



Autumn Meeting on Zoom  
October 8<sup>th</sup> 2020

Start time 10:30am finishing by midday

Welcome

Opening Prayers

Summary of trustees' reports and accounts

We hope that Bishop Olivia, Bishop of Reading  
will join us to give us an address of 'Five Marks  
of Mission'.

## **UNIT UPDATES**

### **Action & Outreach – Jean Vaughan**

This year has been quite busy again with help being given to many different charities.

AFIA has arranged ... holidays this year which have been very well received. We're very thankful for the members and branches that support this aspect of our work.

Hospital support has been very good again. Thank you to everyone who sends items for use at the John Radcliffe Children's Hospital and to other hospitals such as The Royal Berks in Reading. Such a lot of care is put in to your contributions.

Christmas Cards have again been sent to Bullingdon Prison and every prisoner was able to receive a card. There were so many donated that we also shared them with Woodhill Prison in Milton Keynes and two open prisons in Bicester.

Many of you are able to knit and sew items for the hospitals and another charity we have been helping called Baby Basics. The items go towards gifts to pregnant ladies so they have the clothing and bedding needed for a new baby. The charity works in a wide area but the things we donate generally go to Milton Keynes.

We have been contacting another local charity, Children Heard and Seen, which works with the children of prisoners. These children are often discriminated against in very many ways and it's important to help them and their families with the idea of breaking the cycle of offending and prison stays.

Thank you all for your support and donations throughout the year.

## **Prayer and Spirituality – Denise Brown**

The Unit now has an Acting Unit Coordinator, Revd Denise Brown, since Revd. Mary Harwood became Diocesan Chaplain at the beginning of 2020. Several attempts have been made to recruit a new Unit Coordinator and additional Unit members without success so far.

The regular activities of preparing worship and prayer have been seriously curtailed during the pandemic. Three of the four planned Spring meetings were able to take place before Lockdown. Where possible we have transferred to operating online.

Wave of Prayer 20 - 22 April

The Wave of Prayer material was prepared and printed in Focus. Our new Chaplain recorded an online service for members to use and we know that some branches used it 'together' from their homes. It is planned to continue an online version in the future for those who are housebound.

Praying Fellowship

Rosie Killham-Jackson continues to support the Praying Fellowship, through phone calls and online and through the post.

Future projects

Unit members are working on Bereavement resources (of particular importance since so many have lost loved ones in seriously difficult circumstances) and MU involvement in Partners in World Mission - a Diocesan initiative.

## **Fundraising & Communication – Jenny Searle**

The Unit meets three times a year. Anyone interested in joining would be most welcome.

**Focus magazine** continues to be our main way of communicating with every member in the diocese and we are still looking for a new editor. During the year the magazine has been redesigned and now uses full colour and has a more modern look and feel.

**Social media** remains an important part of our communications strategy. As well as the monthly eNews bulletin produced by our membership secretary; and our website, managed by Rachel Buckley; our Facebook site, coordinated by Rosie Jackson-Kilham, has grown significantly. And, during the weeks when we have not been able to meet face-to-face video-conferencing has been a valuable resource for all those with access to the technology. Unfortunately, the planned review and update of our website has had to be postponed because of difficulty securing IT resources during lockdown. Alison Bennett continues to manage our communications with diocesan members through a quarterly mailshot. Val Bolan is leading for us on training. We were able to include some training sessions in the Spring meetings.

**Fundraising** has been more of a challenge since so many events have had to be cancelled. Make May Matter was repeated to raise funds for Away from It All and some branches have found ways to use this and other materials to raise funds in a socially distanced way. MUE has a new focus from Tricia Campbell who has recruited 10 people across the diocese to hold MUE stock and make it available for local events.

**Communities of Interest** are up and running via the Central MU website. Any member can join whichever communities they wish and we would encourage you to do so to: support MU projects and activities; and share your own experiences with others.

## **MU Enterprises – Tricia Campbell**

The financial year started really well with the Autumn Meeting 2019 as I took over £966 on this one day, which is absolutely amazing. Sadly the Spring meetings 2020 have not been quite so productive!!! Takings of MUE cards and merchandise were down at the Spring Meetings in Cowley on 4<sup>th</sup> March and Wash Common on 10<sup>th</sup> March. Sadly I couldn't attend the 3<sup>rd</sup> Spring Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> March but thank Chris Garwood for filling my shoes. Unfortunately due to the Corona Virus the 4<sup>th</sup> Spring Meeting was cancelled. All-in-all revenue from these three meetings was down by £280.00 from the Spring meetings in the previous year.

Before lockdown I managed to visit quite a few of my eight Oxfordshire branches that I look after as AVP and took the MUE cards and merchandise on each occasion which was always well received.

Since lockdown I have emailed all the branches regularly and offered to send out bundles of cards to branches/individual members in the hope of maintaining some kind of revenue ultimately for our Diocese as we collect 10% of all MUE items sold.

Members continue to support MUE and I have ordered 130 2021 diaries this year – my aim is to try and sell at least 200 diaries next year.

At the time of writing this report we have no idea when will be able to meet up again as groups but whatever happens I will continue to buy and sell our wonderful MU cards and merchandise as widely as possible.

Please feel free to contact me on [mue@muoxford.org.uk](mailto:mue@muoxford.org.uk) should you require any MUE items or for more information.

## **Finance & Administration – Louise Butler**

We are delighted that Eve has been able to continue working as our membership secretary, juggling the needs of her family and other interests. She is a great asset to us with her energy and genuine interest and care for our members. She is also using her skills to give time to the production of FOCUS. There have been different challenges for administration during the “lockdown” period but to continue to have the use of a single occupancy office at CMS House, the benefits of their postal service and their IT support has been very helpful.

Last year I referred to the Central Membership Database developed by MSH, where all our Diocesan records are being held. Some features have taken longer to design. We look forward soon to the time when all members will be able to edit their own entries.

We must report that membership has fallen by 7.7%; from 1,142 (2019) to around 1,054 in 2020. There were 33 new members, sadly balanced by the number of deaths through the year. Please do continue to promote MU within your churches and encourage new memberships.

Thank you to all who have taken up the option to renew your subscription by Direct Debit. Over this year we have seen an increasing take-up – from 43% to nearly 49% (514 subs). Most of you have done this online. We will inform members when online applications for 2021 can be made.

**Subscriptions for 2021:** £20 of each subscription must now go to MSH. This has meant we have had to increase the Oxford subscription considerably. On a positive note, each member will receive a magazine twice a year, in addition to the Prayer Diary. An explanatory letter has been sent to branch leaders and DMs.

**Praying Fellowship:** this group will be retained and supported by a Trustee. They will receive regular letters and cards. Visiting may become possible in the future.

**Standard Membership:** rises to £35. Some members will find this a large amount to pay immediately after Christmas, so if this need arises treasurers will have the option to collect in 3 monthly instalments. Branch leaders are invited to contact AVPs if there are any cases of financial hardship.

**Joint Membership:** rises to £65

Thank you to all branches who were able to send money through to the Diocese to be forwarded on to the Emergency Appeal. This amounted to £2,430 at the half year. In addition, you may know that the Diocese sent £5,000 as an immediate response. A legacy from a past member of Chesham branch was left to Mothers' Union. The Diocese has been involved in the administration of these funds and when the first distribution was made, Chesham MU proposed that £7,000 should go to the emergency appeal and this was approved by the Trustee Board. We are also conscious that many individual members have donated to MSH directly. It is wonderful that the Diocese has been able to generously support our Central Organisation.

A few usual pleas from the F&A Unit:

Please send any extra funds in your branch accounts to the office by early December.

Our search for a new treasurer continues and this is urgent. Please help us by asking around in your churches and communities. For someone with financial skills, the commitment is about 2 hours per week.

## **AVP UPDATES**

### **North Bucks – Rachel Buckley**

While we were still able, our branches held some interesting and lively meetings with themes ranging from "Christianity in the Forces", "God's Peace" and "Our Schooldays" among others. Unfortunately there were very few fundraising opportunities before the Lockdown curtailed all our face to face activities, but one branch managed to squeeze in their annual soup lunch before everything stopped. Many of us attended the Spring Meeting held in Milton Keynes and enjoyed both the activities and the fellowship of meeting and worshipping together. With our area Wave of Prayer service cancelled many of us watched the online service at the time our service was to take place which gave us a feeling of being "together but apart".

During Lockdown Branch leaders have been busy arranging telephone calls to members, usually asking committee members to contact a number of members each. One branch then swapped the lists around so each member had someone new to speak to. Another branch has tried a Zoom meeting, which was well received by those who have the technical knowhow, but not everyone has the online capability participate.

There have been sad times with some branches losing members, or loved ones. This is when the prayer support of Mothers' Union is so wonderful, but not being able to comfort each other in person has made these times more difficult to deal with.

We continue to support local initiatives including Baby Basics MK, our local hospitals as well as the John Radcliffe and AFIA.

Shenley Church End branch had no one willing to take over the Branch Officer roles so has decided to close, but the members will become Diocesan Members and still meet together.

## **South Bucks – Christine Beynon**

The South Bucks area now consists of eight Branches: Datchet, Hedgerley, Hitcham, Langley, Upton cum Chalvey, Chesham, Hughendon and Windsor.

All our Branches had met regularly up until lockdown in March 2020. They continue to support their own churches, the John Radcliffe Hospital, Bullingdon Prison and the Burnham and Slough Deanery Project for the Women's and Men's Refuge.

In September of each year Burnham & Slough Deanery arranges a visit to a cathedral. This year the choice was Portsmouth, where, in addition to the tour of the cathedral, we celebrated Holy Communion with mid-day prayers. Our Autumn meeting was led by Jean Vaughan who spoke about the interesting work she has been doing in her role as Area Vice-President. Our Advent Carol Service was held at St. Mary's Church, Datchet, where we had an enjoyable service followed by refreshments.

The Branches had arranged an interesting series of meetings for 2020, including a Quiet Day at Burnham Abbey in June. Hopefully, when this pandemic is over and life returns to normal we will be able to continue with the programmed meetings.

## **East Berks – Jean Vaughan**

The Deanery comprises nine branches at present and Branch Leaders and Treasurers generally meet twice a year to support each other and share what happens in the branches. That has not happened in 2020 but I have kept in touch via email and telephone calls. Zoom has been a useful tool in lockdown and we have all learned new skills we didn't think we'd need.

Many members have contributed toiletries and knitted goods for the John Radcliffe Hospital and also the Royal Berks Hospital. The cookies made for the Chaplain at Reading University in September last year were very much appreciated and we hope to be able to repeat that this year.

### **SONNING DEANERY**

There are seven branches in this deanery and they also contribute to Bullingdon, John Radcliffe Hospital and The Royal Berkshire Hospital. We have been supporting our members through lockdown and tried to keep in touch.

### **HENLEY DEANERY**

The branch in Henley is now quite small but they continue to meet and do come to Diocesan Meetings when they can. The "Thy Kingdom Come" service in Coventry, which had been streamed, was much appreciated.

### **MAIDENHEAD DEANERY**

The Windsor branch is also small but they keep trying to encourage younger members of the congregations to become members. Zoom has been really useful in keeping in touch during lockdown.

## **West Berks – Val Bolan**

As AVP for West Berkshire which includes Abingdon and Wallingford Deanery, Newbury Deanery and Wantage Deanery, I attended the Branch AGM at Hungerford, The Churn, Abingdon and Wash Common in January and February 2020. The year was off to a good start with programmes in place and members enthusiastic to meet regularly. Members from several branches attended the Diocesan Spring meeting at St George the Martyr Church Wash Common Newbury on 10<sup>th</sup> March, enjoyed meeting together and sharing an interesting day. Sadly, the many and varied activities planned by the branches were brought to a halt in March with the lockdown and the Covid 19 pandemic.

From March onwards, branches set up various forms of communication with members; Abingdon prayer partnership kept individuals in touch and the branch produced a newsletter in June with items from members, the Diocese and MSH. The Churn branch continued fundraising (within government guidelines). Wantage branch membership have stayed in touch by telephone and the organiser Kathleen has been busy making masks for her daughter and school community, her hairdresser, local retirement block and others and members have continued with their knitting. Wash Common branch members produced PPE for hospital use, bags for scrubs and masks for general use. Branches arranged zoom calls for those on the internet and telephone calls by committee members helped to regularly update others. Generous contributions were sent from branches and individual members to the emergency national appeal at MSH.

All branches are continuing to purchase MUE and are supporting members whose health is poor, and those members who care for others. Prayer is an active part of all interactions. Thank you to everyone for providing love and support to our members and the wider church in these testing times.

## **Oxfordshire – Tricia Campbell**

Oxfordshire Area still has just two Deaneries – Bicester & Deddington and West Oxfordshire.

Bicester & Deddington has four branches – Bicester St Edburg's, Bicester Area, Bloxham and Bodicote.

West Oxfordshire Deanery has three branches – Ducklington, Milton under Wychwood and Witney.

Cowley is a branch on its' own which used to belong to Oxford & Cowley Deanery, but sadly Cowley is now the only branch existing in this former deanery.

Bicester & Deddington Deanery organise an annual Deanery Quiet Day and also a Deanery Festival, which this year was also going to incorporate the Area Gathering. This year we were fortunate enough to hold the Deanery Quiet Afternoon on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March just before lockdown. Although not many members attended those who did really appreciated the service led by Bodicote's vicar Revd Sarah Sharp. Sadly the Deanery Festival/Area Gathering was due to be held on 10<sup>th</sup> June so obviously couldn't take place. We wait to see what the Government guidelines are before deciding to either rearrange or cancel this particular event.

The West Oxfordshire Deanery organises a Lady Day Service every March – but unfortunately this too didn't take place this year. Most years the Deanery also has a service either for Wave of Prayer or relating to the MU theme of the year, but sadly this never got organised due to the corona virus.

The Area meets twice a year as a committee to organise an Area Service and also to understand the branches and their members better and to offer support where necessary.

As AVP this year, since lockdown, I have communicated with all 8 branches on a regular basis and have been amazed at just how our members have been embracing technology for streamed meetings and services, also looking after each other by telephone calls. My aim is to try and visit each branch twice in a year but this was just not possible in 2020 due to Covid-19. I enjoyed visiting Ducklington, Bloxham and Milton under Wychwood in February, then Witney and Bicester Area in March. Hopefully we will be able to see each other again in the not too distant future.