

Building Hope & Confidence ~ Theme 2020

An All-Ireland Mothers' Union Publication

SPRING 2020



MU Knitting Projects

Knitting trauma teddies, hats and scarves for the homeless and clothing for premature babies



AFIA (Away from it All)

AFIA provides short breaks/holidays, day trips for those who otherwise could not afford it.



16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence

Throughout the campaign, we join with others globally to raise awareness of, and call for an end to, gender-based violence in all forms and in all societies.

Worldwide Parenting Programme



Prison Visits and The Read Together Project



Savings & Credit Groups



The overall aim for countries using this programme is to break down the barriers and challenges faced by women when dealing with money.

Church and Community Mobilisation

CCM helps communities break free from dependency and self-solve issues such as poverty – either financial or educational



Metamorphosis



Metamorphosis is Mothers' Union's approach to enabling and supporting meaningful relationships with God.



Mothers' Union supports families at home and overseas through all these projects.

Dear Friends

The All Ireland Trustees decided early in 2019 that last year should have no major MU events - it should be a period for “regrouping”, for the new trustee body to get to know each other, to decide how best to work together as a team in the best interests of MU in Ireland and to plan for the future. We certainly did plenty of the latter and that is coming to fruition now.

The MU worldwide theme for 2020 is **Building Hope and Confidence** and everything we are tackling now or preparing for in 2020 revolves around our hope and confidence for the future. We began this year with a planning session among the Vice Presidents and the Unit Coordinators to think about what we wanted to achieve by the end of the year and what else we need to plan for all our members.



Richard Millar, June Butler & Revd. Ken Rue

I say “what else” as there is quite a schedule of events already underway. On the second weekend in February we concentrated on matters financial. Over 30 members spent Saturday being guided by Revd. Ken Rue, the All-Ireland Treasurer, and Richard Miller, the Head of Finance at MU, based at Mary Sumner House. With Revd. Ken we covered a myriad of matters from branch returns, through the requirements of charity legislation to the implications for MU of Brexit! Richard brought us up to date with the range of services provided by the staff of Mary Sumner House and the proposals for new methods of funding our wonderful organisation, rather than depending almost entirely on the generosity of members.



Members attending a Training Day on matters financial in The Springfield Hotel, Leixlip

Four of our Trustees - Iris, Patsy, Margaret and Beth - have been reviewing all the recipes forwarded from dioceses and, of course, testing those which will be published in our new All-Ireland Cookery Book to be published before Easter. I think they have enjoyed that onerous part of the task!

Iris has also been chairing the planning sub-committee for the triennial leadership training conference scheduled for the end of March 2020. The theme of the conference will of course be “Building Hope and Confidence” and, as I hope you already know, the Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, will be our main speaker, focussing on the skills and knowledge needed for leadership within MU and how to develop our membership. The day the conference ends, Sunday 29th March, Sheran will preach at a very special choral evensong service to be held in St Patrick’s Cathedral Dublin. Perhaps by the time you read this edition of Focus you will have attended that service - I do hope so as we want to give Sheran the opportunity to meet as many members as possible and give her a proper Irish welcome to these shores.

I understand that membership growth is currently a priority at our headquarters at Mary Sumner House and will also be the focus of a Britain and Ireland conference in England in June 2020. Every diocese can be represented there and I do hope that some who play key roles in Ireland will try to attend as, not only is it invaluable to meet and discuss issues with our counterparts in Britain, but we need to be an integral part of any membership development initiative. Sadly, our numbers in Ireland are declining and the main problem is with lapsed members. We really do need to try to encourage such previous members to re-engage with MU and our varied work.

There is so much happening in Ireland to enthuse all our members. We hope that at General Synod in May there will be an opportunity to speak about the work of MU in the field of gender justice. We will have special festival services and services for Indoor Members in all twelve dioceses over the next few months, many special events including prayer breakfasts and walks, and many activities surrounding our celebration of Mary Sumner day on 9th August. A group of members is currently working to remodel the website so that it will be easier to find out about all our events and projects in Ireland and have better access to MU resources. I understand that, after the Lambeth Conference in July, there will be visits to Ireland by a number of Bishops and their wives who are involved with MU in their own countries and we are liaising with other mission agencies to see how we can join with them in hospitality and worship.

Planning is well underway for the General Meeting for members in Britain and Ireland which will be held in Belfast in the International Conference Centre (formerly known as the Waterfront) on Saturday 26th September, with services of Holy Communion in St Anne's Cathedral on the previous evening - Friday 25th September. There will also be a concert on the Saturday evening of the General Meeting. Members as well as spouses, relatives and friends, can attend any of the services or events but they will all be ticketed and information about how to obtain these will be available after Easter. I do hope that you will consider coming to the General Meeting and one of the services, as well as to the concert. We really need your support in Belfast in September - we must show our visitors to this island just what a great team MU Ireland is!

As I end, I want to pay tribute to the Archbishop of Armagh and the Bishops of Connor, Derry and Raphoe, and Down and Dromore, all of whom have retired in recent months. All four have given tremendous support to Mothers' Union in their dioceses and throughout Ireland and I have, on behalf of all our members, offered them good wishes for a long and healthy retirement. As I write this in early February only two of the new Bishops have been ordained - Bishop Andrew and Bishop David - and I have conveyed to them our congratulations and God's blessings for their new ministry. It would remiss of me not to mention the sad passing of Bishop James Mehaffey at the beginning of January. His dear wife, Thelma, was a former All Ireland President of Mothers' Union and a great encouragement to me personally as I began my MU "journey". Bishop Jim was usually around the major MU events in those days, giving us of his wisdom and humour, and I know he will be greatly missed by Thelma and all their family circle. We convey to them our sincerest sympathy and trust they will find comfort in the Word of God.

There is a lovely quote from Helen Keller which fits so well with our MU theme for 2020: ***"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence"***. As we move into this busy year, we pray that God will give us optimism to plan our work and events thoroughly and confidence to achieve the outcomes we desire. However, we must always remember that God's hand is in all we do:

"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". Jeremiah 29:11

With love and every blessing

June



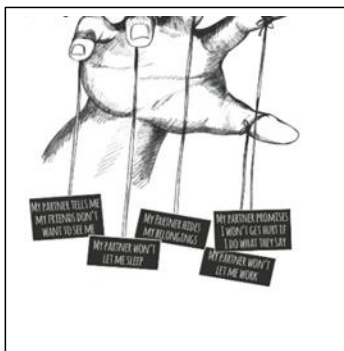
Bishop James
Mehaffey

Awareness:

Statistics indicate that during 2019, 14 Irish children found themselves without a mother. Six mothers died at the hands of an intimate partner, 5 of them in their own homes. In all 231 women have died since Women's Aid records began in 1996. ¹

A 2019 Global Study on Homicide estimated that a total of 87,000 women were intentionally killed in 2017. Out of the total number of victims of intimate partner homicide in 2017, roughly 82% were female victims while 18% were male victims. These percentages have remained quite stable since 2012. **In effect, this means that 82 women across the world are killed by an intimate partner every day.** ²

However not all cases of abuse involve violence. The highest common factor in domestic abuse cases is coercive control.



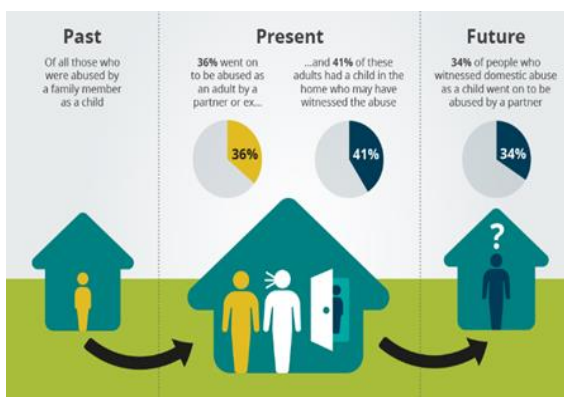
Examples of coercive control include:

- Being stopped from working or going to school/college/university
- Having money taken away or controlled
- Being isolated from friends and family
- Having access to food, drinks and day-to-day products restricted
- Having social media accounts monitored or controlled
- Being told what they should wear
- Being threatened with violence if they do not behave in a certain way
- Having threats made to loved ones or pets

Children's Experience:

Whatever form abuse may take children are affected. The more severe the domestic abuse the more severe the abuse of children in the same context.

72% of the women using one to one services for the first time in 2018 had children. ⁴



The abuse disclosed to Women's Aid in 2018 includes:

- Children witnessing verbal, physical and sexual abuse against their mother.
 - Children being physically hurt, slapped, punched, Locked in rooms
 - Children being called names and shouted at.
 - Children and their mothers being threatened with murder
 - Children being sexually abused.
 - Children being emotionally manipulated and used against their mother including being told lies.
- The mother-child bond being deliberately targeted and broken by abusive fathers.
 - Women assaulted when holding their baby in their arms.
 - Women and children made homeless by the perpetrator.

Despite the range and severity of the impact of domestic violence on children, they are often the forgotten victims, with limited services and protection available.

It is essential that laws to protect women, men and children from the ravages of domestic abuse are not just written into law, but implemented and fully resourced to protect and assist recovery of victims and their families, steps must be taken to ensure that domestic abuse is recognised and tackled before it reaches a critical point. This can involve support for the victim, relatives, friends and the perpetrator.

We are aware that we have each been created equally in the image of God and deserve to be treated as such. Whilst following the example of Christ in our communities, we are mindful of how he constantly challenged injustice and all forms of hypocrisy. Jesus honoured and respected women, men and children. He frequently spoke to women who were outcast or ostracised for one reason or another. He acknowledged how a person's past shaped their present-day position and thoughts, and responded with dignity and respect, whilst pointing them to a way forward.



Our goal is a vision of a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships. This centres on our reflecting the light and life of Christ in our lives. One encouraging expression of this is how we nurture the qualities of the fruits of the Spirit as an integrated spontaneous part of our lives. May we share with hope and confidence, God's blessings of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in the year ahead.

Action:

- **Pray** for all who live in fear of gender-based violence - for positive action, enlightenment and courage, restoration and healing; for guidance towards actions that make a real difference, building hope and confidence in a world where justice, love and peace may flourish.

- **Thursdays in Black** - Find a black piece of clothing and wear it every Thursday. The cloth will not perform miracles, but our prayers and attitudes should⁵ as we signify our determination to rid society of domestic abuse, rape and violence.

- **Be aware** and informed on matters pertaining to domestic abuse and gender-based violence

- When speaking to politicians in Northern Ireland **request that comprehensive domestic abuse laws should be introduced** without delay in line with England, Scotland and Wales

- In the Republic of Ireland, the Domestic Violence Act came into force in January 2019 and the Istanbul Convention was signed in March 2019. **Call on the government to provide the resources needed** to make a **real difference** in the lives of those affected by domestic abuse and in tackling its root causes.



1 Femicide Watch 2018, Women's Aid, Republic of Ireland

2 Booklet 5 - Gender Related Killings of Women and Girls, A Global Study on Homicide, UNODC, July 2019, available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf,

3 & 4 https://www.womensaid.ie/download/pdf/womens_aid_impact_report_2018_launch_programme.pdf

5 Larissa Garcia, Thursdays in Black Ambassador and university student.

“Souls of our Shoes” Exhibition

The Mothers’ Union “Souls of our Shoes” exhibition in Christ Church Cathedral, Waterford, marked the *16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence*.

It received a huge response from the public, Dean Maria Jansson Says:

“This amazing exhibition told the story of women who have been victims of gender abuse and instead of giving figures it told us about people’s lives. You can say that 30,000 reports of gender violence are made to the Gardaí each year – and there are – but that’s very anonymous. If you say, however, that ‘these are the shoes I ran away in’ or ‘I could run fast in these shoes’ it says more about the fear and the whole story than any statistic”



The exhibition drew many people to the Cathedral every day – men and women – with tourists gravitating towards it also; she says:

“First they say ‘what are the shoes doing here’ and then, of course, the narratives draw them in”



Some of the shoes in the Exhibition.



A special service to pray for the victims was also held on **Sunday 8th December** in the Cathedral.

International singer and composer Eleanor McEvoy sang three songs including one she wrote herself called *Half Out Of The Habit*. “After hearing about this service she wanted to be part of it and we were delighted that she came along. There are very few religious events to mark this level of abuse against women and girls and so our thanks to her and to Mothers’ Union for getting this exhibition together. Great credit is due to them,” added Dean Jansson.

The service also included a reading of the poet Maya Angelou’s poem *Still I Rise*.

A special collection was taken at the service for the work of Oasis House Women’s Refuge in Waterford.

Many thanks to the DCO for Cashel, Ferns, Ossory, Margaret Hawkins, for giving permission to reproduce this article which appeared in the January edition of the Diocesan Magazine. Many thanks also to Margaret for the lovely photographs. We are very grateful to Dean Maria Jansson for promoting and facilitating the “Souls of Our Shoes” Exhibition in Christ Church Cathedral, Waterford.



Eleanor McEvoy

“Stepping Out in Fashion” ~ Dublin & Glendalough

Plans were afoot from the outset of 2019 as a small team of Diocesan Trustees planned the Event of the Year, which was held at the Talbot Hotel, Stillorgan on Saturday 19th September. Following months of meetings in each other’s homes whilst drinking copious cups of tea and enjoying (only a few) morsels, the Dress Rehearsal came and went, and The Big Night finally arrived. Backstage all enjoyed having their make-up applied by Courtney Michelle while our MC for the evening, Hilda Smith, introduced all the models with style. The evening was over in a flash following a terrific raffle of all the prizes donated by the members of Trustee Committee. The evening was run as a fun event to raise the profile of Mothers’ Union, however it was a sell-out with over 250 tickets sold. There was a healthy profit of over €3700 made on the night. This will be used within the diocese to support Mothers’ Union members & our projects. And finally, to cap it all - we made the front page of October’s Church Review!



During the evening we were delighted to have some of our fellow members take to the catwalk to showcase their Mothers’ Union uniforms from around the world.

Daphne Danga from Bray Branch Stepped Out in her Mothers’ Union uniform from Zimbabwe.

The following is the meaning of her uniform:

1. **Headscarf** - covering her head as Mary, Mother of Jesus did.
2. **Collar** - a reminder to guard her mouth from cheap talk. James 3:10.
3. **Black skirt** - reminding us we are all sinners. Ephesians 5:8
4. **White Blouse** - reflection of God's Glory. Matthew 5:14
5. **Pockets** - symbolises keeping valuable words one hears.
6. **Blue trimming on pocket** - symbolises a zip for members to keep and not to share what they were told in confidence. Proverbs 11:13
7. **Blue trimming on sleeve of blouse** - members are expected to be of good character. Romans 13:13, Ephesians 5:3
8. **Blue belt** – symbolises the unity of members in times of happiness and tribulations. Romans 8:35; Ephesians 6:14
9. **Blue trimming at the bottom of the Blouse** - members are expected to be of good standing and character.
10. **Five buttons** - stand for Jesus' five wounds suffered at the crucifixion. John 20:27



Mothers' Union at the Ploughing Championships 2019

The tents went up, the sun came out and the families arrived. The NPA Ploughing championship in Co. Carlow was hugely successful. The organisation that goes into building a temporary town that sees hundreds of thousands of men, women and children visiting over the 3 days, and then dismantling it again is phenomenal, and all credit is due to the NPA. The beautiful weather added to the festival atmosphere, with sunscreen, sunglasses and hats being the order of the day instead of the usual raincoats, woolly hats and wellies!



The Mothers' Union baby feeding and changing marquee saw hundreds of babies, toddlers and their families visiting, and some good contacts were made. We were very pleased to facilitate so many, including an employee of the NPA, with whom we communicate every year but had never met in person. She came in with her young baby and was delighted with the service we provide. We were honoured to hear that the area for the Bandstand and Mothers' Union stands are the first to be marked out on a new site, with everything else radiating from there. We were also able to provide a service for adults with disabilities, which once again was greatly appreciated.

We couldn't provide our service without the help of the many volunteers, both local and from all over the country – Cork, Fermanagh, Offaly, Wexford and everywhere in between – with one lady saying she hadn't enjoyed a day as much in years! It was lovely to meet members from all over the country who dropped in to say hello, and browsed the well-stocked literature stand that Phyllis Foot had brought. With our former MU Diocesan and All-Ireland President, Phyllis Grothier, living just down the road, we had a local home from home which meant so much. Thank you to all who helped in any way. Early mornings, late nights, sore feet, but great fun and fellowship.



Some of the Ladies who helped at the Ploughing



Muriel Smyth and Lesley Bayley

The Ploughing will be returning to Ballintranee in 2020, and we look forward to being part of this great showcase of all that is good in rural Ireland.

Many thanks to Linda Ward for this report. Linda has been to the forefront in helping to organise this valuable facility at the Ploughing Championships over the last number of years. Mothers' Union also organise this facility at other shows throughout Ireland and it is greatly appreciated by parents and guardians of babies and small children.

Derry and Raphoe 16 Days Breakfast 2019

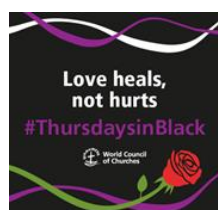
Over 90 women from across the United Diocese, including the Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council and the Deputy Lieutenant of County Londonderry, attended the 16 Days Breakfast hosted by Diocesan President, Ms Jacqui Armstrong, and organised by the coordinator of MU's Faith and Policy Unit, Joan Stockitt. Joan led the 16 Days worship liturgy and intercessions. During the event hundreds of gifts brought by MU members were blessed by Diocesan Chaplain, Katie McAteer, and presented to two local refuge centres.

The annual pre-Christmas event combines worship and activism and the importance of the organisation's campaigning was put into perspective by Marie Browne of Foyle Women's Aid. Ms Browne told the MU members that on average there was one incident of domestic abuse every 17 minutes in Northern Ireland; in fact, she added, Northern Ireland had the highest incidence of domestic violence in the UK.

Ms Browne also introduced everyone to a new project 'Dress for Success' backed by Marks and Spencer and Dunnes Stores, which aims to provide suitable interview and work clothes for any women in need. Mary McKenna, of the Donegal Women's Domestic Violence Service, shared a moving and topical poem, written by a ten-year-old child from a home which experienced domestic violence; she sought just one present for Christmas – a good father.

The Diocesan President urged women from Northern Ireland to challenge canvassers seeking support in December's General Election to explain what they were doing to end domestic violence and introduce the Coercive Control Bill. Ms Armstrong urged support for the 'Thursdays in Black' initiative, which originated with the World Council of Churches and seeks to highlight the need for an end to gender-based violence around the globe.

A "warm Derry and Raphoe welcome" was extended by the President to the guest speaker, Heather Forster, a senior social worker, whose husband Bishop Andrew Forster had just been enthroned in Derry and Raphoe. Mrs Forster stated during her address that we live in a messed-up world – a world of injustice and broken hearts – however we have a God who comes into the mess, sees the brokenness and vulnerability of every individual and walks alongside us, treating us with respect.



'Thursdays in Black' badges were made available to each member with a leaflet of commendation from All-Ireland President June Butler, discussing her personal reasons for wearing black each Thursday.

Rev Katie McAteer led the closing act of worship and the breakfast ended with everyone sharing a global moment of solidarity and unity in prayer with all who are affected by gender-based violence.



Thursdays in Black:



The Thursdays in Black initiative was promoted in each diocese and enthusiastically received. All-Ireland June Butler commented, "A commitment to wearing black one day every week means getting into a rhythm of constantly 'showing up' as a visual, challenging and urgent reminder that domestic abuse and rape happens and must stop.

It's also a commitment to being activist – in prayer and deed – against the abuse of power."

16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence in Photographs

Armagh



Clogher



Cork, Cloyne & Ross



Pictures from Derry & Raphoe above and from Down & Dromore below



Dublin & Glendalough

Cashel,
Ferns,
Ossory



Limerick & Killaloe



Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh



Tuam, Killala & Anchnonry



Connor

Meath & Kildare



Dublin & Glendalough

Mothers' Union Dublin & Glendalough adopts a project to support families at every triennial. This helps it to focus on a particular charity for this duration. Project 2020-2022 is in aid of **Home Start**, a family support voluntary agency in Mulhuddart, Blanchardstown. See website www.Homestartblanchardstown.ie **Home Start** is a voluntary organisation in which volunteers offer regular support, friendship and practical help to families with young children, in their own homes, helping to prevent family crisis and breakdown. Each branch is asked to support this worthy cause by compiling Home Start Welcome Packs as gifts to mothers, with children under 5 years old who are experiencing stress. These families will be accessing Parenting Courses through at their premises in Blakestown Road.



PRAYER VIGIL

A Prayer Vigil to launch the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence was led by Mothers' Union Co-ordinator for Faith & Policy, Ms Avril Gilatt. Revd. Garth Bunting, Rector also took part along with Diocesan President, Ms. Karen Nelson, and other members of Trustees doing readings, reflections and intercessions. Appropriate and uplifting hymns were sung. Members of the congregation placed prayers on the prayer wall.

Special guest speakers were Ms Kathy O'Halloran, Forensic Examiner from The Rotunda's Sexual Assault Treatment Unit, and Ms Michelle Bardin from Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, who spoke about the support given to victims of abuse while they are going to the SATU in the Rotunda, going to the gardai to make a report and on to court if that is required. Women are supported in all aspects of the process. Mothers' Union Dublin & Glendalough thanked all those who attended. (See photograph in centre pages)

Cashel, Ferns & Ossory



The Diocese held two events during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, a service in St. Laserian's Cathedral, Old Leighlin on 23rd November and a service in Christ Church Cathedral, Waterford on Sunday 8th December. See report on the event in Waterford, which included *The Souls of our Shoes Exhibition*, on Page 6 of this edition of Focus

Ferns Area held an Autumn Area meeting on 14th October in The Church Institute, Enniscorthy. This was organised by Naomi Besanson, VP, and the guest speakers were two of the support nurses from The Hope Cancer Support in Enniscorthy. They gave a very interesting and informative talk on the services provided by the Centre and informed all present on how dependent the Centre is on Fundraising.



The Diocese held the re-union lunch for their annual tour participants on Monday 3rd February 2020 in The Hotel Kilkenny @ 12.30p.m.

Phyllis Foot organises a very successful and much anticipated tour in May of each year. The base for the 2019 tour was the Garryvoe Hotel in Co. Cork and a fun filled five days of day trips and events were organised for those on the tour. Phyllis follows it up with a reunion lunch in early February.

Tuam, Killala & Achonry

Tuam, Killala & Achonry's 16 Days Event was held on 23rd November, 11am-1pm, in the central location of the Parish Centre, Chapel St., Castlebar. This venue is really convenient for Diocesan meetings and gatherings. The speakers from An Garda Síochána and the locally based Mayo Women's Support Group were excellent in the presentation of their respective experience, knowledge, preparation for the event and generosity of their time. Those present were very impressed especially with their detailed answers and advice on given situations. Refreshments were organised and supplied by the TKA team.



Ann Nethaway & Heather deLacy (on left)

Hilary from Mayo Women's Support Group (on right)



TKA is delighted that two new names have been added to the team in 2020, Dawn Thomas (Action & Outreach) and Ann Nethaway (Fundraising & Communications). All best wishes to them with thanks for their willingness to serve, as they embark on their roles. Congratulations to Canon Jen McWhirter who has been appointed as our Diocesan Chaplain by Bishop Patrick Rooke. Many thanks to those who are maintaining and those who are changing roles for the next triennium. The Festival Service including the Commissioning of Officers will be held on Sunday 17th May in St Nicholas Collegiate Church, Galway at 4pm.

Armagh

Many members attended the Getaway weekend in October which took place in the Armagh City Hotel.

Members who attended the reception at the Bishop's Palace during the Getaway weekend in Armagh.



Ladies from Meath & Kildare renewed their link with Armagh when they met for lunch and visited No. 5 Vicars Hill beside the Cathedral over the Getaway weekend.



Armagh trustees with their Diocesan President, Sophia Dillon, at the Autumn Council.



Members really enjoying themselves and being put through their paces at the getaway weekend

Connor

Connor Diocesan Fun Night

When DP, Sally Cotter, suggested a diocesan fun night that is exactly what the members in Connor Diocese had. Most ably compered by Archdeacon Stephen McBride the evening in All Saints Parish Hall, Antrim began with songs from the Trustees and Executive followed by Sally telling everyone, through Desert Island Discs, how music was an important part of her life. Each Area contributed to the entertainment with sketches, a fashion show and music. The piece de résistance of the evening was the Young Members, dressed in nuns' habits, giving their version of 'Sister Act'. A delicious supper, fun and fellowship – what more could MU members want?



Remember the acronym for SCAM

S – Seems too good to be true
C – Contacted out of the blue
A – Asked for personal details
M – Money requested

Scamwise: The Young Members in Connor have been very busy in the Diocese. They organised a most informative morning in conjunction with the PSNI in the Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim on how to spot and protect against scammers. Staff Officer Sam and Constable Gerry told those present that there had been a huge increase in scams over the last few years with scammers becoming much more convincing. During five months in 2019 over 2 million pounds had been scammed in NI through doorstep, internet, phone and postal scams. Excellent information was given as to how to spot each type and advice on how to use the internet safely.

Shopping Trip

Young Members also arranged a pre-Christmas shopping trip for Connor members and their friends to the Kildare Shopping Village. This happy group of ladies perused and bought till they almost dropped but thanks to a great meal in Dundalk Golf Club they survived to shop another day.

Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh

A Prayer Vigil was held on Saturday 30th November in The Martin Memorial Hall in Killeshandra. Canon Ali Colvin led the service of worship. Minister Heather Humphreys attended, and she thanked the Mothers' Union for their contribution to breaking the silence on Gender-based Violence. During the afternoon, Garda Antonette Prior gave a moving talk about how we can respond well to those who have experience Gender-based Violence. Thanks to the Killeshandra Branch for providing tea and refreshments which was very much appreciated. We had a huge response to our request for items which will be distributed to Women's link Longford, DVAS Sligo and Sleep out Cavan. These gifts were gratefully received and appreciated. Also, thanks to Marlet Hunter (Social Policy Rep) and Mary Geelan (Faith & Policy unit co-ordinator) for all their hard work in organising this event. It was a thought-provoking afternoon which made a great impression on all present.



At a recent meeting of the Trustee Body presentations were made to outgoing members of the Trustee Body, Whyte and Kathleen Nairn. Regrettably Kathleen was unable to attend.



Mary Geelan and Evelyn Morton presented flowers to Canon Sandra and Sophia and thanked them for their contribution to Mothers' Union over many years. DP, Hazel Speares, also expressed her thanks and appreciation. (Picture on right)

We are pleased to announce the appointment of our new Chaplain Rev. Richard Waller

Hello, my name is Rev Richard Waller. Originally from Pudsey near Leeds, Yorkshire, my wife Janette and I came to Belfast in 2010 where I worked as a Church Army evangelist on the outreach team at Willowfield Church. After pursuing a call to Ordained ministry in 2015, I spent my Deacon intern year in Killeshandra working alongside the Rev Canon Alison Calvin. In September 2017, I was appointed as Bishop's Curate to the Kildallon group of parishes, where Janette and I now live along with our energetic dog Pepper. I was very pleased to be asked to be Diocesan Chaplain to the Mothers' Union and look forward to supporting you as best I can.

*The LORD is faithful to all his promises
And loving toward all he has made. Psalm 145 v 13b*

Limerick & Killaloe



OVERSEAS EVENTS: Recently our diocese hosted two events to highlight Mothers' Union project work in Rwanda and how lives are being transformed with their help.

We were delighted to welcome Iris Suitor, All Ireland VP, who told us of her experiences during her trip to Rwanda last summer to attend Worldwide Council but also to have a look at some of the projects that MU support with the help of our giving. This was a great opportunity for us to learn where our money goes and how essential it is for branches to financially support the continued work of Mothers' Union in Rwanda and many other countries. Iris first visited our diocese for Afternoon Tea in Moneygall Hall, which was hosted by branches from the upper end of our Diocese. It was very welcoming to see the tables laid with beautiful china tea sets and lots of goodies. During her talk and power point presentation Iris told us of the Village Savings and Loans scheme programme which MU members have been rolling out across Rwanda. This scheme allows participants to save together and offer one another small loans to start new businesses. Iris went on to tell us about the parenting groups which promote health and wellbeing and fight child mortality rates with basic health training and education.



That evening Iris visited the Limerick end of the Diocese, for a "Harvest Supper", which is one of our main annual fundraisers for Overseas, to give her talk to members there. Our Overseas Fundraisers were a wonderful success so a huge "thank you" must go to Iris who has seen MU work at first hand in Rwanda and understands the huge problems that still exist in Rwanda given their past history. Thanks also to Eileen Armitage and her team who organised the Afternoon Tea Party in Moneygall and to Margaret Schutz and her team who organised the Harvest Supper in Limerick. As a result of our overseas events, branch giving and money collected through the sale of our cards and diaries etc. our Diocesan Treasurer, Betty Delahunt, has recently sent off a cheque for €2,309 to our Overseas Fund which is a wonderful achievement. Thank you!

Down & Dromore

Mothers' Union in Down & Dromore were given a marvellous opportunity, to promote awareness of the campaign, 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, when they were invited to speak to students in **St Colman's High and Sixth Form College, Ballynahinch on 25th October 2019.**

Joy Silcock & Marion Edwards were very warmly welcomed to St Colman's by Mr Mark Morgan, Principal, and Mr Paul Hazzard, Head of Pastoral Care. They were then shown to her classroom by Mrs Rachel McArdle, Head of Year 9, and assisted with setting up the room for their presentation. They were able to adapt Jacqui Armstrong's very well-prepared presentation to suit the situation.



Mrs McArdle stayed throughout the presentation and was there to support her students. In all about 40 boys & girls aged 15-17 years were present, over two workshops, and the content of the presentation appeared to have been very well received and blended well with their curriculum.

Friendship bracelets were made at the end to assist with conversation starters about building healthy relationships. The only problem encountered was that some of the boys did not know how to plait! This was a good opportunity to work together and for meaningful conversations between and students. Feedback was immediate and positive. This was followed by a delicious lunch provided by the school.



All in all, a very worthwhile venture.

Advent Carol Service on Monday 2nd December 2019

Members from all over the diocese met in Bangor Abbey, for the Diocesan Advent Carol Service at the beginning of Advent. Lesley Harvey was the person responsible for arranging and liaising for this annual event.



The Abbey was beautifully and tastefully decorated for the season and for this wonderful occasion.



We were warmly welcomed by Rev Canon Ronnie Nesbitt who took the service. The Abbey choir led the singing of a varied selection of unusual hymns & carols. Down & Dromore members including Diocesan President, Roberta Macartney read suitably selected lessons.

Refreshments were served very conveniently in the Abbey which meant that it was possible to catch up with friends from across the diocese over a cup of tea.

Some members from Saintfield Branch were joined by Mavis Thompson from Dromara and others.



Clogher

On Sunday 24th November 2019 Fivemiletown Branch celebrated 90 years of Mothers' Union with a church service at which Bishop John dedicated a baptismal roll, a gift from Mothers' Union. Our Diocesan President, Mrs. Irene Boyd, read the first lesson and Mrs. Florence Brunt read the second lesson. Prayers were said by Mrs. Elvina Funston (outgoing enrolling member) and Mrs. Hilary Kenny (incoming enrolling member). Bishop John spoke on the *Kingship of Christ*.

On Wednesday 27th November we held our anniversary dinner in Clogher Valley Golf Club – a night of fun and fellowship. Mrs. Eileen Stutt, one of our longest serving members, cut the anniversary cake.



Bible Stories in Braille:

Eryn Kirkpatrick was born 8 years ago as the first child of Evanna and Maurice, but it was discovered she was blind. Despite specialist therapy and treatment in China Eryn did not gain any sight. Throughout her short childhood she has been greatly supported by her family who spend many hours teaching her a wide vocabulary and encouraging her socially. Her Granny Violet, a faithful member of Colebrooke and Cooneen Mothers' Union, has been a consistent help to Eryn. In autumn 2019 Eryn featured on the BBC Newsline programme, as someone who benefited from the Braille service provided by workers in Maghaberry Prison Braille Unit. A member of Colebrooke and Cooneen Mothers' Union suggested to the Branch Leader to try and have Bible Story books printed in Braille. *'The Nativity Story'* and *'God's Story For Me Bible'* were purchased in The Oasis Bookshop in Lisnaskea and sent to Darren at Maghaberry Prison Braille Unit. Darren and his team worked tirelessly to have the books written in Braille and ready for Eryn in time for Christmas.

At the morning service in Colebrooke Parish Church on 8th December, Mrs. Irene Boyd, Branch Leader was invited by The Rector, Revd. John McClenaghan, to present the 6 volumes of books. Eryn and her sisters Kayla and Ava had lit the Advent candle first and Eryn was surprised to receive the books. She read the title *'The Nativity Story'* and said, *'Thank you very much for the books and I might as well go home and start reading them.'* Mothers' Union members send sincere thanks to the staff at Maghaberry for writing the books in Braille and giving Eryn an opportunity to read the Bible for herself. MU – fulfilling their aim of *'Christian Care for Families'* and the themes for 2019 **'Listen Observe Act in Step with God,'** and 2020 **'Building Hope and Confidence.'**



On Sunday 9th February at St. Ronan's Parish Church, Colebrooke, a Commissioning Service was held for the new members of Clogher Diocesan Trustee Board.

The Reverend John McClenaghan conducted the service with the assistance of The Reverend Charlie Eames, Diocesan Mothers' Union Chaplain, and Mrs Joy Coalter, Diocesan Reader.

All-Ireland President, Mrs June Butler, and Clogher Diocesan President, Mrs Irene Boyd, participated in the service by reading the lessons.

Following the service the congregation and Mother's Union Trustees' enjoyed refreshments in the adjoining hall.

Cork, Cloyne and Ross

On Friday evening November 22nd, a group of 50 MU members and friends gathered at Garryvoe Hotel in beautiful Ballycotton Bay for our annual conference. The Theme this year was “Listening to God, Nurturing Ourselves and our World”. Having registered by 6pm we met in the main conference hall where we had an introduction to the programme and a short time of prayer, before a delicious dinner and meeting up with old and new friends. That night there was a social time and a Beetle drive was enjoyed by most of the group; others made their way to the wonderful Prayer room that was beautifully created by the Faith and Policy members.

On Saturday morning we welcomed more ladies who joined us for the day, some staying until after dinner that night. The format differed this year as we did not have a keynote speaker, but several very talented individuals who took us through Nurturing our Relationship with God, Nurturing ourselves and Nurturing our Environment.



As part of the talk on Nurturing our Relationship with God given by Sylvia Helen an RGN and trained Counsellor. Sylvia spoke to us of being tripartite beings; Body, Soul and Spirit, and spoke of God’s message “Tell my people come back to me”. A YouTube piece was played entitled “The Father’s Love Letter”, which I would encourage you to play; it is a deeply moving piece.



Deirdre Whitley, a retired Nurse and Counsellor, and our Diocesan President Hilary Dring, having completed three units of Chaplaincy training, facilitated the workshop on Nurturing ourselves. We learned that God’s purpose for us is to live life to the full and ‘Stressed’ spelled backwards = ‘Desserts’. We were given topics to tease out and had some interesting group discussions. Reverend Andrew Orr, who is currently Chairman of ECO Congregation Ireland, spoke to us about what we can do to look after our environment and how environmental measures can be incorporated into all aspects of church life.

There were workshops on Christmas Crafts, Chair Yoga and Choral Singing with some line dancing thrown in for good measure, on Saturday evening, which were repeated so everyone got to do two workshops.



On Sunday morning we had a short prayer walk along the seafront before breakfast, followed by a wonderful speaker Sarah Jane Cromwell, who told us her story of gender dysphoria. She was welcomed so warmly by those who were in Garryvoe, indeed some people came along specially to hear her speak. One person’s feedback on the day was especially encouraging – “*I was so impressed with the atmosphere being saturated in grace yesterday...*”. Following a beautiful communion service led by our MU Chaplin we had a collection to enable us to purchase gifts to support the Women’s Refuge in Cork, having consulted them on what they needed.

The emphasis of the weekend is fun, fellowship and relaxation along with great food and comfortable surroundings. We had some deeply moving moments and some thought-provoking presentations; we are so grateful for the talents of all who facilitated each session. We said our fond farewells having had a fabulous, spiritually uplifting weekend; it was truly food for the soul. We are already looking forward to the Conference in November 2020. The theme for 2020 is Building Hope and Confidence. Watch out on our Mothers’ Union website www.cork.mothersunion.ie or Facebook page for details, we would love you to join us!!!

Derry and Raphoe

Derry and Raphoe highlighted the 16 Days of Activism against Gender based Violence by holding their annual 16 Days Breakfast, hosted by Diocesan President, Jacqui Armstrong, and organised by the coordinator of Faith and Policy, Joan Stockitt. This event, which attracted over 90 women, gains momentum each year as numbers continue to rise and political and civic representatives attend to give their support to the Mothers' Union campaign.

This momentum has also been carried forward by President Jacqui as an outreach into the schools in the United Diocese, where she has given presentations and with the help of other members, facilitated workshops on Gender Based Violence and Gender Justice. These included an introduction to Gender Justice and information on the MU Gender Based Violence Campaign 2014-19, encompassing the Irish and worldwide experience with a case study from DR Congo. Students were given the opportunity to consider the essential elements needed for a Compassionate campaign to highlight an area of Gender Justice.



Information on gender-based violence, domestic abuse and the 16 Days of Activism has engaged and interested staff and students and has proved helpful in the implementation of the Ethics module for A Level RE students. Head teachers and Year Heads have also indicated their interest in taking on 'Thursdays in Black' to create awareness and prompt discussion around these issues.

Further talks have been given to highlight gender-based violence at branch meetings and to the Board of Social Responsibility. This group plan to organise an awareness evening on domestic abuse for parishes in Derry and Raphoe during March 2020.

Meath & Kildare

The 16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence Service and Vigil was held in St Mary's Church, Navan on Saturday November 23, 2019.

This was a very thought -provoking Service and the Vigil at the end was very inspiring and gave us much food for thought. Mrs June Butler, All-Ireland President, joined us and gave us a short talk about her work. Ms Sinead Smith from Navan Women's Refuge spoke very passionately about her work.

The picture on the right features Canon John Clarke, Rector, Ms Sinead Smith, Navan Women's Refuge, Sylvia Wheatley and Mrs June Butler.





At Autumn Council in the Springfield Hotel in Leixlip June Butler, All-Ireland President of Mothers' Union, asked us to join organisations nationally and internationally in supporting: "Thursdays in Black", a campaign of solidarity and advocacy against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.



In every country, gender-based violence is a tragic reality. This violence is frequently hidden, and victims are often silent, fearing stigma and further violence.

We all have a responsibility to speak out against violence, to ensure that women and men, boys and girls, are safe from rape and violence in homes, schools, work, streets – in all places in our societies.



The Editor Writes:

*"All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my trust renew,
Me through change and chance he guideth,
Only good and only true,
God unknown,
He alone
Calls my heart to be his own"*

The words above are from a hymn written by Joachim Neander (1650-1680) and Tr. Robert Bridges (1844-1930). Our theme for 2020 is **"Building Hope and Confidence"** and as we think of this how apt are the words of the hymn above. We are now living in a world that is experiencing so much change and challenges and we need to pray and trust in God to guide and protect us.

"Building Hope and Confidence" is a challenging theme for Mothers' Union. During 2020 we will be hearing a great deal about **"Metamorphosis"** which is the new name to describe the Mothers' Union approach to community transformation. The Right Reverend Andrew Proud stated that *"Metamorphosis is about building confidence in the local congregation to listen to what people are saying their needs are and working with them to address those needs and turn their lives around"*.

Mothers' Union, since it was first formed over one hundred and forty years ago, has worked tirelessly to support and promote family life. We have listened to and responded to the needs of many, both at home and overseas, through our various projects and campaigns. However, like all organisations, we have had to adapt and evolve to meet the growing needs of those who are in adversity and need our support. Sadly, we have seen our membership drop in recent years as younger people have so many other commitments, between home, work and family life, that many do not feel that Mothers' Union is relevant to them. We need to listen to them and see how we can best support them and grow Mothers' Union into the future, and I am confident that with God's help and guidance we can.

Every blessing,
Margaret