

# Mothers' Union Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Annual Report 2024



## **Mothers' Union Annual Review and Accounts 2024**

### **Introduction**

St Edmundsbury and Ipswich diocese is a registered charity (charity registration number 249726 and is an affiliated diocesan organisation of the Mothers' Union (charity registration number 240531). The constitution of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Mothers' Union is in accordance with the constitution of the Mothers' Union dated 2018.

### **Vision**

The vision of Mothers' Union is of a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful, and flourishing relationships.

### **Our Aims and Objects are:**

- To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding;
- To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church;
- To maintain a world-wide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service;
- To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children; and
- To help those whose family life has met with adversity.

Mothers' Union is firmly rooted in a voluntary ethos. Its governance, leadership, and activities are driven by and undertaken through its members.

Members of Mothers' Union believe firstly, in the value of each individual and their unique qualities, in the value of relationships. Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself." And secondly, in the value of family in its many forms as a source of love and support for individuals and as the basis for a caring community.

### **Organisation**

St Edmundsbury and Ipswich is managed by a board of trustees, chaired by the Diocesan President. The trustees and diocesan president are elected by the diocesan council, made up of diocesan and branch officers. The diocesan president is approved by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

The work of the charity is organised by Community of Interest (COI) Groups. There is close liaison between the trustee board and COI units. The main work of the charity is carried out at deanery and parish based with some projects carried out across the diocese. Branches work closely with their local parish or deanery of the to

Trustees meet four times a year to plan for and review the work of the Mothers' Union in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. Council meetings are held twice a year and the Annual General Meeting is held in April. The Diocesan Council is the consultative body, which nominates, elects and supports the Trustees, and receives their Reports. It provides a forum for discussion and debate, discusses MU policy and provides working groups as and when necessary.

### **Trustee Board**

President – Jeanette Appleton  
Trustee: Clare Thomas  
Trustee: Ruth Dennigan  
Trustee: Rev Alan Forsdyke  
Trustee: Rev Alison Alder

### **Diocesan Officers**

Diocesan Chaplain – Rev. Catherine Forsdike  
Diocesan Finance Officer: Amanda Langan  
Diocesan Bookkeeper: Rob Shackleton  
Diocesan Minutes Secretary: Ruth Dennigan  
Diocesan Members Rep: Sarah Nicholson  
School Uniform Grant: Win Sutton  
AFIA Rep: Emma-Louise Syrett  
Christmas Cards for HMP Highpoint contact: Sue Norrington  
Craft COI Lead: Cathie McGregor  
Worldwide Contact: Anji Dawkins  
Indoor members Rep: Margaret Morrison:  
Membership Secretary & MUe manager: Clare Thomas,  
Policy COI Lead: Cathie McGregor  
90<sup>th</sup> Birthday's Contact – Margaret Rollins  
Modern Day Slavery Contact- Christine Ward

### **Life Vice Presidents**

Mrs Mary Addington	The Revd Canon Brian Lillistone
Mr Doug Crooks	Mrs Margaret Lowe
Mrs Irene Crooks	The Revd Canon Dr Peter Mortimer
Mrs Hilary Griffin	Mrs Catherine Prophet
Mrs Val Jeffreys	Mrs Christine Ward
Mrs Audreen Lillistone	

In recognition of their outstanding service to Mothers' Union Christine Ward and Val Jeffreys were made **Life Vice Presidents** at the November 2024 council meeting. Kathryn Anderson, the Provincial President presented them with their certificates

## **Mothers' Union making a difference in 2024**

Mothers' Union is making a difference as we live out our five key objectives. Once again in 2024 members of our Mothers' Union have been touching the lives of so many people, through the people they meet, the prayers they breathe and life they lead.

The theme for 2022 to 2024 was **Transformation - Now!** Mothers' Union members continue to show amazing resilience, responsiveness and adaptability. The aim was to build on this experience to transform Mothers' Union to be relevant for 21st century life.

Here is our diocese we have been working to change and respond to the needs of our members and of the communities we live in. Over the past twelve months a review was undertaken of our structures, recognising where we need to change, so that we would have a robust team in place for the next triennium. This meant acknowledging that while on paper our trustee board should have ten members, we actually only had had a trustee board of five people for the past three years and that reducing the numbers on the trustee board was going to be the way forward. Also, that adding extra responsibilities to that of a trustee, had resulted in roles becoming vacant; and vacant for many years as in the case of the Sudbury Area Trustee. In 2022 with no North Suffolk Area Trustee the branches took matters into their own hands and showed how they could work together to support each other, giving the rest of the diocese a model to follow at the end of 2024.

The roles of Diocesan Treasurer and Diocesan Secretary were split into what is termed a job share. This proved easier to fill and by the end of the year the only role still left to fill was that of Diocesan Secretary.

Another role that was difficult to fill was that of Branch Treasurer. Members voted at the November council for branches and deaneries to have the option of having a bank account, thus making it not essential to have a treasurer, in every branch.

Other changes happened suddenly. Due to the situation in the Church of England, Mothers' Union is developing its own in-house safeguarding training courses, and there is a new safeguarding policy which we will look to adopt in 2025. Clare Thomas has been our safeguarding officer for many years and Jeanette Appleton will take over as Safeguarding Lead for the next triennium. As our outreach work often it with children and vulnerable adults it is of the utmost importance that we are all aware of safe guarding issues and how and who to report your concerns to.

A new way of joining Mothers' Union was also approved and Friend of Mothers' Union is now an option for people who are not able to commit to being a member, but who want to support our aims and objectives. A Friend of Mothers' Union pays the same subscription and receive the Connected magazine and prayer diary, but they are not able to vote in meetings or hold the role of an officer.

## **Membership**

Clare Thomas, our membership, secretary reports that 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.

Mary Sumner House is developing a new membership database which should be in use from early 2025 and there is a new website planned for later next year too.

## **Mothers Union Enterprise (MUE)**

Clare Thomas our MUE rep, reports that sales of cards and gifts were strong again during 2025 – we sold just over £10,000 worth of items at diocesan meetings, events and branches. This resulted in our diocese receiving an MUE dividend of £1019.14 which goes into our diocesan funds.

## **Indoor and Diocesan Members**

Not all our members are part of branches and fellowship groups. Margaret Morrison has kept our Indoor Members up to date with news from the diocese and supported them with prayers, reflections and cards. All of which are much appreciated.

Sue Norrington steps down at the end of 2024 as the Diocesan Members Rep. Our diocesan membership has grown over the years. Sue's monthly letters have provided the diocesan members with fellowship and information about the activities of the Mothers' Union across the diocese. The diocesan members started the now increasingly successful Christmas cards for prisoner's project, showing the vital role Diocesan Members play in our organisation and a mark of the central role Sue has played.

## **Making a difference through new ways of meeting**

For our branches and Mothers' Union member the year of 2024 has been as busy as ever as. In March 2024 **we had our first Members Day in Martlesham**. Sixty people attended from across the diocese came to Martlesham and enjoyed a day of fellowship, worship, bible study and workshops. The feedback was very positive and a larger venue with more rooms for the workshops is being taken forward to 2025. By the end of 2024 a member's day with the theme of 'supporting grandparents of faith' had been planned with members of the diocesan Growing Younger team involved. A new location has been chosen at St John's church Ipswich which has extra rooms for the popular workshops.

A new approach of having the AGM and Spring council meeting on the same morning has also proved popular. The venue at Coddensham, with its dedicated car park, step free access and located so that all corners of the diocese have about the same travel time makes it more equitable for all our branches to send representatives.

Mary Sumner Day was celebrated outdoors at Southwold on August 9<sup>th</sup>, with a service accompanied by a brass band. The plaque placed on the pier in Southwold was found and everyone who attended enjoyed a wonderful afternoon of fellowship and worship.

Over the summer months there were many 'Summer of Hope' afternoon teas and events, all supporting the work of Mothers' Union worldwide through funds raised.

### **Making a difference by raising awareness**

The national RISE-UP campaign has been well supported in our diocese with East Bergholt and Brantham and Fressingfield branches being awarded Bronze Awards for their work to raise awareness of the issue of domestic abuse.

Emily Brailsford at Mary Sumner House held ZOOM meetings during the year focusing on the Rise Up campaign, 16 days of Activism and supporting Women's Refuges. This forum shares ideas and good practice across the wider MU.

Modern Day Slavery rep Christine Ward reports that Mothers' union is appreciated as an active members of the diocesan wide team coordinated by Mark Shard who has the brief at the moment.

There is a new initiative, to incorporate trauma informed practice in our worship is being led by 'Rural Dean Samford, Jenny Seggar, with the title SOLACE AND GRACE with particular influence on Survivors of Abuse. Solace and Graces as a Liturgy is developing and Christine is part of Jenny's group for this a have always promoted MU as a deeply interested and possibly effective too. She is pleased to welcome MU prayer, ears and eyes.

### **Making a difference through our projects and activities**

Our formal outreach programme activities here in our diocese includes the gifts we give, the items we sew or knit, the service we give through lunch clubs and food banks, the nurturing of faith in through our involvement in Messy Church and Open the Book and the time we spend teaching life skills to others. The AFIA holidays and School Uniform grants to support families whose lives have met with adversity. These programmes and activities touched the lives of over seven thousand people in 2024

Although we often think nobody notices the work we do and still view us as the ladies who make tea. Our work at HMP Highpoint has been noticed and we have been asked to provide out Christmas cards from both Warren Hill and Hollesley Bay prisons. Sue Norrington leads our **Christmas card for Prisoners projects**.

In the past the making of Christmas Cards for Highpoint Prison was carried out by Diocesan members but over time it was more difficult to gather these members together to make them. Diocesan members have the opportunity to make a donation

towards the cost of producing these cards. These donations allow Diocesan Members to be involved in a different way.

Di Barker and Sue continue to work with MU Branches to make the 1,500 Christmas cards that were needed for Christmas 2024. (The number of cards that we need in the future is likely to rise) In 2024 we led 3 workshops with the branches in Fressingfield, East Bergholt and Yoxmere Benefice.

For some branches a meeting where cards are made has become a regular feature of their programmes. Members and supporters continued to donate used Christmas cards so that we had a good supply of pictures which we trimmed to the correct size.

These workshops often start with a service where Prisons and Prisoners is the theme. This helps to inform members about how they can support prisoners and prison staff by their prayers. It has also been an opportunity to talk about current Mothers' Union thinking about how we can offer support to prisons in other ways.

We always need to ensure that the cards are made carefully and tips to get good results are suggested at each workshop. Di Barker checks all the cards and organises repairs if needed before they are delivered to Highpoint.

The craft work done by members is of equally high standard. Ipswich hospital approached Mothers' Union for help when they needed covers for the Gel Pillows used on the Neonatal Unit. Some members had experience of working on neonatal units and were able to create a pattern and provide a schedule for making the Gel Pillow covers.

The Suffolk Infant Feeding lead also approached Mothers' Union with a request to make 120 knitted breasts which are used by their team to help and advice new mothers with breast feeding. The target of 120 knitted breasts was exceeded during the year and this project is now on hold.

Mary Staley has taken over the role of collecting the sea farers hats for the Mission at Felixstowe.

We continue to support the Moses Project with baby supplies. Patterns are available on the [musuffolk.org.uk](http://musuffolk.org.uk) website.

## **Making a difference with support for families whose lives have met with adversity**

### **Away From It All Holidays (AFIA)**

Val Jeffreys has continued to act as our AFIA rep and in this role has provided grants to families for much needed holidays, as well as funding for pupils to attend a residential school trip. Val steps down from this role at the end of this triennium, we thank her for her dedication in providing holidays to suit each family nominated. Val is handing over the role to Emma-Loise Syrett, a new Mothers' Union member of Hadleigh Branch.

**School uniform grants** have been given to several families this year. One recent grant was to a family that had had to move mid term and the three children required new uniforms. This extra expense on top of the cost of moving had been too much for the family. A request from the chaplaincy team enabled the family to be given a grant of £300 within just a few days of the referral being received. Val Jeffreys has also administered the School Uniform Grant scheme since its conception. Val hands over this role to Win Sutton a member of Halesworth branch. Val is a wonderful example of the way in which Mothers' Union members step up and take on roles to support families in need.

### **Making a difference through prayer**

Prayer underpins all our work and especially with our link dioceses and the **Wave of Prayer**. Mothers' Union in Suffolk has four diocesan links, with Jalingo in Nigeria, Lake Malawi in Malawi, Byumba in Rwanda and Lucknow in India. These are in the published Mothers' Union Prayer diary, used by our Mothers' Union members. This prayer focus takes place between 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July and groups use the materials as they wish.

By the end of the year a new Trustees board was in place to continue to lead the work of Mothers' Union here in our diocese and we give thanks to all those who have given so much during 2024.

Jeanette Appleton

Mothers' Union Diocesan President  
Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich