

UNIT UPDATES for AGM 2021

Action & Outreach – Jean Vaughan

AFIA has not run any holidays this year as we had no requests made. We hope to provide holidays for members of Children Heard and Seen next year, and would be pleased to receive requests for holidays and special outings from members.

Hospital support has been very good again. Thank you to everyone who sends items for use at the John Radcliffe Children's Hospital, which has had over 200 bags donated, and to other hospitals such as The Royal Berks in Reading. Alison Bennett is not able to visit the wards at the moment but that may change.

Christmas Cards have again been sent to Bullingdon Prison and every prisoner was able to receive a card. So many cards have been donated that this year we have sufficient.

Many of you are able to knit and sew items for the hospitals, Baby Basics and Children Heard and Seen.

We sent 200 Advent Calendars to Children Heard and Seen so that all the children the charity supports had a calendar. In order to fund this our members were extremely generous and that led to us setting up a particular account for funding Projects throughout the Diocese.

Members also helped by knitting beautiful chicks for the children at Easter and we bought chocolate eggs to fill these. As the chicks also became finger puppets when the egg had been eaten the project was a great success.

You also collected sleeping bags and wellington boots for the residential held in the summer and we used some of the Project money to buy outdoor toys and some wellies in sizes not donated. Sarah Burrows, Director of Children Heard and Seen, has sent a letter thanking us for our contributions.

Baby Basics in Milton Keynes has also been helped with knitted hats and sweaters for babies, as well as toiletry bags. The charity is now helping the families of refugees being settled in the area so clothes for older children have been supplied. We will need to help with toys for Christmas this year for children up to 5 years old.

This year we are working on a knitted chain to represent a small percentage of Modern-Day Slaves in our Diocese. The chain will be displayed in Reading Minster on Monday 18th October, which is Anti-Slavery Day, and then move around the churches of our branches in the diocese.

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

Prayer and Spirituality – Denise Brown

Revd Denise Brown has remained as Acting Unit Coordinator for the duration of this triennium, approved each year by the Trustee Board. The work of the Unit has been maintained through the strange times of the pandemic but there is a need for new membership. Anyone interested in attending unit meetings to find out more would be very welcome.

Wave of Prayer 20 - 22 April

In addition to the normal written service, a beautiful recorded Wave of Prayer service was produced, with a good variety of members taking part. This was done with huge commitment from Marion Gunning and a technical expert in her church. Sadly, Marion has now moved out of diocese and until we have plans for her replacement, we don't know what the future capacity will be.

Praying Fellowship

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

Overseas Relationships

We are engaged with the diocesan Partners in World Mission (PWM) and looking for ways of developing prayer relationships through the use of social media.

Future projects

Unit members are involved in producing worship for diocesan events and eNews, for quiet times both face-to-face and online and maintaining our Book of Remembrance.

Fundraising & Communication – Jenny Searle

The Unit has met on zoom three times during the year and the members are Alison Bennett, Val Bolan, Rachel Buckley, Tricia Campbell, Rosie Jackson-Kilham, Jenny Searle, and Maureen Weston.

Focus magazine remains the main way in which we communicate with all members within the diocese. During this year we have introduced a number of enclosures relevant to the time of year for each edition: for example, prayers for 16 days of activism against gender-based violence in the Autumn edition. We now have a dedicated proof-reader for the magazine and are still looking for a new Editor. More frequent communications with members include a monthly eNews and far greater use of social media including Facebook and our website. During this year we have increased usage of videos and these are accessible via our website.

A much more extensive programme of events has been put in place for Diocesan members which builds on the work begun last year and involves all our AVP's. Alison Bennett is stepping down from leading this programme and we are looking for someone to take over this work.

Fundraising has been more challenging during the pandemic but where local initiatives have been successful we have publicised these so that others may be inspired and do likewise. There are early signs that MUE activity is recovering as more members return to normal activities. We are keen to recruit a new member of the Unit with a focus on fundraising.

Thanks go to everyone who works so hard to continue our work.

MU Enterprises – Tricia Campbell

Sadly, income is down quite a lot this last year – many branches stopped meeting therefore the sale of cards plummeted and there was no Autumn meeting in 2020. The previous year the Autumn Meeting alone took over £966. The Spring meeting in 2020 was on zoom so again generated no income.

I have continued to email all the branches regularly and many members have placed orders. Since the summer orders have increased dramatically which is really encouraging and sales of 2022 MU merchandise are

equalling previous years. I have pre-ordered 150 diaries and have every confidence that I will be able to sell them all before the end of the year.

Please feel free to contact me on mue@muoxford.org.uk should you require any MUE items or for more information.

Finance & Administration – Louise Butler

Overcoming a hard year.

Sadly, we have lost members, through death, lapsed memberships and those who have moved away. Some branches have struggled to keep operating. Coming to the end of this Triennium, we have to say goodbye to Geoff, our Treasurer for 13 years, and are still looking for his replacement. Other Trustee positions are waiting to be filled.

But we are moving forward in a positive light, with hope and confidence.

- Eve has been our ray of sunshine as membership Secretary, working both at home and in our single-occupancy office at CMS House. Thank you, Eve, for your hard work and dedication.
- Online meetings have kept us connected and have enabled groups of DMs, under Alison's guidance, to meet together in this new way. Branches, AVPs and Rosie, our Praying Fellowship Officer, have spent many hours phoning, writing and sending cards to members not linked to MU by the internet.
- For all these reasons and more, MU membership has not fallen as severely as we had imagined through the pandemic. We retain nearly 950 members, a fall of just over 10%, when 20% could have been expected.
- More good news – subscriptions for 2022 will NOT increase and remain at £35 for individuals and £65 for joint membership.
- This Unit is looking at new ways to handle MU Finance; to employ a person for "bookkeeping" work, leaving a

Treasurer to set budgets, monitor finance, draw up the Annual Accounts and advise Trustees.

- The Unit pledges to support any branch which may need help with their finances. Visit our "Money Matters" table today.
- To ensure there is no depletion of the Trustee Board a number of Trustees will remain in position for 2022, mentoring those who come forward to serve.
- Several bequests and legacies have been received into our funds and this will enable MU in this Diocese to pioneer new ways to transform our communities.

Over to you

- Prayerfully consider if you can take a position on a Unit or as a Trustee
- Help us search for a new Treasurer with this reduced role; someone in your church family maybe, with accountancy experience.
- If you enjoy working with figures, could you be our new Finance Officer?
- Pay your subscription by Direct Debit; it lightens the work for branch treasurers
- Support MU locally or worldwide by making a bequest in your will.
- And my usual end of year plea to branches; please send in any extra funds in your account to the office, by early December.

AVP UPDATES

North Bucks – Rachel Buckley

Our branches have still been meeting virtually and keeping in touch with their members via telephone and email. We are now tentatively getting back to face to face meetings; how wonderful it is to meet “in person” again.

There have been sad times with some branches losing members, or loved ones, and it is at these times when the prayer support of Mothers’ Union is so comforting.

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

Although we have some Diocesan Members in this area, they are very spread out and what with fewer people driving as well as difficulty accessing public transport, we have not been able to meet together this year.

South Bucks – Christine Beynon

Our branches in the Deanery began to open up in June when we met face-to-face. Datchet MU ran a cream tea which raised money for our Summer of Hope. After our face-to-face Deanery meeting we were able to plan for the latter half of the year. We held a service at St. Mary's, Langley, for the 100th anniversary of the death of Mary Sumner and the 145 years of the founding of the MU. It was attended by all our branches. The collection went to the Summer of Hope.

Some of our branches meet in each other's homes. Langley will continue to meet with Upton-cum-Chalvey. Hitcham & Taplow are still seeking a new leader to follow Jo Eden who now resides in a care home. Our advent carol service, run by Hedgerley branch, will take place on 29 November at 2 pm at St. John's, Farnham Common.

East Berks – Jean Vaughan

Our eight branches have had a mixed time this year as they worked to keep in touch with their members and endeavour to meet. Unfortunately, Reading St Bartholomew branch has closed, though some of the members are now Diocesan Members.

In spite of problems with Covid there have been good times online and meeting outside when possible. Members were still able to contribute when we asked them to knit chicks for Easter and gather sleeping bags and wellingtons for Children Heard and Seen, so thanks particularly to Earley St Nicolas' and Wokingham St Paul's branches. Christmas cards were collected for the prisoners in the Diocese, and toiletries were given for bags supplied to the John Radcliffe and Royal Berkshire Hospitals.

Tilehurst St Michael and Loddon Reach branches held several online meetings very successfully, bringing speakers from farther afield than usual. However, Loddon Reach has found that numbers attending zoom meetings have reduced, but some members are helping in a pop-up café in St Mary's Church, which has been a great form of outreach.

Tilehurst St Catherine have also used Zoom but did manage to have their AGM in person and have welcomed a new member. Some members are unsure as yet about welcoming other members into their homes for small meetings, but they did come to an afternoon tea in the summer which raised £200 for Summer of Hope.

SONNING DEANERY

There are seven branches in this deanery and they also contribute to Bullingdon, John Radcliffe Hospital and The Royal Berkshire Hospital. Bracknell Branch is still very small but they continue to keep in touch with each other and are planning to meet in person.

Crowthorne St John's branch made masses of filled bags for the John Radcliffe Hospital, and Wokingham St Paul's made bags for the Royal Berks Hospital.

As part of our outreach Wokingham St Paul's branch held a Mouse Hunt in the church and churchyard using knitted mice which the children (and some adults) had to find. It was really good to welcome people to the church and serve tea and cakes outside when the children came to collect a mouse to take home.

West Berks – Val Bolan

Branches have been keeping in touch with their members and busy planning meetings with the theme Rebuilding Hope and Confidence.

The Churn Branch held a virtual AGM in February 2021 and a monthly meeting on line; April was the wave of prayer. 40 Mothering Sunday cards were made for prisoners and Easter cards made for those on benefice prayer list and others. Fund raising ideas included – a May Marathon and poems for care homes.

Wash Common Branch held a virtual branch meeting in January, virtual AGM in February and hosted a speaker on zoom in March. The branch continued with monthly zoom meetings and held an outdoor meeting in June and a garden party at the local cricket club in July where handmade cards were sold and a raffle held for the Summer of Hope Appeal. Members contributed to the appeal for Mothering Sunday cards and MU charities.

Abingdon branch has kept well connected with news sheets, letters and phone calls and Enews printed and delivered to members without internet access. Members have been knitting and sewing and have made 150 Christmas cards and 50 Mothering Sunday cards. Branch leader Barbara Earl passed away unexpectedly in May and is sadly missed. The branch met for the AGM as its first face to face meeting, and a cream tea fund raiser was held in August with proceeds to AFIA as Barbara had planned.

Hungerford branch has closed and donated the remaining funds to MU Oxford Diocese. Several members have become diocesan members for 2021 and will receive MU correspondence and are contacted as part of the new initiative by AVPs.

In August, Diocesan Members were invited to church services and other activities to celebrate Mary Sumner and Mothers' Union. West Berkshire DMs and friends enjoyed a day at St Mary's Convent in Wantage.

Oxfordshire – Tricia Campbell

Sadly in the last year two branches have closed – Ducklington and Milton-under-Wychwood – both from the West Oxfordshire Deanery. This means that there are now only 6 branches left in the Oxfordshire Area ~ Bicester St Edburg's, Bicester Area, Bloxham, Bodicote (all in the Bicester & Deddington Deanery), Witney - West Oxfordshire Deanery and Cowley - formerly part of the Kidlington & Oxford Deanery.

Bicester St Edburg's (an afternoon group of 12 members) were invited to join Bicester Area over the last year and have therefore enjoyed monthly zoom meetings. Since early summer they have managed a couple of face-to-face social meetings but Bicester St Edburg's branch hope to return to church soon to resume their usual type of afternoon branch meetings and enrol the 4 new members waiting in the wings.

Bicester Area (evening group with 12 members) has met every month, apart from July and August, by zoom and has extended these meetings to the afternoon MU branch, plus the church congregation and others. July was their first face-to-face meeting with a strawberry tea and prosecco in a members' garden. Members joined the Deanery Quiet Afternoon, a Lady Day Service, Spring Meeting and Wave of Prayer, all on zoom. As a group they have managed to meet 12 times in the last 12 months and twice with the Deanery or Diocese, plus have accessed services on Facebook. Communication has happened mainly by email, sometimes by phone and very occasionally face-to-face. Bloxham has 18 members with 3 new members about to be enrolled. For the last year they have met virtually on a monthly basis by zoom and have met socially face-to-face since June. Prior to zoom their planned speakers provided written notes for members to read and as a branch at the start of the pandemic they divided into 3s in order to keep in touch with each other through emails, letters and phone calls. These groups have become close and still continue. As a branch they have worked hard to include all members either through zoom or hard copies of MU material and this has worked well.

Bodicote has 25 members and has tried meeting on zoom a couple of times over the last year. The committee has met 3 times. Members of the branch, when allowed, have supported a monthly Pause for Prayer time, celebrated World Day of Prayer in church as well as Mary Sumner Day and a small garden party was held to raise money for the Summer of Hope appeal. The four committee members have kept in touch with around 5 members each by phone which is something they have always done but has proved even more welcome during the pandemic.

Cowley has 11 members and has been under the strong leadership of Rosanne Butler for many years, but sadly her husband's health deteriorated due to dementia this year and has recently died so the branch now needs to make some decisions as to their future. Although the

branch has not met or been able to communicate through zoom over the past year all the members have kept in touch with each other through phone calls or face-to-face encounters when allowed, through church.

Witney Benefice MU has 22 members and kept in touch via letters and phone calls during the last year with a couple of meetings in August and September when 12 members attended. The committee, however, met six times by zoom and once in September face-to-face and there is now a full programme of meetings organised up until March 2022.

Normally I aim to visit each branch twice in any calendar year but I have not visited any in the last year. By the time you read this report we will have held an Area Festival at Bloxham on 28th September ~ indeed a cause for celebration as branch and Diocesan members meet face-to-face.

Hopefully next year will see life returning to something like 'normality'!!