

FOCUS

... on the future



Workshop at one of our Spring Meetings.

Summer 2019

AUTUMN MEETING AND AGM

Thursday 10 October

Benson Village Hall, OX10 6LZ

**10:30 am start,
coffee available from 10:00 am**

Speaker:

**Ursula Kopp from Mary Sumner House
on "Modern Slavery"**

**Please bring your Christmas cards for the
prisoners at Bullingdon prison.**

The message written under the printed greeting
should be:

With best wishes from a member
of Mothers' Union in Oxford Diocese

Please do not seal the envelope or
write anything else.

Please choose appropriate cards,
either religious or secular.

Thank you for making a difference to the
lives of the prisoners this Christmas.

The cards are much appreciated.

From our Diocesan President

Dear Friends

It seems a long time ago since the Lady Day Service when Bishop Andrew commissioned the Trustee Board and me as your new Diocesan President. We had a lovely sunny day and everyone really enjoyed being together for the service, seeing the banners and the delicious refreshments afterwards.



Since then we have had three Spring Meetings, in Milton Keynes, Cowley and Reading, where people had the opportunity to meet and contemplate our theme – “Mothers’ Union listens, observes, acts – in step with God”. We also shared in a wide variety of workshops. Three very different people have given their responses to the meetings (see pages 6–8). Many ideas were suggested at the Spring Meetings but more Quiet Days and Craft Days seem to be the most popular.

One sad piece of news is that the Balsam Family Project is closing at the end of June after 10 years ably led by Alex Walker. We have decided to honour our commitment to them by providing AFIA holidays and also lots of socks, tights and shoe vouchers. (see page 9)

Many of you will have read the article in *Families First* about Modern Slavery (pages 8–11). It was written by Ursula Kopp and she has kindly agreed to be our guest speaker at our Autumn Meeting and AGM in October.

A small team of Trustees has been working on revising the Oxford Diocese MU Constitution this year, which we hope to present at the Autumn Meeting.

Following the major changes in the Central MU Constitution the Central Units have been disbanded and have been organised into “Communities of Interest”. After some consideration, the Oxford MU Trustees have appointed individuals to each of the communities of interest but have regrouped them into the existing Units now named as: Finance and Administration, Prayer & Spirituality, Action & Outreach and Fundraising & Communication. This means that we will receive information about the different communities of interest from Mary Sumner House but we will process it through our own Units.

It has been suggested that we hold a competition for best branch programme. Please send your new programmes to the MU Office, the deadline is 31 December. Each branch programme received in the MU Office will be judged for both content and presentation. A prize will be awarded for both aspects. Your branch may win a prize!

As we face the future with so many opportunities to serve God, I am reminded of the time when Jesus' family, his mother and brothers, came looking for him and Jesus' reply was "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." (Luke 8:19-21) Let us encourage one another to do this.

With love and prayers
Maureen

From our diocesan chaplain

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter, the Church has just celebrated the amazing feast of Pentecost, which I often refer to as the Birthday of the Church, for the coming of God's Holy Spirit was what the apostles had been told to wait for before beginning their ministry. By the time you read this letter, we will be well into Ordinary Time, the Green season, the Growing season, the many weeks after the festivals of Holy Week, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity, during which we are challenged to decide what our response should be, how we are going to grow in our faith and live out our calling to follow Christ, and for us in Mothers' Union, how we do that through this great mission organisation to which we belong.

It is our pattern in Mothers' Union to pray. Prayer is at the heart of our membership. In Oxford Diocese our Wave of Prayer fell over the Easter weekend this year, so the resources prepared by our Faith and Policy unit were designed to be used personally rather than in a group since we recognised that many of us would not be able to meet together. I hope you found the prayers helpful and inspiring.



You may have taken part in Thy Kingdom Come, the global prayer movement celebrated between Ascension and Pentecost, inviting us to pray for more people to come to know Christ.

As we get older, it can become more difficult for us to be active in our work for Mothers' Union, but we are never too old to pray. So I invite you in this Growing season to assess where you are in your prayer life. There are many beautiful resources from Mothers' Union, centrally and in the diocese, on our websites and in our publications. But praying does not always have to be with words. Listening to music, looking at a beautiful scene, whether through your window or in art, or just dwelling in God's loving presence are all ways of praying. Familiar ways and words can be comforting but new ways and words can be stimulating and refreshing, so I do invite you to experiment.

Internationally, Mothers' Union is changing. Our new Worldwide President is already helping us to focus on Mothers' Union in the wider world. The very first Worldwide Council has taken place in Rwanda. How exciting to lift our eyes to this further horizon and add our support through prayer, not only using our prayer to channel God's love to our work across the world but also not forgetting to focus on what we can do locally to progress the work of Mothers' Union supporting families.

Dear Lord,
Grant us the grace to seek you,
So that we find you and come to know you
In order that we may truly love you and in loving you we
may fully serve you.
Amen

Blessings, Denise
Revd Denise Lady Brown
MU Oxford Diocesan Chaplain

Spring Meeting 1

Milton Keynes, Saturday 11 May 2019

Once we found the right venue, a warm welcome greeted us at The Church of the Servant King and Community Centre. The meeting started with a MULOAs-style bible study from 1 Corinthians 12:12–17, thinking about the Mothers' Union being one body with many different parts each part having different gifts to bring to the organisation. One thing in particular that struck me was: every member is important and has something to offer.

We then had a choice of three workshops to take part in. One was about branch business, finance and finding your way around the Mothers' Union website. Another was sharing branch programme ideas. Each person rolled a die and answered a question relating to the number it landed on, ie How do we make a difference outside the branch? Or What was the best fundraising idea? Most attractive branch meeting? Or most attended branch meeting? This was a simple game that could be played at a branch meeting with appropriate questions one for each number on the die. The third workshop was doing crafts, and exploring and sharing ideas of projects.

After lunch, we heard about MU enterprises and what they had for sale. Then we took part in another workshop, with a choice of 3 again. Growing

your faith, which involved samples of various daily readings with commentaries and sharing what other people had experienced. Another was sharing ideas of how we might raise awareness of Mothers' Union in order to grow our membership.

The afternoon finished with thanks and prayers. All in all there was something for everyone to take part in – a really good, worthwhile meeting.

Margaret Culley



Spring Meeting 2

Cowley, Oxford, Thursday 16 May 2019

Maria Skoyles has written this lovely piece for *Focus*:

As part of our recent family move to Ducklington we decided to embrace village life. We've joined our local church and I've become a MU member as part of that journey. I was thrilled to be enrolled and welcomed at the Spring event. The day was really inspiring with other members sharing how their branches support mothers and how they mother others. We discussed how crafting is used to share Jesus love: a personal passion of mine! It's great how the MU mother those in local hospitals making cot quilts and through chaplaincy programmes knitting prayer shawls and squares that have been prayed over.

We also chatted about how we could grow our branches and engage local congregations with our work. It was interesting to hear how others used social events like pudding and poetry evenings, prayer groups and Bible studies to support members and local mothering initiatives. There were also workshops to help manage our branches efficiently and how to engage members in our May matters campaign. As a new member it was great to get an insight into some of the work that is happening in the diocese. I was welcomed well and enjoyed meeting friends and making new ones, thank you!



Spring Meeting 3

St Nicholas Church Woodley, Saturday 18 May 2019

I do enjoy our small MU Spring meetings where we can meet our Diocesan Trustees and catch up and exchange ideas with other branch members.

St Nicholas Woodley, where our third session was held, proved an excellent venue with plenty of parking and a spacious hall and also scrumptious cakes provided by our hosts!

With coffee cups in hand 52 MU members gathered round small tables and very soon chatting happily with other MU members. After a warm welcome by Maureen and opening prayers the meeting proceeded with a bible study from 1Corinthians 12. It was exciting and not at all threatening to exchange the thoughts we each received from the passage and it prepared us well to cover the main part of the day which were the workshops.

The topics were amazingly varied including Crafts, Finance, Making May Matter, Bible Study, Programme Ideas and 'How to Grow your Membership'. The latter two, which I joined, were the most popular choices. Useful ideas were exchanged on fund raising, interesting speakers and one off ideas for meetings with special interest for non-members. A huge wealth of ideas was forthcoming.

Over lunch we were able to browse the MU Enterprise table. We came away with some great bargains, baptism cards and prayer books for us but there was very much more.

Our grateful thanks to Maureen and all the Trustees and members for the hard work they put in to make this meeting so successful and enjoyable.

If you haven't been to one before do make the effort in future, I do not think you will be disappointed.

Jean Leslie

Balsam Family Project

It is with great sadness that we have to inform you that the Balsam Family Project has had to close from 23 June 2019. This came as a shock to everyone involved as the Balsam Family Project has been working and developing well over the past 10 years. However, due to unforeseen circumstances several Trustees resigned due to changes of employment and location and the remaining Trustees felt unable to continue this work without their support.

The Oxford Mothers' Union Trustees felt that it was important to honour our commitments to the Balsam Family Project and continued collecting the generous donations of socks, tights and shoe vouchers which were passed on to Balsam Family Project. Needy families were encouraged to apply for AFIA holidays and it is great news that six families will be going on holiday this year.

Thank you everyone for donating socks and tights for children being supported by the Balsam Family Project in Didcot. There was a terrific response from you all as these were all collected in at our Spring Meetings. Louise counted over 300 pairs of socks and over 50 pairs of tights! The photo shows Balsam Administrator, Anne Phillips, receiving the delivery.

Your MU has also given 14 shoe vouchers of £20 each to children whose parents have successfully completed their Balsam College courses. We gave them this greeting "Step forward with joy!" Thank you for the individual and branch donations we have received for these.



Contact us

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Focus Editor: focus.editor@muoxford.org.uk

Webmaster: Rachel Buckley, webmaster@muoxford.org.uk

Copy deadline 18th October 2019

*We try to include all contributions sent,
but may have to edit articles to fit.
Please keep branch reports to a maximum of 350 words.*

Trustees for Oxford Diocese



**Maureen Weston
Diocesan President**



**Denise Brown
Chaplain &
Safeguarding**



**Louise Butler
Finance and
Administration**



**Rachel Buckley
Area Vice President
North Bucks,
Webmaster**



**Christine Beynon
Area Vice President
South Bucks**



**Jean Vaughan
Area Vice President
East Berks, Action &
Outreach**



**Jenny Searle
Fundraising &
Communications**



**Valerie Bolan
Area Vice President
West Berks, Member
Development**



**Rosie Jackson-Kilham
Praying Fellowship.**



**Tricia Campbell
Area Vice President
Oxford, Mothers'
Union Enterprises**

Dates for your diary

Everyone is welcome at area events.

- 10 July 2pm, Oxford Area Gathering at St Mary's Church, Witney. Service with guest speaker Maureen Weston, followed by cream tea.
- Friday 9 August Mary Sumner Day
- Tues 17 September Celebration Services at Portsmouth Cathedral
- Wed 18 September MU General Meeting, Portsmouth Guildhall. The keynote speaker will be our Worldwide President Sheran Harper
- Thurs 10 October 10am for 10.30, AGM and Autumn Meeting at Benson Village Hall, OX10 6LZ. Guest speaker: Ursula Kopp from Mary Sumner House on "Modern Slavery".
- Wed 13 November 11am, Oxfordshire Area Eucharist, St Mary's Church, Witney

Find Mothers' Union online

Diocesan website: www.muoxford.org.uk

Provincial website: www.canterburyprovincemu.org.uk

Central MU website: www.mothersunion.org

Facebook: search for 'Mothersunion Oxford'

Do you get our e-newsletter?

If you don't yet, you can sign up on our website.

Introducing Sheran Harper

When asked how she was going to manage the job as our new Worldwide President, Sheran said "By the grace of God and by working closely with all the Provincial Presidents". She was amazed by all the many activities that Mothers' Union members are involved with and wants to encourage members to carry on with this work.

Sheran began her MU journey 31 years ago when she married at the age of 25 . Shortly afterwards some "golden girls" visited her from the local MU branch. They asked her to "create a poster" for a MU competition, saying they would return the following Saturday to collect it. However, she then got a phone call asking if she could bring the poster to their next meeting instead. Well, she thought, "I will just go along, hand in the poster and escape." However, that was not to be ... and now she is Worldwide President!

She became involved in all aspects of Mothers' Union life but especially with the Parenting Programme. She looked at the UK experience and then adapted the programme to Guyanan culture. She even did further adaptations to take the parenting programme to the hinterland of Guyana among remote villages where there is much domestic violence. She saw women's lives changed and improved. By 2009 Sheran was in charge of the Worldwide Parenting Programme. From there she eventually became Vice President of the Province of West Indies. She was elected to the central Trustee Board for 6 years where she saw the global impact of Mothers' Union which fed her passion. After going on several retreats and praying for guidance, she decided to put her name forward for the job as Worldwide President saying, "Yes, I will serve you, Lord."

Sheran has many ideas on how to make an impact on our communities. Our Social Policy work will be a priority as we reach out to the vulnerable and lonely, and address issues of poverty, domestic violence, abuse and neglect. She would like MU to be more involved with "peace and reconciliation" in our homes and communities.

Sheran is a trained physiotherapist and her husband, Roger, was an active professional cricketer for many years in the UK and West Indies but now does admin and coaching. They have two sons, Richard, who is a police officer in London and Reginald, who is doing law.

MUe update

Hello MU friends,

The new Autumn/Winter MU mail order catalogue is out and if you would like a copy and have not already received one then please let me know.

In June I placed an order for diaries, calendars and planners as requested by your branch leaders/correspondents. If you did not pre-order them but would like to place an order, please let me know and I can hopefully order more when I place my next large order from MSH at the end of July.

Christmas cards (perish the thought) are available now from the new catalogue, together with lots of seasonal gift ideas. If your branch or group of branches would like to place an order amounting to £60 (which is literally 12 packs of birthday/sympathy/get well cards of 5 cards in each pack) then I can place the order for you; you won't need to pay any postage and the order can be sent direct to you, so please give this idea some thought. Failing that I will take ordered items to our Autumn Meeting at Benson in October, or post them out to you if needed before then.

As a reminder Oxford Diocese receives 10% of all items purchased so please keep spending!!

With my thanks for your support
Tricia Campbell – mue@muoxford.org.uk

Dear Friends

Thank you all so much for your very generous present to me at the Lady Day Service. The flowers were stunning and lasted for ages and the box of goodies was very exciting! I am looking forward to my visit to the distillery as well as sampling the various mixers. I would like to buy a piece of art work with the cheque that you gave me but I have not yet seen the right piece, I will probably see it when I least expect to!

It was a great privilege to serve you and our Lord. God Bless you and all your Mothers' Union work in the years to come.

With love Alisonx

Who is Comfort Fearon?

Comfort Fearon is our new Mothers' Union Diocesan President for Southwark Diocese, our Link Diocese in the UK. She comes from Nigeria but has lived in England several times. The first time she came was to marry Josiah. He was studying theology at St John's College, Durham and then went on to Birmingham to do further study. Comfort worked as a nurse during this time.

After five years, they returned to Nigeria where Josiah became Bishop of the Diocese of Sokoto. Later he became Archbishop of Kaduna which is a rural area in the north of Nigeria where less than 5% of the population are Christians.

As it happens in most parts of Africa, the wife of the Archbishop is the President of Mothers' Union and the wives of vicars also lead Mothers' Union in their parishes. Consequently, Comfort has been involved with Mothers' Union for many years. She is committed to working in communities to help people with income generation as well as helping with classes for young mothers. She also continued nursing.

In August 2016, Archbishop Josiah became the General Secretary of the Anglican Communion Office and they currently live in a house in the grounds of Lambeth Palace. Comfort has a passion to care for clergy wives and help equip them to lead their MU branches and train them to support their communities.

Since her arrival in England, Comfort has been involved as Action & Outreach Co-ordinator for two years before she was commissioned on Saturday 16 March by Bishop Christopher as the Southwark Diocesan Mothers' Union President. She wants to make the work of Mothers' Union better known. Southwark Diocese are involved with refugees, teaching "English for women by women", working with prisoners families and encouraging younger people to become part of our amazing organisation.

Maureen Weston





Crowthorne

We have been very busy in Crowthorne over the spring months beginning with our posy making, Simnel cakes and catering for Messy Church all on the same weekend of Mothering Sunday.

We had to wrap up warmly for our church May Fair held on Bank Holiday Monday on the recreation ground. Local residents know that the Mothers' Union will be there and make a bee line for our stall.



Consequently we sell our large stock of homemade cakes very quickly.

We have just had a cream tea party attended by 37 of our members and we are looking forward to an evening of Glen Millar in July. We will be sending the proceeds of the raffles at these two events to the Summer of Hope Appeal.

Chesham

Chesham Branch held a Coffee Morning on 4th May in aid of AFIA funds and raised the sum of £85.

Chaplaincy of the Waterways

At their June meeting, St. Michael's, Tilehurst welcomed a speaker: Rev. Pat Willis who talked about being a Waterways Chaplain. She said that after she retired from full-time ministry she felt that God was calling her to do something and when she was down by the canal she saw a barge with a sign Waterways Chaplaincy. She spoke to the woman on board and took some leaflets but did not do anything about it immediately as she had decided on a year's sabbatical traveling the waterways with her husband on their narrowboat. On her return she applied to be a chaplain. She said they do not make the application easy but after attending the initial training programme, she joined a chaplaincy group based in Newbury.

The Waterways Chaplaincy is part of St Albans-based 'Workplace Matters', a charity which supports town centre and airport chaplaincies. It is expanding to cover all waterways around the country and they are seeing an increase of chaplains walking towpaths all over England and talking to people they meet. There are also a couple of 'roving' chaplains living on their boats. She is part of a group of chaplains based in Newbury and has to walk at least a mile along the tow path each week wearing her chaplaincy coat. She also attends a meeting of her chaplaincy group every month and a two-day training course each year. It is an ecumenical venture and they support and encourage all regardless of religion, orientation or race.

There are a lot of homeless people living on boats hoping it is an easier alternative than living on the streets. However that is not always the case. People who live on boats have to pay mooring fees, need a licence and have to move on after so many days depending which council that bit of waterway falls under. It also means that you do not have a postcode so it is difficult to register with a GP, claim benefits or even open a bank account. What is pleasant in the summer is rather a different story in the winter especially if you cannot afford fuel. There are a lot of vulnerable people some with mental health issues, post-traumatic stress or just homeless who can be taken advantage of by either drug dealers or drug users.

She gave us a few examples of people she has helped including a girl who was so nervous that she was not even able to make a phone call; and a man who was just about to lose his barge for non-payment of licence and

overstaying his mooring. When this happens, barges are usually lifted out of the water and mostly are left to rot. Chaplains also help people who they meet just walking the tow path.

In closing, she said that Mothers' Union could help their work by spreading the word about the Chaplaincy of the Waterways and praying for the chaplains and the people they are trying to help.

Waterways Chaplaincy Prayer Card: Romans 12.12:
Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Bishop Andrew's Retirement

The church of St Mary Minster in Reading was the venue for a joyful service to mark Bishop Andrew Proud's retirement. The large church was filled with hundreds of well wishers including members of Mothers' Union from many branches in the Archdeaconry and beyond.

Prior to becoming Bishop of Reading in 2011, he served as Chaplain of St Matthew's Addis Ababa and was consecrated as Bishop of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in 2007.

Bishop Andrew commissioned three Diocesan Presidents in our diocese, Gillian Johnson at Christ Church cathedral (where Andrew was enrolled as a Mothers' Union member), Alison Bennett at Gerrard's Cross and this year Maureen Weston at Abingdon. He also served as Central Chaplain to Lynne Tembey, our World Wide President, for six years. The Mothers' Union in Oxford diocese has much to give thanks for the dedication and service given by Bishop Andrew and his wife, Janice, who is also a member.

Giving thanks for Bishop Andrew's ministry, Bishop Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford, paid tribute to Andrew saying that he has been an enormous gift as Bishop of Reading and that both he and his wife, Janice, were held in great affection across Berkshire. The Mothers' Union can truly endorse those sentiments.

Gillian Johnson

Celebrations

Olga McKenzie, St Edburg's branch, celebrated her 90th birthday on 16 May 2018.

Beryl Buckley, St Edburg's branch, celebrated her 90th birthday on 6 December 2018

Pam and John Leach, Chesham branch, celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary on 30th May.

Gillian and John Watson, Abingdon branch, celebrate their Golden Wedding Anniversary on 6th September.

MU Acrostic

At a recent MU Fellowship Meeting we were invited to form an Acrostic with the letters of MOTHERS' UNION. Although this was just written for fun, we published it in our church magazine in the hope that it might encourage some of our church members to find out more about the MU and possibly encourage some new members.

Marriage and family life are promoted.

Our meetings are friendly and fun.

The Church often gains from the cakes that we make.

Help on occasions is offered and done.

Each committee member helps without shirking,

Running the Branch to ensure that it's working.

So many activities – cleaning, food and flowers

Use our talents for this church of ours.

Not forgotten are Bible Study and Prayer,

In each other's homes - we are nurtured there.

Our Christmas Meetings have Carols and Readings,

Newly mulled wine and mince pies for feeding.

Jean Almond, St Catherine's Tilehurst

Editorial team needed for *Focus*

We are looking for a new editorial team to take on *Focus* magazine and provide the vital link between the different parts of Mothers' Union in the Oxford Diocese. Many of our members do not use email or the internet and *Focus* is the main way they find out what is going on in MU Oxford. For the last few years the Editor has put together the magazine while the Assistant Editor has been primarily concerned with collecting the stories and news about our activities across the diocese, chasing contributions etc. A new team could divide up the aspects of the work differently. Some technical ability is needed to create the magazine, and both need to attend the thrice-yearly editorial meetings.

If you are interested in bringing your God-given abilities and resources to take *Focus* to a new level, please contact Jenny Searle, Fundraising and Communications Unit Coordinator, communications@muoxford.org.uk or 07785 938071.

Recently I visited Gracewell of Ascot residential home, where I was presented with £50, raised by resident Florence Coughlin. Florence has been a Mothers' Union member for many years and had recently moved to Ascot from Harpenden and decided to knit teddy bears to sell to raise funds for Mothers' Union. During our



conversation she asked that the money go to AFIA as she felt it was a good cause within the umbrella of the work that MU does. Florence would love to become an indoor Member now so we are arranging this for her and Gracewell have kindly asked our branch to have some meetings in their premises, so Florence can continue to enjoy the family of MU. Margaret Armstrong, branch leader