



# FOCUS



**Spring 2023 ... An All-Ireland Production**  
**Theme 2023 ~ Transformation-Now!**



## ANNUAL GATHERING 2022



The Editor writes,

Welcome to the Spring 2023 edition of Focus. This edition features reports and photographs from many of the events which took place during 2022 and it was wonderful to be able to meet up in person again for so many of these occasions and to renew friendships.

Sadly, the year 2022 continued to be a challenging time for many as we struggled with the ongoing spread of Covid -19, the rising cost of living and the effects of the war in Ukraine. Mothers' Union has been to the fore in helping to provide support for those families who have fled from war-torn Ukraine, as well as continuing to help families in our own communities who are struggling to provide for their families, through practical help and the power of prayer. A prayer which very much comes to mind in these troubled times is the prayer of St. Francis.



*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy;*



*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

As I write this article, we are busy planning for the Triennial Conference in Termonfeckin in March and we look forward to meeting newly appointed Trustees that weekend. Elections took place for the All-Ireland Vice Presidents in the last quarter of 2022 and the following were elected:

- ✚ **Action and Outreach** – Hazel Speares supporting Clare Stewart
- ✚ **Faith and Policy** – Patsy Devoy supporting Kay Clarke
- ✚ **Finance and Central Services** – Sophia Dillon supporting Kaye Nesbitt
- ✚ **Fundraising and Communications** – Moira Thom supporting Margaret Jacob



On February 7<sup>th</sup> this year Mothers' Union held the inaugural talk to celebrate Annabella Hayes Day, founder of Mothers' Union in Ireland. June Butler gave a brief history of the life of Annabella Hayes and this was followed with a talk by Máiréad McGuinness MEP, European Commissioner for Financial Services, Financial Stability and Capital Markets Union, who spoke glowingly about the work of Mothers' Union. A link to a recording of the talk is available on the home page of the website: [www.mothersunion.ie](http://www.mothersunion.ie)

As we begin 2023, we wish every blessing to all those who are taking up new roles in Mothers' Union, whether at All Ireland level, in their Diocese or in their Branch. We especially welcome our new All Ireland Chaplain, The Venerable Dr Stephen McBride. (see page 24 for more details)

Every blessing,

Margaret



# *A letter from The Most Reverend John McDowell Primate of All Ireland*

Dear Friends,

First, many thanks to our All Ireland President, June Butler, for this invitation to write a few words for this edition of Focus.

I am very grateful to June and to Debbie our Diocesan President in Armagh for keeping me up to date on MU activities and for inviting me to sundry events. It was a great treat to meet and have a long discussion with Mrs Sheran Harper, the MU World Wide President, when she visited Ireland late last year. For someone from Guyana the Irish climate in November must have been quite a challenge, but I know Sheran found the welcome warm wherever she went. As well as discussing a very wide range of MU business, I discovered that Sheran is married to Roger Harper who I am old enough to remember as a very fine right arm off break bowler in the great West Indies cricket team of the 1980s and 1990s!

I would like to thank all of you who play your part as members or officeholders in this remarkable organisation. Particularly I would like to pay tribute to the work that is being done in raising awareness of the horrors of gender-based violence, in the home and in society. It is a profoundly Christian work to recognise and uphold the dignity of all human life and to cherish it especially in the context of marriage. All human relationships are in a sense sacramental and the relationship of marriage centrally so, which makes it deeply tragic and painful when such a sacred relationship becomes violent or oppressive.

Domestic violence is a deep seated and largely hidden problem and I have been very moved and impressed by the work that Mother's Union is doing in this area, not least in providing space for victims of domestic violence to tell their story, should they feel able to do so.

However, I know too that the bread and butter work of the MU lies in the monthly round of meetings, worship and activities, no more so than in the winter months which are now drawing to a close. These are particularly wearying times for people who find it difficult to get out, and the vocation which you have of visiting indoor members will have been greatly valued by those who have had such a long connection with MU but are no longer able to meet for fellowship as they would have done in the past. So, thank you for helping to bring the presence of God and His Church into so many homes.

Perhaps it's a bit early to talk about Spring, but it's at this time of year that I begin to yearn to see trees again in full leaf and I hope that Lent and Easter will provide each of you with an opportunity to renew your faith and discipleship as children of the Resurrection.

In Christ

+John Armagh



## *A Letter from June Butler*

Hello Everyone

It is a delight to me to be able to write to all our members again through Focus. The Trustees of All Ireland Mothers' Union realised that, with increasing costs and distribution difficulties, it was not going to be practical to publish an autumn edition – instead, therefore, you are now getting a “bumper” spring 2023 edition which can be easily distributed when representatives from all the Dioceses meet at our triennial conference at An Grianán in Co Louth at the end of March. I hope you enjoy finding out what your fellow members across Ireland have been doing during the past year.

The conference I just mentioned will focus on “Reimagining Mothers' Union” - something which we will have to take very seriously if MU is going to flourish coming out of the Covid pandemic. I recently read some words attributed to the naturalist and biologist Charles Darwin: ***“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, not the most intelligent. It is one that is most responsive to change”.***

Mothers' Union across the world will have to change in some ways to meet a range of different challenges – health, climate change, fewer resources and changes in technology, education and church to name but a few. We in Ireland are no different and we will be focussing on how we might adapt to meet those challenges while still maintaining our core aims and objectives and of course being there to support all our members and those in our communities in times of need. We should remember what Paul wrote to the Romans in ch12 v2: ***“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”***

One of our main concerns across Ireland is the apparent reluctance of some members to attend regular meetings - many have become so accustomed to being at home that they will not venture out, especially not in the evenings. Another issue is that branches are closing because no one is willing to assume roles such as branch leader or secretary. Thus we may have to change our ways of thinking about how Mothers' Union will work “on the ground”, but this need not be either radical or sudden – we have to maintain our heritage too.

My branch in Saintfield has decided to vary its pattern of meetings and we now meet sometimes in the evenings and sometimes on Saturday mornings, which also accommodates those who are in employment. Occasionally we venture outside the parish and combine forces with neighbouring branches for key speakers and services. Also we try to demonstrate to potential new members that we are much more than a “clique” of well-meaning parishioners by explaining about some of the work we are doing in the fields of domestic abuse, supporting refugees, maintaining overseas projects to enhance literacy, numeracy and the environment and of course our work at home with foodbanks, providing well needed breaks to distressed families and giving vouchers for basic essentials to those struggling “to make ends meet” and to parents to help them meet the cost of school books and uniforms.

The need for some lateral thinking about we operate and thrive as a body was also one of the concerns the eleven Diocesan Presidents and I addressed when we met together for an “away day” at the end of January (see the photograph on P.5). It was a great opportunity to share our work in branches and the wonderful projects undertaken by members in our dioceses. However, we also gave considerable thought to the challenges facing Mothers' Union at the present time and some of the themes which emerged were:

- **The need for better communication to – and from - branches**
- **The fact that good leadership at both branch and diocesan level was critical**
- **The need to work more within our communities and liaise with local organisations working in their specialist fields (great examples already of connections with foodbanks, schools and local refuges)**
- **The need to work more closely with and support our clergy.**

Ireland is not unique in having to address such matters – reimagining MU was a theme which emerged during the wonderful Annual Gathering which All Ireland hosted in Belfast at the end of September last year. The services in Belfast Cathedral (St Anne’s) on the evening of 23rd were really uplifting, especially the inspirational address given by Bishop Andrew Forster, and the Gathering itself on Saturday gave everyone who attended much food for thought. There is coverage of that event elsewhere in Focus.

Another highlight of our year in 2022 was the visit of MU Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, in November. Reports and photographs of how she engaged with members over those five days are also covered in this publication. I had the privilege of hosting her visit and everyone who met her was not only charmed by her personality but were left in awe by her Christian outreach, her commitment to Mothers’ Union and her amazing knowledge and wisdom. A very special lady!

Before I end I would like to pay tribute to those Diocesan Presidents who ended their term of office just before or during 2022 - Irene Boyd (Clogher), Sophia Dillon (Armagh), Lucy Kavanagh (Limerick and Killaloe), Roberta Macartney (Down and Dromore), Karen Nelson (Dublin and Glendalough) and Hazel Speares (Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh). They did marvellous work leading and inspiring the members in their dioceses in recent years. I would also acknowledge the dedication and expertise of other All Ireland Trustees who have recently stepped down from their various roles - Kay Clarke, Joy Gordon and Beth Wortley. Three other people I would like to acknowledge and thank for all their work on our behalf are: Norma Bell who for six years has been committed to recognising important birthdays and anniversaries of our Indoor Members; Brigid Barrett who has been a stalwart Administrator for the past year (and kept me right on so many things!); and of course our All Ireland Chaplain, Revd. Canon Robert Deane who sadly has had to step down from this role due to ill health. We will miss his calm presence and his special skill in preparing, with Beth, much of our All Ireland worship.

I will finish with a verse from Joshua C1 V9 which I hope will give you courage as you give some thought to and work to strengthen the future of MU in your branch – and diocese. We must remember that God is walking this journey with us:

***“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”***

Wishing you and your loved ones every blessing.

With love  
**June**



# What does it take to be a *BYSTANDER*?

*I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.* John 10:10

Recently, Eve, a Holocaust survivor, aged 92, spoke in Belfast of her traumatic experiences. As she left the podium she turned and stated decisively,

**'If there is one strong message, I want you to take from here, it is this - DO NOT BE A BYSTANDER, have courage, take action, stand up, speak out and be counted.'**

Being a bystander is often associated with violence against women, but it doesn't start there, it starts in the cradle. Not all disrespect towards women results in violence. *But all violence against women starts with disrespectful behaviour.* Our children form their beliefs from the world around them – what they hear, see, talk about and from the stories, people and experiences that are an integral part of their childhood.

I don't agree with that comment.

Sorry, what do you mean by that?

What we expect of men and women is often subtle, not noticed or seen as normal and accepted as the way things are, and often remarks making fun of a girl or boy because of their appearance or gender eg. 'stop kicking the ball like a girl', without realising it can serve to reinforce and develop disrespectful attitudes.

Yes, we want what's best for them. Though sometimes, without meaning to, we ignore disrespectful behaviour, prefer not to get involved or make excuses to protect our children.

However, what we think is acceptable and normal can change over time. We no longer think that drinking and driving is acceptable. At one time, women were not considered intelligent enough to vote and a man giving up work to look after children would have been unthinkable!

Some of the most common ways we excuse disrespectful and aggressive behaviour include:

- **playing down disrespectful behaviour**
- **accepting aggression as just part of being a boy**
- **blaming girls who are treated with disrespect.**

That joke isn't funny.

Gradually, boys and girls start to believe that disrespect is just a normal part of growing up.



So often we hear something, see something and we let it pass. Yet through taking small, courageous actions in our daily life, together we can create a significant cultural shift.

In the Gospels, we see how Jesus, time and again, challenges the culture around him in both words and actions. When he heard or saw something he knew was not right, he stood up and said so, often to the surprise of those around him. We are called to follow His example.

Would you say that if she was a man?

**An active bystander** is someone who steps in having witnessed or heard about an incident or situation they do not think is right. The action they take is called '**bystander action**'.

I'm concerned about what you said earlier?

It is about taking action in response to everyday sexism, gender stereotypes, disrespect towards women, and anything that excuses or trivialises violence against women.

## TOGETHER WE CAN HELP STOP THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As role models, we can have a positive influence and set the standard for what is and what's not acceptable, right from the start.

- We can be more aware of the excuses we make, and how they can have a lasting impact.
- We can start having conversations about respect with boys and girls.
- We can 'stop it at the start' and help prevent violence against women.

Are you  
ok?

***Preventing violence against women is everyone's business. Bystander action is a highly effective way to create positive culture change.*** We can each find a way of taking action that works for us. The important thing is that we do something. *With Jesus' teaching and example as our guide our small actions can make a big difference.* By being intentional and making the most of such opportunities in our daily interactions, we can create and reinforce the culture we wish to see – one where everyone can flourish and know life in its fullness. (John 10:10)



16 Days 365 in 2022



Congratulations on the ripple of gratitude and positivity that has emanated from MU "16 Days 365" activities in 2022. The many highlights included:

- **Equipping The Church To Take Action To End Domestic Abuse** for further information or to book this course, please contact [presidentdrmu@gmail.com](mailto:presidentdrmu@gmail.com)  
**Please note - this programme will be launched in 2023 with an exciting event in both jurisdictions – watch out for dates and venues.**
- Thanks to a **Mind Matters** grant a group are undertaking training to facilitate the creation of a **Survivors' Wellness Group**.
- The **RTE 16 Days** service on 4<sup>th</sup> December was very well received and much commented upon.
- **16 Days 2022** - around the dioceses wonderful diversity and creative thinking was evident. Reports are found among the diocesan notes. All dioceses linked in with their local domestic abuse services and provided items and much appreciated vouchers.
- Interesting discussions continued with **Safe Ireland** and **Women's Aid Federation NI**
- **Mothers' Union took part in two important consultations:**  
-**NI Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy** and the new **Equally Safe Strategy** and met with representatives from **NI Executive Team on Domestic and Sexual Abuse, and GBV**  
-**R of I Third National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence Strategy 2022-2026**
- MU attended a **Shared Island Dialogue** on Domestic Abuse and are invited to approach Minister for Justice in the Republic of Ireland, Helen McEntee, on her return from maternity leave.
- **MOVE** Men Overcoming Violence – a government NGO, promoting the wellbeing and safety of women and their children currently in Leinster, Munster and Galway. MOVE also run courses for perpetrators.
- Attended the **GREVIO** launch with the *National Observatory on Violence Against Women and Girls*. GREVIO is the independent expert body which informs the European Parliament of Ireland's progress in relation to domestic abuse and highlights what needs to be done to fulfil the commitments as a signatory of the Istanbul Convention.

# Welcome to Ireland – Ukrainian Teddy Project

'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (Matthew 25). We have all been touched by the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine, particularly the plight of women and child refugees. Derry & Raphoe Mothers' Union decided to knit comfort teddies, so applied for a 'Mums in May' grant to purchase a bulk order of safety tested Cygnet Yarn and polyester filling in compliance with CE Toy Safety Directive.



Members and friends started knitting immediately, with a shared vision of creating 200 teddies in colours of the Ukrainian flag. Each comfort teddy was placed in a gift bag with a specially designed 'Teddy Passport,' featuring a welcome and blessing in three languages. Teddies were distributed to Ukrainian refugee families in the joint diocese through word of mouth, primary schools, and other agencies. For Ukraine Independence Day on 24<sup>th</sup> August, Donegal Local Development CLG presented 120 teddies with passports to child refugees under 4 years of age. Teddies were very well received.

In December, 80 Derry & Raphoe teddy welcome packs were delivered to the Kiltonga Christian Centre. This Christian charity works with churches and local agencies to provide newly arrived refugee families throughout Northern Ireland with clothes and household items. Just before Christmas, Belfast City Council contacted Kiltonga to request teddy welcome packs for a special event hosted by the Lady Lord Mayor on 8th January. This was a wonderful gathering for six hundred Ukrainian mothers and children, and local VIPs to celebrate Christmas on Ukraine's traditional date.

Young people in national costume entertained with their beautiful carol singing and dancing, then Saint Nicholas distributed presents, with children of 3-5 years of age receiving MU Ukrainian teddies. Afterwards, there was a delicious Ukrainian meal for everyone. It was great privilege to attend such a moving and significant celebration of our Lord's coming.



We remember these brave people in our prayers:

Jeremiah 29 v11: ***"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."***

## Mothers' Union Getaway 2022



Our MU Getaway this year was on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> November in the Springfield Hotel in Leixlip. The event was organised by the All Ireland Reps Liz Greer and Wendy Halligan. The Getaway was opened by June Butler, All Ireland President. June welcomed all attendees to the event and introduced our guest speaker, Worldwide President, Sheran Harper. On Friday evening we all enjoyed a delicious meal followed by several fun games at our tables.

On Saturday morning Sheran gave an inspirational talk on the MU theme for 2022 “Transformation Now”. We need to transform ourselves, personally and spiritually to live out our faith, to transform our churches and communities and to transform MU to be relevant for the 21st century. We discussed the various challenges along the way.

Sheran said that MU members showed great resilience, responsiveness and adaptability throughout the pandemic and now is the time to build on this experience. Sheran presented medals to all the DPs in Ireland and prayed with each of them as she put the medal around their neck; this was a very special and moving occasion for all present. Also on Saturday, Wendy and Liz shared an activity on prayer and reflection.



Before the Getaway closed, those present enjoyed a demonstration by African dancers, Sharon and Deborah who are also MU members. Sharon began by explaining the different items of MU uniform that are worn by the members in Africa before both ladies showed us the very energetic way they dance whilst singing at their meetings!

The Getaway was a wonderful opportunity for the members to enjoy a little “me time” in their busy lives. The Springfield Hotel proved to be a wonderful venue, with great food and a very relaxing atmosphere. Everyone commented on how much they enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and making new ones. There was an enthusiastic sense of fun and fellowship throughout our time away.



- Save the date for our **2023 Getaway**. Venue **Hotel Kilmore, Cavan** which is in the Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh on the **6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

## Armagh Diocese

Armagh MU members were delighted to return to a “near normal” Programme during 2022.



At our Overseas Meeting in March, Mrs Debbie Davidson was announced as our new Diocesan President and received her DP Pin from Mrs Sophie Dillon, outgoing DP. June Butler, All Ireland President, spoke to approximately one hundred socially distanced members at this meeting about her trip to Rwanda.

Our Festival Service was held on 1<sup>st</sup> June in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Armagh and all branches were invited to bring their Branch Banner, which was conducted by Dean Shane Forster. Debbie was commissioned as DP, together with Claire Smyth as Unit Co-ordinator for Faith and Policy and Heather Montgomery as Enterprise Rep. After the service, tea was served together with special Jubilee Trifle supplied by our DP to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth.

Members attended Armagh Show, where we enjoyed a very busy day at the MU Baby Changing and Feeding facility, with great feedback from grateful parents.



Our Summer Gathering Walks in May and June were a lovely way to catch up and enjoy the fresh air, some better attended than others, but those who were there certainly enjoyed themselves. On Mary Sumner Day we had a beautiful prayer walk at Lissan House, Cookstown. We were blessed with beautiful weather, meaningful prayers and singing which was made all the better by our Prayer Rep Claire playing the mandolin and the inspirational words from our MU Chaplain, Revd. Alan Cross.



At the end of September, our Indoor Members enjoyed a lovely Tea Party in Drumglass Parish, Dungannon. There was a great crowd who all enjoyed the delicious treats and entertainment. Our Rural Deanery Services were held during September and October; which were well attended and again had the Enterprise stall.

Over one hundred members attended our Prayer Breakfast to mark the start of the 16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence and Abuse was held on Saturday 26th November in the Royal Hotel, Cookstown which Archbishop John McDowell and our Diocesan Chaplain Revd. Alan Cross attended. Mrs Lesley Bailey was our Guest Speaker together with Representatives from Women’s Aid, Nexus, PSNI and Mid Ulster District Council.



At our Autumn Council we acknowledged four Trustees who had decided to step down from their role, Betty Williamson, Jennifer Hagan, Alyson Scott and Evelyn Love. Each were presented with a gift voucher and pot arrangement



Just before Christmas members of Trustees made up wash bags and gift bags; our DP and Irene, our Action and Outreach Co-ordinator, delivered these to Craigavon Area Hospital for A&E Department for distribution to people who need to stay in A&E over Christmas, together with Ward 4 South. Each bag contained toiletries together with a bookmark with MU prayer and Christmas message from Debbie, the Armagh Diocesan President.

## *Kilmore Elphin and Ardagh*

### **Festival Services**



A service of Thanksgiving and Commissioning of our new Diocesan President, Ann Howard, was held in St John's Church Longford on 10<sup>th</sup> May. The Service was conducted by Revd Simon Scott. Hazel Speares presented Ann Howard to Bishop Ferran Glenfield for commissioning as Diocesan President. The lessons were read by Diane Stewart, Longford Branch leader, and Ann Howard.

Jean Glenfield gave a wonderful address, based on the transformation of Zacchaeus and offered her heartfelt support from the See House. A lovely supper was provided by the members Longford Branch

The second festival service was held in Drung Church. The service was conducted by Revd. Nick Jones. The lessons were read by Barbara Smith, Drung Branch Leader, and Hazel Speares, Former Diocesan President. Irene Boyd, Clogher Diocesan President gave a very uplifting address and was very encouraging about the work of Mothers' Union. Bishop Ferran Glenfield gave the final blessing. A lovely supper was provided by the members of Drung Branch



### **The Branch Meetings**

The Mothers' Union branch meeting is the most important part of our organisation. Branch leaders put lots of time and energy into these meetings to provide a valuable forum for a range of different functions, helping people to share ideas, make decisions, build relationships, and even help women to feel less lonely. Branches are at the very heart of all that Mothers' Union does. Across the world, there are thousands of groups coming together to work, pray and campaign together, and the principle of meeting in fellowship has been central to the unique way that we work for many years.



### **The Getaway Weekend.**

The Getaway which was an overnight stay in the Springfield Hotel in Leixlip Co Kildare was a wonderful opportunity for the members to enjoy a little 'me time' and meet other members. The Springfield hotel proved to be a wonderful venue, great food and very relaxing.

**Save the Date:** The **2023 Getaway Weekend** will be held in our own Diocese at **Hotel Kilmore Cavan on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023.**

### **The Ladies Breakfast**

The Ladies Breakfast in Cox's Steakhouse, Dromod on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October was a joyful occasion with ninety-two members present. The buzz of conversation and general pleasure at meeting again was evident. Revd Alistair Graham from the Mullingar Union of Parishes gave a most inspiring talk. To bring the morning to a close, Miriam Gunn sang a few well-known pieces, and everyone joined in.

### **16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence**

Again this year KEA were very active in this Campaign. On Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November at 3 o'clock there was an event called "Come Together" for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in The Bush Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon. It was great to see Bishop Ferran and Jean Glenfield there. Revd. Richard Waller, our Diocesan Chaplain, conducted a short service and Leila Beattie played hymns.

Our Diocesan President, Ann Howard, gave the address and Liz Greer read most beautifully the heart-breaking story of a woman who, as a young woman had suffered violence by her husband, but gladly came through and subsequently spent her life helping others who had been abused. There was lots of discussion over refreshments.



# Cashel, Ferns, Ossory Diocese



It was wonderful to be able to meet up again in person at many events during the year. At our Festival service in March 2022 we said goodbye to the Right Revd. Michael Burrows as he left CFO to head to the newly formed United Diocese of Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe. Bishop Burrows has always been very supportive of Mothers' Union, and as he requested that we did not give him a gift, a donation in lieu was given to The Literacy Fund

On Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> June, ninety members came together in Rathwood, to part-take in an amazing afternoon tea and to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of our Patron, Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II. It was a wonderful few hours of fellowship and chat, eating delicious food and generally having a good time, while also raising funds for our own School Book and Uniform Bursary Scheme and the Burundi Literacy Programme.



The 2022 Ploughing Championships was held in the Diocese in Ratheniska, Co Laois. Mothers' Union again provided the Baby Changing and Feeding Facilities and parents/guardian are delighted to have a clean, safe environment in which to feed change their baby/toddler. We had babies on site who were just weeks old and some parents who had used the facility in the past called in to say hello.

We were delighted to have a visit from Máiréad McGuinness, European Commissioner for Financial Services, Financial Stability and Capital Markets Union, on the final day. She was greatly impressed with the facilities we provide and also spoke about the great work Mothers' Union does in highlighting "The Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence".

The Diocese was represented at many Mothers' Union events throughout the year ~ the Re-imagining Conference in Liverpool, the Annual Gathering in Belfast, The Getaway Weekend in Leixlip and the RTE service which was recorded for the "Sixteen days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence". We continued to support many projects such as AFIA, our School Book & Bursary Scheme, local Women Refuges and our involvement with the Midlands Prison has also been renewed. We are very grateful to all of our members who so generously support these projects and for the grants received from "Mums in May"



Our Diocesan President continues to hold services via ZOOM every Tuesday evening and produces a monthly newsletter keeping members informed of all that is happening in Mothers' Union both in the Diocese and at All Ireland level. We were delighted to welcome our newly appointed Bishop, the Right Revd. Adrian Wilkinson to refreshments after our Autumn Council Meeting.

## *Cork, Cloyne and Ross Diocese*

Spring is here, and our weather is as changeable as the seasons; but thankfully our God remains the same – as loving and concerned for the welfare of His creation as always. We are always grateful for the love, hard work and dedication of Mothers' Union members the length and breadth of the land as we progress our shared ministry of care to those in need. As we begin this year's theme of Transformation- Moving Forward after a year of much activity, we continue the process of re-emerging from the pandemic. Here in Cork, Cloyne and Ross, members gathered together on a number of occasions during Autumn and Winter in a variety of ways.



Socially, members gathered during the summer on two occasions. In July, we met up in the stunningly beautiful church of The Ascension in Timoleague, West Cork. The interior of the church is unique in that most of the interior walls are covered with amazing Mosaics. We were greeted at the church by the Rector, the Revd. Kingsley Sutton, who gave us a brief history of the church and of the mosaics. Some restoration of the exterior of the building was also taking place as lime mortar was being restored to the walls. This will protect the inside of the building from damp, so protecting the precious mosaics. After the talk we enjoyed our packed lunches, seated under the yew trees in the churchyard. Luckily the weather was very pleasant that day. In August, some members were welcomed into St Mary's Church in Doneraile, North Cork, by the Rector of Mallow Union, the Revd. Meurig Williams. We celebrated Mary Sumner Day together with a short service, then some went for a walk around Doneraile Park which is just across the road from the church.

As part of the **Reimagining Mothers' Union** process, a small group of Trustees planned and organised two meetings in Carrigaline (August) and Clonakilty (September) as a follow-up to the Reimagining MU conference which took place in Liverpool in July. It was a great opportunity for members to reconnect with each other as we re-emerged from lockdowns, but we also had a task to do! Hilary Dring and Hazel Sweetnam (our delegates) were tasked with sharing the Liverpool discussions with members, and to receive feedback from them, with the aim of coming up with **3 committed actions** to show how we would "re-imagine MU" within our diocese. Both days were well attended and much appreciated by members. Our 3 committed actions based on feedback from evaluation forms were: 1) **Tell the story of MU** and show how important MU is in a parish. 2) **Stay connected** – it's important to keep the present members informed of everything that is happening. 3) We must do a better job of **marketing ourselves**, who we are and what we do.

Our work with **AFIA** continues apace. We have been continuing our voucher support to families in need in schools. The fund has also supported a variety of activities for Ukrainian adults and children who have contact with the Carrig Centre in Ballincollig. We have reached 22 children who have enjoyed Lego Summer Camp. Another 16 children have been able to enjoy a series of swimming lessons. The formation of a Ukrainian Choir is reaching 25 adults and 4 children. An Irish family of 10 enjoyed a 3-night stay in Trabolgan Holiday Centre which they were thrilled with and they cannot thank Mothers' Union enough.

As part of highlighting the “16 Days” campaign last year, the exhibition entitled “The Souls of Our Shoes” came to Cork in November. It was exhibited in the Carrig Centre in Ballincollig, and after that it moved to St Mary’s Church in Carrigaline. There was a steady stream of visitors, many of whom were deeply moved by what they saw and read. It got very good publicity in the local press.



## *Cork, Cloyne & Ross Getaway Weekend*

The year ended with our annual “Getaway Weekend” in the Garryvoe Hotel in East Cork. Our theme was **“Transformation – Moving On”**. What a blessing that weekend was to those who came! In total about fifty-five people gathered to enjoy fellowship (there was a lot of catching up to do after three years!) relaxation and fun with workshops, free time and excellent food, along with spiritual nourishment with three wonderful people speaking to us over the weekend.

Revd. Isobel Jackson, our Diocesan Chaplain, shared her faith and life story which was so interesting and encouraging. How good it is to look back at what God has done in our lives – sometimes we don’t see things at the time but in hindsight can really recognise how He has led us all the way. Rev Isobel also led our worship on Saturday morning on the theme of transformation.



Our guest speaker on Saturday was former Archbishop, Richard Clarke. It is hard to fully convey the both encouraging and challenging message he brought us in two sessions; the first on transformation of ourselves as individuals, and the second on Mothers’ Union as an institution. He quoted some words of St Catherine of Siena **“Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire,”** We were challenged to allow Jesus to move us from the shallow waters to deeper ones, just as he said to Simon Peter in Luke chapter 5. He said that in his years of ministry, Mothers’ Union members have often asked ‘What can we do to help the church?’ He suggests that we must now look at how we can take the lead and tell the church what it should be doing when it comes to injustice and the many challenges we face in society.

On Sunday morning Revd. Eileen Cremin both led and preached at our service of Holy Communion, which incorporated both the themes of Remembrance and Transformation. A big thank you to everyone who made the weekend possible. May Mothers’ Union be **“who God meant it to be and set the world on fire.”**

# Clogher Diocese

We have enjoyed a wonderful year of celebrations at All Ireland level and in our own Dioceses.

Clogher Dioceses hosted three Area Services in May, St Laebhan's Parish Church, Killeevan, Christ Church Maguiresbridge and Kiltyclogher Church. The theme of these services was 'Transformation Now' inspiring us to shake things up and transform ourselves and our communities.



A wonderful afternoon was held at the Bishop's Indoor Members Jubilee Tea Party held at St. John's Parish Hall Fivemiletown. Lovely company, fellowship and delicious tea was enjoyed by all present. The entertainment was fantastic and a special thank you to Fivemiletown Primary School and Miss Jane Kinley.

More than 50 Clogher Mothers' Union members and friends attend the Annual Gathering held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> September. The highlight was the services of Celebration held in St Anne's Cathedral. Clogher Mothers' Union members travelled by bus with a stop-over at the Seagoe Hotel, Portadown for tea.



A special service was held in St Macartan's Cathedral Enniskillen on the 6 November to mark the visit of the Worldwide MU President, Mrs Sheran Harper and All Ireland President Mrs June Butler. The Very Revd. Canon Kenneth Hall welcomed everyone to the commissioning of Mrs Heather Ellis as President of Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union Trustee and Mrs Debbie Davidson as All Ireland Trustee.

Clogher Diocese Mothers' Union marked the 16 Days of Activism Campaign by holding a 'Walk Together Against Domestic Violence'. Over 130 people from across the community joined together in the grounds of Colebrooke Estate. The event was attended by the PSNI, Garda Síochána, Fermanagh and Omagh Women's Aid, Tearmann Domestic Abuse Service and The Aisling Centre. This campaign will continue to highlight Domestic Violence.



## Connor Diocese



**(Young Members Committee members ready to serve their audience!)**

Who does not love a night at the movies? Well, Connor diocese Young Members Committee gave members a great night out at their very own Movie Night. Held in St Patrick's Hall in Ballymena, it proved to be another very successful event, the second of its type. The movie of choice this time was 'Downton Abbey' and the committee members certainly got into the spirit of the evening by dressing as maids to serve popcorn and sparkling or still water to everyone as they took their seats. The traditional half time interval saw the maids back on duty as they served delicious ice creams to everyone.

This was the first event organised by the Young Members in over two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone as evidenced by the chat and laughter around the hall. A great 'Night at the Movies' - full of fun and fellowship - which also raised over £300 for the Mothers' Union Worldwide Fund.

### **Retail Therapy!**

Most of us love a bit of retail therapy and it's an even bigger treat when we have a day out with friends. The Young Members Committee set off once more for a pre-Christmas trip to Kildare Village Outlet. Having missed this annual trip for two years due the pandemic, the pennies had been saved up and so a bus load of excited ladies hit the road to Kildare once again. We think it is safe to say that everyone had a wonderful day out with lots of laughter, fun and fellowship and a good start was made to the Christmas shopping!



### **'It's Never Too Late'**



This was the theme of a curated exhibition organised by Women's Aid, in collaboration with Spark Opera, exploring the voices and lived experience of older women affected by domestic abuse through a range of art forms including dance, visual arts and writing to mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2022. Irene Gates and Joyce Bond from Connor Diocese attended the event where they found a very powerful exhibition of graphics, sculptures, photographs and film work capturing the pain and suffering of women affected by domestic violence.

Women's Aid 'Older, But No Safer' project works with older women and communities to increase awareness about domestic abuse and provide greater protection for women aged 55 and over who are affected by domestic abuse.

**'Older women tell us that they may be older, but they are no safer. Through this project we want older women to know it's never too late to get help.'**

# Derry and Raphoe Diocese

## INSPIRATION INSPIRES TRANSFORMATION!

How does God restore the years that the locusts have eaten?



In October members from across the diocese gathered in An Grianán Hotel, Burt, Co Donegal for a Prayer Breakfast at which the speaker was Revd. Rosie Diffin. Revd Rosie has been a member of Mothers' Union for 37 years. Speaking on the theme 'Transformation Now', she based her talk on Joel Ch 2 v25, when God promised Joel, he would restore something that seemed impossible to restore, 'the years the locusts hath eaten'.

Just as the Lord answered Joel and his people saying, 'the fruit of the spirit is love,' Revd. Rosie reassured members that the fundamental truth remains that God is still in our midst, with his people, and his spirit is working in us. 'Transformation,' she said, 'begins with each member and although we have a massive task ahead, He will direct us in our fruitfulness'. Praising the work of Mothers' Union, Revd. Rosie said that through showing we care and knowing God is there, He will honour and be there for us.

### '16 Days' Global Day of Activism

The Derry and Raphoe Prayer and Reflection Service, the highlight in the Mothers' Union campaign against gender-based violence, was held in St Columb's Cathedral, Londonderry on 26th November. In attendance were the Deputy Mayor of Derry and Strabane District Council, Angela Dobbins, Lady Girvan, Lord Lieutenant of Co. Londonderry, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, Right Revd. Andrew Forster, Dean Raymond Stewart, invited clergy and guests, and members.

The guest speaker was author and editor of Vox magazine, Ruth Garvey-Williams, who has investigated experiences, perceptions and attitudes surrounding domestic abuse. She thanked Mothers' Union for 'leading the way in the church on this island' in responding to domestic violence. Readings and prayers were delivered by clergy and members and a candle was lit as a symbol of the light of Christ shining through the darkness of abuse.

Revd. Andrea Cotter shared with the congregation the new course which Mothers' Union had developed, in conjunction with the Bishops' Appeal and Tearfund, to counteract domestic abuse and gender-based violence. Bishop Andrew said that Mothers' Union was helping the church look out and support and advocate for victims of domestic abuse. He thanked Diocesan President Jacqui for being at the forefront of that work and for being a 'voice for the voiceless'.



### 85th Anniversary Celebrations for Ardstraw, Baronscourt and Badoney Mothers' Union



Revd. Ivan Dinsmore, Rector of Ardstraw, Baronscourt and Badoney with Greenan Parish Churches, is pictured with Branch Leader, Ruth Baxter, and members and friends of Ardstraw, Baronscourt and Badoney Mothers' Union, following an Advent Agape Christmas Dinner in Ardstraw Parish Church Hall, to celebrate the 85th anniversary of their Mothers' Union branch.

Mrs Isobel Mowbray and Mrs Myrtle Pinkerton, two of the longest serving members of the branch, cut the celebratory cake.

## Down & Dromore Diocese

Practical support for families in difficult economic circumstances.



As the cost-of-living crises deepens, our D&D Trustees took steps on behalf of all our members to help alleviate poverty locally. While members donate to food banks and charities on an ongoing basis, £600 was secured to provide £100 of food and essentials to six local food banks working throughout the D&D area.

Thanks to everyone involved in this initiative, peace and joy to all those who will benefit from it. **'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him'** Romans 15:13

**D&D Diocesan Event as part of 16 Days of Activisms 25 Nov - 10 Dec.**

The message of 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will suffer abuse in their lives and 275 million children globally will experience violence in their homes, was well made at a Diocesan event held in St Finnian's Church Hall when members from throughout the Diocese came together in support of the global '16 Days' initiative. This was led by Joy, Marion, Sally and AI President, June, taking part along with branch representatives. Our Diocesan President, Mavis, opened the event with a warm welcome and thanked everyone for attending.



**Celebrating Mothers' Union Anniversaries – congratulations to all!**

Members in **Annahilt** recently celebrated their 70 years Anniversary on the same day that Magherahamlet celebrated their 60th Anniversary! There was a joint celebration with services in both churches. Guest speaker was Mrs Hilary McClay and Bishop David joined members and friends for lunch in Annahilt Parish Hall.

**Seagoe Branch** celebrated one hundred years. The parish has a large and active branch of approximately 80 members. Members contribute significantly to the life of the church

**Shankhill Lurgan Branch** also celebrated their 80-year anniversary!



Mothers' Union members from Down & Dromore pictured with Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, and All Ireland President, June Butler, at the Women's Getaway weekend in Leixlip

# Dublin & Glendalough Diocese

## 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence 2022

This year's Dublin and Glendalough's campaign for the "16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence" activities were arranged based on the United Nations designated themes for each day as well as those in the Mothers' Union 2022 Prayer Diary.

During this 16 Days of Activism from 25<sup>th</sup> November – 10<sup>th</sup> December, we were trying to increase awareness of this issue for more people by having the daily Broadcasts via Zoom and then YouTube with speakers from several services that support victims of abuse. Each day was focussed on imparting knowledge to the general public including members of Mothers' Union on the issue of gender-based Violence.

Each broadcast consisted of intro music, presentation by speakers from 16 different agencies associated with women and family services, followed by individual prayers by Dublin and Glendalough Mothers' Union members and closing music.



On Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November, **The Global Day of Action**, an in-person Seminar titled "Understanding Gender-based Violence" took place at 10:30am in All Hallows College. Speaking at this seminar, Professor Pat Barker, Counsellor, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, and Ms Lydia Monds, Education Advisor, Bishop's Appeal, spoke about the impact of gender-based violence. Tips were given on how to be a good listener to those who wish to tell of their own experience and how best to steer them to appropriate support service.

**International Widow's Day** was celebrated on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022, in Kiltarnan Parish Church, the Celebrant was Revd. Rob Clements. Lunch was served afterwards in the Gathering Centre.



**(Grief never ends, Love never dies, Missing him forever).**

**Mothers' Union Festival Service** was held on 15th September, in St. Saviour's Church, Arklow, the preacher was Archbishop Jackson. It was great to see Mothers' Union Members out and about catching up; there was plenty of chat over a cup of tea.

**Mothers' Union Annual Appeal:** The Christmas appeal to support Jigsaw, Darndale crèche and the women's refuges was once again a huge success. Members were asked for specific presents for the children's creche, and selection of items for the women's refuges.



**Home Start:** Our 3 Year Project with Home Start 2020-2022 to provide Personal Care Packs was completed in December 2022. 46 Care Packs were delivered to Cathy Kelly, Volunteer Co-Ordinator which will be used to give to mothers whose children attend Home Start Creche and Pre-school Services. The parents are availing of Parenting Support and Education. On behalf of the parents, Cathy Kelly thanks the Mothers' Union Dublin & Glendalough Diocese for their Support over the last three years and extended their appreciation to the members who have contributed the Care Packs.

## Limerick & Killaloe Diocese

**Fundraising:** Last October several of our branches got together for our annual Fundraiser. Everyone enjoyed a delicious Harvest Supper hosted by Adare Branch when members and friends came together for lots of chat and great fellowship. There was huge excitement as tickets were drawn for a raffle and there seemed to be a prize for everyone in the audience! A grand total of over €685 was raised for the work of Mothers' Union Overseas.



**Vigil:** In November we gathered together as a diocese in the Methodist Church in Roscrea for our Vigil marking the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender based Violence. We were led by Revd. Canon Jane Galbraith, our Diocesan Chaplain, who had set up prayer points around the church, each one telling an individual story of abuse and coercion but also listing the many ways in which help can be sought and how we can help by just being there to support. Canon Jane led us in prayer throughout our vigil and it was one of the most thought provoking vigils that we have attended. Our members and friends were hugely generous for our collection of non-perishable items and toiletries and a several bags of items were subsequently delivered to Adapt House Women's Refuge in Limerick.



**Diocesan Elections:** Following elections in the Autumn our new Board of Trustees took up office on 1st of January. We thank all those in our diocese who left office at the end of 2022 for all that they have done for Mothers' Union and congratulate all those taking on a new role.

**Branch Activities:** Our branches have resumed meeting following the Christmas break. We have busy programmes planned for the year ahead and it is lovely to be able to meet up again with relative ease following the last few years!

## *Meath & Kildare Diocese*

We had a good attendance at our Festival Service in St Patrick's Cathedral, Trim on Sunday May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Our Chaplain, Revd. Ruth O'Kelly, prepared and conducted the Service and Dean Paul Bogle gave the Sermon.



In June we held our **Indoor Member's Tea Parties**. The first one was hosted by Newbridge Branch in the Wesleyan Hall, Curragh Camp on Tuesday June 14<sup>th</sup>. Revd. Alan Melbourne conducted a Service of Holy Communion.



The second one was hosted by Athboy and Trim Branch in the Parish Hall in Athboy. Dean Paul conducted the Service of Holy Communion.

Both Parties were very well attended and we were entertained with singing, telling stories etc.

On Sunday September 4<sup>th</sup> we had our Overseas Service in Geashill. Revd Ruth O'Kelly prepared and conducted the Service. Our speaker on this occasion was Mr Geoffrey McMaster who had visited several countries, some of which Mothers' Union supports in our Overseas work.



Ruth Moloney, Cherry Carter and Sylvia Wheatley, Diocesan President, attended the Women's Getaway weekend in the Springfield Hotel, Leixlip in November. They had a very enjoyable time. Mrs Sheran Harper, Worldwide President, gave some very inspirational talks about her work.

On Saturday November 26<sup>th</sup> Ena Wilson, Rosemary Roberts and Sylvia Wheatley were invited to a Gender Based Violence Service in Athlone organised by Revd. William Stacey.

The following Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, we held our Diocesan Council meeting in the Parish Hall in Edenderry which was followed by our Gender Based Violence Service conducted by Revd. Ruth Lesley Bayley, Diocesan President of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory told us about her experiences of violence in a previous marriage. Lesley was an excellent speaker and there wasn't a dry eye in the Hall at the end of her talk.



Rosemary Roberts arranged to have hampers filled with toiletries and they were delivered to two refuges in early December, and both very much appreciated receiving them.

## *Tuam, Killala & Achonry Diocese*



We were happy to hold our Diocesan Festival Service in Skreen Church last May, led by Diocesan Chaplain and VP Canon Jen McWhirter with the support of Revd. Karen Duignan and with Bishop Michael Burrows giving the address. It was a joyful occasion followed with a sumptuous repast in the nearby “Old Schoolhouse.” Since then, Canon Jen has recently departed Tuam for Mullaghduin in Clogher Diocese and we wish her great happiness in her new environment.

In September, Diocesan President Myrtle Nairn and Kilmoremy/Killala Branch leader Valerie Wilson attended the Annual Gathering in Belfast. Myrtle was delighted when she was invited by Revd. Andy Pierce to attend a United Family Worship Service for the five parishes in the new Skreen Group that also incorporated an opening service for Skreen, Rathbarron and Tubbercurry branches. During the service children assisted in an in-church scavenger hunt to find items that could be associated with the Mothers’ Union 2022 theme “Transformation Now”. It was very pleasing that the local branch leader Audrey Moore presented Mrs Jackie Pierce for enrolment. A group of ladies from across the diocese attended the Women’s Getaway in November.



During the annual International “16 Days” a Service, to which members and friends from across the Diocese were invited, was led by Rev Pierce in Rathbarron Church, Sligo. Myrtle, DP, introduced and spoke about the domestic abuse issue and there was follow up information along with survivors’ stories being read by Branch Leader, Canon Doris Clements, afterwards in the church hall.

As a Diocesan Project in recent years, our Mothers’ Union has supported the Galway Women’s Refuge in association with COPE; Mayo Women’s Support Group in Castlebar has also been gifted vouchers so that their clients may be helped to purchase ordinary needs in their situation. Recently we reimagined AFIA in association with Ballina Churches Together by gifting vouchers for the purchase of necessary goods to vulnerable people in need of support in the local community. Also, we have been in contact with centres for Ukrainian Refugees and schools with pupils from Ukraine to ascertain how we might provide help

During the Christmas and New Year period members attended festive branch gatherings in fellowship and goodwill, with hope for the future in this period of transition for the diocese as Ballisodare Branch transfers to the Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh and thought is given to the working of MU along the Diocese of Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe.

## *Mothers' Union Annual Gathering 2022*



The 2022 Annual Gathering took place on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September in the ICC, Waterfront Hall, Belfast. Two services were held on the previous day in St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. The celebrant for the services was Right Revd. George Davison, Bishop of Connor. The guest choir was Kerygma with their musical director, Lorna Palmer and the organist was Neale Agnew. During the services there was an act of remembrance for her Majesty Queen Elizabeth who was Patron of Mothers' Union. The Right Revd. Andrew Forster, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, gave a very thought-provoking sermon at both services.

On the following day we met in the Waterfront for the Annual Gathering during which there were several presentations:

- **Highlighting the work of Mothers' Union in Ireland**  
~ June Butler & Iris Suitor
- **Updates from Mary Sumner House**  
~ Adam Sach, Richard Millar, Robert Daws & Bev Jullien
- **A report on various projects throughout Great Britain**  
~ Bishop Emma Ineson, MU Central Chaplain, Bev Jullien, Deb Lee, Steph Nunn, Alison Fernandes and Kim Darby



There was also a virtual address and presentations from the Worldwide President, Sheran Harper.

The opening worship was led by the Bishop of Down & Dromore, the Right Revd. David McCloy

Midday Worship was led by the Archbishop of Armagh, The Most Revd. John McDowell, and the closing prayer by the Bishop of Connor, Right Revd. George Davison.

On the Saturday evening there was a very successful and enjoyable concert featuring the Clare Chorale.

## *New All Ireland Chaplain*

The Venerable Dr Stephen McBride is Vicar of Antrim Parish, Archdeacon of Connor and the current Connor Diocesan MU Chaplain, and has been announced as the new All Ireland Chaplain. He has had a long association with the Mothers' Union, first through his mother Claire who was a former Chairperson of the Holy Trinity and Immanuel Parish, Belfast branch. His mother-in-law, the late Jean Clyde, held several diocesan posts in Connor and Armagh at executive level. Stephen's wife Helen has been a member of the Mothers' Union from 1987 and was Branch Chairperson in Antrim Parish from 1996-2002.

When he was approached by Archbishop John McDowell to take on the role of All Ireland Chaplain, Stephen said he was honoured to be considered as Canon Robert Deane's successor and he looks forward to working alongside June Butler and the All Ireland Trustees and to meeting, worshipping with and supporting MU members across Ireland.

