

## Peculiar Times!

**Greetings!** from the Mothers' Union Diocesan Trustees and Officers

We're very nearly there! What a joy to be able to once again come together, have real fellowship and prayer times face to face, and share our stories, encouraging one another on our Christian journey....

As I write, we are in the "novena" (!) – the nine days between Ascension Day and Pentecost – an ancient tradition of time given to devotional praying, especially focusing on Thy Kingdom Come – in practice, we are being encouraged to regularly pray over this period for five specific people to come to know Jesus as their friend and Saviour, or it may be that we pray that their faith be strengthened and deepened. I've



found the Lectio 365 App really helpful - with audible morning and evening devotions (just 10 minutes).... Have a look and see what you're missing! And there's the Daily Hope telephone line too, on 0800 804 8044 with the MU Midday Prayers.....



In Mothers' Union, at local branch level, diocesan, provincial, and globally, so much has been going on behind the scenes during lockdown, there's just not enough space here to record it all!

Over the last two days I have been 'zooming' at the Diocesan Presidents' Provincial Conference, and it's been very exciting to learn how other dioceses are working, reading all their accounts of what different dioceses have been doing. (We are up there with the best of them – well done members!)

On the Monday, we started with a service led by the Provincial Chaplain, and this was followed by a catching up session. On Tuesday, we were split into breakout rooms to discuss the role of the Strategy Group and Cluster Reps, and how we can better utilise the skills of those Trustees and Officers, Branch Leaders and Committee members who are standing down. We also looked at how we could improve information-sharing, the role of regional meetings, and webinars. After coffee we talked about looking beyond our parish and diocesan boundaries, and suddenly it was time for Midday Prayers. A quick lunch was followed by the formal Provincial Meeting – the main points of which are as follows:

- that we (as trustees) will need to discuss and reach a decision [next week] about whether, as a diocese, we are willing to support MSH in giving members the option of paying their subscription by direct debit – do let me know your views.
- a request was made to MSH that in future subs are only increased along with the rate of inflation (currently 0.7%) – a good idea!
- information about any breaches of GDPR (whether internal or external) must be reported to MSH
- Ely diocese shared a "fun" quiz based on the new "Connected" magazine – if you would like a copy of the quiz, let me know.
- St Albans are setting up a **Zoom Branch** with the specific aim of attracting younger members – any novel suggestions how we at St Eds and Ips can increase our numbers? At present we have 684 members.....
- Metamorphosis online training, available at a cost of £50 per person.

Let's going on.... - see "Connected" (do send me your comments on this new MU publication [replacing Families First], and I will pass them on to MSH) – soon this new magazine will be available as a CD, digital format and on the website in a shortened edition; and there's more information in the Prayer Diary (and if you have not received either, please let me know), and also on our website ([www.musuffolk.org](http://www.musuffolk.org)).

Do look especially at the new updated section on the group and branch resources page on the MU website "Starting to meet together again 2021" (see <https://www.mothersunion.org/resources/group-and-branch-resources>)... Not on the computer ?— ask a grandchild, a god-child, a friend or neighbour....

Covid has accelerated change. There is ongoing discussion within the movement around the role the Provinces, the way forward, and how it should be funded. MSH are looking at new ways of working, including using the Direct Debit scheme to pay for subscriptions (see above), At Trustees, we will also be discussing exciting opportunities on the horizon – any thoughts on perhaps a replica MU Banner to replace the Diocesan Banner in the Cathedral which, because of the huge costs involved, is now virtually beyond repair?, or are you ready to accept the invitation to join in at the Bishop's Garden Marquee? (see Dates for the Diary). Any ideas/suggestions about how we should celebrate Mary Sumner Day on the 9<sup>th</sup> August, and we'll also be finding out who the winners are of the Mary Sumner Award for the branch recruiting the highest number of new members this year...? Is it your branch?

So much is going on! Congratulations to Ann Price (Martlesham Heath) on being an MU member for SIXTY YEARS!, and to Rachel Parsons for her musical talent in the MSH Thy Kingdom Come service and the Hymn Singing Group on Fridays (zoom), and Val and Sandra for organising the Pamper Evening where Mothers' Union has purchased a variety of pampering items for the ladies at the Ipswich Refuge. They have a choice of nail varnish colours for their fingernails and toes nails, moisturising hand and foot cream, they can relax with a face masks on and use some lovely smelling face scrubs. Sandra Griffiths and I also brought some hairbrushes and hair accessories items and some Cadburys Roses to enjoy while they pamper themselves (VJ) - how blessed we are with members doing their thing!

Looking further afield: our Wave of Prayer for our linked dioceses in Byumba, Jalingo, Lake Malawi and Lucknow is fast approaching. We may be small – be it branch/group/diocesan member - but as well as caring for our own, we have a global vision too of what God is doing around the world.

....and with a wider perspective – Prison work. An often overlooked dimension of those affected by the prison system within the UK is the families of prisoners. Almost 150 years ago, Mary Sumner recognised that families are the fabric tying society together. It is in this same vein that the movement she initiated works to assist families in need. Mothers' Union (MU) today works to serve families in all forms without prejudice no matter their situation. This includes the families of people who have been incarcerated and now find themselves having to engage with the prison system.

It's something we would like to rekindle and develop across our diocese. Both bishops were involved with our prisons that Christmas-time, and we can use this as a springboard for MU to grow the work here. We already have a small group, but need someone to take the lead. It's been exciting to hear what other dioceses are doing – eg. Rochester, Lichfield, the Angel Tree, Spurgeons, 'Outfits' and lots of other paths to follow. The first approach could perhaps be to write to the Prison Chaplain and ask if we, as MU, can pray for them.... Who knows where that would lead! If this is something with which you would like to get involved (and do something real!) let me know and we can begin..... MSH has a team of 4 members on the Board of Reference to plan and design Prisons Week, and their priority is to continue creating space for members to learn and share what is working with prisons through scheduled zoom meetings ... lots of help and resources available from MSH.

*Together, we pray for those in our diocese who are in prison:*

Father God, I lift everyone that is in prison into your able hands. Lord, they have not only broken the law, but they have sinned against you. Forgive them for going against your word. Life in prison is tough and most people, especially new inmates, are at the mercy of old inmates. But Father, we know that you are in charge of their lives and you will not let anyone hurt them. Cover them with your wings and keep them safe. In Jesus' name, I believe and pray. Amen.

.....And a prayer from Sheran Harper (WWP) ..... Brothers and sisters let us pray together: Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, I am with you always, even to the end of time. Be with me today Lord, as I offer myself to you. Hear my prayers for others and for myself, And keep me in your tender loving care always. Amen.

This comes with love – and even a hug!