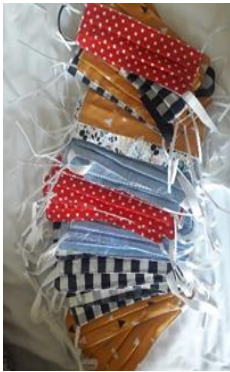


Focus Newsletter ~ Autumn 2020

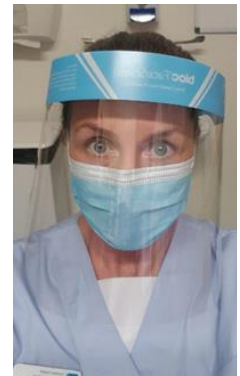


From the Editor:

Little did any of us think when I wrote in the Spring Edition of Focus that the world would have changed so much in the interim. Which of us would have believed that a virus could cause so much heartache, anxiety, and disruption to daily lives in every country throughout the world? So many things we have taken for granted can no longer be enjoyed by everyone and we look forward to when we can once again go about our daily lives without the fear of contracting Covid-19.



As members of Mothers' Union many have been to the forefront in providing support, whether by sewing scrubs and masks, knitting hearts and prayer squares, providing food hampers or by simply keeping in touch with those who are lonely and self-isolating. Although we have not been able to meet in person, we have embraced new technology with WhatsApp groups, zoom meetings, virtual services and have appreciated the ability to stay connected in this way. June, our All-Ireland President, and members of the Trustee Board have contributed regularly to our new website and it has been kept updated with news from Mothers' Union. Many have also enjoyed participating in both the photographic and poetry competition. More information on the website www.mothersunion.ie



We give thanks for the friendship and fellowship we enjoy as members of Mothers' Union and pray for all those who have suffered illness or loss during these stressful and challenging times.

Every blessing, *Margaret*



A Message from June Butler ~ All-Ireland President

Hello friends

Margaret, our Editor, has written elsewhere in this edition about the difference Covid-19 has made to all our lives. Indeed as spouses, parents, children, siblings, friends and as members of Mothers' Union we are living our lives in ways which are few short months ago were unimagined and unimaginable! We have a "new normal" and there are aspects of that which I suspect will become accepted as routine in the future. I always try to be a "glass half full" type of person and admire the determination of Winston Churchill, who towards the end of World War II, famously said: **"Never let a good crisis go to waste!"**

Covid indeed has been, and still is, a crisis but it has given us all a different perspective on life. If you haven't already done so, I would ask you please to look at the winning poems on our Ireland Mothers' Union website - we have so many talented ladies among our members and they have conveyed so poignantly how this pandemic impacted on them and their lives. Everyone will find something which resonates with them - for me it was walking with only the accompaniment of birdsong. With increasing traffic noise, that is one thing I wish could continue.

Just while I'm referring to the website, I would like to thank Margaret Jacob (a lady with so many skills!) for her tremendous work in developing, launching and now maintaining our new Mothers' Union All-Ireland website. It is really easy to navigate and is the essential "place to go" to find relevant MU information. If any member has a news item of interest - or wants to publicise future events - please contact Margaret.

I must also offer the grateful thanks of every member, and especially those of us who have volunteered in any Trustee role over the last 13 years, to Jane Grindle, our MU Administrator, who stepped down from this position in September to take her career in a different direction. She has guided and supported us in so many ways over the years and has also provided calm through our storms and knowledge when we were uncertain. We will all miss you Jane and wish you God's richest blessings for the future.

To the future in the world of Mothers' Union.... we may not be able to meet physically but we will still be together in spirit and will continue to work as creatively as ever to fulfil the objectives of our wonderful charity, both at home and overseas. As with daily life, the MU world may be different but it is as constant and strong as ever. That is evident from the wonderful contributions from Dioceses in this edition of Focus and submissions to the website and The Gazette in recent months have shown the extent of our on-going work in Ireland. My thanks to all of you have been so committed in supporting members, parishioners, those in our communities and our health workers in many different ways.

Another positive in this crisis has been the advent of Zoom. I have to admit that some days I am tired only seeing one dimensional people on a screen, but it has been a great boost to our MU work. We are able to meet from the comfort of our homes, quickly and without incurring the cost or inconvenience of travel. Sometimes my meetings involve the Worldwide Trustees so there are eleven of us, spanning the globe from Australia, through Africa, to the Caribbean and Canada and joining with the MU staff based in England. This technology has been a blessing to facilitate discussion and decision-making at a time when we cannot meet in person.



One of those decisions was the MU theme for 2021 - "Rebuilding Hope and Confidence". There are many resources on the main website which will be so helpful in the coming year. We are all now in very different and unexpected situations and we need to rebuild the hope and the confidence of everyone - prayerfully, practically and sensitively.

The WW Trustees have also had to take many difficult decisions in recent months (including redundancy for some of the central staff and to halt improvements to Mary Sumner House) and I have no doubt that there will more challenges ahead. However, the WW Trustees and also our All Ireland Trustees have a strong faith that God will lead us through these difficult times. One of my concerns is for those who live alone as we come into winter, with few opportunities to meet others during the day and then the longer dark nights. Please remember someone like this and telephone occasionally- a few kind words can make such a difference.

Thoughtful words can bring light to someone's dark life - we remember that light is often used to symbolise God and faith throughout Scripture. As Christians, we are called not only to walk in the light but to be the light for others. I hope and pray that we all do this in our daily lives as members of Mothers' Union and that through these darkening days, you all will try, however you can, to see the positives in this crisis and use God's word as a base to rebuild. I will leave you with heartening words from Psalm 18 v28

"You, LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light".

God bless you all

June

The Prize-Winning Poems



DISLOCATION

BLUE HANDS

She stood beside the bed – blue from head to toe;
Her wide, brown eyes peeping out from the blue
Swimming in glistening tears that dropped silently on
blue gloved hands, holding feeble hands of love.
She knew it would be the last time her hands were
held;
She knew it would be the last time to hold these
hands;
Where did all the time go to – why was she always so
busy?
Why were we always so busy? always trying to catch
up
Catch up on what?
Never did a hand feel so good and never did it feel so
bad;
She closed her eyes, a small smile appeared on her
wrinkled face
Brown eyes wept quietly, while the blue hand
gently touched the face of love one last time.

*Olive Thorpe, New Ross /Fethard-on-Sea MU
Cashel, Ferns & Ossory*

I walk unyielding pavements by the roads
past nature clipped, pruned, mown, confined
by hedges, fences, walls and wire
past soaring trees with tarmac round their roots
their seeds adrift on stony ground.

I think about a dark brown path
soft underfoot
that leads me up the hill through lush wild woods
the brackish ponds
the smell of green all round
the sun that spotlights curling ferns
through leafy gaps in beech and thorn
and then legs aching
breathing short
the top is reached,
the fallen tree its roots exposed,
the bench nearby
and there
the open country stretched away
and Strangford gleaming in the mist-filled light.

A car goes roaring past too fast
exhaust fumes linger, air is stale
I turn for home on dusty paths.

Valerie Reilly, Belfast Cathedral MU ~ Connor

News from around the Dioceses

Connor



The country may have been in lockdown but that did not stop Connor MU members supporting the NHS. Examples of the many efforts are St. Aidan's, Belfast, whose members prepared emergency wash bags for the Belfast Trust hospitals.



The branches of St. Mark's, Ballysillan, and St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, pooled resources to send wash bags and other items to the Mater Hospital.

St. Mark's with the help of the congregation also sent wash bags to the ICU in Antrim Hospital for relatives who have unexpectedly had to spend the night with seriously ill patients.

Killead & Gartree and St. Jude's branches (Mid Connor Area) joined with the Lisburn/Belfast N.I. Scrub Group to prepare and sew scrub sets, bags, face masks and patient gowns. Killead & Gartree also sent food hampers to the ICU and Ward 7 for the staff who were not allowed to leave the work stations.



It was discovered that the Lagan Valley Hospital, Lisburn, was in great need of emergency toilet bags so again MU stepped forward. Lambeg MU made up bags and delivered to both Lagan Valley and the Royal Victoria, Belfast, hospitals at the end of June with the Area Chairman, Valerie Christie, assembling and delivering more bags at the end of July.

Mrs Maisie Jameson from the Church of the Epiphany MU, Belfast, celebrated her 100th birthday on 13th September 2020. She said it was the best birthday celebration she had ever had. Maisie has had Covid-19 and survived which is remarkable at her age.



Limerick & Killaloe



In the Limerick & Killaloe Diocese we have been giving a helping hand, through our Mums in May Grant Scheme, to two Women's Refuges, Esker House and Adapt House. Esker House is at the upper end of our Diocese and Ballinasloe Branch liaises with them. When we were in touch with Adapt House in Limerick we were told that they were badly in need of items to help families start out again in their own accommodation with supplies such as bed linen, frying pans, towels and toiletries. These were all delivered along with several other items that have been collected from members. Well, when we say delivered, we had to drop the bags outside the building, they then were put into a van to be kept there for 72 hours before anyone else touched them! Strange times!!

Armagh

Sunday afternoon 9th August - Mary Sumner Day, saw a number of Mothers' Union (MU) members from the Diocese arrive at the car park in the Palace Demesne in advance of a Prayer Walk around the Palace grounds. The sun was shining and there was not a cloud in the sky as the first group set off around the Palace listening to music and stopping at various points to pray and reflect and give thanks to God for His wonderful creation. Prayers were offered for our founder Mary Sumner, the pandemic we are living in, the hungry, the sick, and the lonely, for the new Archbishop John who had just come to this beautiful Cathedral City, and Leaders and Trustees as they continue the great work of MU around the World in difficult circumstances.



The walk concluded outside the private chapel at the Palace with everyone present joining in Mary Sumner's Personal Prayer.

Fellowship continued as members had brought along a picnic which was enjoyed on the grass in front of the Palace.

Cashel, Ferns & Ossory

Like every other Diocese we have had to re-imagine how we have communicated and kept in touch with members over the last number of months. Technology has suddenly become our "best Friend" as we embarked on ZOOM meetings, virtual services, WhatsApp groups etc and we have embraced its use. Members have greatly appreciated the ability to keep in touch with friends and family using this technology.

We held a virtual Diocesan Festival Service in the garden of the Bishop's House and it went live on Mary Sumner Day. Bishop Michael Burrows, in his address, reminded us of all of the worthy causes that Mothers' Union has championed down through the years. He stated that "black lives matter" was now a campaign that we could support.



Over the last number of months, we have also seen the great need for financial support among families in our Diocese and we have helped many families through our School and Uniform Bursary Scheme, for which we were delighted to receive a grant from Mums in May, and also A.F.I.A. It was very evident from the number of applications for support we received how important it is for Mothers' Union to help and support families here at home. **The vision of Mary Sumner to help and support family life is just as relevant and necessary now as it was over 140 years ago.**

Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh



Our Mothers' Union Festival Service was broadcast on YouTube from Christ Church Kildallon on Sunday 24th May. The Service was introduced by Diocesan President, Mrs Hazel Speares. Canon Hazel Hicks conducted the Service and Rev Capt. Richard Waller preached the sermon following his commissioning as Diocesan Chaplain by the Bishop. Lessons were read by DP Hazel Speares and Indoor Members Rep for Elphin and Ardagh, Ruth Dobson. Prayers of intercession were read by Lorna Graham, Diane Stewart, Suzanne Siberry, Marlet Hunter and Mary Geelan. The Service was enjoyed by a great number of people from many parts of the country

A message from our new Diocesan Chaplain, Rev Capt. Richard Waller CA:

'We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.' Hebrews 6v 19

The writer to the Hebrews is offering hope to his readers who were being tempted to return to the Jewish faith because of persecution - instead he urges them to persevere; please read Hebrews chapter 3 v 1-6. This hope can be found in the person of Jesus Christ. We too can we receive that same hope when we trust Jesus Christ with our lives knowing that he went to the cross to die for our sins. We receive his forgiveness and the gift of salvation. Mary Sumner, the founder of Mothers' Union in 1876, was a person of faith who helped women support one another in bringing up children. She was passionate about transforming the home-lives of Parish families. Mothers' Union continues to support women and children in different situations all over the world, for instance family life in our parishes, those in domestic violence, families needing a holiday away and young people going to summer conferences. Mothers' Union seeks to give hope and confidence and this can be given to others. Do please keep the work of the Mothers' Union in your prayers, indeed I encourage you to say the Mothers' Union prayer each day. We pray too that others would want to join the Mothers' Union.

KEA featured among the prizewinners in the Photographic and Poetry competitions. Lorna Graham was joint 1st in the Back to Nature section of the Photographic competition. Vi Breen and Margaret Sides had their poems commended.

Clogher

The project launched by the Trustees in the Clogher Diocese was under the theme, Grateful, Thankful, Blessed providing a "Blessing Bag" for each Mothers' Union member and all the Rectors in the Diocese. The bag contained a booklet of practical activities as well as spiritual guidance in the form of prayers and insightful scripture prepared by some Trustees. As members were unable to hold their branch meetings, the bag was to be an unexpected surprise to bring encouragement to each member and inspire them to communicate with others during the Covid 19 pandemic.



The bag contained a notebook and pen, sachets of cup a soup, porridge and hot chocolate, a packet of tissues, a packet of biscuits, a thank you card outlining the MU projects supported this year, a small bag of sweets and a reusable face covering.

The Mums in May Fund provided a grant towards the cost as well as funding from the Diocese and each branch supplied the sweets and face coverings for their members. The generous donations of products from Dunnes Stores, ASDA and Tesco in Enniskillen added to the variety of contents in the bags.

Trustee members spent time sorting each item into boxes for the branch leaders to place in paper bags for delivery to their members (730 of each item). The responses expressed by members who have received their “Blessing Bag,” have been encouraging as “surprise”, “delight”, “wonderful idea” and “much appreciated” are some of the comments. Another encouragement has been the opportunity for branch leaders and others to speak to members face to face, outside their door, and share together, as the bags have been delivered.



Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union have demonstrated 'Christian Care for Families,' and fulfilled the theme of building Hope and Confidence in their membership.

Cork, Cloyne & Ross Diocese



Well, Covid19 has been and continues to be a challenge. We were disappointed to have to cancel planned events such as our Getaway Weekend, and even branch meetings; but never let it be said that MU in CC&R has rested on its laurels! We have been creative in the midst of restrictions. As masks began to be necessary for all of us, Leah O'Flynn (Hazel Sherlock's granddaughter) began making some pretty stylish cloth masks. They proved very popular with family and friends alike. Hazel herself, and other members, have also been busy knitting prayer cloths (knitted squares with embossed Crosses), and knitted hearts, some of which have been donated to St Luke's Care Home in Cork, and also sent to parishes across the dioceses. A purple knitted square was also sent to our Bishop Paul Colton, who is recovering following his unfortunate accident recently. Thankfully he is well on the mend. We continue to send him our prayerful good wishes.

Another initiative which has been affected by the pandemic restrictions is our AFIA (Away From It All) programme. Even though we've been encouraged to go on 'staycations', we felt that this was not feasible for families at present; so, the idea of giving a hamper containing lots of goodies instead was suggested by Lucinda McDonald (one of our Trustees). She told us of a company called Absolutely Fabulous Hamper (abfabhampers@gmail.com) based in Kildare. The service has been outstanding; to date approximately 36 adults and children have received the benefit of 12 surprise hampers, and we have received beautiful Thank You cards from approximately 75% who thank MU from the bottom of their hearts. Some quotes: “We are humbled by the thoughts, the generosity and the know-how that went into organising the beautiful hamper we received”, “The hamper was greatly appreciated. God bless you. May you have peace and love for all your good works.” Avril Jennings (AFIA Coordinator) also sent an MU AFIA headed note to each family, which was included in a card to accompany each hamper for delivery by An Post.

At the time of writing, we are putting the finishing touches to our 'Virtual Festival Service' which will take place (Covid permitting) on October 6th in the new Carrig Centre in Ballincollig. The centre is a newly completed building, an initiative by the Carrigrohane Union of Parishes in Cork City. We are delighted to be able to use this splendid facility for our service, which of course will be a 'reduced' affair. We will be pre-recording the service at which our new Officers and Trustees will be commissioned by the Ven Adrian Wilkinson (as Bishop's Commissary). The service will then be broadcast online on the following Sunday so that members across the dioceses can join in. We are grateful to the Rev Robert Ferris for his assistance, and all who have helped to bring this to fruition.

Dublin & Glendalough

The MU Annual Festival Service with the commissioning of Trustees, Ann Mulligan and Rom Olusa, took place in Christchurch Bray on 10th September, 2020.

The service was conducted by Rev Baden Stanley, Rector, and the Archbishop Michael Jackson was in attendance. The Theme for Mothers' Union this year is 'Building Hope and Confidence' and Rev Baden Stanley spoke about the C of I and MU needing to be a voice of hope in difficult times. He linked the experience of this pandemic with the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland 150 years ago when we were called upon to make changes. We now need, more than ever, the supports provided by Mothers' Union and we need to find new ways of connecting.



Joy Gordon CNM2, Ann Hickey ADON, End of Life Coordinator and Lisa Dunne CNM3 ICU Department
Image provided by TUH Medical Photography

Thank you to Joy Gordon, CNM 2 in Endoscopy Validation and All Ireland Vice President for Mothers' Union. The volunteers of the Mothers' Union wanted to help staff caring for patients at End-of-Life Care in TUH in a practical way. They have generously created unique "hair" pouches for the ICU Department. This gift affords staff the opportunity to give grieving families a lock of hair in a dignified manner. We are most grateful to all the Volunteers for their generous gift of their time and talents and most specially to Joy Gordon for making this project a reality.

Down & Dromore

New banner for St Paul's MU in Gilford.

All social distancing regulations were in place on Sunday 20th September which was a memorable day in the life of St Paul's MU in Gilford. During the service of Morning Prayer, a beautiful new branch banner was dedicated by the Rector, Rev. Denise Caddoo. The new banner was presented to the branch by Mrs Dorothy McClory in memory of her mother Mrs Gretta Higgins. Diocesan President Roberta along with her husband Gerald, D&D Chaplain, as well as Phyllis Burrell, Dromore Area Secretary and Diocesan Trustee, attended.



Mount Merrion Church, Down and Dromore MU and Active Belfast joined forces for a weekly mini-bootcamp and packed lunch giveaway in the middle of the Cregagh estate, in South Belfast, over the summer months. The Mothers' Union in Down and Dromore had planned to get involved with the original 'Grub Club' by providing a team to prepare and serve the meals and also to support the initiative financially through their "Mums in May" fund, which awards grants to support projects in communities across the country. Clare Stewart, Action and Outreach Coordinator, said, "One of our objectives as a Mothers' Union is 'to promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children', so when we heard about the "Grub Club" project which Revd Adrian was planning we were very keen to support the project in every way we could."



When the plans changed, the Mothers' Union quickly adapted and offered their support in providing a packed-lunch give-away instead. Roberta Macartney, Mothers' Union Diocesan President said, "Mothers' Union in Action is about seeing a need and supporting those better placed in the community to fulfil it. We are able through our 'Mum's in May' grant to be able to supply food for this worthwhile project. Mothers' Union are delighted to support Mount Merrion Church with this initiative and look forward to helping in whatever way we can. We wish Revd Green and his team every blessing as they undertake this worthwhile project." Clare added, "We hope that many families will have some fun together at the Mini Bootcamp and Lunch Giveaway" over the Summer of 2020 and we look forward to being involved in the Grub Club in the future."

Meath & Kildare

I will start with verse 1 from Hymn 680:

*"Will your anchor hold in the storms of life.
When the clouds unfold their wing of strife?
When the strong tides lift and the cables strain
Will your anchor drift or firm remain?"*



We have just entered Level 3 lock down. Covid-19 has taken over and has changed life as we knew it. We have a new normal which is proving very difficult for everyone, especially for people in Nursing Homes, living alone and the vulnerable. Even our Leaving Cert students have been hugely impacted with their exams and results.

Members have been keeping in contact with older members and have helped out people in any way they can, such as bringing them to hospital for appointments, collecting shopping, medicines etc. We look forward to the day when we have a "new normal" and are able to have our meetings.

I will finish with the chorus from Hymn 680:

*"We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
fastened to the rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love."*



This is how Ruth Moloney kept herself busy while cocooning. She joined a group called "The Free Musketeers" making single use masks for front line workers.