**Diocesan President’s Report to AGM for January – December 2017**

During February 2017 I had the privilege to represent St Edmundsbury & Ipswich at the Worldwide Conference in Ireland where DPs from GB & Ireland were joined by DPs and PPs from across the world. During that precious time we enjoyed each other’s company and learnt of MU in places very different to Suffolk. It is inspirational to see the faith of our brothers and sisters and listen to their story. Lynne Tembey led the discussions around the new Worldwide Constitution that will lead MU into this new era. There was discussion and amendment around the principles of the content to be passed to Privy Council for approval. This will give an equal sharing of governance, policy, finance and responsibility to be developed over the coming years. The Provincial Conference at High Leighs was a time of sharing our experiences and an introduction to MULOA. We were encouraged to work in our Communities and Churches and there were amazing Outreach projects shared including Stories on the Streets and AFIA projects which gathered families in week long events run by MU leaders

. I continue to attend our Cluster Group, within Canterbury province, comprising Lincoln, Norwich and Ely and enjoy our time together in sharing East Anglian issues and our relationship with MSH. Collaboration in this way is supportive and effective – a very positive experience. Returning to Suffolk I am always grateful for all that is achieved by MU here.

Our Lady Day and Wholeness and Healing services draw us together in worship and this year we celebrated a Mary Sumner Day Eucharist at the Cathedral that I hope will become a regular occasion. The Diocesan Banner in the Lady Chapel needs TLC and I am in conversation with Rachel, Head Verger, to seek the skills we need.

Across the Diocese Tony and I have been invited to Yoxmere and St Andrew’s Melton & Ufford Benefice Communion Services at which MU has been included as part of the Benefice life. The beautiful Wave of Prayer liturgy prepared by Janice Brett is appreciated and of the 4 I attended each was different. Advent is a special time for me and I loved sharing in your branch worship. Three of those services included either Lunch or Tea and extended a welcome to the wider community especially when several branches joined together.

Being invited to speak at Branch Meetings is always my favourite and this year I’ve made at least 10, thank you. Keeping you in touch with the wider MU and sharing your ideas and questions is real MU. The Area meetings and events like the Sponsored Walk, Pop-up-Shop and coffee mornings are both fun and fundraising. It was good to meet Bishop Martin and enjoy a warm summer evening at our June Garden Party . . in his garden! Thank you Bishop and also the Rushmere Singers.

During this year I have been invited to the Seafarers Service in June and the Prisons Service in October in the Cathedral, the West Suffolk Neo-natal Christmas Mince pie and tea, Christmas Drinks at Park Road and 3 meetings of Diocesan Synod, not because of my smile, but in recognition of the work of Mothers’ Union. On each occasion I wear my badge with pride and tell our MU story. Well done Margaret for hiring a table at the Woodbridge Community event on 1st April to raise the profile of MU – I enjoyed the day and we met many who had never heard of MU till then! Congratulations to Sandra for booking us in to the Wedding Fayre at Trinity Park in September. Again, MU is right there to celebrate with happy couples and offer them prayer, on heart shaped cards, and sweets to their families! This is valuable Outreach and the conversations we have are incredible.

The Trustees and Officers are accountable for the proper running of MU in this Diocese and then sharing it as widely as possible, so everyone knows where we are; this is no easy task and I’d like to thank them all for the responsibility they carry and their commitment. Sadly, Linda Ginn laid down the work of Faith & Policy Co-ordinator in September and we all feel gratitude for her input and especially that she agreed to continue with organising the Retreat in May 2018.

This year we were back at the Suffolk Show through the kindness of the Rural Coffee Caravan group. Again, we had many good conversations and MU was there to show and tell of our activities. It was an experiment and we are most grateful to RCC hospitality. The viability of promoting our aims and objectives and trying to increase our membership in an arena dedicated to animals and selling agricultural or craft products is uncertain. However, our involvement in the ‘Who Cares?’ project has borne fruit and members learnt a great deal at our November Council meeting.

For every successful initiative there are many that just don’t fly, but please never be disheartened. An event may last 2-3 hours but the work involved in thinking, planning, promoting it usually takes months. A Conference can last 4 days but the reading, reporting and follow-up – much longer. Council Meetings start at 10 am on the day but Trustees, Officers and especially your Treasurer, Secretary and Chairman spend hours, in preceding weeks, preparing the Agenda and presentations. Whether it’s a Branch Meeting or a Banner Service being planned, it’s the idea, the attention to detail, the phone calls and the worry about who will come, that is common to each. We all do it because we believe in MU as an organisation which has prayer at it’s heart and the worth and well-being of families and children everywhere, as its focus. What ever you are planning and wishing for 2018, please support and encourage each other in faith and in love and you will succeed, gloriously! Remember, with God, nothing is impossible.

Christine Ward

DP St Edmundsbury & Ipswich

20 June 2018