


Spring 2024

Mothers' **UNION**

# connected



**Debbie Bruwer talks  
life, faith and sport**

**A gift  
of life**

**Growing  
membership,  
discipleship  
and our  
communities  
around the  
world**

**Holding  
onto hope**

**Shine  
your light**

# connected



Welcome to your latest edition of *Connected*, our membership magazine, where we share stories, discuss important topics and connect Mothers' Union members worldwide.

As Spring is upon us and we celebrate Easter, the focus of this edition is on new growth: growing

membership, discipleship and our communities here and around the world. We interview Debbie Bruwer, née Flood, a member of the Great Britain Rowing team and double Olympic silver medalist, about how she managed to prioritise both her faith and her sport. With declining congregations and families facing the dilemmas of attending church or sports clubs we explore how our faith isn't just for Sundays in church and how we can take faith onto the sports field.

2024 is the election year. With almost 50% of the global population heading to the polls, we discuss the importance of voting and how, as MU members, we have the opportunity to challenge and shape the views of candidates on social justice issues. We explore the complexity of happiness, the vast new field of Artificial Intelligence and how to cope with feelings evoked by global conflict and disasters that we can't control.

We also shine a light on how our members here in Britain and Ireland have been bringing about change in their communities, and showcase some of our work in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Madagascar and Tanzania.

As we go about our daily lives in this fragile and complex world, we are reminded to 'trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight' (Proverbs 3:5,6).

From everyone at Mary Sumner House thank you for all that you do for Mothers' Union. We pray that you have a joyful Easter.

**Sarah Button-Stephens**  
Editor

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

9 – 19 May  
Thy Kingdom Come

June, July, August  
Summer of Hope

● **Receive our monthly e-newsletter**

For regular updates about what Mothers' Union is doing around the world, the impact of our membership and useful member resources, visit [mothersunion.org](https://mothersunion.org) and scroll to the bottom of the homepage to sign up!

● **Follow us on social media:**

- 📌 [facebook.com/MothersUnion](https://facebook.com/MothersUnion)
- 📷 [instagram.com/officialmothersunion](https://instagram.com/officialmothersunion)
- 🐦 [twitter.com/MothersUnion](https://twitter.com/MothersUnion)

● **A reduced audio version of *Connected* is available for those who require it**

Contact [communications@mothersunion.org](mailto:communications@mothersunion.org) or 0207 222 5533

**Editor** Sarah Button-Stephens **Sub-Editor** Lucy Hannah **Art Editor** Emma Golten **Production** Fretwell Print & Direct Mail

**Editorial office** *Connected*, Mothers' Union, Mary Sumner House, 24 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3RB

**T:** 020 7222 5533 **E:** [communications@mothersunion.org](mailto:communications@mothersunion.org)

**Mothers' Union Worldwide President** Sheran Harper **Chief Executive** Bev Jullien

Published by Mothers' Union as part of its membership offering.

Mothers' Union is a registered charity in England and Wales (Registration number: 240531)

© All contents are copyright 2024. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of Mothers' Union. While every effort is taken to ensure the accuracy of dates and comments, Mothers' Union cannot accept responsibility for any loss, damage or inconvenience caused through any error or omission.

# CONTENTS

2 **Creating a better tomorrow:** Sheran Harper shares how MU brings lasting change, unity, and energy

4 **Doing life – and sport – with God:** Debbie Bruwer talks about how faith and sport aren't an 'either or'

6 **Instruments of change: the future of women's leadership:** a gathering of the six African women bishops

8 **Shine your light:** how we can challenge and shape social justice issues

10 **It's been a privilege:** the unexpected benefits of being a diocesan president

11 **Inspiring fundraising:** members step up to an innovative fundraising challenge

12 **Making friends with happiness:** exploring the right to be happy

14 **Holding onto hope:** how to cope with our feelings on issues we can't control

16 **A haven for healing:** the therapeutic impact of gardening

18 **Securing our future:** an update from our Membership team

20 **Sowing seeds of resilience:** overcoming challenges in Madagascar and Burundi



22 **RISE UP!** updates on our latest domestic abuse campaign

24 **Sport: an opportunity:** how we can take faith to the sports fields

26 **Money money money:** the importance of cash and MU's role in financial exclusion

28 **Gift shop:** treat yourself or loved ones with special gifts

34 **Changing the story:** collaborating with partners at conferences across the Province of Ireland

36 **Look both ways:** exploring the increased use of AI

38 **Gift of life:** the outcome of our Christmas Appeal

39 **Lace up your shoes:** the benefits pilgrimage

40 **Our dear country:** how agricultural projects are bringing hope in the DRC

41 **Vitality through prayer:** how prayer is strengthening communities globally





# CREATING A BETTER TOMORROW

**M**U is the rock, the promise, and the hope! For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

Supporting women and caring for families has been at the heart of Mothers' Union since its founding, almost 150 years ago. This drives our work across the world, prioritising the end of poverty, violence and social injustice.

In 2023, I visited members in eight provinces – in East, Central and Southern Africa, Britain and Ireland, and the Indian Ocean. Inspired by their faithfulness, I left the shores of each province with my own faith renewed. My whole being was re-energised.

I walked hand in hand with women and families in local

communities, listening to their many challenges mixed with eagerness to overcome them; observing them as they stood strong, praying together and trusting God; and watching them use whatever little gifts they received, not for personal gain but to open doors for others. This can only come from hearts that have experienced the sacrificial love of Jesus.

Members' determination was demonstrated in three projects in three different provinces – equipped with two goats, two pigs, and a pair of ducks. They multiplied and progressed from serving just three families to entire communities. The meat, eggs and milk from the livestock provided food to sustain them and an income to keep children in school. In a brief time, they had enough to



**Worldwide President**

**Sheran Harper**

**shares how Mothers' Union is changing lives around the world**

share and lift each other out of poverty.

Wherever I went, I felt the deep appreciation for the impact MU has in empowering women, supporting families and enabling communities. What felt so significant this time was the way the wider community and government officials wanted to be involved and better understand the faith that drives us. There was a readiness to be engaged in something wider than their own secular work, with a desire to see MU progress.

'What you are doing around the world is real... it's life changing!' said one government official in



Lusaka, Zambia, to a cathedral congregation of 1,000. Many leaders from the church and wider community approached members after an interview I did on national radio in Southern Africa.

Our movement is engaged and motivated to create a better tomorrow, united in our vision to be effective. Our strong faith drives us to make the love of Jesus Christ visible and known without prejudice, reaching even the most remote villages, ensuring no one is left behind. The sweet fellowship means so much to us that we are skilled in dreaming up any excuse to get together, have a bite to eat and a good laugh! It is here that seeds of conversations take place, bright ideas tickle hidden talents, leading to a giving of oneself.

Mothers' Union brings lasting change, unity, and energy.



## WORLDWIDE PRESIDENT

**Is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go Lord, where you lead me ...**

**A hive of activity answers this call. For example:**

**Uganda** – Mothers' Union continues to promote healthy relationships in marriages and families in the church and community.

**Mombasa, Kenya** – MU leaders work in partnership with the Men's Fellowship to empower and mentor boys, end GBV and strengthen families.

**Kitwe, Zambia** – For more than a decade, MU members, supported by the government ministry, have sustained the project of protecting and nurturing *Children on the Street*. Increasing numbers of children are returning to school to finish their education.

**South Africa** – Mothers' Union and the church are doing all they can to end GBV by showering communities with awareness programmes, supporting victims, enabling survivors to be independent, engaging teenagers in art and sports, and implementing helpful projects.

**Winchester, Canterbury** – Members continue to keep our founder's vision alive by observing Mary Sumner Day with a service, prayers and laying of flowers on her grave. Mary Sumner's Bible, membership card, portraits, and other items have been preserved, with plans to display them in a special room at Old Alresford.

**Wales** – *Behind Closed Doors*, an initiative to increase awareness of GBV, was launched at the Wales Governing Body in September 2023. Members of clergy were extremely interested and asked, 'What can we do to help?'

**York** – The 2023 Annual Gathering demonstrated strengthening of relationships between Mothers' Union and the clergy. It was an amazing day of business and fellowship, bringing together hundreds of members.

**Madagascar** – Eight bishops, clergy and 1,200 MU members attended the week of activities for the celebration of the MU's 120th Anniversary held in Fianarantsoa. MU was commended for its partnership with the church in leading the *Resilience* programme in Madagascar.



# DOING LIFE – AND SPORT – WITH GOD



Debbie Bruwer, née Flood, was a member of the Great Britain Rowing team for 15 years. A double Olympic silver medal winner and five times world champion, she is now a mum of three. She works for Christians in Sport, supporting elite athletes. She is manager at a Christians Against Poverty debt centre. She tells us about her journey:

**When I was young, I knew there was something precious about life and that life had meaning.** I grew up in a Christian home. My grandparents were missionaries in Liberia.

At first, sport was something I did to spend time with my parents. I loved going on runs with my dad and cycling with my mum. Church was a priority. We went every Sunday as family.

I believed in God, but it wasn't until I joined a Christian youth club that I started to understand more about who Jesus was, the life he lived, why he came and had to die for us. I realised, God has blessed me with abilities, but first and foremost he created me to have a relationship with him. This relationship

wasn't automatic. It was something I needed to choose for myself. That was the point I started doing life with God.

**Everything changed when I became a Christian.** Before, I'd be in church waiting for it to finish so I could get to training. Once I became a Christian, my whole life reordered. My faith came into everything. Before I started rowing, I was in the junior British Judo squad. When Judo competitions started clashing with Sunday services, my parents encouraged me to go to the youth club instead. I loved the peer support and the leaders were wonderful role models. They helped me get my nose back into

the Bible, whether I was doing well or not in my sport. They encouraged me to use the abilities and opportunities that God was giving me. I wanted my team mates to know that I was a Christian. I was excited by it!

**Being Christian wasn't just for Sundays. It was every second of my life.** Sport and faith weren't an 'either or' option. I was part of the Christian Union at university. I couldn't always make it because of training. I was shocked to be asked 'If you can't come to Christian Union and you can't go to church, how are you growing in your relationship with God?' My relationship with God is personal. It doesn't rely on being at church or the Christian Union – but God does encourage us not to give up on gathering with others.

My youth group leader contacted Christians In Sport and asked what support they could offer me. They were regularly in touch with me. I did Bible studies with them and they prayed for me. It was all very centred on me growing in my faith. When I joined a new church, there were a number of elderly couples who regularly invited me for dinner and would pray for me. I was blessed by the consistency of care that they showed me. I was very lucky to be supported in my faith and sport journey by my family, my church, my youth group and Christians in Sport.

**I would encourage churches with sports people in their congregation to support both the youngsters and the parents.** When I retired and went to support friends in the Rio Olympics, I realised what an emotional rollercoaster it was to be a parent of a youngster in sport. Only a small percentage of youngsters make it through to professional sport. If they don't make it, it can be really hard for all involved.

Families need to unburden to God and they need friends to help them to do that too.

Encourage people's talents, but also remind them that God has a plan, which might not look like you want it to look!

'Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight' (Proverbs 3:5,6).

**If athletes are doing well, they can feel like they're winning in life. They're on top of the world.** But in sport you can go from hero to zero instantly. Putting your worth and value in your results or in what other people say about you is very unstable. God used disappointments in my sporting career to give me perspective to fall back on him and to trust him for whatever he held for my life.

My worth and identity are not in my results or how well I'm doing. My worth and identity are in God, as a child of God. This gives a huge anchor in the ups and downs in the world of sport.

**Life is made up of seasons.** Things change. After rowing, I was working, then I was a mum and married. There is always more to learn. God has purpose for each day: to know him more, to love him more and to love others. This is the same whether you're an Olympic athlete, a stay-at-home mum or whatever you are doing – whatever season of life.

Jesus gave his life in service of others, so how could we, as members, do anything less? Let us show the world that it is love that drives us to use countless opportunities to be a blessing to others.

**Debbie was awarded the Eric Liddell Award in recognition for her outstanding character on and off the sports field during the London 2012 Olympics. Find out more about Eric Liddell and how we can celebrate the Paris 2024 Olympics on pages 24 and 25.**

Bishops Filomena Tete Estevão (Bom Pastor, Angola), Dr Emily Onyango (Bondo, Kenya), Rose Okeno (Butere, Kenya), Elizabeth Awut Ngor (Rumbek, South Sudan), Dr Vincentia Kgabe (Lesotho, Southern Africa), Dalcý Dlamini (St Mark the Evangelist, Eswatini)



# INSTRUMENTS OF CHANGE: THE FUTURE OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

**In January 2024, the six pioneer African women bishops, or 'Africa Six' as they have become known, met together for the first time in a retreat in Kenya to explore Christian leadership for the 21st century**

**C**hristianity is a women's movement. This was the point emphasised by Professor Esther Mombo, an established and respected theologian and teacher, as she opened the public panel session with the Africa Six. Women have been responsible

for the growth of the church and its mission, evidenced by the strong presence of women in our churches.

It has been a long journey for women's leadership. We have had caring, educational and supportive roles for a long time. Women have been at the pew and men at

the altar. In Africa, there are just six women bishops and over 500 male bishops. But women must be leaders in the church – leadership should reflect the membership. It is important that we change leadership styles to enable women to be leaders and not to impersonate men.



'We have crossed rivers but we have oceans ahead,' the Africa Six declared. 'We need many more women leaders being fully represented in church and society and we need to navigate the spaces where God has blessed them.'

The panel was asked what leadership means to the Africa Six. 'Leadership is being an instrument of change,' said Bishop Rose from Kenya. Bishop Dalcy from Eswatini added: 'God calls us into places of influence and God needs people who answer. You need to be ready to answer.'

Professor Mombo and the Africa Six have all overcome significant challenges, going against cultural norms to be where they are today. Bishop Emily and Professor Mombo were the first women to attend St Paul's University in Kenya to study theology. Bishop Emily became the first women bishop in Kenya. Bishop Rose, a Mothers' Union member, stepped into the role of bishop as a widow responding faithfully to the call.

'Sadly, many women continue to experience different forms of discrimination and being pushed further away from the life of society,' explained Bishops Vincentia and Dalcy. 'It is imperative that institutions such as the Church remain vocal in highlighting the reformative and transformative power women hold as change agents, as well

as speak to diminish barriers that hinder their full inclusion in ministry and service – and forms of abuse against them.'

The women bishops highlight that society is changing. 'We live in a rapidly changing world where everything is instant – it doesn't satisfy us for a long time,' said Bishop Vincentia. 'We cannot hurry life. We have to be anchored and have meaning.' We need to advocate and be responsive, present and engaging within the life of the church and our communities to bring real and lasting change.

Professor Mombo and the Africa Six have all been advocates and champions in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). Bishop Rose expressed how much the issue of GBV hurts her and how she is called to respond: 'I am a mother; I am a parent. Seeing women go through this experience hurts me. If she is in pain, I am in pain. I can't be leading people who are hurting quietly and there is nobody to turn to and I am not seeing. I am a shepherd.'

Bishops Vincentia and Rose have both been involved in

Mothers' Union's 18 month pilot to address GBV in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Uganda and Kenya, which ended in June 2023. We are exploring further work together on this issue. They are both involved in diocese-wide GBV programmes working collaboratively across the church.

Supporting, affirming and enabling women's leadership is a key part of MU's work globally – within the church, Mothers' Union and the community. It is part of how we encourage and lift women up. The work responds to God's call and the needs that exist in our communities and churches. It helps break the barriers that hold us back as women in our work and ministry. In all the programmatic work that MU undertakes, we look at the growth of women's leadership in the church and community.

Professor Mombo and the Africa Six, as well as all the women who are serving in their churches and communities, are truly an inspiration. Through their encouragement and example, more women will answer the call to lead.

**'In Kenya, as is the case in the continent and globally, women continue to be great tools of hope, transforming the world and offering thought and practical leadership in various issues that affect society.'** *Bishops Vincentia and Dalcy*



# SHINE YOUR LIGHT

In times of increasing indifference,  
**Bev Jullien** asks 'Why vote?'



**Y**ou are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bushel. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.' (Matthew 5: 13-15)

In 2024, national elections across the globe are planned in at least 64 countries – both general and presidential elections in some, including Pakistan; presidential elections in the USA; and general elections in South Sudan and South Africa. As I write in the UK, we will also be expecting a general election, this year or next.

Living in an 'electoral democracy', it is tempting to forget how relatively young electoral democracy is. Defined as 'meaningful, free, fair and multi-party elections', this privilege has been enjoyed for less than 50 years. And that's by the countries that have it – it is easy to forget that the majority of countries of the world still live in either electoral autocracies, such as Russia, or closed autocracies, such as South Sudan and Sudan.

In such countries, it is easy to understand why people may feel that there is little point in casting a vote, as the result seems pre-determined. Yet people still find the courage to

express their views when they feel strongly about an issue, if necessary by taking part in demonstrations, even when it may seem impossible to make a difference. This may be at great personal risk; it can be deeply humbling.

You could say that it is all the more important for those of us living in countries with free elections to make use of our privilege. So why can the turn-out often be so low? 'Well, it is a safe seat, my vote will make no difference' or 'I was just too busy and forgot', people may say. I can only imagine what the reaction of those who fought so hard for women's suffrage would be to hear such indifference!

# SHAPING OUR FUTURE

## Mothers' Union elections 2024

It's that season again – the last year of the current triennium, when our members choose leaders for 2025-2027, at diocesan, provincial and worldwide levels.

This time it is even more important than ever, as we continue with Transformation in Action – nurturing the new shoots which are coming up across the dioceses in Britain and Ireland and beyond.

At first, this may seem daunting, but it is also a great cause for hope. We see increasing examples of people supporting or taking part in the wonderful work of members in their communities.

Do reflect prayerfully as to whether you feel called to shine your light in an area of Mothers' Union activity, whether locally or more broadly, or whether you can encourage and support a friend to come forward. Together, we can bring in the harvest.

This year, we will be saying 'goodbye' to our wonderful Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, who will be stepping down after 12 years of service on the Worldwide Board of Trustees, six of which as Worldwide President. Please pray for a strong and worthy successor.

Members will also be electing new Zonal (regional) Trustees from around the world, including five from Britain and Ireland. Do you know someone who may be suited to the role?

You can find out more about the elections on the website: [mothersunion.org/MUElections2024](https://mothersunion.org/MUElections2024), including the role descriptions for the Zonal Trustees and Worldwide President. The nominations process runs from the start of May until mid-June. Voting takes place over July and August.

Please 'shine your light' in these elections, in whatever way you feel called.

Why should we bother? First and foremost, if we do not choose to cast our light on an issue, we are effectively hiding the light of our views, insights and beliefs under a bushel. We are failing to stand up for what we believe to be right, for ourselves as individuals but also, very importantly, for our wider community. We are missing an opportunity to preserve the wellbeing of all and to prevent harm to others. Edmund Burke put it succinctly, quoting from the Psalms: 'All that is required for evil to prevail is for good men

to do nothing.'

As members of Mothers' Union, we have opportunities to challenge and shape the views of all candidates on matters of social justice which matter most to us, for example:

- **When will the Domestic Abuse Bill be extended to give protection to women of insecure immigration status?**
- **What resources will be put in place to support survivors of domestic abuse, through refuges and local services?**
- **How can education, from primary level upwards, be strengthened to support**

**developing healthy relationships and make domestic abuse a thing of the past?**

- **What is being done to reduce the scourge of Modern-Day Slavery?**

Whether or not our preferred candidate is successful, each and everyone of us, like a grain of salt, can make a difference, influencing all those involved in the elections and beyond, speaking up and speaking out. For 'if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?'

# 'IT'S BEEN A PRIVILEGE'

I was relatively new to Mothers' Union when I was surprised to be approached to consider the role of diocesan president (DP), says Deb Lee. I am so pleased I agreed. It has been a privilege, but also great fun!



As a DP, you have the chance to meet so many wonderful members and discover the fantastic things that they have done over the years. I was very nervous about doing something wrong as I knew very little about how Mothers' Union functioned. But, of course, you have your trustees to support you and also the other lovely DPs in your province! I also realised that the aims of Mothers' Union are far more important than how it works. Being in a position to share all the wonderful work of Mothers' Union, locally and worldwide, with the diocese at the various meetings stimulated much more

interest than just talking about the practicalities that had worried me so much. I realised I was talking and praying about things that I really valued.

Being DP did not take up as much time as I was worried it might. It has given me the chance to develop my skills, particularly encouraging and enthusing others, linking folk together and reinforcing the importance of being a Mothers' Union member. I have also done a few things I would not have done (such as two big bike rides) being reminded that 'I can do all things through Christ,

who strengthens me.' – (Philippians 4: 13).

Being DP has also developed my faith, partly as I have felt more 'connected' with the prayers and worship resources that Mothers' Union provides. I feel it has given me the opportunity to live out the John Wesley prayer: *Do all the good you can, to all the souls you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as you ever can!*

As we approach the next triennium, do consider taking on the role of diocesan president. Your MU needs you and it will help keep you young!



# INSPIRING FUNDRAISING

**Jacky Fredrickson, Diocesan President of Bristol, invited members to take part in an innovative fundraising challenge**

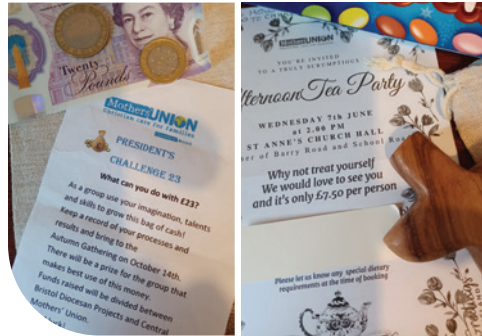
Inspired by hearing of a similar project, I set out to involve as many Mothers' Union members as possible in this 2023 fundraising challenge, called the President's Challenge.

The project was launched at our March AGM and Members' Day. Groups were invited to sign up to receive a cloth bag containing £23 in cash and an instruction sheet, suggesting that they work together to use their talents and skills to grow this £23.

The ten branches that signed up had until our Autumn Gathering in October to come up with ideas, put them into practice, and to return the proceeds with the story of how they had achieved this. There would be a prize for the group that raised the most money or had the most original ideas.

## What did members choose to do?

Several afternoon tea and garden party summer events raised good sums of money. One was a very posh affair with china crockery and cake stands full of afternoon tea goodies. There were many other ideas, from selling plants, fudge, and preserves, to giving out Smarties to eat and fill the empty tubes with coins. Some talented members made cards, decorated glass bottle



lamps, other craft items and activity bags for children. One group put on an Easter play and had a collection.

One group related the whole task to the parable of the talents, dividing the money into portions of five, three and one, working all together, in a small group and as individuals, showing that we are most successful when we all pull our weight.

## Reaping the benefits

The sum raised was amazing. Three groups made over £500 each and the total raised was £2,726.65. This has been divided between central Mothers' Union and Bristol projects. Each group received a certificate, and the winners received a candle with a Bible verse on it to use at their prayer times.

Members enjoyed the thought processes and the popular social gatherings. We had a wonderful afternoon at the Autumn Gathering, hearing about the diversity of activities and how much everyone had enjoyed this project, how it brought people together, and provided opportunities to invite friends along to Mothers' Union gatherings. Everyone agreed that the challenge had been a positive experience.





# MAKING FRIENDS WITH HAPPINESS

**The International Day of Happiness, which takes place on 20 March 2024, is described as ‘a global movement towards a happier, more inclusive, and resilient world’. Here, Lucy Hannah shares her own story reconciling the complexity of suffering with the right to be happy.**

Memory is a funny thing. It picks and chooses what comes to mind. You can scrape about for a piece of information and it shies away. Then, sometimes, a moment sticks for no apparent reason at all.

It was just one thought, early in a lifetime.

I was a teenager in the car with my mum, being driven home. There was nothing special about the journey. Yet I even remember the stretch

of the road. In that moment, I realised I was happy.

Things felt like they were going well (which, for an insecure, hormonal teenaged girl, was no small thing!). And yet, as soon as I realised my own contentment, I felt... dread. Guilt, even. As if I wasn't supposed to be happy. As if, at any moment, it would be snatched away. As if I had sneaked in happiness, without God's say so. *Now where did that come from?*

I was a sincere member of

my church youth group and had grown up in a Christian household. I had ingested, somewhere, that it was wrong to feel happy, as if my goal should be suffering. If I wasn't suffering, I certainly shouldn't be happy, because plenty of people in the world were suffering. What gave me the right to be happy?

In that moment, the delight of happiness was replaced by moralistic panic.

Fast forward a few years: I was studying theology. An

older student told me, ‘God wants you to be happy.’ I smiled but internally recoiled. *That can’t be right.*

God wants me to do God’s will, I thought. Happiness is irrelevant.

To me, in my confused, hurting (and judgemental) little soul, it felt shallow. It stunk of self-love and selfishness. I’d trained myself that suffering was good. That self was all bad. I’d taken the verses about rejoicing in suffering, about suffering building character, etc., to mean that I should not settle for happiness, I should settle for pain. In fact, during my sixth-form years I wrote an entire journal about welcoming the path of pain to grow the fruit of the Spirit in my life.

Decades later, I look back and think: *you poor, well-meaning girl.* I was glorifying suffering to the degree I felt I should seek it. My theology had an inherent imbalance. I was breaking my own heart – on purpose. I thought it would make me a better human being.

I won’t be the only one. This is my story, not yours. Your story will have other threads – and some may need unpicking, like mine. But I do want to ask – have some of our church traditions enthroned suffering to an unhealthy level? Certainly the self-flagellation

of long-dead ‘saints’ come to mind, but are there more subtle ideas at work?

The irony is, I would never say what I said to myself to someone else. That’s often a good measure of things! Would you treat someone else the way you treat yourself? I’ve asked this question of others – kind, sweet people, wanting to do what’s ‘right’, but they treat themselves so poorly. They think they are undeserving of happiness. They would never, ever treat someone else the way they do themselves.

Today, I am happy. I am not without struggles – I have a chronic illness which means I am in constant physical pain, but I am nonetheless content with my life. These days I welcome happiness. If there was a way to take my pain away, I’d welcome that, too. I’ve learned that happiness is a gift. I’ve also learned that, rather than being selfish, allowing myself to be happy releases me to share joy with others. I am *more* likely to want to help the hurting, to make a difference – not less. Anxiety and false guilt take up so much energy.

Retraining my brain was not an easy thing. I had to make a brave lifestyle shift that was, at the time, utterly traumatising. In the moment of walking away from a situation that

caused me years of suffering, which I tried to bear ‘dutifully’, something broke.

It was the hardest thing I ever did. I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t do anything, for the days following. Shock consumed me.

Then I emerged and I knew I was free. I could not go back to the situation that had caused me so much pain. If I hadn’t left when I did, I don’t know what would have happened inside me. Something profound would have had to shrivel and die. For the first time, I truly welcomed happiness and said no to the suffering I had endured for so long.

Suffering is a reality. But it is not the defining feature of life. The work of Mothers’ Union, calling people out of lives of abuse and suffering, emphasises the vision of wanting everyone to thrive. Surely, happiness is a part of this! Yes, we can grow through suffering, in strength and in wisdom. But I hold that knowledge in balance now.

I am kindest to others when I’m kind to myself. It’s no longer duty, but instinct. It turns out I am not a bad person to value happiness, nor am I called to put up with others’ harmful behaviour in order to ‘fulfil God’s will’. Happiness is no longer a bad word in my life. My happiness brims over. I’ve made friends with happiness, and I will never feel guilty for being happy again.



***I was breaking my own heart  
– on purpose***

***'Oh, it's absolutely hopeless!'***

wonder if you have ever uttered those words? Perhaps when trying something that keeps going wrong, or attempting to fix a thing that has broken, or when tempted to give up on a situation that is causing you to become exasperated.

That phrase could also sum up how we might be inclined to feel sometimes, looking at our wider world. We see so many horrific things happening: disasters, conflict and other terrible situations; the war in Gaza, which has had ripple effects around the world; the ongoing war in Ukraine; the climate catastrophe. In my own city of London, several young people have been killed recently, the victims of knife crime. These events and circumstances can leave us feeling helpless, even hopeless.

How do we cope with those feelings? How do we hold on to hope when it all seems so absolutely hopeless?

We tend to find different ways of coping. For some of us, it seems better to try and ignore it – not watch the news too much, to focus on happier things. *What's the point? We can't do anything anyway*, is the heartfelt cry. There will be others who want to engage as fully as they can, to read and learn everything there is to know about these situations.

They want to be informed and have an opinion. These people may find talking about these situations helpful, as it helps them process what is going on.

As Christians, we may fall into both camps. Each one of us might react in one way or the other at different times, and in connection with different issues. Both have resonances in the Bible. The Psalmist, for instance, expresses frustration with God at the way evil seems to

# HOLDING ONTO HOPE

Bishop Emma Ineson suggests ways to cope with our feelings as we observe the wider world



flourish in the world, whilst good people suffer: 'I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not plagued like other people' (Psalm 73:3-5), and yet also expresses absolute hope and trust in God who holds all things: 'Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand' (v.23).

Our response to the seemingly hopeless situations we see in our world will therefore be multi-faceted. It might involve reflecting

quietly, talking with others, getting clued up on the facts. It might also involve some kind of action. For example, in situations of war and disaster, we can make donations to organisations on the ground, who offer support, shelter, food and therapy to those most affected.

Although we certainly can't solve the problems of the world on our own, which can lead to feeling helpless and hopeless, there are things we can do. Even if things feel hopeless, they are not and we should not give up. There's a quote widely attributed to the church reformer, Martin Luther: 'If I knew that tomorrow was the end of the world, I would plant an apple tree today.' Certainly, when it comes to the environmental challenge, each of us doing our own small thing, whether

that's planting a tree or recycling our rubbish, can make a difference when added to the many small actions of others.

The other thing we can do is pray, and do so with hope. The one thing we do have as Christians is a sense of hope. Hope is different to mere optimism. It's different from simply putting on a smiley face and hoping everything will get better. Hope is something given to us by God, springing from a biblical perspective on the world and its woes – that God made this world, that God loves this world and its people, that one day God will return to make all things new. Until that day God weeps to see its suffering, and is with us in the pain. And when we understand that, we know that all is not hopeless, for we follow the God of Hope.

## A PRAYER

*'Teach us how to weep while we wait,  
and how to hope while we weep,  
and how to care while we hope.'*

*(Walter Brueggemann)*



# A HAVEN FOR HEALING

Sophia Jones shares her journey of finding joy in gardening through difficult times

I was diagnosed with invasive breast cancer in February 2019. My consultant told me that it had been caught early. However, what I wasn't expecting was the journey that followed – several surgeries, chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Because I was at home most of the time, healing, I would sit out on the terrace of my flat. I started venturing to the garden centre and adding to the small collection of flowerpots, plants and hanging baskets that already existed. By the summer of 2019, I had a flourishing beautiful haven where I would sit and read, pray, drink a cup

of tea and just enjoy.

I soon realised that, after each surgery, the terrace was where I spent my time. The plants and flowers were like a healing balm and I thank God that he laid it on my heart to turn this space into something so special. During the summer of 2019, we visited Kew Gardens. While my tiny terrace was nowhere near the grandeur of that wonderful place, it gave me ideas of the garden I would like to one day have. It came into its own during the COVID-19 pandemic. I was already at home most of the time and getting over many rounds of chemotherapy.

When the pandemic struck, I had to isolate. My terrace continued to be my special place throughout the summer of 2020.

I moved house last year and now have a front and back garden. I spent the summer redesigning both



gardens. My front garden includes strategically placed cordylines; I planted daffodil bulbs and summer flowers too, so there will be something to see all year round. I created flower beds in my back garden and painted the back fence blue. I've planted ferns, camellia, roses in memory of my late mum and aunt, and I have several pots too.

I also joined a gardening club nearby as well as a gardening Facebook group. Last summer I spent my days learning as much as I could from my fellow gardeners in the club. It has become my other haven. It is run by my local council for people with Special Educational Needs or mental health challenges.

I referred myself because I realised that the past few years had taken a toll on my mental health. Not in a major way, but I know that gardening literally calms my soul. When I am at the club and given the task of watering the vegetables or weeding or

planting potatoes, I spend time talking to God and thanking him for all he has done for me.

The benefits of gardening truly are amazing – being out in the sun, watching things grow from scratch and seeing their beauty. I've collected hundreds of marigold seeds and I'm looking forward to planting them. When I'm digging or watering or weeding, I also get a workout. Gardening is great exercise.

I'm looking forward to the spring and summer. I can't wait to get out in my garden and to return to the club. My dream is to create a tropical-looking garden and I am taking steps in that direction. It is a journey with lots of trials and errors along the way.

I wish I'd done all of this sooner! Better late than never. It doesn't matter how small your space is. I had a terrace to begin with and filled it with hanging baskets and pots. The reward is a stunning array of colourful, beautiful flowers. This spring I plan to plant some vegetables among the tropical plants and flowers. That's my next challenge.

**Sophia Jones is a former MU Communications Manager and is currently working at the Anglican Communion Office.**



## HATS FOR FARMERS

At the Canterbury provincial meeting at High Leigh in May 2023, Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Lichfield shared that they were knitting hats for farmers.

Members in the Diocese of Derby were inspired by this activity and decided to take up their knitting needles to help farmers in their rural communities. They have been energetically knitting hats for their Young Farmers' Clubs in aid of the Farming Community Network's (FCN) Wool and Wellness campaign. The hats are knitted using British wool.

The suicide rate for male farmers is three times the national average, with three people dying by suicide every week in the UK farming and agricultural industry. A FCN label, with their helpline number printed on, is sewn into the hat. This means the farmer always has the helpline number to hand if they ever need to talk to someone.

**Find out more about the campaign here: [fcn.org.uk/wool-and-wellness](https://fcn.org.uk/wool-and-wellness)**



# SECURING OUR FUTURE

**What's in store for Mothers' Union? Steph Nunn shares how you can help harness its potential**

We are pleased that much of the groundwork from the reimagining process on turning membership decline around and securing the future of this wonderful movement is showing signs of success. A big THANK YOU to members who have been involved in the Reimagining Steering Group and other groups and communities.

**Continuing to work together across Britain & Ireland, your new Membership Team's key objectives for 2024-2026 are:**

- Achieving your nine reimagining MU priorities.



- Membership growth, including recruiting new members and supporting existing ones! New ways to engage with MU, including the Supporter option and the Gifts of MU scheme, plus the new parish-based membership model that is currently being tested (these are in addition to

new member and clergy packs being developed and a review of all membership resources).

- Supporting our clergy better and building the 'bridge' between MU and the Anglican Church, so MU support and resources are available in more parishes in Britain & Ireland.
- RISE UP campaign on



## FOCUS ON FAITH

**Faith is at the heart of all we do within the Membership Team. One of the team is Ish Lennox, your Faith and Church Relations Manager.**

Ish comes to us having first had a career in the NHS. She then spent several years working on a variety of Christian initiatives including *More Than Gold*, the church's response to the 2012 Olympic Games and 2014

Commonwealth Games. More recently, she has been involved in the Church of England's *Setting God's People Free* initiative and *Thy Kingdom Come*.

'I believe God has a vision for our lives. Our personal challenge is to discern and fulfil God's vision in every new season of our lives. To do this, we must develop an expectation that we will hear from God. God has more invested in us discovering what we are created to accomplish than we do. However, God is also looking for a people who are paying close attention to what he has to say.

'I am reminded that God's vision for our lives may be you-shaped, but it will inevitably be God-sized. The opportunities for Mothers' Union currently are huge and I am excited about the privilege of working with members to develop faith, build church relations and share stories of what God has done.' **Ish Lennox**

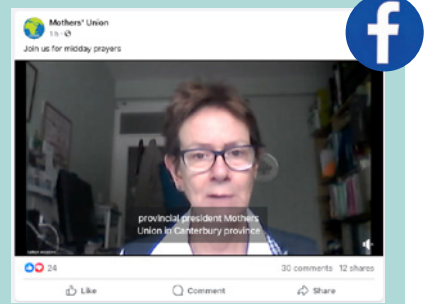


tackling domestic abuse evolving into a new national programme framework.

- New national programme frameworks to support your MU Community Outreach Work. Where agreed, policy and standards, resources and support will be packaged for use in all dioceses, helping volunteers and members doing the work on the ground to be supported and to help MU be as impactful as possible.
- Member Communities of Interest, where member representatives and diocesan chaplains from each diocese work with Mary Sumner House on key MU work. This includes membership initiatives and data; communications; community outreach work, including domestic abuse; prisons; AFIA; craft; and faith. These representatives then feedback to the diocese on key initiatives.

*If you are interested in becoming involved, please contact your diocesan president.*

## JOIN US IN PRAYER ONLINE



If you do not already join us for Midday Prayers via the MU Facebook page, you are very welcome!

**[facebook.com/MothersUnion](https://www.facebook.com/MothersUnion)**

If you'd like to take part in leading the prayers, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact us:

**[faith@mothersunion.org](mailto:faith@mothersunion.org)**

## GIFTS OF MU

Purchase a one-year Gift of Membership, Gift of Friendship or Gift of Supporter for your family and friends.

Share Mothers' Union as a special occasion gift and they will receive updates about the work we do and the impact we have. During their gift year, they will be contacted with information about how to join their local branch or become a diocesan member.

Go to the Join Us page on the main MU website ([mothersunion.org](https://mothersunion.org)). Making sure you are logged out of the website, select the Gifts of MU tab in the box.

You will be sent a gift card to give to the gift recipient, and they will be asked to register their gift. During their gift year, recipients of Membership and Friendship receive *Connected* magazines and the Prayer Diary, recipients of Supporter, receive a regular email on MU's work.

**All branches and dioceses are working on Membership Growth Plans – if you have not received the template from your MU diocese, please contact them.**

**You should also be receiving a monthly Member Update from Mary Sumner House via your diocese. If you are not receiving this, again, contact your MU diocese.**

**Lastly, you are encouraged to sign up to our regular email: by visiting [mothersunion.org](https://mothersunion.org) and scroll to the bottom of the homepage.**

# SOWING SEEDS OF RESILIENCE

Mothers' Union faces challenges and brings hope in Madagascar and Burundi

## MADAGASCAR



**Jocelyne Razafiarivony, MU's Provincial Community Development Coordinator for the Indian Ocean Province, based in Madagascar, talks about the resilience work she is leading.**

For 83% of the population in Madagascar, agriculture is the main source of household income. In 2016, Mothers' Union began a programme of building resilience across its communities, working towards changing mindsets and learning new cultivation techniques to develop livelihoods and enhance agricultural output.

### **Antsiranana and Fianarantsoa**

The Dioceses of Antsiranana and Fianarantsoa focused on helping clergy families who relied on church income that had dried up. They were given seeds and, as they didn't have large pieces of land, they were encouraged to use what they had, such as plastic bags and used tyres, to create their own vegetable patches around the church compounds.

### **Toamasina and Mahajanga**

The Dioceses of Toamasina and Mahajanga worked with their communities to clean channels, which take excess water off the roads and can be used to carry water to the fields further out of town. This allowed thousands

of households to benefit from a good harvest from over 700 hectares of rice fields.

### **Antananarivo**

Before the COVID-19 lockdowns, people in Antananarivo, the capital, relied on the local market and bought produce grown hundreds of kilometres away. The pandemic meant they had to start growing their own fruit and vegetables. The diocese set up *Zaamafi*, meaning 'I sow', which has been instrumental in changing people's attitudes towards growing their own food, as well as environmental preservation.

Previously, agriculture was thought to be only for rural areas, but now city households are becoming more resilient and self-reliant. They have developed a new source of income, as well as providing for their families' daily needs. Each participating household in the

project is encouraged to give a portion of the seeds they have grown to other families.

### **Toliara**

For the Diocese of Toliara and its ongoing drought situation, the challenge is much bigger. Communities have been encouraged to diversify their agricultural production, adding new crops to their staple of sweet potatoes, such as maize, cassava and peanuts. So far, the production and harvest have been good. MU members and their communities also use their local resources; in many areas, cactus is the only visible vegetation. MU members in Ambovombe parish make cactus fruit jam and send it to those in the Diocese of Antananarivo to sell to church members, connecting with and supporting each other to develop sustainable livelihoods. Profits are sent back to be reinvested.



## BURUNDI



**Claudette Kigeme, MU's Provincial Community Development Coordinator, shares details of the changes being seen through the newly added agricultural component – *Terintambwe* – to the long-running literacy programme**

The majority of people in Burundi (92%) also rely on subsistence agriculture. In 2022, Mothers' Union began to incorporate an agricultural focus into the Literacy & Financial Education programme in the Dioceses of Buhiga, Matana and Rutana. This initiative has been fully embraced by the recipient communities; they have renamed the programme *Terintambwe*, meaning 'one more step'. The aim is to help communities become more self-sufficient, enabling households to grow enough for their daily consumption and enough to sell to increase their family income, which can be put into savings groups. It has helped increase community collaboration and cohesion, as well as individual household emancipation.

### Matana

Before *Terintambwe*, in the Diocese of Matana, Kanka community was living in isolation from neighbouring communities. Most adults were illiterate and didn't value education, so none of their children attended school. They were not open to any kind of development, having refused

previously to participate in former programmes. However, since the introduction of *Terintambwe*, there have been some encouraging changes.

Regine Kwizera, their literacy facilitator, helped get them mobilised and learning well. Before, they lived in isolation. Now they participate in larger meetings alongside others. They engage in discussions related to socio-cultural constraints and are resolved to promote a community of gender equality. They send their children to school, irrespective of their gender, and work hard to find school fees for them. They have decided to plant soy beans together and plan to improve their harvest each year.

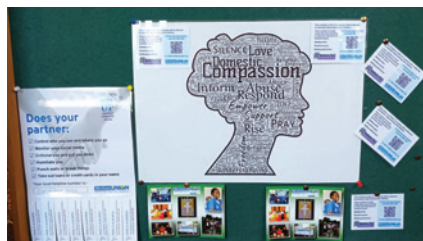
For whatever they learn collectively, each member goes back and applies all the agricultural learning in his/her family. Previously, there was no sense of hope, but now households have real potential for sustainable transformation.

The addition of agriculture training and knowledge to MU's initiatives has had a significant impact. In Madagascar, it has helped change mindsets, enabling urban households to start



growing their own produce. Communities have learned new cultivation techniques, developed sustainable livelihoods, enhanced agricultural output, and become more self-reliant. In Burundi, *Terintambwe* has mobilised and transformed previously isolated communities. Recipients have begun collaborating, sending their children to school, planting crops collectively, and applying the agricultural learning within their families. Overall, agriculture training has increased incomes, resilience, community cohesion, gender equality, and hope across households in both countries.

# PRACTISING CARE AND EMPATHY WITH OUR RISE UP CAMPAIGN



Mothers' Union's *RISE UP Against Domestic Abuse* campaign was launched at our Annual Gathering in September 2022. It was developed to raise awareness around domestic abuse and to give people the knowledge and skills to help support victims of domestic abuse with care and empathy.

It doesn't make us domestic abuse professionals, but it does teach us how to respond appropriately to a disclosure and ensure we know where to signpost a victim. We are

working to ensure that as many churches as possible have information about their local domestic abuse helpline.

We have been overjoyed and humbled by how Mothers' Union members have embraced the *RISE UP* campaign. Our members have distributed over 10,000 *RISE UP* posters across Britain and Ireland.

You can put up posters without taking part in the campaign, but if you would like to apply for the Bronze, Silver or Gold award, sign up to the campaign by sending your

name, contact details and the name of the church or branch you are registering to [RISEUP@mothersunion.org](mailto:RISEUP@mothersunion.org).

Once registered, please fill in the form found on the *RISE UP* page of our website: [mothersunion.org/RISEUP](https://mothersunion.org/RISEUP) then we can assess what level you have achieved and get your certificates on their way to you. Certificates will be sent out the week after Pentecost Sunday, 19 May. We hope that it will be a week of celebration for everyone involved.

We'd love members to progress to the next level. We already have some dioceses working towards their Gold award, which is very impressive!

**If you need any help in working towards the higher levels of the campaign, get in touch by emailing [RISEUP@mothersunion.org](mailto:RISEUP@mothersunion.org).**





To achieve a **Bronze award**, which is the foundation of the campaign, we are asking branches or churches to put up a RISE UP poster in a public place, pray for those affected by domestic abuse and to make a link with your local refuge organisation to see what help you can offer.

To achieve the **Silver award**, your branch or church should:

- 1 Host at least one annual speaker from other organisations to speak about domestic abuse, eg Restored or other regionally appropriate organisations.
- 2 Reach out to churches without an MU branch and actively promote MU and the RISE UP challenge, therefore developing new member opportunities.
- 3 If asked to do a talk to another group about RISE UP or domestic abuse, ask for collections to go towards our RISE UP work.
- 4 Use the healthy relationship study materials, such as the Bible Study on the Book of Ruth found on the RISE UP webpage.
- 5 Include information about abuse and helpful resources in church and branch communications.
- 6 Preach about equality and mutual respect in all forms of relationships, including equality in relationships in youth work and children's work as appropriate.
- 7 Attend or watch the Bystander webinar. This will help members to support someone who is being subjected to unwanted attention or inappropriate behaviour.

To achieve the **Gold award**, your branch or church should:

- 1 Organise events providing local people with an opportunity to engage with MPs and local leaders on domestic abuse issues.
- 2 Engage with vulnerable groups, for example, prisoners who have been affected by abuse.
- 3 Commit to pray for Mothers' Union's wider gender-based violence prevention and awareness work.
- 4 Appoint a champion to lead on domestic abuse work and join the Mothers' Union Domestic Abuse Community of Interest.

## RISE UP GLOBAL

MU recognizes that domestic violence is a global issue. Globally, our members are very active in speaking up and campaigning on this issue. MU groups around the world are interested in adapting *RISE UP* to further encourage churches to tackle stigma and to create safe spaces to inform, unite and respond well to domestic violence.

● Mothers' Union in Southern Africa is planning to introduce *RISE UP* in the *16 Days of Activism* campaign 2024, building on the *No More 1 in 3* and *We Will Not Be Silenced* campaigns.

● In Uganda, Mothers' Union is exploring using music, dance and drama competitions to engage households and churches in *RISE UP*. By working together, members see this as a way to raise awareness and increase their impact.

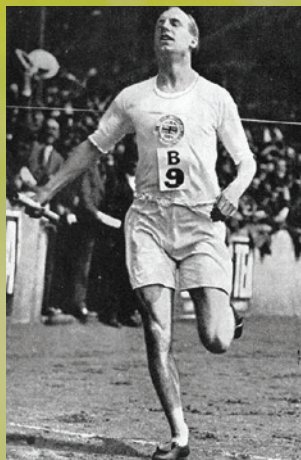
● In Papua New Guinea, Mothers' Union is looking at how churches can get involved all year round in *RISE UP*, to further motivate churches in positively responding and taking action against domestic violence. This follows a successful *16 Days of Activism* campaign in 2023, where they partnered with the church, young people, government departments and NGOs to raise awareness of gender-based violence.

To get inspiration about how to promote *RISE UP*, look at what dioceses around the world did during the *16 Days of Activism*: [mothersunion.org/news/members-around-world-take-part-our-no-more-1-3-campaign](https://mothersunion.org/news/members-around-world-take-part-our-no-more-1-3-campaign)

For more information, please visit: [mothersunion.org/RISEUP](https://mothersunion.org/RISEUP)



# SPORT: AN OPPORTUNITY



In 1924, it was not common for Christians to take part in sport on a Sunday. When Eric found out that was the day of the heats for his race, he refused to take part. A fellow athlete, who admired Liddell's stance, offered him the opportunity to take his

**'When I run, I feel His pleasure.'** This is one of the more memorable lines from the Oscar-winning movie *Chariots of Fire*. The film tells the story of some of the more famous British athletes who took part in the 1924 Paris Olympics. **The line was attributed to Eric Liddell, a Christian Olympian.**

place in a different race, a race in which Liddell went on to win the gold medal.

A hundred years on and Paris will once again host this summer's Olympic games. Since that time, our Christian views on sport have evolved. We now understand our engagement with sport has not only a health benefit, but is also a tool for discipleship and mission. Maybe it can also support Christian family life. Many of us lament that there

are fewer children involved in Sunday morning church, as that is often the time when sports practice takes place. I wonder if we can turn that lament into celebration and give thanks that our children have the opportunity to learn team skills, at the same time as increasing their physical and mental wellbeing.

We can, as Christians, celebrate Paris 2024 for giving us all an opportunity to demonstrate that faith and



sport are not incompatible. Indeed, these games can give us a fresh way to engage with children and young people.

Sport is an untapped resource for mission across all ages. In the UK, approximately 41% of male adults and roughly 32% of female adults participate in sports on a weekly basis. Roughly a third of the population enjoys water sport at least once a year, and swimming as well as football are the most popular sports among children and adolescents in England. The average unchurched person is not likely to come and check out your church on a Sunday morning. As that truth becomes more and more of a reality, the chances of meeting people who do not know Jesus on a sports field is not only a fact but also a great opportunity.

The mission field of sport gives us room to open our mouths and share the hope of Jesus. It also paves a way for us to put our faith into action.

As people watch us and our children approach sporting activities with a Christ-centred mentality, it puts flesh on the message of the Gospel. We can embody and enact our faith on the sports field. We can love and serve our opponents. We can bless the officials and referees. We can model viewing the wins and losses not as a measure of our value but as a motivation to strive after excellence. Acting thus, those we are sharing the field with will not just hear our words, they will also see our faith and love of Christ lived out.

#### Get involved in the conversation

You may be wondering how to make the most of the mission and discipleship opportunities of the Paris 2024 Olympic games. Some of you may remember how the UK church got involved in the 2012 games by screening the Opening Ceremony or hosting a curry and a quiz event. Christians in Sport

have produced a fantastic sports quiz that you can use to help you celebrate Paris 2024. This quiz gives you the opportunity to invite the different sports groups within your community to come together under your church's roof for a fun event. Do have a look at their website: [christiansinsport.org.uk/churches/quiz](https://christiansinsport.org.uk/churches/quiz)

Alternatively, you may want to invite your community to a screening of Chariots of Fire followed by coffee, cake and a chat. The movie and the hospitality are great bridges to help people talk about faith.

Whatever you do, get involved in the conversation. Sport and faith are not mutually exclusive. Sport can be the bridge that brings someone to Christ.





# MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

How we use and access money is changing, observes Stephanie Mooney

**T**he last bank on my high street recently closed. If I need to pay for parking in Brighton, where I live, I can no longer use coins; I have to pay using an app on my smartphone. A growing list of restaurants have become card only.

We have become a more 'cashless' society, a trend further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people may prefer this approach, feeling safer carrying less cash, finding it more convenient and valuing not having to carry a bulky

wallet or purse! But does cash still have its place?

In the UK in 2022, there were still 6.4 billion payments made using cash. This is a 7% increase from the previous year, partly due to people attempting to manage limited budgets during the cost of living crisis. Around 40% of us use cash to buy something at least once per week. A UK Finance survey indicated that 16 to 24 year olds still use cash as regularly as those aged between 44 and 54. My mum, in her 80s, prefers using cash where possible. Learning about the different coins

and notes is still taught as part of maths and numeracy education in primary schools.

We have to think about financial inclusion. With the closure of banks, it can be particularly difficult for people living in rural areas to access cash when they need it. Some vulnerable people, including my own mother, would be lost without being able to use cash. Many people are isolated and have to make difficult choices about how and where they spend their money.

In light of this, access to a bank account is a critical

## “ We have to think about financial inclusion

issue. It's not easy for some people to get a bank account if they don't meet requirements such as regular employment, a fixed home address, a minimum income or an acceptable credit rating. Fees and charges related to having a bank account also limit choices for people on a low income.

### **Mothers' Union is committed to and passionate about addressing issues of financial exclusion worldwide.**

Kingdom Savings is a key programmatic strand that runs faith-based savings programmes, and MU has done this in different forms for over 30 years. Our approach works and transforms lives. It enables people to access finance that seemed out of reach, allowing them to build livelihoods for themselves and their families.

As you can see on page 38, our 2023 Christmas Appeal was focused on extending a savings and skills training project in Tanzania. In the project evaluation, 76% of those participating reported being able to meet their household needs consistently and 75% have improved their homes. All groups are using a portion of their resources (financial, social, spiritual) to assist the marginalised and vulnerable in the community.

As part of the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Agricultural and Literacy programme, savings and income generation is also

included. Money in the DRC, and many other countries, can be sent and stored through a phone SIM card. When money is available, it is given out by offering loans to group members who are supported by a guarantor. Mothers' Union is innovative in supporting people to access money in an accountable way, when there are no available banks and where instability makes it difficult to keep a cashbox – or if people need to leave their homes at a moment's notice.

In a world leaning towards a cashless society, the work of Mothers' Union is vital in helping those people at risk of being left behind.



# GIFT SHOP

We are excited to share with you some of the cards and gifts from our Spring/Summer 2024 gift guide. You'll find plenty of new gift ideas to bring joy to a friend or loved one, with the knowledge that your shopping will help support our work helping the world's hardest-to-reach communities to transform their lives, ending violence, ending poverty, ending injustice. Our vision is of a future where everyone can thrive.

## DAISY COO HIGHLAND COW



### DAISY COO CANVAS BAG

Thick canvas durable material with colourful lining. Size: 420mm x 400mm x 100mm.  
**WD2419 £20.00**

### DAISY COO MAGNETIC SHOPPING PAD

Illustrated lined pages for notes and lists, with a handy magnet on the back.

Size: 210mm x 99mm.

**WD2421 £5.00**



## HOW TO ORDER

Online: [www.mueshop.org](http://www.mueshop.org)

Email: [enterprises@mothersunion.org](mailto:enterprises@mothersunion.org)

Phone: 020 7222 5533 (option 2)

Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4pm.

Post: Order form and postage details on page 32.

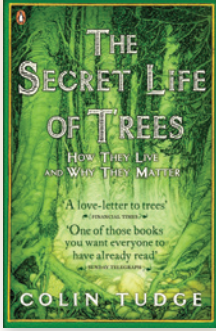
Your purchase makes a difference.  
100% of the profits support our work stopping violence, stopping poverty, stopping injustice.



### DAISY COO WOMEN'S SOCKS

Supersoft bamboo material. One size (women's 4-7). Comes with gift bag.  
**WD2418 £7.60**

# IN THE GARDEN



## SECRET LIFE OF TREES

*The Secret Life of Trees: How they Live and Why they Matter*, explores the hidden role of trees in our everyday lives and how our future survival depends on them. Paperback, 464 pages. **PH2401 £12.99**



## GARDEN BIRDS JIGSAW

This Garden Birds 1000 piece premium jigsaw puzzle features over 100 beautiful detailed illustrations. Hours of fun, packed in a wonderful plastic free box. Size: 680mm x 480mm. **WD2405 £25.00**



## TREE TOPS BIRD SOAP

This beautifully wrapped Tree Tops Bird Soap bar is fragranced with note of white jasmine and sandalwood. 190g bar of soap **WD2402 £6.00**



## COTTAGE GARDEN SOAP

This beautifully wrapped Cottage Garden Soap bar is fragranced with notes of rose and lily of the valley. 190g bar of soap **WD2401 £6.00**



## GARDEN SHED MEN'S SOCKS

Garden inspired design on supersoft bamboo material. One size (men's 7-11) **ST2401 £8.00**

## THE GARDEN JUNGLE

A wonderful introduction to the hundreds of small creatures with whom we live cheek-by-jowl and of the myriad of ways that we can encourage them to thrive. For anyone who has a garden, and cares about our planet, this book is essential reading. Paperback, 288 pages. **PH2402 £9.99**



# BIRTHDAY CARDS



## SUMMER MEADOW WITH COTTAGE

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.

Greeting: *Happy Birthday.*  
**CC2309 £5.30**



## MEADOW WITH POPPIES AND FOXGLOVES

141mm x 141mm.

Pack of 5 Cards. Greeting:  
*Enjoy your special day.*  
**CC2401 £5.30**



## DAISIES & BEE

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.

Greeting: *Happy Birthday.*  
**CC2402 £5.30**



## BIG FLOWERS

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.

Greeting: *Happy Birthday.*  
**CC2408 £5.30**



## AFTERNOON TEA

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.

Greeting: *Happy Birthday.*  
**CC2409 £5.30**



## MEADOW BEEHIVE

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.

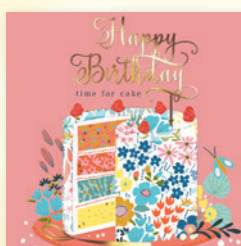
Greeting: *Have a wonderful day.*  
**CC2410 £5.30**



## TEA CUP BLOOMS

Luxury card pack with gold foil finish.  
141mm x 141mm. Pack of 5 Cards.

Greeting: *Happy Birthday.*  
**CC2404 £6.30**



## CAKE BLOOMS

Luxury card pack with gold foil finish.  
141mm x 141mm. Pack of 5 Cards.

Greeting: *Happy Birthday.*  
**CC2405 £6.30**



## MAGICAL WILDFLOWERS

Luxury card pack with gold foil finish.  
141mm x 141mm. Pack of 5 Cards.

Greeting: *Enjoy your day.*  
**CC2406 £6.30**



# SYMPATHY CARDS



## WILDFLOWER BUNCH

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.  
**Greeting:** *Thinking of you at this difficult time.*  
**CC2454 £5.30**



## FLORAL PEONY

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.  
**Greeting:** *Thinking of you at this difficult time.*  
**CC2455 £5.30**



## BLUE MEADOW WITH BUTTERFLIES

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.  
**Greeting:** *Thinking of you at this difficult time.*  
**CC2451 £5.30**



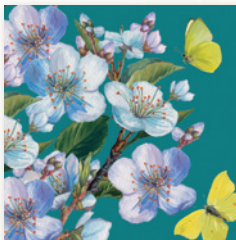
## LILY OF THE VALLEY

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.  
**Greeting:** *With deepest sympathy*  
**CC2452 £5.30**



## BLUE TIT SYMPATHY

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.  
**Greeting:** *Thinking of you at this difficult time.*  
**CC2253 £5.30**



## MODA BLOSSOM

141mm x 141mm.  
Pack of 5 Cards.  
**Greeting:** *Thinking of you at this time.*  
**CC2354 £5.30**

## MINI PACKS



**THANK YOU FLOWERS**  
100mm x 100mm.  
5 blank cards.  
**CM2301 £3.50**



**FLOWER FIELD  
THANK YOU**  
100mm x 100mm.  
5 blank cards.  
**CM2306 £3.50**



**LAVENDER JUST  
A NOTE**  
Luxury card pack  
with g100mm x 100mm.  
5 blank cards.  
**CM2307 £3.50**

## CONNECTED ORDER FORM

### ORDER BY POST - PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR EMAIL OR TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH THIS FORM

Detach completed order form below, and return with payment to:

MU Enterprises Ltd, Sales Office, Mary Sumner House, 24 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3RB.

If you would like to speak to a member of our sales team, please call 020 7222 5533 (option 2).

Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4pm.

| CODE | QTY | DESCRIPTION | PRICE | TOTAL PRICE |
|------|-----|-------------|-------|-------------|
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |
|      |     |             |       |             |

Please continue on a blank sheet of paper if there is not enough space to complete your order

- £3.95 standard delivery charge for all orders under £60 – applicable to UK and Ireland.  
 Free delivery for all orders of £60 or over – applicable to UK and Ireland.

#### PERSONAL DETAILS

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

POSTCODE \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Please include the name of your diocese below (optional)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Total order value

£

Postage cost

£

I would like to give a donation to support the work of Mothers' Union

£

Or please round up my total as a donation

£

Grand total

£

#### PAYMENT DETAILS

BY CARD

Secure payment accepted via Visa, Mastercard and Maestro

NAME ON CARD  
\_\_\_\_\_

CARD NO.

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|

EXPIRY DATE

SECURITY CODE

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

SIGNATURE  
\_\_\_\_\_

BY CHEQUE I enclose a cheque made payable to

MU Enterprises Ltd to the value of £

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR EMAIL OR TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH THIS FORM

# MOTHERS' UNION GIFTS



**MOTHERS' UNION  
NOTECARDS**

125mm x 125mm.  
5 blank cards.  
**MUC01 £4.50**



**LOGO CROSS  
PIN BADGE**

Gilt and enamel.  
30mm x 40mm  
**JM04 £3.90**



**MOTHERS' UNION  
PRAYER CARD**

With Mothers' Union  
Prayer on reverse.  
Credit card size. 40%  
recycled plastic.  
**PC04 £1.30**



**LOGO KEYRING**

Gilt plated.  
45mm diameter.  
**JM10 £4.80**



**LOGO FRIDGE  
MAGNET**

Gilt plated.  
44mm diameter.  
**JM11 £4.80**



**UNITED IN PRAYER  
& WORSHIP**

Mothers' Union  
service book.  
Paperback, 76 pages.  
**MU006 £3.00**



**MOTHERS' UNION  
BALL PEN**

Featuring the  
Mothers' Union logo.  
Black ink.  
**LM100 £1.20**

For more information on any of these items, look online at [mueshop.org](http://mueshop.org) or call our sales office.

# CHANGING THE STORY OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN IRELAND

Jacqui Armstrong is Diocesan President of Derry & Raphoe and has led the All-Ireland MU response to domestic abuse and gender-based violence since 2014. She tells us about recent conferences calling for a Christian response.

‘I am not weak. I am not useless. I am not worthless. I am strong. I am capable and I am valued. I am a survivor.’ With these compelling words, Lesley Bayley brought home the reality of domestic abuse. Here, the excellent theoretical and practical information expressed at the All-Ireland ‘Changing the Story’ conferences in 2023 was brought sharply into focus and, as Lesley spoke to her captivated audience, you could hear a pin drop.

The impact of COVID highlighted the plight of women locked in their homes with their abuser. The need to understand, to highlight and to signpost took on new significance. During this period, Ireland forged stronger partnerships with domestic abuse services, created a gender justice programme in collaboration with Bishops’ Appeal and Tearfund Ireland and, with Restored, edited an Irish edition of *A Guide for*

*Churches to Address Domestic Abuse*. Survivors spoke of the long-term effects of trauma on emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. This led to training with Kintsugi Hope and the creation of ‘Changing The Story’ wellbeing groups.

In September, to celebrate these initiatives and highlight the issue of domestic abuse, ‘Changing the Story’ conferences took place in both the Gathering Grounds at Kiltarnan Parish in Dublin and in Seagoe Parish in Portadown.

## **The Bible doesn’t tell me so... speak up!**

The keynote sessions were fascinating and brilliantly led by Bekah Legg of Restored and Rev Dr Helen Paynter, biblical scholar and author of *The Bible doesn’t tell me so*. Exploring the biblical context, they encouraged delegates to uphold God’s plan for relationships between men and women, to answer God’s call to seek justice and to defend

the oppressed. Sessions were so engaging that one delegate wished she ‘could bottle their message and have it shared in every church in Ireland’.

## **Equipping the Church to take Action and End Domestic Abuse programme**

Having undertaken the programme, Revs Graham Hare and William Stacey shared how their parish teams feel better equipped to speak about domestic abuse and to signpost people in the right direction. They actively raise awareness in their churches and community and have connected with local women’s refuges and relevant local services.





Archbishops John McDowell and Michael Jackson pledged their support and encouraged as many people as possible, particularly men, to undertake the programme and bring the issue to the forefront of their parishes.

‘People who experience domestic abuse know that it is insidious, engenders fear, is disruptive of life, menacing, undermines security, and destroys confidence and self-esteem,’ said Rev Mike Buchanan, a Deacon Intern and retired Garda (Irish police).

Chair of the Church of Ireland’s Mind Matters programme, Bishop Pat Storey, agreed that the Church should

be entirely visible and vocal in supporting the MU campaign. Mind Matters research into mental health is encouraging in that it has found people do appreciate support from their faith and their church community.

Bishop George Davison reflected on the message of Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing groups: ‘We are all broken and therein lies beauty. Out of brokenness good can come. We are called to be communities of love for all our children, communities of hope.’

## RISE UP!

Emily Brailsford, Mothers’ Union Domestic Abuse Manager, expertly guided delegates through the Rise Up Against Domestic Abuse campaign. Branches and parishes were motivated to take on the challenge in coming months. More details on pages 22 and 23.

Colette Stewart, Onus Chief Executive, detailed Safe Place and Safe Church training. A number of parishes currently engage with this programme. Joy Silcock spoke of her parish’s experience of becoming a Safe Church and encouraged parishes to get involved.

Karen Devlin, Women’s Aid NI and Mary McDermott, Safe Ireland, affirmed that conferences like ‘Changing the Story’ are a gift beyond measure in bringing the

message to the wider community.

In describing domestic abuse as a social responsibility, Detective Superintendent Lindsay Fisher noted that the Police Service Northern Ireland are contacted every 16 minutes in relation to domestic abuse.

## Moving forward to change the story

‘Our Christian responses to domestic abuse and gender-based violence need to be joyfully and wonderfully embedded in our ministry, to become an intrinsic part of our culture and in the life and culture of our church,’ said Bishop Andrew Forster, in his closing remarks. ‘We need to listen, believe the victim and respond appropriately.’

Bishop Andrew thanked Mothers’ Union for being the heartbeat in parishes and, also, the stone in the shoe – making people uncomfortable and making them think. ‘It calls us back to our Christian calling and our need to do something – to speak up, speak out and respond. This involves men and women working together for the betterment of our society.’

Many seeds were sown. We pray that, in time, all people will come to know that ‘in their culture, in their community and in their church that they matter, that they deserve to be safe, valued, empowered, and equipped’ (Rev Graham Hare).



# LOOK

Lucy Hannah reflects on the complex implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

# BOTH WAYS

When someone says 'AI', we may feel fascination, disinterest, confusion or alarm. A number of science fiction films may spring to mind.

What is AI? Someone I spoke to immediately thought of the 'robotic voice' she had to deal with to get through to her doctor's surgery. However, these are normally just automated computer systems with pre-programmed responses. True Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the concept of computer systems performing tasks associated with human intelligence and decision-making abilities – listening, recognising patterns and learning from experience. However much you repeat yourself to the automated system at the surgery, it won't teach it anything!

One type of AI is 'generative AI'. This generates content for us. 'ChatGPT' is an example. This 'chatbot' will answer questions and create pieces of writing at your request. I asked ChatGPT to write a poem; I was startled at the excellent quality of the result. You can ask it to write outlines of articles or

books, proofread and edit your own existing writing.

Some AI platforms create pictures, videos and audio (based on human instructions, known as 'prompts'). Some are obviously AI – a hand is on a foot! – but others are indistinguishable from human-created art. There's a reason for that – AI learns from pre-existing human-made content. It doesn't work in a vacuum. It's being pointed out that taking elements from pre-existing work without permission is actually breaching copyright.

As an artist, editor and writer, I see this from a variety of angles. It was surreal to find AI performing all my roles in different ways, highlighting the dangers; yet, as I discussed this with other creatives, I learned it could be a useful tool – for example, a visual artist struggling with words found it helpful to compose text for their artist statement.

Authors can generate a cover image for their self-published book, playing with the idea they had in mind. As an author, I see the appeal of this. As an artist, I see this means fewer commissions for original art and reproduction

of artists' work. People want to save money, which, with the cost of living, is an understandable factor in decision making. But what then happens to artists who rely on reproductions of their work to pay their bills?

It can help one person greatly, but in doing so can take another out of the equation. This has been a reality since the industrial revolution, with machinery taking on manual labour – but now it's moving into the creative sphere.

How do we know what is human or machine, does it matter and when does it matter?

## Questions of integrity

This leads us to the world of the 'deepfake', an AI depiction of someone saying what they never said, or doing things they never did. Forget the old days of photoshopping pictures; these 'deepfakes' can be incredibly sophisticated. They are often used for pure silliness on social media platforms. A celebrity singing a stupid song seems fairly harmless, though it can be much worse, leading to libellous, hurtful pranks.

In a world of propaganda and electioneering, opponents can be made to appear to say anything. A misquote usually gets far more views than its correction; even if someone discovers the deepfakery, the damage has been done. More troublesome still, what if you can't prove something is fake – and what if you can't prove if it's real?

The risk is not just that people will fall for the false but that they will cease perceiving anything as truth.

There are tools that can analyse, assess and regulate content, but they need development themselves. It's no easy task. Human ingenuity is needed to work through this – but also integrity. Unfortunately, integrity is not always on the agenda. How do we safeguard the truth?

### How do we even begin to think about this?

How do we use AI-generated content? Do we declare that we have used it? Do we take everything we see and hear at face value? All tools should be used carefully and with discernment. Let's remember check our facts and examine our sources.

We're in that messy era of relative 'newness'. It can be tempting to ignore all this because we find it too alarming, but I'm not sure it's in our best interest to close our eyes. We train children to look



**TERMINOLOGY**  
The world of AI has its own language. This is a tiny sample!

#### Algorithm

Instruction that AI uses in order to carry out the tasks required, though not itself AI.

#### Chatbot

An application that simulates human conversation, usually in the form of a text chat.

#### Deepfake

A piece of media created by AI to misrepresent reality.

#### Generative AI

AI systems that generate text, images, video, audio, or other media from prompts.

#### Machine learning (ML)

A subset of AI, machine learning uses algorithms and data to learn and improve programme responses. This is utilised by virtual assistant programmes e.g. Alex and Siri.

both ways because cars are on the road, regardless of whether we drive them. We get them to develop their senses to be aware of the dangers; we don't ask them not to look .

It all still lies with humanity – how do we decide to use a tool, how do we regulate it? Do we use it with integrity or deception, to help or to harm?

AI can do an enormous amount of good. In medicine, for example, AI is able to recognise very subtle patterns, which can mean cancers and other illnesses are detected and diagnosed earlier. Wearable devices monitor patients' health, so doctors can get a clearer picture of what's

going on, as well as remind patients what they need to take or do in order to manage their conditions. The use of AI to assist surgeries means more precision, allowing surgeons to give their patients the best chance of successful treatment. There's a huge, life-saving potential here, and it's important not to lose sight of this.

There are more questions than answers at the moment, but let's not close our eyes. Let's not be ruled by fear or paranoia. We are called not to dismiss but to discern. We need to look both ways. We need to be able to cross that road.

# A GIFT FOR LIFE

A huge thank you to everyone who supported our 2023 Christmas appeal. You really did give a gift for life! Not only did we hit our online fundraising target, in which every donation was doubled, we went even further and

raised just over £110,000 towards our savings and skills work in Tanzania.

Thanks to your prayers and donations, hundreds of women across Tanzania are going to have access to the training and tools they need to build a

secure economic future for themselves and their families. Projects like these have impacts far beyond the initial training. Increased household incomes will see improved nutrition, healthcare, housing and access to education.

## MARY'S STORY

Being a single mother with three children, Mary\* was very aware of the responsibility she had to feed, protect and enrich the lives of her children. Unexpectedly, that responsibility doubled when Flora\*, a close friend of Mary's, died. Flora also had three children and there was no one else to care for them. Mary's family grew from three to six overnight.

Around the same time, Mary heard of the Mothers' Union's savings and skills project that was linked to her church. She started saving and was empowered by the business skills and marketing training. She has not looked back since. Using her knowledge of the village, Mary started a small business that was a bit different to the ones most others were starting. She took out a loan and started an ice lolly business! She did this firstly on foot but, as the business grew, she was able to purchase a bike. This meant she could venture to surrounding villages.

Mary's business not only gives her the income she needs to protect her family, it also allows her to visit and engage with local villages, where she shares the story



of her Mothers' Union savings group. She is always being asked by others if they can join.

Last year's Christmas appeal was essential, because even more women are ready and waiting to be given the opportunity to transform their own lives. It is thanks to your donations that these women are now able to build stronger, more resilient families and communities that are better equipped to overcome the challenges they face.

**Thank you for giving a gift of life – it really will last a lifetime.**

*\*Names may be changed to protect identities*



# LACE UP YOUR SHOES

**Daniel Jarvis, Mothers' Union's Senior Database Officer and passionate Camino YouTuber, talks about the boundless benefits of pilgrimage**

A pilgrimage can be unique to each and every one of us, but what does it mean to you?

Whether you're marching 500 miles along the sacred Camino De Santiago in Spain, wandering through the serenity of nature, or making a pilgrimage to your favourite football ground, the joy and positive mental health benefits of a pilgrimage are boundless.

The Camino De Santiago, with its medieval charm and spiritual significance, beckons pilgrims from far and wide. As you traverse quaint villages and lush landscapes, there's a palpable sense of connection – not only with the earth beneath your feet but with the countless pilgrims who have toiled on this pilgrimage route before you.

If the thought of walking a 500-mile journey on foot feels a tad daunting, fear not. A pilgrimage can be as simple as a stroll to a place of significance to you, be that nature, a shrine or even the hallowed turf of a football ground. The key is to find what resonates with you personally and let the journey unfold.

For some, the gentle crunch underfoot of leaves in a forest is perfect backdrop for introspection and mental reset. Getting lost in nature sets the stage for self-discovery and regeneration. Time out is time well spent.

Then there are those who find solace and spiritual fulfilment in watching sport with others. A pilgrimage to witness your favourite team in action is not just about the game; it's a communal celebration of camaraderie, shared triumphs and the occasional heartbreak. The rhythmic chants of the crowd become a hymn, echoing the collective heartbeat of devoted fans.

Whatever the chosen path, the mental health benefits of a pilgrimage are as plentiful as the



“ *a pilgrimage can be as simple as a stroll* ”

routes themselves. The sheer act of putting one foot in front of the other becomes a meditative act, a therapeutic ritual for the mind. The endorphin release from physical exertion intertwines with the euphoria of reaching milestones – both literal and metaphorical.

In the grand tapestry of life, a pilgrimage is a thread that adds depth, colour and joy. So, whether you find bliss in the echoes of a thousand dusty footsteps on Camino, the rustling leaves of a serene forest, or the roar of a stadium, lace up your shoes, embark on your journey and embrace the benefits a pilgrimage will bring.



# 'OUR DEAR COUNTRY'

## Mothers' Union's Literacy & Agriculture Programme offers hope through insecurity in DRC

**D**emocratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been plagued by conflict for over 30 years. The largest country of sub-Saharan Africa, it has a wealth of natural resources, including minerals and fertile lands. However, the ongoing political, economic and societal insecurity has resulted in it becoming one of the poorest countries in the world – ranking 179 out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index.

This insecurity affects women and children the most, according to Mama Damalie Sabiti, the first MU Provincial Development Coordinator, now wife to Bishop Sabiti, and MU Diocesan President in the Diocese of Kamango. 'Churches and other local initiatives cannot develop, because of the lack of funds and earning potential,' she explains. 'People are not able to give their offerings to the church as there is not enough money to survive on, even for family life. This

is the daily situation and the history of our dear country.'

These conditions are exacerbated by the low levels of literacy and numeracy of rural Congolese women. With this as the backdrop, Mothers' Union DRC developed the Literacy & Agriculture Programme, which became the Big Give Appeal in December 2020. It raised enough funds to start the programme in four dioceses in DRC – Beni, Butembo, Kamango and Kindu.

Over the past two years, the continuing insecurity greatly disrupted half of the 48 literacy circles, with many becoming displaced for some time. However, the programme has given them hope in these very challenging times. A number of the group members report that the programme changed their mindset and has given them life-saving skills in their hour of need. Through this new learning, they now know much more about agriculture and nutrition. Now, if they have

to flee their homes, they take their seeds and plant as soon as they have found a safe place to stay until they can return. In Congo's fertile soil, they can harvest lenga-lenga in a couple of weeks, a nutrient rich local spinach used to supplement their staple foods of cassava, rice and maize.

'During the war, we were scattered to Uganda,' says David\*, secretary of his savings group in Nobili. 'When we came back, we started again. All of us wanted to continue learning. The name of the group Tuwe Na Nia Moja means "of one mind". This literacy will help us all in the future.'

The shadow of insecurity is not dimming the light shining into these communities through this MU programme, bringing hope, new skills and ideas for their futures.

Money raised through our 2020 Christmas Appeal funded this project. Special thanks to the Bishop's Harvest Appeal in Carlisle for supporting this project for four years.

*\*name changed to protect identity*

# VITALITY THROUGH PRAYER

**Thank you to all members from everyone at Mary Sumner House for completing and submitting your MU Live reports. Here is story from Eswatini :**

**D**uring 2023 we heard from the Mothers' Union in Eswatini, Southern Africa, regarding work they have been doing to strengthen their prayer life. It started as an initiative led by their Mothers' Union chaplain. The idea was to have time every quarter to dedicate to praying for an entire day and night. This led to some amazing results.

The initiative started just before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and began to help people in the community living in isolation feel as though they were contributing. As time went on, it became clear that, by prayer, people involved are growing in their faith. They have realised the importance of being together, virtually or in person, to pray. By opening this initiative up to all parts of the community, it has shown that Mothers' Union and the church are places of welcome, raising the profile of Mothers' Union.

Eswatini is currently going through a very challenging time, politically, economically and socially. This growing initiative is enabling Mothers' Union to provide safe spaces for those that need it. It's a place where Christians can grow in spirit and in number. The participating members are aiming to involve more members and more people from the community, hoping that participants will then be able to share their experiences with others and revitalise their wider prayer life.



## **Other initiatives started by our members:**

- In Accra, Ghana, members visiting a children's hospital ward spent time singing hymns and praying with the children.
- In the Diocese of Ankole, Uganda, members have helped with prayers on the Revival radio programme, designed to help women pray for their families.
- In Australia, for MU's Global Day of Action, members held a prayer service after a peaceful protest against gender-based violence.
- In Canada, an online Mothers' Union group for lone members was formed in June 2022. This group aims to reconnect lone members and provides a place to share and pray.

Reflect on how important prayer is to you. How you might be able to use it to grow and strengthen Mothers' Union in your diocese?

**MU Live** is a website where provinces and dioceses can upload details of what they are doing, from small acts of change to projects and case studies. We use these to celebrate our work as a global movement. If you have any questions speak to your diocesan president.

During Holy Week (25 to 29 March) we will be hosting prayers at 6pm on our Facebook page



# THY KINGDOM COME

9 - 19 May 2024

This is an annual invitation and encouragement to Christians and churches to seek the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that we might live out and share the Kingdom of God.

At the heart of Thy Kingdom Come is our focus to 'pray for five'. It is an invitation to bring five people before God, family, friends, neighbours or colleagues, who are not yet following the Lord Jesus.

Mothers' Union is asking members to **'pray for five, invite one.'** As well as encouraging us to pray, we are using this as an opportunity to invite one individual each to a Mothers' Union event.

For more information please visit:  
[mothersunion.org/ThyKingdomCome](https://mothersunion.org/ThyKingdomCome)