

Minutes of Council Meeting: Tuesday 28 October 2025

10.30am The Coddendam Centre, Mary Day Close, Coddendam IP6 9SR and via Zoom

- Present in person:** **Diocesan President:** Jeanette Appleton (also Safeguarding lead)
Trustees: Ruth Dennigan (minutes), Clare Thomas (also Membership and MUe)
Officers: Amanda Langan (Finance), Cathie McGregor (Craft and Policy),
Sarah Nicholson (Diocesan members), Christine Ward (Modern Day Slavery).
Members: Richard Appleton (Constable Churches), Penny Braybrooke (Henley),
Lorna Brooke (Cathedral), Christine Christian (Fressingfield), Rosemary Cleaver
(Hadleigh), Jean Cobb (Woodbridge), Denise Gibbs (Fressingfield), Sandra Griffiths
(Ipswich St Mary Stoke), Jane Harrison (Hadleigh), Geoffrey House (Cathedral),
Heather Lee (Fressingfield), Jane Leung (Cathedral), Meg Mateer (Rushmere St Andrew),
Judy McDonna (Woodbridge), Beryl Mee (Ipswich St Mary Stoke), Shirley O'Connor
(Cathedral), Rosemary Savage (Fressingfield), Ann Smith (Hadleigh), Tricia Tyler
(Rushmere St Andrew), Anna Vessey (Fressingfield), Janet Walkey (Diocesan),
Jane Whight (Claydon & Barham), Janice White (Hadleigh), Anne Wright (Woodbridge).
- Present online:** Margaret Bloomfield, Margaret Goldstone, Andy Turner (Acting DP, Diocese of Norwich).
- Visitors:** Jennifer Sheehan, Les Sheehan.

Jeanette welcomed attendees and Richard Appleton led the opening worship.

1. Apologies have been received from Alison Alder (trustee), Anji Dawkins (Worldwide), Alan Forsdike (trustee), Catherine Forsdike (Chaplain), Val Jeffries (Needham Market), Margaret Lowe (Woodbridge), Sue Norrington (Cards for Prisons), Margaret Rodgers (Shotley), Margaret Rollins (90th Birthdays), Monica Twaits (Martlesham).

2. Conflict of Interest – none were declared.

Safeguarding – Jeanette (as Safeguarding Lead) thanked those who have sent in their safeguarding certificates and noted that the Central Charity will be putting the training online for all to access (any difficulties, let Jeanette know).

Domestic Abuse – Jeanette read the “Rise Up” prayer. She noted that North Suffolk Area have a travelling “Souls of our Shoes” exhibition. She highlighted that the University of Suffolk Students’ Union are organising a “Reclaim the Night” march on the evening of Tues 25 Nov as part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Christine Ward advocated the CofE “Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse” training which mentions MU as part of the work addressing domestic violence – Jeanette noted that we have been asked to provide a diocesan workshop on this.

3. The minutes of the April meeting were accepted as a correct record, with Sarah Nicholson proposing and Jean Cobb seconding this.
4. Matters Arising: Questions were asked about the dress displayed at the last Council Meeting – Jeanette noted that this was not being advertised at the recent provincial gathering.
5. Treasurer’s Report (circulated in advance of the meeting): Amanda provided a summary of the circulated documentation with a slight update to 20 October, showing that we hold just over £41,000 in total across our various accounts. The “variance” figures shows our closing figures for 2024 against where we are now which, due to world circumstances, has fallen. We owe just over £600 to the central charity. There are just over £7400 in designated funds and £18,000 in general unrestricted funds. In response to a question it was explained that funds (e.g. to the Women’s Refuge) tend to be donated at certain times of the year, with additional donations during the year if the refuges ask for specific items. This raised an issue as Fressingfield had held a fund-raising event, for the refuge, at a local café, but the money raised had not yet reached the refuge, meaning that an acknowledgement for this had not been received to share with the café. Jeanette explained that this had occurred as she was intending to use the money to buy items for the refuge but had been ill and so unable to do so – this would be rectified on Friday. **Action: Jeanette.** Just over £18,600 has so far been sent to the central charity, including £5,000 from the legacy received, which has gone to the “credit, savings and livelihoods” project. Diocesan income is slightly up on last year, meaning that our general income is remaining fairly steady. Diocesan expenditure is up by around £1400, with rising costs and an increase in conference expenses, plus the need to pay for a new independent examiner. The situation with branch accounts remains the same, with branches holding, in total, just over £6,500. 18 branches currently have an open bank account, with two expecting to close shortly. Problems are being experienced with Lloyds accounts, which used to be free of charge but they are resistant to allowing this to continue which means that accounts may need to be moved e.g. to the Co-Op who don’t charge.

Amanda informed the meeting that Freda Smith, who died in August aged 107, had owned a tablecloth with 114 names on it (shown at the meeting) – noted as the MU branch of St Matthew’s Church Ipswich (no date provided); Amanda has digitised the names and asked members present to have a look and provide feedback if any names are recognised in order to attempt to date the tablecloth.

Jeanette presented Amanda with flowers in recognition of her imminent standing down from this role.

6. Diocesan President’s Report (circulated in advance of the meeting) with Q+A: Jeanette highlighted to the meeting:
 - the new diocesan logo provided by the central charity and the new anniversary logo for the coming anniversary year;
 - the big success of the Grandparent Day at Fressingfield, which had a shout-out on local radio;
 - we will shortly be advertising grants for marriage preparation;
 - we are supporting CofE schools, encouraging the Advent and Lent “bags” (Jeanette noted this might be better provided as a box of resources than a set of bags!);
 - AFIA holiday camps are in the planning stage, with the sports camp planned for this year having been postponed to next year;

- Hadleigh have been providing Year 6 leavers' books for their local school – provided by Scripture Union, called “It’s Your Move” about moving up to high school;
- hymn books and service sheets have been provided for HMP Warren Hill and HMP Hollesley Bay, and Bibles for HMP Highpoint, and fabric provided for the Sewing Room at HMP Warren Hill (cotton thread is needed – Woodbridge MU branch is the collection point for this);
- we’ve had some new events – “Tea by the Sea”, “Souls of our Shoes” exhibition, “The “World We’re Passing On” reflective day led by Alison Alder, the “Feast of Music” raising money for AFIA, the tea and cake afternoon, people joining as Friends of MU, afternoon teas and raffles and sunflower-sowing as part of the “Summer of Hope” appeal.
- Woodbridge, Henley and Claydon & Barham branches have all received their bronze Rise Up awards.

7. 150th anniversary events and ideas – feedback and discussion

- National Events:
 - St Paul’s Cathedral, 5pm on 10 June – tickets on sale now (here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mothers-unions-150th-celebratory-service-tickets-1828242575759?aff=oddtcreator>) with a further release on 16 Dec; they are allocated to provinces so please ensure that you select “CAN” when buying your ticket. Tickets cost £16.96, £15 of which pays for a commemorative booklet and £1.96 to cover Eventbrite fees (the cost of the cathedral and service is £25,000, being covered by the central charity). It is possible to book more than one ticket, but a name has to be allocated to each ticket for security reasons. Next spring, when tickets have been purchased, we’ll look at whether we can organise transport for the diocese, for this and for the following event.
 - Annual Gathering – 11 June 10.30-4.30 at the Emmanuel Centre next to Mary Sumner House (which will be open for the day). Details will be released on 16 November.
 - Global Gathering – 30 Sept – 3 Oct in Durban.
- National challenges to local MU:
 - £150 challenge – each diocese which applies can be given £150 with the challenge to turn this into £1,500. Jeanette suggested that each branch be given £5 to turn into £50 – this could be done by buying a book of raffle tickets with the £5 – though the prize needs to be worthwhile, perhaps a skill (Jeanette had once raffled her husband to provide three hours’ gardening).
 - Challenge to get 150 new members / friends. In 2020 we had 701 members in the diocese, in 2025 we have 512. Sometimes membership lapses as people forget to pay – encouraging people to use direct debit avoids this. Jeanette noted that it’s important to encourage people to join – invite them, keep asking them and reminding them – and to persuade people not to leave. It was noted that toddler groups often have many grandparents attending so this can be a place to “recruit”. It was also noted that people with no contact / interest / belief in God can’t be encouraged to become members – but that God works in people’s lives and an invitation to attend something can lead people on a journey to faith.

- Suggestions for local (Suffolk) events for branches, groups and diocesan members:
 - Bishop Joanne has agreed, in principle, to preach at the Lady Day Service on 25 March at Ipswich Minster – the time is to be confirmed depending on +Joanne’s availability.
 - MU Big Family Quiz – most of the answers will be searchable online but some will require further knowledge! £1 per quiz sheet (sold by branches, with branches keeping half the money and sending the other half to diocesan MU to fund the prizes).
 - Big Knicker Night – being organised by Clare Thomas, Alison Alder and Christine Ward – see one of these if you’d like to help.
 - Mary Sumner Day service – 9 August is Mary Sumner Day (although Mary Sumner actually died on 11 August which is an alternative day for an event), and it is possible that there will be a service at the Cathedral to celebrate.
 - Silent knitting challenge – come together to knit, with a fine to pay if you talk.
 - Sunday takeover – asking local clergy whether the MU branch can run a Sunday service.
 - Teddy Bears’ picnic.
 - Branch afternoon teas / Lent lunches / prayer, prosecco and Pimm’s evening / pasta, pamper and prayer evening.
 - Toddler toddle.
 - Raffles with a difference (already mentioned above – raffling skills).
 - Talk to 150 people about MU.
 - Embroidered tablecloth for the branch / group.
 - Ministry of cakes, recipes past and present.
 - Pillar box toppers – Jeanette had brought some starter packs to take away.

8. Gideon Advent and Lent Bag resources: The representatives of the East Suffolk branch of Good News for Everyone (formerly Gideons) in attendance were the Bible secretary and the Friends Secretary, and they provided some information about their organisation. The organisation is made up of volunteers who’ve found the Bible to be useful in their lives. There are four branches in Suffolk. For many years they have gone into secondary schools (and some Year 6 assemblies) to give out their “little red book” – New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs. The Bible is still the most published book in the world – but not the easiest to read and therefore the books provide suggestions of passages to read in different circumstances, and a 30-day reading plan. They have produced a QR code for teens and adults enabling the downloading of the Bible in different languages onto phones. They provide Bibles for hospitals, care homes, prisons (recently including HMP Warren Hill) and universities. They are thrilled that we’re looking at including their “Discover” booklet in bags going into primary schools. This has been created in partnership with NATRE (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education) in order to relate to RE syllabi across the country.

Jeanette has provided branch leaders with labels to go inside the books (identifying them as a gift from MU) and asked branch leaders to collect their books before leaving.

Christine Christian presented flowers and a card to Janet from the North Suffolk Area who has now moved and so is no longer part of the committee.

9. Midday Prayers were led by Jeanette.

10. Feedback from MU Branches and MU Groups:

- Christine Ward shared that on the Shotley Peninsula they are providing a Blue Christmas service in Holbrook Methodist Chapel – 2pm on 3 December.
- Jane Leung shared that last Sunday the Cathedral marked Prisons Sunday and the MU branch provided scones and cakes for a Q+A session with members of the congregation listening to prisoners and prison staff, noting that it was really moving to hear their stories. The leftover cakes went to one of the local centres for the homeless.
- Jane Leung also shared that there is a craft group meeting at the end of each month; during the spring/summer they made a quilt which was auctioned, raising £720 for the Bury Drop-In Centre to buy tents, sleeping bags and underwear.
- Cathie McGregor highlighted that on the craft tables she's brought labels to sew into handmade items. There is also a chair with homemade cushions for sale to buy vouchers for the women's refuge.
- Tricia Tyler from Rushmere shared that they'd had a talk from Lighthouse which inspired them to collect 18 washing up bowls and cleaning materials, with people bringing items when they'd had no previous MU / church connection. Knit and Natter – next week they are filling boxes for Samaritans' Purse and are hoping that in 2026 they will have a speaker who has helped to distribute these boxes.
- Christine Christian shared that last year Fressingfield had achieved their Rise Up Bronze award and are shortly having a speaker from Lighthouse and donating items for them. They had an afternoon tea in the summer with the most guests for a few years, and will be having an afternoon tea for Advent. They are planning a Lent Lunch and Lent reflection in March 2026. They've been asked to provide the lunch for the deanery marriage preparation event taking place next year. They may also, next year, offer the raffling of their husbands.

11. Any Other Business

- Jean Cobb asked whether there would be a downloadable service for the 16 days of Activism – Jeanette will look into this. **Action: Jeanette.**
- Christine Ward highlighted that the next United in Solace and Grace service (a trauma-informed service) will take place at Capel St Mary on the last Sunday in November. These services, which are now being promoted nationwide, are for people who have experienced abuse, and for their families, to enable them to seek solace and grace.
- Tricia Tyler has received an email about the MU Christmas Challenge and asked people to note that between 2 and 9 December every pound donated online will be doubled by "The Big Give". Amanda noted that these donations need to be made online by individuals, not via diocesan MU.

12. Jeanette led the meeting in saying the Grace as our closing prayers.

Dates of meetings 2026

Trustee meetings 2026:

- Tues 27 Jan 2026: Trustees' Meeting: 1.30-4pm at Westerfield Church Room.
- Tues 17 March 2026: Trustees' Meeting: 1.30-4pm at Westerfield Church Room.
- Tues 30 June 2026: Trustees' and Officers' Meeting: 1.30-4pm at Westerfield Church Room.
- Tues 29 Sept 2026: Trustees' Meeting: 1.30-4pm at Westerfield Church Room.

AGM and Council meetings 2026:

- Tues 28 April 2026: AGM and Council Meeting: 2pm at Coddenham Centre.
- Tues 20 October 2026: Council Meeting: 2pm at Coddenham Centre.

Diocesan Services Lady Day: Wed 25 March 2026, 2pm at Ipswich Minster.

Mary Sumner Day: tbc

Healing service 18 October 2026: venue and time tbc

16 days of Activism: 25 November – 10 December 2026