

Peculiar Times!

Greetings! from the Mothers' Union Diocesan Trustees and Officers

We hope this Newsletter finds you well and enjoying the warmer days, blue skies, birdsong and sunshine. The roses in our garden are looking and smelling really beautiful. Life in our household is a bit busy at present – even chaotic – so hopefully I've captured the essence of things going in our diocese and in the wider context of Mothers' Union, both here and overseas. Information is coming out of MSH every week, so do keep an eye on the national Mothers' Union website at www.mothersunion.org, our own website at www.musuffolk.org.uk, *Families First*, and other correspondence and resources from MSH. I'm sorry this newsletter is double the length, but we have been asked to share this information with all our members.....

Below are some snippets to pass on to you.....

In a recently received email from Bev Jullien, our MU CEO
She basically writes to tell us about the action points around recent ZOOMs (see my DP Report for our Council Meeting next week!), the proposed new member publication and the online training/webinar programme – and updates on MSH staffing, spiritual communion, Mary Sumner Day, Communities of Interest and database verification. For a fuller picture of what she writes, contact dpmusuffolk@gmail.com for more information

Mary Sumner Day from MSH

Mary Sumner Day (9th August) will be very different for us all this year due to COVID-19. However, the relevance of our founder and her vision is more vital than ever. We, at MSH, are currently planning a day of prayer and reflection with online services and bible reflections plus resources for members. If you have any resources, prayers, thoughts on how the day may look then please do not hesitate to get in touch with the team:

communications@mothersunion.org

Questions for Sheran, WWP

I have just been invited to catch up with the Worldwide President, Sheran Harper who will be holding a question and answer session via Zoom at 2.00 pm on the 2nd July for all DPs.

Any questions should be sent to Adam (adam.sach@mothersunion.org – and please copy me in too!)) in advance (by 26th June), so that Sheran can prepare. Sheran is also very happy to take further questions on the day, time permitting, so let me know if you want me to raise anything for you, but no promises that I will be heard!

Database verification

We are acutely aware of the need to ensure that the database is as robust as possible going forward more information in early July, with the aim to complete the verification by the end of September.

New Membership Publication – questionnaire and focus groups

So far, the New Membership Publication questionnaire has had almost 400 responses! Thanks to you and your members for taking the time to fill this in and share your thoughts. Ideally, we would like even more input. Please can you continue to encourage your members to complete this - there is still lots of time as the deadline is 31 July 2020.

The questionnaire only takes 5-10 minutes to complete and can be accessed at <https://r1.dotmailer-surveys.com/6c1i8y57-d54js7ed>, or for a web-friendly link please type bit.ly/publicationquestionnaire into your preferred Internet browser. We have heard from a few members to say they were getting an “already completed” message when accessing the previous link so hopefully this will solve the problem. If the message does still pop up please try a different device and let us know if you are still unable to access it.

We are also planning to carry out a number of **focus groups** (these will be on Zoom), and would like to involve a cross-section of members from the five provinces. In order to gather a variety of opinions, we would like to speak to both subscribers of *Families First* and non-subscribers, new members and long-standing members, those who have held positions within MU and those who haven’t. If you have anyone in mind, please check with them first and then send your recommendations to publications@mothersunion.org. We will be in touch with further details in the coming weeks.

Webinar Programme

Building on the areas selected at the last DP ZOOM call, the team has gone away and rated topics under each of the areas. Because we are keen to ensure we focus on the most immediate needs under each area we are seeking your help to prioritize these topics! Please click through the link to a short survey where you can give your opinion on the topics we should start with under each of the different areas.
<https://r1.dotmailer-surveys.com/6c1i8y57-394pot79>

Families First:

Any time now you should be receiving the *Families First* magazine – Clare has been working really hard for us, and our computer database is right up to date so everyone who has paid their £10 for 2020 should be receiving four issues across the year.

If you have not yet subscribed, there is a downloadable form to send into MSH on our website at www.musuffolk.org.uk.

There is also an audio version (CD) available for those who are visually impaired. If you have a problem, let me know.

Operational Update with Mary Sumner House, 2pm on 16th July.

Briefing documents will be sent in advance, to cover a range of topics including the Reserves history and accounts for 2019, Finances for 2020, forward plans for 2021, database and membership subscriptions, cost cutting measures, based on the decisions taken by the Board and Audit and Risk Committee; give short update presentations and then have questions and answers. We would welcome the sending in of questions in advance, so that the briefing can be as well prepared and comprehensive as possible.

Newsletter No. 7 - end of June/early July

If you would like to contribute something (subject to editor’s discretion!), please send your comments, opinions, thoughts to Linda Ginn, Diocesan President at Wisteria Cottage, The Street, Hacheston, IP13 0DS, phone 01728 748365 or send me an email – dpmusuffolk@gmail.com or to Beryl at secretarysuffolkmu56@gmail.com
Take care and stay safe.

Key points for sharing – Mothers’ Union worldwide board meeting, 12-14th May, 2020

This was the first full Board Week held by ZOOM, with members joining from around the world. It had been preceded by 2 Extraordinary Meetings on 25th March and 8th April, to provide oversight and guidance through the early stages of the Coronavirus Pandemic Crisis. Key points follow:

- The Charity is facing a very significant challenge to its revenue streams in 2020 and into 2021 because of the Crisis, with all income streams (rental and meeting room revenue from Mary Sumner House; Retail revenue through MUe Reps; Member subscriptions; investments and fundraising) impacted. The result is a risk to revenue of some GBP1.5m
- The Charity has taken rapid action in cost control, taking about GBP1m out of costs by putting 50% of staff on furlough, stopping travel and external events, pausing all programmes minimizing administration costs.
- The charity has also launched an Emergency Appeal for funds for 2020, which is progressing well – the Board would like to offer their sincere thanks to all individuals, Dioceses and Provinces who have contributed. Whilst there have been inaccuracies in the mailing, for which management apologise, levels reported are comparable with mailings of a similar size across the sector
- The target is to close 2020 without a financial loss
- It is expected that the impact of the crisis will extend into 2021, so the Board is working with Management to ensure that scenarios are assessed so that the charity can live within realistically available resources, and begin to rebuild reserves over time
- By September, a budget for 2021 will have been produced which has conservative assumptions on revenue for the year. Costs will be managed to ensure that activities are within the affordable envelope, whilst at the same time focusing on the key priorities for the movement identified through the MULOA and subsequent strategic planning process last year.
- A request for planning permission has been submitted to Westminster Council for the renovation of Mary Sumner House, but the development has been put on hold until the economic situation becomes clearer. Planning permission will in itself increase the value of this asset to the movement
- Despite the challenges, the aim is that priorities are set to enable the charity to thrive long-term. To assist this, extensive consultation has been ongoing with Provincial Presidents and Community Development Coordinators and Diocesan Presidents to determine priority areas of work.
- In all countries, MU members have been responding to the crisis by helping others in whatever ways they can, for example by educating on hygiene and correcting on misinformation (eg in DRC, Myanmar, Uganda) or providing help and support for key workers (eg in Britain and Ireland, making scrubs and scrub bags, or knitted hearts for loved ones who are separated).
- The MU profile has increased in the media, with coverage in the UK in the Church Times, Church of England News, BBC and Radio. Social media coverage has grown significantly, and innovative approaches adopted, such as streaming midday prayers daily on Facebook Live. The latter has about 2500 viewers every day around the world
- Core work has continued on improving systems and processes, as agreed at Worldwide Council in June 2019. In particular, a project management cycle suite of tools including for monitoring and evaluation, has been developed and is now in use for new projects
- There has been a step-change in the use of technology, with frequent use of videoconferencing for meetings which is enabling greater connectivity than before. It is planned that a series of webinars will be started on topics prioritized by the membership to help to build capacity in different fields across the movement
- Safeguarding remains a key priority for the Charity. Progress has been slowed due to the crisis, but the Safeguarding Committee will be meeting in May to agree a way forward, which is likely to also link to programme work in the post-COVID-19 recovery period related to domestic violence.
- The Board unanimously approved that MU Advocacy and Policy work over the coming year focus specifically on Domestic Abuse issues arising during and following the crisis. An advisory group including external experts will be set up to support the planning and delivery of practical steps forward
- An IT committee is being established reporting to the Board to review current systems and assist management in developing practical ways forward in the light of strategic priorities and the current resource-constrained environment

Virtual Mothers' Union

What has in the past been facility-centred ministry is now home-based ministry – remote work for many has become the new normal. The church is now a digital organisation often from home, with a physical expression – no longer the other way around. For many of us this is inconvenient, even disruptive, but in order to survive we need to embrace change – to be flexible in our thinking. We may not like what's happening, but that doesn't alter the facts that for many today, digital is the preferred option.

In these circumstances in which we find ourselves, each of us has to take responsibility for his/her own spiritual growth - for evangelism, discipleship, and even leadership in our families. Covid has taken away a greater proportion of the older generation, and those of us left are called to be enablers, equippers, helping people to bring their faith more deeply into the homes and communities in which we live. In the Mothers' Union, this is what we are all about, or as Linda Cadman would say, we are to "blossom where we are planted". Just think - We are the lived-experience of what others are watching online - it's amazing - and this is how we build the kingdom of God in the places where we live.

Our mission and ministry, and our outreach, is more important than ever now – much more than the methods we have used in the past, or think we need to stick to. Look at the world around us – shops that did not "go online" are failing: and conversely Amazon, which started on-line, is now extending into the in-person experience as well. We could learn and seize the opportunities.

The Church has tried to "grow" by concentrating on numbers attending Sunday services and hoping that people will just turn up - but people today are preferring the digital option (see why Epping's Mothers' Union is thriving "Supporting Families in Epping" – A Presentation by Natalie Kelberman from St John's Church, Epping Mothers' Union, Mary Sumner Day Celebration, Chelmsford Cathedral 9th August 2019). The on-line approach is transcending geography, physical and time barriers. Working from home remotely is now the new norm – with the added bonus of "meeting" experts in their field through webinars and such like. No longer (apparently!) do folk sit and watch a television programme at a particular time on a particular evening – it's all changed and even television is watched on-demand, as and when convenient, fitted in between other things, different for everyone.... How far are you along the FLEXIBILITY spectrum?

So, things move forward, and as a diocese we will need to shape our thinking according to the current situation. I would love to hear your comments as to how we proceed – with newsletters, Pathways, online, webinars, closed Facebook groups, Blogs...., but above all we need to continue to pray for God's guidance as to how to proceed in these very different circumstances, which may be here for a very long time.... LG

In your prayers, we have so much for which to thank God:

- ♥ for the generosity of members in sending gifts and financial donations to the MSH Urgent Appeal Fund
- ♥ for the willingness of MU staff and senior team members to make sacrifices on our behalf, and who are prayerfully seeking a way forward for the Mothers' Union here and overseas
- ♥ for our membership – our fellowship, support and companionship - as we journey together along the Christian path, rejoicing in all the blessings that we receive from each other

We can ask God

- ♥ to guide and strengthen all our leaders as they meet, plan and discuss the next steps for MU.
- ♥ to be with us in our Zoom Meeting on Monday morning – and in particular, as it will be the first time that we meet for a Council Meeting in this way, for all the practical details and arrangements
- ♥ to be with our families, our loved ones and those we care about – especially those going through a time of loss, or grief, sadness or bereavement, that they will feel the presence of God very close to them.

News from Beryl: Our next Council Meeting will be on Zoom on Monday, 22nd June at 10.00 am. Please make sure you, or a representative from your Branch/Group, has signed in beforehand so that you can join the meeting. If you have any problems, please get in touch. Many thanks.