**Reports for November Council Meeting**

**Diocesan President’s Final Report for Council, November 2024 – an Overview from 2019-2024**

This brief report gives an overview of the triennium 2019-2021 and 22-24, and includes the major topics discussed, current membership status, financial report, ongoing initiatives and the future direction of the Mothers’ Union in the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

Because of the covid pandemic, the Mothers' Union Annual General Meetings for 2020 and 2021 were conducted via Zoom, and attended by approximately 41 members each occasion. The meetings began with prayers, and both sessions saw approval of the previous year's minutes and satisfactory financial reports.

Membership has continued to decline, with numbers dropping from 2,430 members in 1989 to 714 members in 2020, reflecting a general trend seen nationally, and this decline has led to several branch closures. Consequently, many members have transferred to other local branches, re-joined as Diocesan members or set up ad hoc pilot Fellowship Groups. In 2022, I was invited to serve a second term of office as Diocesan President, and despite all the challenges, believe that God was calling me to continue. I have been so grateful for the encouragement, love, and support of the trustee board and members alike, especially through health issues, bereavement and moving house.

The “ABC strategy” continued to guide efforts, focusing on AFIA (Away From It All), Befriending activities (a parenting training programme and introduction of new ways of working within the prisons) and the Clewer Initiative drawing attention to modern day slavery. Efforts were also directed towards supporting families facing hardship through foodbanks, loneliness, isolation (due to covid), bereavement, financial problems or issues around domestic abuse. Safeguarding measures and DBS training were upgraded. Policies and protocols were devised, reviewed and amended in the Constitution. Other campaigns, such as the 16 Days of Activism against gender violence, Restored, “#NoMore1:3”, the Red Chair Project, and fund-raising for Make a Mothers’ Day, Harvest and The Big Give were all well supported.

The pandemic impacted the way we operated in St Eds and Ips, with increased use of online tools like Zoom, YouTube and streaming of services, but Covid also gave rise to the production of two eBooks - a *“Book of Comfort”* and “*For Better – For Worse”* offered to clergy and couples when planning to marry. Branches also produced their own booklets on *“The Bible Speaks to us”, “Prayers from the Heart”* and *“A Christmas Sparkle”.* A regular monthly newsletter *“Peculiar Times“* was introduced (the name later being changed to *“Transformation – Now!”*) to reflect the current global MU theme.

Our finances were healthy, with the accounts for 2019 and 2020 being approved, and members thanked accordingly for their generous donations. The MSH Crisis Appeal was well supported, and financial stability was ensured despite many challenges. Regular unit reports at Trustee and Council meetings show that members had been innovative, and local initiatives such as creating "Bags of Love", knitting, sewing, and baking skills, Messy Church and toddler groups, pastoral visiting and prisoner work, help with Ukrainian refugee projects and, closer to home, the Women’s Refuges, were rekindled. Disadvantaged groups benefited from projects like the making of Christmas Cards for Prisoners and other fundraising activities prospered. To raise awareness and identify churches which no longer had MU branches, we ran an “I Spy the Mothers’ Union Banner” competition, checking church inventories and signing parish visitor books to announce our presence - over 50 banners were found. Online Midday Prayers and the Help Phone line were much appreciated.

The triennium concluded with agreement that the future direction of MU should continue to focus on our “A,B,C strategy supporting local communities, with more emphasis on addressing the needs of vulnerable groups such as parenting training and those in prisons, the two women’s refuges, care homes, and the neonatal unit. Creativity and adaptability were watchwords, as the organisation moved towards a "new normal" after the pandemic. We continued to build on our reliance on digital tools, and community outreach looking to seize the new opportunities, develop our Community of Interest encouraging branch members to engage in leadership roles. I was so grateful for all the love and support shown during the pandemic crisis and personal loss, emphasising the hope and resilience that MU represents in all the local communities across the diocese. During the next triennium, we would continue to embrace change and adapt, and thus ensure the continued positive impact of MU’s work here in St Eds and Ips, growing in faith and confidence, and in the knowledge that God, although unseen, is working His purposes out as we seek to serve Him through MU.

During the second triennium, MU here continued to remain vibrant and active despite ongoing challenges. We continued with our *“A,B,C strategy”* to guide our thinking and enable us meet and measure specific outcomes. Significant efforts were made in adapting to modern needs while staying true to core values. Emphasis was placed on transforming the organisation to meet current needs. This included better use of technology, rethinking how branches operate, and boosting internal communication. Many branches facing closures became Fellowship Groups, which minimized administrative tasks while still maintaining their activities. We built on the earlier foundation using newly acquired tools such as Zoom, YouTube, and social media to enhance communication and have been indebted to our website manager who has also taken on responsibility for managing the database, membership, safeguarding issues and the MUe sales which have ‘rocketed’ under her supervision. The restructuring program from Mary Sumner House helped streamline administration and updated communication channels, allowing us improved connections with other dioceses across Britain and All Ireland and enhanced our Wave of Prayer commitment.

For MULive calculations show that members touched the lives of 8,772 people in 2022, an increase from 2021. In 2019 there were 938 members falling to 578 paid up members at the end of 2023. There were 22 Branches and 9 Fellowship Groups, broken down into 522 Branch Members, 56 Diocesan Members and 50 Indoor Members (Life members who do not pay a subscription) totalling 628. Fellowship Groups, introduced as a pilot in 2021 to address declining membership were subsequently amended in the Constitution in 2023. That year a Discovery Day focused on the “Reimagining MU” process prioritising and generating action plans under a theme of “Transformation – Now!” introducing new ways of being MU, raising our profile within the church and community and working more closely with clergy.

The introduction of a new direct debit payments for the collection of annual subscriptions helped ease the burden on branch treasurers. Although financial reporting faced challenges due to delays, significant funds were reallocated for local branch support and our global commitment. Fundraising efforts around campaigns such as "Make a Mother's Day," "Summer of Hope," and "16 Days of Activism" were widely and generously supported.

MU representation on Diocesan Synod, Mission and Ministry Team, World Mission Group and Clewer continued. MU was also invited to attend the Licensing Services of new clergy to establish contact with non-MU churches. AFIA grew to include not only days out but offer help to families struggling with the cost-of-living crisis through the introduction of a school uniform grant scheme. The Community of Interest craft group, among other activities, knitted hats for seafarers, sewed small pillow covers for neonates, and produced NHS teaching aids for new mums. The number of members involved in making Christmas cards for prisoners increased with more branches participating in the project. 90th+ Birthday and Anniversary cards are sent out to cherish and maintain links with our older members. Two Women’s Refuges were offered gift vouchers, sanitary products, toiletries, days out and toys for families whose lives had “met with adversity”, and these were much appreciated. It is hoped that this work will continue.

As Covid restrictions eased, members participated in various social gatherings, including coffee mornings, garden parties, and much more. We continued our “*I Spy…*” theme with an “*I Spy the Mothers’ Union plaque on Southwold Pier*” on the 9th August, celebrating in an Open Air Service of Worship and Thanksgiving for the life and work of Mary Sumner. Such events provide an opportunity for fellowship, fun, food and focus, whilst making “MU more visible” in our local communities. We continued our programmes supporting domestic violence survivors and were kept well-informed and updated about the Clewer Initiative, addressing modern-day slavery.

The team has largely stayed the same, but there have been sad occasions when long-term faithful members have died, in particular our Emergency Prayer Chain Rep. We were sad to say goodbye our Indoor Rep of many years’service and wished her well in retirement, but have been delighted to welcome new members, especially our supportive MU diocesan chaplain who has been overseeing our worship and festival services. We also gladly welcomed the return of our Diocesan Treasurer, together with the appointment of new team members. Again, at the close of the second triennium, special thanks were extended to all the Trustees, Officers, Community of Interest leads, STARs and volunteers and thanked them for all that they have done, and especially our Diocesan Secretary without whom MU in St Eds and Ips would have ceased to be. We have so much for which to be grateful and acknowledge that God is working His purposes out. Reflecting on these past six years has been a real joy and privilege to serve as the Diocesan President. We wish Jeanette and her new team every blessing and are confident that the faithful work which Mary Sumner started nearly 150 years ago, will continue to remain rooted in its faith and impact lives through its ongoing campaigns, outreach, fundraising initiatives and new exciting ways of working. LG/9.10.24

**Secretaries Report**

This will be the last report I give to Trustees and Council as your secretary. I have enjoyed my 6 years keeping you all updated with what is going on in the Diocese as far as MU is concerned. I do hope there is someone who will take the jobs of Admin Secretary and Minute Secretary. These are really worthwhile jobs, and the trustee board requires your support as they carry out their duties. If anyone wishes to know more about what the duties entail, I will be very willing to have a chat and hopefully encourage someone not necessarily a member as this is a job that can be done by a non-member to take it on. I would like to thank the trustees and members for your support over the time I have been your secretary and previously your AFIA rep and wish the new trustee board good wishes for the future.

Beryl Mee Secretary 11th October 24

**MUe**

Thank you to all members who have already ordered from the new Autumn / Winter catalogue, and thank you to the fourteen branches which have invited us to bring the stall to their meetings. Everything we sell will earn us 10% grant back from Mothers’ Union, which we can then use for any of our Diocesan projects. Recently it has paid for the Indoor Members to receive their copies of Connected and the Prayer Diary, Christmas and Easter cards and regular newsletters.

**Membership**

We now have almost 30% of our members paying their subs by Direct Debit, which is excellent. This does make the branch treasurers’ jobs easier each autumn, so thank you. There is still plenty of time to set up a DD if any of your members would like to, but there is absolutely no need to – we will always be very happy to receive subs by cash, cheque or BACS.

Mary Sumner House is developing a new membership database which should be in use in the new year, and there is a new website planned for later next year too.

**Website / Social Media**

Thank you to everyone who has sent me news for our website and Facebook. Please remember that any photos with people in do need to be accompanied with a signed permission form otherwise we can’t publish them. Also photos need to be high resolution – 200kb at least, but 1-2Mb is much better.

**Safeguarding**

Mothers’ Union is developing its own in-house safeguarding training courses, and there is a new safeguarding policy which we will look to adopt next year. Once more information is available about the safeguarding courses we will let you know.

Clare Thomas 13/10/2024

**Policy COI Report for November 2024 .**

I have re-established contact with MSH and have reconnected with Zoom meetings and joined the CoI for domestic abuse in July.

A new COI has been created to take on the role of ‘Modern Slavery’ which Christine Ward has taken on. This is very good news as the Diocesan group is currently not active.

Cathie McGregor September 2024.

**CRAFT COI REPORT FOR TRUSTEES OCTOBER 2024.**

The knitted breasts project for the Health Visitor Teams and Midwives within the NHS in Suffolk has achieved its target and is currently on hold.

We have sent 148 to Lisa Locke who is really pleased with them.

Seafarer’s hats, drain bags and other items continue to be made and distributed.

The project of cotton ‘gel pillow cases’ for PICU is active and the pattern is available on the website.

I have not progressed the possibility of making reusable sanitary pads for Kagera which will need to be discussed.

Baby items can be directed to the Moses Project for new mothers. There are collection points in Ipswich and Stowmarket.

There have been no further updates from MSH.

Cathie McGregor September 2024.

**Ipswich Area**

Details of Ipswich Area.

Coffee Morning will be again held on Saturday 16th November at St Michaels Church Martlesham 10am – 12noon.

The Stalls we will be having are.

Bottle Tombola, Supermarket Stall, £1 Parcel Stall wrapped in Christmas Paper, Christmas Draw and the MUE stall.

Tea & Coffee will be available.

Entry £1

This is my last report for Council as I finish as a Trustee, Ipswich Area Rep and Deanery Leader I have enjoyed doing these roles over the last six plus years.

I will still be an active member in my own branch St Mary Stoke.

I would like to thank you all for your continued support over the years it has been very much appreciated.

Sandra Griffiths

Ipswich Area Rep.

**Diocesan Members Report**

**for Council Meeting on 5th November 2024**

I have sent out the newsletters from Trustees and a letter from me each month. I have also sent out the MUe catalogues to Diocesan members, as well as Easter and Christmas cards.

I am starting to collect 2025 subscriptions, and I am hoping that all these will be sent to me by November. I would like to prepare the mailing list ready for Sarah Nicholson to look after Diocesan members from January onwards. Sarah will send out information to Diocesan Members each month as I have done, but 2026 Subscriptions will be collected by Clare Thomas.

We are about to do our first Workshop at East Bergholt to make some of the 1,500 cards that will be needed to send to the prisoners at Highpoint. Two further workshops are planned in October. Don’t forget to retain the pictures from the cards you receive this Christmas and send them to me. After trimming they can be used to make cards for prisoners next year.

Sue Norrington Oct 2024

**Over 90’s Report**

I now have 36 members who are 90+ 4 new members recently from Martlesham!! I am very happy to continue to send cards Get lovely feedback

My apologies shall be unable to attend meeting.

God's blessings.

Margaret.

**Indoor Members Report**

Regards the report for indoor members we have 47 on the list and I continue to send them newsletters and a letter every 2 months. That is all I can report. On a personal note, my family and I did enjoy the Mary Sumner Southwold experience, so well organised.

Best wishes,

Margaret

**A.F.I.A. Report**

I have received request for more grants this year, than for holiday.

1, grant for £280.00 for a pupil from Old Newton Primary School to attend a

residential school trip this September.

2, grant for £100.00 to help with running costs for Claydon & Barham Young Families group.

They have been running for 33 years and welcome parents, grandparents and carers from Claydon £ Barham and surrounding villages.

3, grant for £300.00 to a single parent with 3 growing boys to help with school uniform.

This referral came from Families together Suffolk.

4, another grant for school uniform for a single parent of £150.00.

5, A grant form has been sent to Rev Daniel Whiffin

Vicar of Bures with Assington and Little Cornard.

This is to help a single parent and her children to attend her father’s funeral in the north of England.

I have just booked a holiday for a dad and his 4 children. Mum has sadly just died from cancer. They are going to a lovely cottage in North Norfolk. When I contacted the owner and explained about MU & AFIA she very kindly gave me a lovely discount.

This is my last year of being AFIA rep and after 24 years being on trustees wearing a variety of MU ‘hats’.

Thank you all for your support, which ever hat I wore.

Val Jeffreys

AFIA Trustee.

A black and white drawing of a sand castle

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