thanks.
Deb: debtudor@live.co.uk 01543 382390
Office: office@mothersunionlichfield.org.uk 01785 227221

Mothers' Union Diocesan Office

Diocesan Administrator: Adrian Palphreyman

The office will be closed during the weeks beginning 23rd and 30th December 2024 and will reopen on Tuesday 7th January 2025.

When the office is open again the times when Adrian will be available to take calls remain as

Normal Opening Times
Monday 9.30am – 1.30pm
Tuesday 10.30am – 2.30pm
Thursday 9.30am – 1.30pm

Mothers' Union Office, Parish Church of St Andrew and St Thomas,
Doxey, Stafford, ST16 1EQ

Please call if you intend to visit to ensure Adrian is available.

Tel: 01785 227221
email: office@mothersunionlichfield.org.uk website: <https://mothersunionlichfield.org.uk>

Please note that in January there will be switch to a new broadband and telephone provider so there is a chance that, for a few days it may not be possible to contact the office. Once a date is confirmed it will be publicised, with an alternative contact number.