

# FOCUS ~ 2025

## Join us & Join in!

*Leading Mothers' Union as we begin a new  
Triennium!*



**Congratulations to Kay Clarke,  
the newly elected All Ireland  
President of Mothers' Union.**

**Kay is from the Diocese of  
Derry and Raphoe**

**Congratulations to June  
Butler who has been elected  
to serve as Zonal Trustee in  
Zone I for 2025-2027**



**Congratulations to Kathleen  
Snow who has been elected to  
serve as Worldwide President  
of Mothers' Union.**

**Kathleen comes from Canada.**



## *From the Editor.....*

As we begin a new Triennium in Mothers' Union, with a new Worldwide Trustee Board and a new All Ireland Trustee Board, the prayer below taken from "Dear Lord" and written by Frida Sakala Kazembe from Lusaka, Zambia is very apt.

***Father, guide and give wisdom to our Worldwide President and all those who hold leadership positions in Mothers' Union as they plan for the future and sustainability of this great organisation.***

***Father, we earnestly knock on your door, asking you to send your Holy Spirit into Mothers' Union; fill us with your Spirit, re-energise us, re-enthuse us daily as we work in your field.***

***Father, our vision is of a world where everyone will experience your love and we look to you to make it a reality.***

***We ask this with hearts full of gratitude, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen***

We wish every blessing to the new Worldwide Trustee Board and our new All Ireland Trustee Board as they lead Mothers' Union into the future. In a world where there is so much unrest and where families in our own country continue to struggle with the "cost of living" the projects supported by Mothers' Union are as necessary as ever. The practical support given to families in adversity by Mothers' Union is greatly appreciated. In this new Triennium there is going to be a greater emphasis on the Literacy Programme. This programme has transformed the lives of women in many of the poorer countries in Africa and around the world enabling them to learn to read and write, set up co-ops, schools, and Credit Unions. The Literacy Programme, undertaken by Mothers' Union overseas, really resonates with our members and there was great enthusiasm about it when Bev Julien, CEO of Mothers' Union, spoke to members at a meeting last year in Kiltiernan.

***We ask that we continue to be energised and enthused to continue all these essential projects.***

Every blessing, *Margaret*

## *From Our All Ireland President:*

Greetings Dear Friends,

This is my first letter to you in my new role as Provincial President. I am very humbled to have been entrusted with this important role and will at all times endeavour to serve you and ultimately bring glory to the Lord who is my rock, salvation and daily guide. I am still very early in my term of office, but I have already been overwhelmed by the number of cards, messages, and words of encouragement which I have received from members all across Ireland. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I am blessed to be surrounded by the wonderful membership, and I am so looking forward to meeting many of you in the months ahead, as we seek to extend the work of Mothers' Union in this land we love.

For those who do not yet know me I'd like to share a little bit about myself. I was born in Lisburn, Co Antrim where I enjoyed a happy childhood with my parents and younger sister. An active member of St Paul's Parish Church, I have had an awareness of God for as long as I can remember and accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour when I was six. My faith grew steadily through the example and teaching of my mother and grandmother who taught me the importance of personal prayer. My Rector, Canon Ken Cochrane, greatly nurtured my faith in his post-confirmation class. He encouraged us not to be 'saved and satisfied' but to continue to work out our salvation daily by being open to the honing of the Holy Spirit.

I have recently retired from my teaching career as Head of Computing in Omagh Academy having taught in the post primary sector since 1984. I consider it a privilege to have shared in the lives of so many wonderful young people. My husband Robert is the Rector of Edenderry and Clanabogan Parishes outside Omagh, where we have lived since marrying in 1990. Robert greatly encourages and supports me in all I do, particularly in relation to Mothers' Union. We have two lovely daughters, Alicia, married to David and Cathy, married to Gregory. We are also blessed with two grandsons, Toby, two years old and Bertie, seven months old who bring us joy every day.

My mother first introduced me to Mothers' Union. She was a branch member in my home church and 'Literature Rep' for Connor Diocese. I recall she loved her night's out at Mothers' Union as they always seemed to have great fun! I always remember them having a bit of a 'carry on'!! Likewise, my sister and I enjoyed MU nights too as we got to stay up late watching TV with dad! I liked helping mum sort out the Mothers' Union booklets and resources for distribution to the branches and still have some literature she gave me when I joined in 1990 after I married. Since then, I have held many roles at branch, diocesan and All Ireland level and am looking forward to my new role serving you in God's strength.

I know that many of you have special services planned this year and a few branches are celebrating 125 years of Mothers' Union in their parish. What a fantastic achievement! Sadly, we have also lost a number of members and many more have been bereaved through the loss of precious family members, Be assured of my love and prayers as you face the days ahead.

We have so much to mark, and I want to thank you for all of the good work being done in the name of Mothers' Union throughout Ireland. The range of projects and your generosity is inspirational. We also have a number of new faces on the All Ireland Trustee Board and I know you will support and encourage them in their new roles. Thank you to all who responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and agreed to accept the call to office at All Ireland and in the dioceses and branches.

As I write this letter we are in the season of Lent – a time of preparation and repentance as we look forward to the resurrection power of Jesus on Easter Day. Jesus is the new wine that fills our lives with grace. We step out in that grace in his name as we seek to serve others through the work of Mothers' Union. In Luke's Gospel we read: 'No-one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But the new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved'. Luke 5:37-39.

Last week I attended a busy Domestic Abuse event in Londonderry at which Mothers' Union was the only faith-based group in attendance. It struck me that in the midst of all the other organisations present, we were unique in advocating for victims of domestic abuse through sharing God's love and concern for the wellbeing of his children, in whatever circumstances they find themselves. We are in a privileged position to be able to share the love and grace of God, and that is what we need to commit to in our churches, branches and the wider community. Our Mission 'to demonstrate the Christian faith in action by the transformation of communities worldwide through the nurture of the family in its many forms' can only be truly carried out if we accept the new wine of the Gospel and thereby become the 'new wineskins'. The start of a new triennium is an opportunity to take stock of what is good but also to consider how we need to change and evolve to touch the lives of those around us in a meaningful way. This does not mean abandoning all we have cherished but rather identifying what hinders. We are living in a different age when so many have drifted from our churches and many children do not have the church and Sunday School background that most of us enjoyed. The church, never mind the Mothers' Union, is seen as out of touch and irrelevant to so many and yet we have the most life changing message for all! We need to find ways to engage meaningfully with this 'lost generation' to strengthen communities all over the world, help the most disadvantaged at home and advocate for the rights of families.

The old wineskins in the reading can be seen like the legalistic approach of the Pharisees. We cannot allow ourselves to be so tied up with rules and legality that it hinders the Mothers' Union Vision of 'a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful, and flourishing relationships'.

Jesus is not against tradition, but he is against tradition which is used to hinder the work of God. The new wine represents Christ's teachings and the Holy Spirit. Jesus favours new ways of thinking which requires new containers (methods and traditions). He encourages us to be open to change because to receive the new, we must be willing to let go of the old. This means we need to be willing to be transformed and embrace new ways of approach while not clinging to tradition for tradition's sake. We need to be open to new experiences and new relationships while being willing to let go of old habits which no longer serve us or God. We look forward as 'Resurrection People' filled with the new wine in our new wineskins so that we are better equipped to reach out to those in our parishes and communities who are looking for peace in the wrong places.

Every blessing, *Kay Clarke*

# Mothers' Union 'Souls of our Shoes' Exhibition launched in Enniskillen Library

The *Souls of our Shoes Exhibition* was launched in Enniskillen Library on Tuesday 26 November 2024 by Mrs. Cathy Doig, the All-Ireland Mothers' Union Social Policy Representative for Northern Ireland. This exhibition highlights stories of resilience from victims and survivors of domestic abuse.



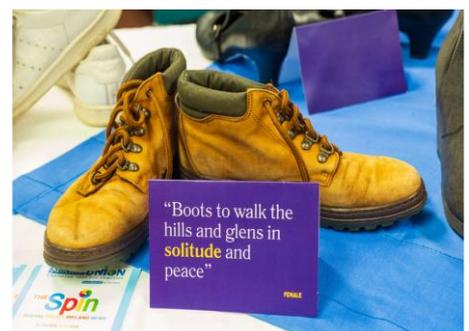
The Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union President, Mrs. Heather Ellis welcomed everyone to the launch. She told those present that this exhibition had its beginnings in Scotland, and it has been used by Mothers' Union in Ireland in a variety of diocesan and parish contexts from Coleraine to Cork and now more recently in Clones. Mrs. Ellis explained: "It is an extension of our Mothers' Union initiatives which highlight abuse, and the practical and prayerful support we offer to families. It is a reminder that with timely help, many can escape from their abusive situations, rebuild their confidence, and live in safety."

Mrs. Ellis also said, "For us in Mothers' Union, complacency is not an option, actions, no matter how tiny, are the way forward. Tiny steps have a habit of turning into large strides. Armed with prayer, compassion, and integrity, we step forward and continue to build on our work to combat domestic abuse and gender-based violence. Together we call for #NoMore1in3'. Heather ended by saying 'I believe that not one of you who sees these shoes and reads the comments tonight will ever forget this experience – nor should we ... but we also must continue to pray for all who are victims and do whatever, however and wherever we can, to help and support them."

A special hymn was sung by Miss Jane McKinley (MU member Enniskillen) entitled *16 Days*. Mothers' Union Members from eleven branches attended the event along with representatives of partner agencies from Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Police and Community Safety Partnership, Women's Aid, and the PSNI. Several other local charities as well as Clergy from the Diocese of Clogher and Bishop Ian Ellis were also present. Speakers at the event were the Vice-Chair of Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Mrs Elaine Brough, Inspector Joni Beattie PSNI and Bishop Ian Ellis.

Bishop Ian in his remarks noted that 'An exhibition such as this raises awareness and lifts our eyes to a problem in society. It prompts us to develop a compassionate and hopeful response, to ensure that anyone experiencing domestic abuse can feel safe and supported by the church and wider community.'

The Diocesan President concluded by recording her thanks to those attending and following the launch, all were invited to view the exhibition and enjoy refreshments provided by the Library Staff and Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union.



## Getaway Weekend 2024



The MU Getaway in 2024 was on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of October in Armagh City Hotel. The event was organised by the All Ireland Reps Liz Greer and Wendy Halligan, under the watchful eye of All Ireland President, June Butler and VP Action and Outreach, Hazel Speares. The bookings totalled 162 attending either part or all of the Getaway. It was great seeing new faces and welcoming back the regulars. The guest speaker was Ruth Garvey-Williams from Buncrana in Co Donegal. Ruth has been working for the last 34 years in both the UK, Ireland and across Europe. Ruth has two grown-up daughters, one of whom is getting married on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October but Ruth had committed to being with us before the wedding plans were confirmed! Our theme for the Getaway was **“Gloriously Ordinary”**. Ruth reminded us on Friday evening that this was our time to reflect and our precious time away. Ruth is only too well aware of all that the Mothers’ Union in Ireland do and the fantastic awareness of the 16 days of activism against violence as well as all the work we do in our own communities and overseas.

The Getaway got off to a marvellous start on Friday evening with a visit to the Palace Demesne, Armagh. Members walked or drove to the Palace which is surrounded by beautiful grounds and the autumn colours were amazing to admire. We were greeted by the Lord Mayor, Sarah Duffy and were served delicious canapes and refreshments. After dinner back at the hotel, our All Ireland Chaplain, Archdeacon Stephen McBride led our Mini Big Sing accompanied by Claire Smyth, who is a brilliant musician. The hymn which topped our poll was “How Great Thou Art”. Thanks to our All Ireland Chaplain for introducing and bringing his own thoughts to each hymn. Friday evening closed with a short epilogue led by the Most Reverend Bishop John McDowell.



The next morning after breakfast, June Butler, All Ireland President welcomed everyone to the Getaway. We had a further 82 folk join our overnighters. Registration was busy, but all was under control with the help of Debbie, DP of Armagh and her members who were a huge support and help to the whole event.

Ruth covered 3 sessions in the morning, Jars of Clay, This Treasure, and Time Out for personal reflection. Each session began with a hymn once again accompanied by Claire on the keyboard. Ruth reminded us of getting to know our God. Our God who is generous, kind and loving. Whatever you are facing you have this treasure, and the ability to keep going. While Ruth was speaking to us, we had fun with some clay and making a mould for our tee lights. We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. There were amazing treasures of clay being made and Ruth reminded us of the light shining through the gaps of our treasure, something to hold onto, listen to our God as we are always in his capable hands.

Ruth's final session gave us time to think and reflect on what we had heard earlier. We had the opportunity to walk outside and enjoy the Armagh autumn colours around us, sit in a quiet place to reflect on the treasure that is the Lord Jesus and spend time thanking Him. Talk to Jesus about where you feel afflicted, perplexed or struck down. Reflect on the hope that HE is with you. Ruth very kindly gave everyone the opportunity if they wanted to talk to her privately and pray with them.

Mid-day prayers were led by Armagh Diocesan Chaplain, Revd Alan Cross, who is always very supportive of the Mothers' Union throughout the Diocese of Armagh. After lunch, we had our final session entitled "GO Activity" with Carol Doey leading us. The session started in fine fashion with calypso dancing to "Jump In The Line" (Shake, shake, shake, Senora) which certainly woke us up after our delicious lunch. Carol then asked us to think of the title of our life story and the titles of the first 5 chapters of the book with the next chapter to be continued. Those who wanted could share with everyone what they had written all of which were very thought-provoking. Carol then facilitated a time of meditation which allowed everyone to relax, she then closed the GO Activity session with a rousing rendition of "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine".



The Getaway was a wonderful opportunity for the members to enjoy a little "me time" in our busy lives. Armagh proved to be a wonderful venue, with great food and also a very relaxing atmosphere. Everyone commented on how much they enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and making new ones. There was a great sense of fun, faith and fellowship throughout our time away. At the end of the Getaway, it was great to see friendships being formed and the exchanging of contact details.

A huge thanks to June, All Ireland President, Hazel Speares, VP Action and Outreach, and Debbie Davidson, DP of Armagh for their support, and valued expertise along the way to make this event happen. Thanks to Heather and her helpers for providing the MUE stall which was available over the entire Getaway. Thanks also to Ann Howard, our photographer for the Getaway, Ann just mingled around and took photos and videos when the opportunity arose. Thanks to Joy Greer who made the heart gifts as a lovely keepsake for everyone who attended, it was the host diocese's way of sending love and fellowship from Armagh back to all the other dioceses, branch members and friends.

The 2025 Getaway is on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> October in the Four Seasons Hotel, Monaghan. The booking form is available on the All-Ireland website ([www.mothersunion.ie](http://www.mothersunion.ie)). December 2025 will mark the end of our six-year term of office as young members rep for the north and south of Ireland. In your dioceses please think and pray about who would be willing to bring their own talents and expertise to the wonderful work of Mothers' Union as young members representatives.

Report by Liz Greer & Wendy Halligan

## Cork Getaway Weekend 2024



In early November members and friends of Mothers' Union gathered in the Garryvoe Hotel in East Cork for a most enjoyable weekend. Feedback has been excellent and, without a doubt, the weekend seems to have been well worth all the effort and planning and was well appreciated by all who attended. We had a wealth of knowledge from all our speakers. Canon Alan Marley (UCC Chaplain) encouraged us to Grow and Flourish (our Conference Theme), linking it to his own personal journey of faith.

Canon Alan's own relaxed and often humorous style went down very well with the members, as did his extensive experience of working, living, and sharing with the Taizé Community in France. We loved listening to some Taizé chants during our Eucharist on the Sunday morning.

Iris Suitor made the long journey down south to be with us, and we were so glad she did! She began by sharing a bit of her life and faith journey, then leading on to her role as a Zonal Trustee for Mothers' Union.

Unfortunately, Covid had sorely curtailed the ability for the Worldwide Zonal Trustees to meet in person, so Zoom was the only way. Iris also told us about some of the many Overseas projects that Mothers' Union is involved in. Iris is a natural storyteller, which coupled with her wonderful dry wit, kept members fully engaged and laughing!



Mary St Leger talked to us about her work with OSS (One Stop Shop) Cork. OSS deals with people affected by domestic abuse and gender-based violence, giving them much needed information and support. It is the only domestic abuse service in Cork that supports both men and women. Mary a lifelong experience with them which showed in her presentation which was both sobering and, in some ways, encouraging.



Afternoon workshops on Fit for the Future, Flowers on a Budget, and Crafting kept some of our number active and engaged, while others took the opportunity to get some much-needed rest and relaxation (or a walk on the beach). Members also got the chance to purchase their cards and Christmas cards from our MU Enterprise stall! We were very well looked after by the amazing staff at the Garryvoe Hotel to which we are extremely grateful!

On Sunday morning the Rev Eileen Cremin led us sensitively and beautifully in a Eucharist Service for Remembrance Day. We were delighted to have poppies for the occasion and to have a good amount to pass on to the Royal British Legion/Poppy Ireland fund.

## Action & Outreach Unit

The Action & Outreach Unit spearheads many of the projects which Mothers' Union gets involved at both All Ireland level and overseas. Dioceses throughout Ireland have initiated innovative and different projects which have helped families in adversity ~ AFIA (Away From It All), Helping Hands, School Book & Uniform Bursary Schemes, supporting local Women's Refuges, families of prisoners, Ukrainian refugees, and refugees from other countries to name just a few. Many members also knit items for neo natal units, seafarers, and fiddle sleeves for dementia patients in nursing homes as well as trauma teddies.

The Unit is also now responsible for coordinating the Baby Changing Facilities at the Ploughing Championships. This facility, which is an important outreach for Mothers' Union, is greatly appreciated by the parents/guardians of babies/toddlers attending the ploughing as Mothers' Union provides a clean safe environment in which to care for the child's needs. We also receive great support and encouragement from the National Ploughing Association when organising our involvement at this prestigious show.

Numerous projects are supported by Mothers' Union overseas. Our members work at grassroots level around the world. They bring hope and practical support to thousands of people every year through parenting, literacy, and community development programmes.

Ending violence, ending poverty, ending injustice. Our projects are helping build a better future.



My name is Margaret Jacob and I am the current Unit Coordinator for Action & Outreach. I am a retired primary school Principal from the Diocese of Cashel, Ferns & Ossory. I am married to a farmer, have two sons and two daughters and two grandchildren. I joined Mothers' Union in 2014 having retired from teaching and quickly became involved at Diocesan level as Secretary and Unit Coordinator for Fundraising and Communication.

I was previously the All-Ireland Unit Coordinator for Fundraising & Communication and I am the current Editor of Focus as well as looking after the All-Ireland website. I enjoy knitting, baking, decorating cakes and I play the organ in my parish.

My name is Hazel Speares and I have been a member of Mothers' Union many years. I have held various roles at Diocesan level in Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh. Presently, I am All Ireland Vice President for Action and Outreach. Mothers' Union is truly a wonderful organisation that has afforded me many opportunities. I have made lots of lovely Christian friends and learned so much.

I am a retired primary school principal. I thoroughly enjoyed my teaching career. My husband, James, is a semi-retired farmer and together we have four grown up children and three beautiful healthy grandkids. I enjoy travelling abroad, walking, swimming, and spending time with family and friends.



# Faith & Policy Unit

Our Christian faith is at the heart of Mothers' Union. Prayer and worship are central to our work and praying with purpose underpins all our activities.

The role of the Faith and Policy Unit is:

- To support members in their faith.
- To research and campaign on faith and policy issues relevant to the vision and aim of Mothers' Union.
- To enable members to be active in areas of faith and policy.
- To network and liaise with external organisations nationally and internationally, on faith and policy issues.
- To support Indoor members.
- To support clergy with faith and worship resources as well as practical help.

The Unit consists of the All-Ireland Indoor Members Rep, two Social Policy Reps, and a Faith and Policy Unit Coordinator from each of the dioceses, as well as a VP and Unit Coordinator. Recent activity has included promoting "Thy Kingdom Come", raising awareness of and working to bring an end to all forms of violence against women and girls, highlighting issues such as homelessness and modern slavery and contributing to Government consultation documents.



## Some words from the Vice President Patsy Devoy ;

Married Robert forty-nine years ago this year and can't believe it! We came to Cork the next year - and it's been home ever since. I have three daughters and eight wonderful grandkids and so lucky that they're all close by.

Faith and Policy (back to Prayer and Spirituality days!) has always been my MU 'home' base. I served in the diocese, at All Ireland and in the Unit in Mary Sumner House - now the privilege continues as VP...this being my final year (a naughty 7th as I was co-opted for the first year!). My latest special thing has been (at last!) being able to attend the 'Equipping the Church to End Domestic Abuse' course - which I really recommend. Such a sad thing to even need, but so very very important. As for many reasons over the years, I'm very proud of this leadership shown by MU.

## And from the Unit Coordinator Cathy Doig;

I'm originally from Co. Fermanagh and before I came to live in Broughshane sixteen years ago I lived in England, Scotland and briefly in Japan.

I have been married to Dave for twenty-three years and we have one daughter. Before I took on the role of Northern Social Policy Rep, I was the Social Policy Contact in Connor Diocese for six years. All my life I have been about campaigning for human rights, equality for all and environmental issues, I believe strongly that as Christians we have a duty to speak out against injustice in all its forms. I am proud to be following in the footsteps of my Mum as a Mothers' Union member and look forward to the next chapter of my journey in my new role as Unit Co-ordinator.



# Finance & Central Service Unit

The finance and central services unit is tasked with coordinating the administrative and financial activities of Mothers' Union. This includes insurance, risk assessments, nomination and election processes, safeguarding, finances and many other governance related items. The unit is here to assist dioceses as much as we can to help them run smoothly.

We are very fortunate to have such a committed team in the unit. The All-Ireland unit consists of the following:

- **Brigid Barrett** – All-Ireland Finance & Central Services Unit Co-ordinator
- **Sophia Dillon** – Vice President, All-Ireland Finance & Central Services Unit
- **Revd. Canon Ken Rue** – All-Ireland Treasurer
- **Hannah Tate** – All-Ireland Administrator

## Brigid writes:

Little did I realise when I sat at the last Unit meeting as a diocesan unit coordinator that I would be taking on this role at All-Ireland level! It is a privilege to be the All-Ireland Finance & Central Services unit coordinator for the next three years.

I have been a member of Mothers' Union for over 20 years and have taken on many roles during my time – Branch Leader, Diocesan Secretary, Diocesan Finance & Central Services Unit Co-ordinator.



Sophia & Brigid

I am married to Arthur; a Church of Ireland Rector and we have three grown up children and one grandchild. In my working life I have been an accountant in a secondary school and administrator to a small charity completing all administrator and financial work for them. I have worked in the Church of Ireland also with various roles including Diocesan Secretary, Bishops' Secretary and P.A. and most recently I am working as Safeguarding and Education Administrator in the Diocese of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory.

As I said at my first Unit meeting, I believe that God will equip each one of us in our varied and different roles in Mothers' Union. He knows us inside and out and places us where we are supposed to be. I am really looking forward to this new role and working with and supporting all the Diocesan Unit Coordinators

## Sophia writes:

My name is Sophia Dillon. I am vice president of Finance and Central services and enjoy my role and meeting new faces.

I am a retired widow living just outside Tandragee. I have three children who are all married and have twelve grandchildren ranging from 3 to fifteen years of age and at times they can keep me busy but I enjoy helping out.

I worship in Ballymore Parish church and have been an MU member almost forty years having taken on various roles within the branch and also at diocesan level before joining All Ireland Trustees. I really like how MU support families here in Ireland and overseas.

# Fundraising & Communication Unit

This Unit within the Mothers' Union is responsible for managing fundraising activities and all forms of communication to raise awareness about our work, engage supporters, and generate donations to support our projects and initiatives in Ireland and across the globe.

Communication takes the form of the Mothers Union All-Ireland magazine, Focus, which is distributed in Spring and also in the form of communications from Mary Sumner House, such as the twice yearly magazine Connected and the Prayer Diary.

This unit runs the website and Facebook page and group and is responsible for sending information about Mothers' Union to local and national papers. Through Mothers' Union enterprises, MUE, we raise money through the sale of merchandise which includes cards, gifts, notepads, and tote bags.

The unit is made up of a Unit Coordinator, Revd. Canon Jen McWhirter, one of the All-Ireland VPs, Moira Thom, and the PROs from each diocese.



My name is Canon Jen McWhirter and I am a native of Co. Antrim. I have been ordained for twenty years.

I joined Mother's' Union in 2009 following a mission trip to Kajiado Diocese in Kenya.

I became PRO for the Southern Dioceses in 2017 and was involved in the organising committee for the annual gatherings in both Belfast and York. I contribute regularly to Midday Prayers on the Mothers' Union Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/MothersUnion/>) and I also write for the annual prayer diary.

I have been involved in the Fundraising & Communications Unit for many years at various levels. As Unit Coordinator between 2013 – 2018, I was part of the team who organised the thirteen events to mark thirteen decades as we celebrated our 130th anniversary in Ireland during 2017. I also led the team organising the souvenir stalls at the General Meeting 2014 in Belfast.

I also initiated the distribution of Focus free of charge to every member in Ireland. Along with Phyllis Grothier, we created the idea of Mums in May as a triennial Fundraiser. My career background was in Sales & Marketing - I am qualified with the Chartered Institute of Marketing – and so I have always endeavoured to make our MU marketing tools as professional as other charities.

***We have a great story to tell and the challenge is always to communicate that as widely as possible.***



# Focus on the "Big Hymn Sings"

## Mums in May

The Opening "Big Hymn Sing" service took place in St. Canice's Cathedral Kilkenny and the special preacher was the Right Revd. Adrian Wilkinson, Bishop of Cashel, Ferns & Ossory



The Right Reverend Adrian Wilkinson  
June Butler &  
The Very Reverend Stephen Farrell

The congregation joined in gusto with the singing of :  
"To God be the glory!", "Dear Lord and Father of mankind", "How deep the Father's love for us", "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah", "Amazing grace", "What a friend we have in Jesus", "Blessed assurance", "Be thou my vision", "Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided" and finally that rousing hymn "O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder".



## Armagh “Big Hymn Sing”



Our ‘Diocesan Big Sing’ on Mary Sumner Day, 9th August was held in Brackaville Parish Church where we raised the roof and sang our Top Ten Hymns voted for by our members. Over 200 members and friends attended the service, and we raised £1255 for Mums in May Funds.

Rev Canon Matthew Hagan MBE, Rector, and Rev Alan Cross, Diocesan Chaplain read our Bible readings. Each hymn was introduced with details and history.

The MU ladies from Brackaville, Donaghendry and Ballyclog provided a delicious supper, and everyone enjoyed a time of fellowship.

## Connor “Big Hymn Sing”



Mothers’ Union members from all corners of Connor Diocese came to All Saints Parish church, Antrim on the afternoon of Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May, raising their voices in a fundraising “Big Sing” for the Mums in May Fund.

The All Ireland President, Mrs June Butler attended the event in Antrim as did the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison and his wife Nadine. The sermon was given by the All-Ireland Mothers’ Union Chaplain and Vicar of All Saints, the Ven. Dr. Stephen McBride. The lessons were read by Mrs Cathy Doig, Fundraising and Communications Unit Coordinator, and Mrs Alberta Miskimmin, Finance and Administration Unit Coordinator. The Diocesan President, Mrs Sally Cotter spoke about the importance of the Mums in May Fund in Ireland.

Of course, no Mothers’ Union event would be complete without a much needed cup of tea afterwards when everyone had the chance to catch up with friends old and new.



## Cork, Cloyne & Ross "Big Hymn Sing"

Members and visitors came together in Ross Cathedral on a very sunny day in April. 2024. We were delighted to have June Butler with us for the service. Dean Cliff Jeffers did an excellent job of researching the stories behind the hymns which we sung, which really helped us to appreciate not only the authors of the hymns, but also the sentiments behind them. It was a truly moving and tuneful service. Hilary Dring had also put together a PowerPoint presentation about the work of Mothers' Union at home and worldwide. It was good to be reminded of what we have been involved with and the positive difference Mothers' Union has meant to families and individuals. After the service we moved to the Parish Hall for refreshments



Thank you to Ross Union of Parishes and the local MU branch for their welcome, to Rev Ivan Ruiters our preacher, to Eunice Jeffers, our organist. It was wonderful to have Joyce, who has been a member for seventy-five years at the service.



## Down & Dromore "Big Hymn Sing"



Members from all over the diocese and indeed from much further afield filled St Finnian's Church in Belfast for the penultimate All Ireland Big Sing. Each hymn/song was introduced by the person who had chosen it and the reason why this piece was meaningful to them. The incredible singing, on Sunday evening 8 September was led by a superb musical group from St Finnian's that culminated in a wonderful version of Amazing Grace that had us all swaying.

## *Meath & Kildare "Big Hymn Sing"*



We held our Festival Service combined with our Big Hymn Sing in St Patrick's Cathedral in May. This was conducted by Dean Paul Bogle. We had a big turn out and the singing was mighty. Dean Paul was worried the roof might be damaged.

## *Cashel, Ferns & Ossory "Big Hymn Sings"*

A large congregation gathered in St. Colman's Church, Templeshanbo (Enniscorthy) for a "Big Hymn Sing" and to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of Killanne/Killegney branch.



The service was conducted by Revd. Canon Trevor Sargent who had pastoral care of the Union, which was vacant at the time. We were delighted too to welcome our Diocesan Chaplain, Revd. Ger James, and Revd. Redfern who was providing holiday cover in the Union for the months of May and June. The special preacher was Janet Crampton, a former Rector's wife and Branch Leader and the organist was Margaret Jacob.

Cashel, Ferns and Ossory also held a Mums in May 'Big Hymn Sing' Concert in Christ Church, Gorey on Mary Summer Day, August 9th. It was a brilliant few hours of singing the 10 favourite hymns which were introduced by the Diocesan President, Lesley Bayley, and picked by members from across the Diocese. We were joined by Lir Female Ensemble and the Arklow Shipping Silver Band, with Naomi Besanson the organist for the night.



## Derry and Raphoe - "Big Hymn Sings"



As part of the triennial Mums in May fundraising drive, Derry and Raphoe held not one but three Big Hymn Sing events! The first took place in Kilcronaghan Parish Church, Tobermore on 7<sup>th</sup> March when members from the areas of North and South Sperrin came together to raise the roof with their singing. The service was led by Rev Rosie Diffin.

The second event took place in Lislimnaghan Parish Church, Omagh on a wet and windy evening but that did not deter the large congregation that turned up to sing their hearts out. The service was led by Revd. Canon Derek Quinn, who was joined by the Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, Rt Rev Andrew Forster. As well as raising funds for Mums in May, across both evenings we learnt more about how the Mums in May grants helped throughout our diocese and further afield in the last number of years; we focused on our four units, the work they do and were encouraged by Bishop Andrew to continue to be a blessing in our communities through Mums in May.



The third event was an evening of praise and celebration with Rev Canon David McBeth and friends in the beautiful St Peters Parish Church, Londonderry. An inspirational and fun evening of gospel songs, old and new and a wonderful way to round up our Big Hymn Sings for 2024!



# Clogher "Big Hymn Sing"

Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union held a Big Hymn Sing in St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen. Everyone was welcomed by Very Revd Kenny Hall, Dean of Clogher.



Mrs Heather Ellis, MU Diocesan President introduced the event and all were entertained to an evening of wonderful musical items. Donagh choir, conducted by Ethne McCord, and accompanied by Gerard Toal sang four pieces. We were also entertained by Lynnea Hardy, Judith Anderson & Ellen Bloomfield, Jane McKinley, and Revd William Jeffrey.

The Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union Trustees also sang two items, accompanied by Diane Simpson. Mrs June Butler. All Ireland MU President read the lesson.



Revd Dr Edwin Aiken (Curate at St Macartin's) and Valerie McMorris (Faith & Policy) led the prayers. Revd. Rebecca Guildea gave an insight into a grant which she obtained from 'Mums in May' for the Sunday School children in the parishes of Garrison, Slavin, Belleek & Kiltyclogher.

Bishop Ian Ellis gave a very interesting and appropriate reflection. The organist for all of the hymns and for some of the singers was Glenn Moore.



*Mums in May*  
BIG HYMN SING

## Dublin & Glendalough "Big Hymn Sing"



The Big Hymn Sing Festival Service was on Sunday 15th September 2024 in St. Maelruain's, Tallaght which was very well attended, it was great to see past members joining with us. I would like to thank Avril for her research on the introductions to the hymns, thank you Avril.

It was great to see all the Branch Banners on display, the colour and design. On behalf of everyone I thank St. Maelruain's Parish for their wonderful welcome and hospitality. It was a privilege to have June Butler All Ireland President in attendance and June said a few words at tea. There was a great spread of delicious eats and the food left over was given to Saoirse Womens' Refuge in Tallaght and they were very grateful.

## Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh "Big Hymn Sing"



Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh Diocese held their "Big Hymn Sing" on Sunday 8th September in St. Paul's Church, Collooney. It was a wonderful event of praise and thanksgiving. Film clips of members introducing the hymns were used throughout the service taking the congregation to various parishes throughout the Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh.

A delicious supper was served to the large congregation after the service which was very much appreciated by everyone in attendance

# The Final "Big Hymn Sing" ~ Ballymena

(Report and pictures by kind permission from the DCO Connor Diocese, Karen Bushby)



The last in the Mothers' Union's series of All Ireland Big Sings was held on Saturday November 16 in St Patrick's Parish Church, Ballymena.

The service in Ballymena was June Butler MBE's last formal All Ireland event as MU President. President-Elect, Kay Clarke, Diocese of Derry and Raphoe, was also present at the Ballymena event.

The preacher was the Most Rev John McDowell, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All-Ireland. Also in attendance were Bishops George Davison (Connor); Ian Ellis (Clogher); and Sarah Groves (Moravian). The Clare Choral from Ballyclare led the singing and also performed a number of pieces.

The Rev Canon Mark McConnell, rector of the Parish of Ballymena (Kilconriola) and Ballyclug, and the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor and All-Ireland Mothers' Union President also officiated.



The lesson was read by Mrs Butler, All Ireland President, who also gave a personal reflection on her favourite hymn "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah."

Iris Suitor, All Ireland Zonal Trustee, spoke about the work of Mum's in May, and prayers were led by the All-Ireland Unit Co-ordinators Clare Stewart (Action & Outreach), Kay Clarke (Faith & Policy, Kaye Nesbitt (Finance & Central Services), and Margaret Jacob (Fundraising & Communication).



Several hundred Mothers' Union members and friends attended from dioceses across Ireland, and St Patrick's was packed for the service.



# Diocese of Armagh News

The New Year began with the first of the All-Ireland Communion Services as it was decided to trial holding a service in a different Diocese each month. The Diocese of Armagh was delighted to host the first service with the Archbishop, the Dean, and Diocesan Chaplain taking part. Also, in January the members and friends had a fantastic night at 'Snow White & Seven Dwarfs' in the Grand Opera House. A big thank you for organising this goes to our Young Members Rep, Lynda Galway.

Mums in May awarded us a grant which we used to purchase "Madlug" bags. We purchased 80 Backpack Madlug bags and eighty free hold bags. These were donated to Women's Aid Refuges in Cookstown, Portadown, Newry and Dundalk, to ensure children moving from abusive homes or from care homes will have their belongings in a decent bag and that they retain their dignity. Later in the year, we purchased a further eighty bags to continue this work with this Project.

Our Worldwide Meeting was held in Church House, Armagh on 19<sup>th</sup> March, this was very well attended and everyone enjoyed Roger Thompson who is in Partnership with CMSI and Burundi & Rwanda. He spoke on MU Literacy Project and interacted with the audience which included some dancing. In May we were delighted to have a well-attended Festival Service in St. Patrick's Cathedral. Our All Ireland President, Mrs June Butler attended and delivered the address. We were delighted that June could be with us in Armagh as this was one of her last official functions in the Diocese for her term of office.



Two New Trustees were commissioned, Jennifer Pillow as Unit Co-ordinator for Finance & Central Services and Eleanor Orr as Database Co-ordinator for Finance & Central Services. Eleanor was also the winner of the All-Ireland competition to write a Prayer for Annabelle Hayes, Eleanor read this prayer at the service.

Our Indoor Members Rep, Teresa organised a wonderful Communion Service in Kildarton Parish Church, Archbishop McDowell and All Ireland Indoor Members Rep, Irene Boyd also attended. The members of Kildarton Mothers' Union provided a delicious Afternoon Tea for everyone.

We had a fantastic day at Armagh County Show where MU provided the Baby Changing and Feeding Facility, we had around two hundred babies through our facility and as always received appreciative comments from incredibly grateful parents. We really enjoy being part of Armagh Show, getting MU into the community and have built up a great friendship with the committee.

We marked International Widow's Day by sharing prayers and thoughts on our Facebook page and promoted a recorded service by All Ireland Mothers' Union which was available to watch on You Tube. We feel it is especially important to support Widows and their families.

September is always a busy month, and 2024 was no different, we had five services for Tynan, Mullabrack, Dungannon, Tullyhogue and Kilmore Rural Deaneries. All very well attended services and a wonderful time of praise and fellowship with a cuppa afterwards. Our MUE Rep, Heather faithfully attended all the services which enabled our members to stock up on cards, gifts and calendars and diaries for 2025.

The Indoor Members were treated to a beautiful Afternoon Tea Party provided by the ladies of Desertcreat MU in the Parish Hall. The ladies who enjoyed food, fellowship and reminiscing with lifelong friends and a sing-along with Revd. David Bell.

Our Annual Prayer Vigil & Breakfast was held in the Royal Hotel, Cookstown on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> November. Melanie Douglas was our very inspirational speaker who also played her guitar and led us in praise, songs, and prayer. We had over 140 members present, and everyone enjoyed a delicious breakfast.

Two busloads of members and friends attended the final ‘Big Sing’ on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November, in St. Patrick’s Church, Ballymena at 2pm. After the service we enjoyed refreshments in the Parish Hall and an opportunity to renew friendships. We stopped on our way home for our evening tea.

At Christmas, the Diocese filled gift bags for patients in Hospital and in the Hospice which were greatly appreciated, the patients and their families said it was lovely to know that they had not been forgotten.



During the year, we were delighted that Clonfeacle branch celebrated 75 years and Derrygortreavy branch celebrated 65 years in a joint service and later in the year Donaghmore branch celebrated 75 years. On both occasions Lady Eames gave a thought-provoking address, and we were all treated to delicious cakes and refreshments after each service.

## *Diocese of Cashel, Ferns & Ossory News*

The Diocese continues to be continually active in supporting families in adversity through AFIA, the School Book & Uniform Bursary Scheme and helping Hands. Sadly, we continue to see families struggling and they are incredibly grateful for the help and support they receive from Mothers’ Union. We are grateful to the “Mums in May” fund for grants received to support these projects.



This year Diocese throughout Ireland raised funds for Mums in May by selling a Quiz Book, holding “Big Hymn Sing” services and other fundraising events. Members also support the local women’s refuges, knit for baby units in our hospitals etc.

Lesley Bayley, Diocesan President, continued to hold ZOOM services every Tuesday evening with a loyal band of members logging in. Other services which were arranged during the year included a “Service of Remembrance for all who are Bereaved,” the Diocesan Holy Communion Service and a service to mark the Mothers’ Union Global Day of Action.

There was two “Big Hymn Sing” events in the Diocese, one held by Killanne/Killegney Branch to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the foundation of the branch and a “Big Hymn Sing” concert in Christ Church, Gorey.

Long service certificates were presented to Joan Dier and Iris Tector at the service in St. Colman’s, Templeshanbo hosted by Killanne/Killegney Branch. Sadly, Joan Dier, a former Diocesan President died just after Christmas.



We lost another former Diocesan President, Margaret Stephens in early January. Both ladies were great supporters of Mothers' Union and in lieu of flowers donations were given to The Centenary Fund in memory of Joan and The Overseas Fund in memory of Margaret.

The picture shows Iris and Joan receiving their long service certificates.



The National Ploughing Championships were hosted in the Diocese in Ratheniska, Stradbally and Mothers' Union yet again provided the Baby Changing facilities. This facility is greatly appreciated by the parents/guardians of babies/toddlers attending the Ploughing as it is a clean, safe environment in which to cater for their child's needs. This is an important outreach for Mothers' Union as many say that they would not be able to attend as a family if this facility was not available.

Lesley Bayley completed her six year term as Diocesan President at The end of 2024 and a presentation was made to her by the Diocesan Chaplain, Revd. Ger James at the Autumn Council in The Woodford Dolmen Hotel on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October. Thanks were expressed to Lesley for all the time, energy, and commitment that she put into her time as Diocesan President. Lesley continues in her role as Social Policy Representative for Southern Ireland.

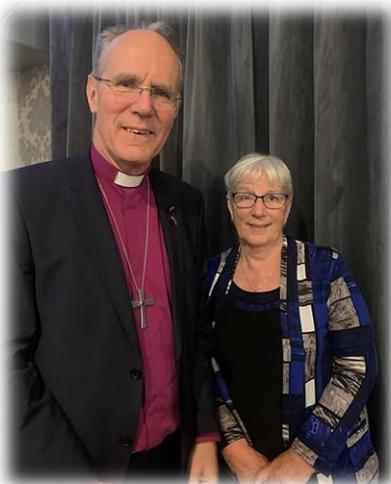
We are grateful to all the outgoing Trustees for all they have done for Mothers' Union in the Diocese during their terms in office.



Congratulations to Linda Ward who has been elected to serve as the new Diocesan President of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory. Linda is a member of Castlecomer Branch. Following her election Linda Said:

"It is a great honour and privilege for me to accept the role of Mothers' Union Diocesan President for this Diocese. We in Cashel, Ferns & Ossory Mothers' Union are blessed to have so many talented and gifted members. I look forward to working with them as a team as we endeavour to nurture members and branches in the years ahead."

## *Diocese of Clogher News*



As an active member of the Garrison group of parishes, Dot Barlow, has been recognised for her community work. She has received a certificate from Fermanagh Rural Community Network at the recent Community awards. She has been recognised as an individual who makes a difference for all of her community, volunteering and cross community work. As branch leader of the Garrison Church, Mothers Union group Dot visits vulnerable and housebound people in the area. She was also the brainchild of a community soup lunch that has been running over the last 18 months which takes place in Garrison Church hall each month. She is helped with this by other Mothers' Union members.

She is congratulated here by Bishop Ian Ellis

A large contingent from Clogher Diocese travelled to Ballymena to attend the final Big Hymn Sing on Saturday November 16 in St Patrick's Parish Church, Ballymena.



Clogher Diocese hosted The Souls of our Shoes Exhibition in Enniskillen Library on Tuesday 26 November 2024 and it was launched by Mrs. Cathy Doig, the All-Ireland Mothers' Union Social Policy Representative for Northern Ireland. This exhibition highlights stories of resilience from victims and survivors of domestic abuse. A full report can be read earlier in this edition of Focus



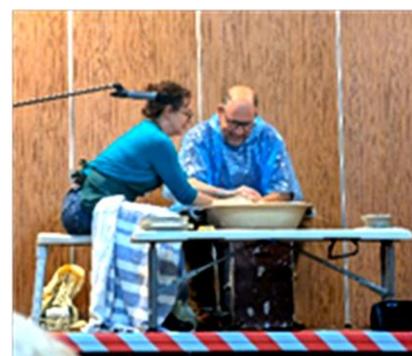
## Diocese of Connor News

### THE GENERATION GAME



The Young Members Committee in the diocese, led by Diocesan YM Rep Melanie McAlister, held a night of fun and laughter with a revival of the popular TV gameshow 'The Generation Game.' Three couples took part – Bishop George Davison and his wife Nadine, Archdeacon Stephen McBride with his Curate Clare, and Diocesan President Sally Cotter and her husband Bob. All three pairs entered the game with enthusiasm.....and a good deal of trepidation! Their first game was to copy the guest Drum Major in following a Royal Marines drum routine.

The concentration on their faces was a sight to behold and the audience roared with laughter. After a supper break, that good old Generation Game stalwart – the potter's wheel – became the second challenge. Instructed by a professional potter, concentration was paramount as the clay wobbled and swayed on the wheel. The finished 'pots' ranged in size from one which might pass for an egg cup while another bore more than a passing resemblance to a plate!



The audience voted for the winning pair who were treated to the challenge of a conveyor belt of random items to remember (aka YM members running across the stage!) in the tradition of the TV programme. A great night of fun, fellowship and laughter which also raised funds for the diocese!

### **DIOCESAN HOLY COMMUNION SERVICE**



The Diocesan Holy Communion service took place in June in All Saints' Parish, Antrim. Led by the Diocesan (and All Ireland) Chaplain, Archdeacon Stephen, the church was filled with members from all over the diocese. Coincidentally, the All Saint's branch was also celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary and kindly invited everyone to join them in the parish centre for supper and a slice of their delicious anniversary cake. The cake was cut by Paddy Wallace, a member of the branch and former Diocesan and All Ireland President.

### **MARKING 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

The Diocesan Social Policy Rep, Jacqui McLaughlin, organised a very successful morning in a local hotel to mark the 16 Days campaign. Three excellent guest speakers had been invited – the Communication & Engagement Manager from the local Women's Aid, a PSNI sergeant who specialises in Domestic Abuse incidents and the Clinical Director of the local Sexual Assault Referral Centre.



All three speakers were excellent and held the audience's attention with the often harrowing accounts of their work. Cathy Doig, All Ireland Social Policy Rep for the Northern Dioceses, spoke on the work that Mothers' Union was doing in the field of Domestic Abuse with the Rise Up campaign and encouraged parishes to get involved in the Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards for their work in highlighting this scourge on society.

### **NEW DIOCESAN PRESIDENT FOR CONNOR DIOCESE**



Alison Skillen has been elected Diocesan President in Connor Diocese for the next Triennium. With over 30 years membership of Mothers' Union during which she has held a variety of roles, Alison brings wonderful experience to the role.

Reflecting on her election, Alison said, *'The Diocese of Connor stretches from Lisburn to the north coast of Antrim. There are forty-five branches of Mothers' Union in the diocese in which members actively support projects locally and worldwide. We seek to increase our membership to enable us to expand our vital help and support to individuals, families and communities who have met with adversity, both at home and worldwide.'*

### **MUMS IN MAY 2024**

Branches across the diocese joined in with this triennial fundraiser holding all sorts of events and selling copies of the Quiz Book. Whilst raising substantial funds for the Mums in May Fund, everyone enjoyed being together for fun and chat in the various events. Well done, ladies!

# Diocese of Cork, Cloyne & Ross News

## 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence

Last year, some of our Trustees aided by Rev Hazel Minion set up a stall in Douglas Village Shopping Centre and we were very encouraged by the response from shoppers.

Many shoppers shared their experience as we sat in Douglas Court Shopping Centre in Cork on the 6<sup>th</sup> December. Some of our trustees spent several hours there, simply available to chat, and to raise awareness of Domestic abuse to those who passed by. We had small cards with helpline numbers on them which we were able to hand out.



It was a privilege to be there, and our hope is that by doing this we have prompted some people to think about what is happening to them or to someone they know, as well as to bring the whole topic of abuse more out into the open. Silence does indeed hide shame, so let us not stop talking about it whenever we can, so that those who are trapped may find the courage to act and become free.

Clonakilty Branch also made their contribution to helping to raise awareness by having a prayer vigil. Kilgarriffe Union set up prayer stations in their Parochial Hall in Clonakilty. The event was called Extraordinary Prayer. Rev Kingsley Sutton, along with MU members set up a display of relevant information and aids to prayer. It ran from 12 midday on December 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> at 2pm. It closed in the evenings. Since this occurred during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, one of the stations displayed posters and information on the Rise Up campaign and handy numbers to support anyone going through abusive situations. Groups from local schools, along with people from the community visited, and it was busy until closing time.

## Mary Sumner Day

Members and friends in Cork, Cloyne and Ross were delighted to link up with our sister diocese of Lichfield in the UK for Mary Sumner Day, 9<sup>th</sup> August.

We gathered for coffee at the parish hall at St Mary's Church in Carrigaline, after which we moved into the church to join, via live stream, fellow members who were at Lichfield Cathedral for a special Eucharist Service to celebrate the day. The Lichfield Diocesan Chaplain led the service along with MU members who read and led intercessions. The link had also gone to another sister diocese of theirs in South Africa, so there was a great sense of being linked, via technology, across many miles. People were also able to join in from their own homes.



After the service we moved on to Camden Fort Meagher in Crosshaven for lunch and a wonderful tour of the fort, which looks out over Cork Harbour, the second deepest harbour in the world after Sydney, Australia.

It was the most beautiful sunny day, and we learned so much about the history of the fort along with the history of our country. As always, members and friends enjoyed catching up and spending time together with stunning views all around us. It is always good to remember Mary Sumner who continues to be an inspiration to so many around the world. Thank you to all at Lichfield Cathedral for making it possible, and to their Diocesan President, Helen, for her help. Thank you also to Deirdre Whitley in particular for all the organising.

On 4<sup>th</sup> July about fifty members and friends gathered in St Mary's Church in Dunmanway for an All-Ireland Holy Communion Service. Thank you to Rev Adam for his welcome and for being our preacher, to Fanlobbus Mothers Union for their welcome and participation in the service, and to Revd. Ivan, our chaplain for leading the worship.



Thank you also to local members for the delicious refreshments they served. It was a wonderful time of fellowship. Three Fanlobbus members were presented with certificates for 52 years of MU membership, Kathleen and Jean Kingston and Hilda Deane.

## *Diocese of Derry & Raphoe News*

### **MIM Project to Improve Literacy of Adult Prisoners in Magilligan Prison:**

Derry and Raphoe Mothers' Union received a MIM Grant of £400 to purchase biographies and other non-fiction books as advised by the prison librarian. This phase enhances further development of the current creative writing programme with Writer in Residence, Pamela, in conjunction with the Prison Arts Foundation\*. The book handover took place a week before Christmas in Magilligan Prison where DP, Jacqui Armstrong, and A&O Unit Coordinator, Anne Smith, received a very warm welcome from the staff. Huge gratitude was expressed by the Governor and staff for this generous MIM donation. Librarian summarised the importance of the library in the lives of offenders and outlined the extensive award-winning creative writing arts programme Pamela, PAF, has run in recent years. Each year, chosen pieces are published in book format and a magazine is compiled by offenders twice a year.



The library is the most used facility in the prison – much more popular than even the gym! The prison runs many programmes and has a range of work and educational facilities, including partnership arrangements with the University of Ulster, and Northwest College. A chapel has been built to facilitate the needs of all chaplains and Prison Fellowship, which runs a restorative justice programme.

Overall, it was an amazing afternoon and most illuminating. We were struck by the holistic way the prison is run and its sense of community. There is an emphasis on prisoners making positive choices for the future and overcoming challenges like addiction and wrong decisions in the past.

Prisoners are given lots of opportunities to develop life skills and hidden talents, like art, writing, gardening, woodwork, and sports. Thus, each prisoner is provided with many opportunities to choose to transform. This is a key element to creating a positive future.

Our thanks to Church of Ireland Prison Chaplain, Rev. Brian Hassan and the Activities Governor, Colin, who took overall charge of the afternoon. Our collaboration is a work in progress, and we look forward to future initiatives.



At Diocesan Council on 5th December 2024, with the Rt Rev Bishop Andrew Forster in attendance, the baton of Diocesan President was passed to Mrs Kaye Nesbitt. Our outgoing President, Mrs Jacqui Armstrong, recapped her term in office, the highs and lows, the challenges of Covid but her lasting memories would be of the love, support, fellowship, and friendship she received from all the members as she travelled throughout the Diocese.

Bishop Andrew thanked Jacqui for her dedication over the past six years, the energy, enthusiasm, love, and compassion she brought to the role and he wished her every blessing on the next phase of her journey, wherever that would take her. The Diocesan President's brooch and bible were then presented to our new incoming president, Mrs Kaye Nesbitt. On behalf of all the members in Derry and Raphoe, Mrs Kay Clarke then presented Jacqui with a gift and flowers.

# Diocese of Down & Dromore News

## INDOOR/SENIOR MEMBERS MAY 2024

St Mark's Newtownards saw almost 100 members meet for Holy Communion followed by a superb afternoon tea. All arranged by Sally McCurry and food provided by Trustees. We were very pleased to welcome All Ireland Unit Co-ordinator Irene Boyd to the event pictured, on the right, with Sally.



## WOMEN'S GETAWAY ARMAGH OCTOBER 2024

Down & Dromore members who once again took this opportunity to join members from around the country to feel connected, inspired and enjoy the fellowship and friendship that comes from being involved with Mothers' Union.

*D&D members with June Butler (immediate past All Ireland President) who is of course from Down & Dromore*

## ACTION & OUTREACH

Our support for **Women's Aid** in Newry and Bangor continues all year round but at the beginning of December we were honoured to be able to, once again, present gifts to mothers and children who were resident in the refuge in Newry. Each person got a personal gift of dressing gown, pyjamas and slippers which were very warmly received. This followed lunch which was supplied by trustees seen here with a staff member with some of the gift bags.



Craft classes continue every Monday night at the female prison in Belfast. A dedicated group of members continue to inspire and support those whose life has met with adversity. It is so popular that there is even a waiting list for those wanting to join these classes.



Knitted and sewn items continue to be a great support for hospitals in our diocese but we were recently asked by staff at the **A&E department** of the Ulster Hospital to provide **comfort packs** for women suffering a miscarriage. Each pack contains a pair of black leggings, three pairs of black pants, maternity pads, feminine wipes, tissues and a little notebook and pencil. These are put into a black shoe bag which can also act as a laundry bag. Three different sizes are delivered by our Action & Outreach co-ordinator who has built a good rapport with the sister in the **critical pregnancy section** of that department. These packs are very well received and used.

## DIOCESAN PRESIDENTS

It appears you are destined to be Diocesan President in Down & Dromore if your name is Thompson!

Lynda Thompson (centre) is the new DP of our diocese and takes over from Mavis Thompson (right) who has completed three years leading Down & Dromore Mothers' Union.

Both are pictured with Bishop David McClay at Lynda's commissioning service in January 2025



# *Diocese of Dublin & Glendalough News*

## **Diocesan Tea Party in May 2024:**

On a glorious afternoon in May 2024 members attended a lovely Tea Party in Stillorgan Parish Centre hosted by the Trustees. Out came the china tea services and tablecloths. It was great to see and meet some Indoor members too. Everyone had time to chat and meet old friends and there was no rush. It was enjoyed by those who attended, and we plan to hold one every second year.



## **Christmas Appeal:**

The Diocesan Christmas Appeal for Darndale and the Christmas Refuges was very well supported by all branches, thank you to the members. Items received were PJs, nightdresses, personal toiletries for the refuges, Darndale, Christmas gifts and age-appropriate toys. All donations were much appreciated by the Refuges and Darndale.



# *Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh News*

All-Ireland Mothers' Union Getaway in Armagh was a fantastic weekend and it had a great balance of spiritual leadership with plenty of time for fun and fellowship with others. The line-up of inspirational speakers included The Most Revd John McDowell, Ven Dr Steven McBride and his musical instruments, Revd Alan Cross, and much loved diocesan magazine editor, Ruth Garvey Williams. Carol Doey, a therapist from the Hub b180, facilitated activities to energise us after all the lovely food in the Armagh City Hotel and guide us home safely. We sang, we reflected, we crafted with clay and just had a very peaceful and happy time. I am personally looking forward to next year already. Thanks go to our MU stalwarts Liz Greer and Wendy Halligan, along with the MU team, for organising such a wonderful event.



November is the month of promotion for 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign. While this campaign runs all year round it is especially marked from Nov 25<sup>th</sup> to Dec 10<sup>th</sup> each year. This year KEA got a full stand at a Community Safety and wellbeing expo event to tell the story of domestic abuse using a display of the shoes and posters called “Souls of Our Shoes” The main speaker was Dr Katriona O’Sullivan who has written an interesting book from a woman’s view. As well as this event the display was in some of the local churches in KEA for the public to visit.



### **Fund raising and Communication.**

Mums in May fundraising events had a beautiful puzzle book printed especially for the event and sold very well at just €3. Killeshandra Branch MU hosted an afternoon tea party and they were joined by non-members for what turned out to be a very enjoyable occasion.

### **Action & Outreach.**

Thirty knitted baby cardigans, twenty baby hats & knitted cotton blankets were donated to Cavan General Hospital Premature Baby Unit. Nursing Homes have received many crocheted knee rugs & Twiddle Muffs. AFIA Fund enabled KEA to hand out Food Vouchers & send children to Bible Camps. We are in the process of considering other ideas.

### **Overseas**

A presentation focusing on The Literacy Programme in Burundi and South Sudan and the wonderful effect that taking part in this programme has made on the lives of many women. Much of the work being done in The Democratic Republic of Congo focuses on health issues, domestic abuse, and financial guidance. In Madagascar, much of the work of MU centres on education and training women to alleviate the forces of nature.

### **Faith & Policy**

The Prayer Circle letter continues to be distributed monthly to ten intercessors. We are indebted to these ladies who willingly give of their time to pray, some of whom have been involved in this ministry for over twenty years. We believe that our God hears and answers the prayers of his people. Our 1<sup>st</sup> All-Irl Holy Communion service took place in Longford in April. Fifty ladies attended and were grateful for the welcoming morning tea/coffee and tray-bakes. Three clergy assisted with the service and the Bishop preached. Lunch was provided afterwards by the Longford ladies.

We had two festival services in May at the different ends of the diocese, in Kildallon and Riverstown Churches.

### **Sharing day.**



We had a full house in the Cooper Hall, Riverstown, for an afternoon of fun, fellowship and brainstorming with afternoon tea served in China cups provided by the local members. Thank you to Mrs Hilda Shaw and the wonderful hosts for greeting, meeting, and treating us with such wonderful splendour. Mrs Jacqui Armstrong was the main speaker from the All-Ireland Faith and Social Policy unit of the Mothers’ Union.

### **The Branch meeting**

The branch meeting is the most important part of our organisation. Meetings provide a valuable forum for a range of contrasting functions especially prayer, sharing worries and excitements, building relationships, campaigning together for women's rights and help people to feel less lonely. Branches are at the very heart of all that Mothers' Union do.

### **Trustee Body**

The powerhouse of Mothers' Union in KEA is our hard working And dedicated trustee body and branch leaders. We are ever grateful to our supportive Chaplain Canon Richard Waller. The trustee body links us closely with the All-Ireland Membership, and indeed, the Worldwide Mothers' Union family.



## *Diocese of Meath & Kildare News*

Our spring Council meeting was held in April, was followed by lunch, and quiet time. Our speaker on this occasion was Revd. Mike Buchanan who was a deacon in the diocese. He told us about his transition from serving as a Garda for years to entering the ministry.



In June we had our Indoor Members Tea Parties in Navan and Edenderry. We had a great turn out for both and a very enjoyable time was had by all.

Our Overseas Service was combined with the livestreamed All Ireland monthly Communion Service in St David's Church, Naas in September. Mrs Iris Sutor, Zonal Trustee, told us about her work overseas. In October 13 members from the Diocese attended the weekend away in Armagh City Hotel. Ruth Garvey Williams was the guest speaker and she gave us a very inspiring message on "Gloriously Ordinary."



Also, in October we had an extraordinarily successful meeting in St Brigid's Cathedral which was organised by Diocesan Presidents of Dublin & Glendalough, Cashel, Ferns & Ossory and Meath & Kildare. We had a particularly good attendance from neighbouring diocese. Revd Philip gave us a truly short, informative tour of the history of the Cathedral. This was followed by mid-day prayers led by Dean Isobel and Ish Lennox from Mary Sumner House told us about her work and then we enjoyed fellowship and lunch.

We held our 16 Days of Activism in November combined with our Autumn Council in Edenderry Parish Hall. Tom Wheatley conducted the Service, Diocesan Lay reader, and the speaker was a lady from Women's Aid, Kildare who told us about the wonderful work they do. And finally in December Dean Isobel used the "Blue Christmas" Service which was very much appreciated.

# Diocese of Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe News

## **GALWAY BRANCH:**

Galway MU and friends held a bake sale on in February for The Bishops Appeal for Gaza and raised €710! A huge 'thank you' to all those who helped in any way.

On 26th March we are hosting an MU Thanksgiving service and have invited a speaker from Modh Eile Women's Domestic Violence Refuge in Galway to talk about the support they offer and how we can help. We will also do a collection for toiletries through Lent for the refuge.

A planned tour of St. Patrick's Cathedral will take place on 3rd April and we are looking forward to that!

## **KENMARE & DROMOD BRANCH:**

Throughout the year branch members have been focusing on the issue of Domestic Violence.

The Rise Up Campaign – during the spring, eight of our members took part in Equipping the Church to End Domestic Abuse sessions and so far we have achieved the Bronze and Silver Awards and are on our way towards the Gold Award! The Souls of our Shoes exhibition was held in St. Patrick's Church and we had a steady stream of visitors each day. We welcomed the General Manager of Kerry Refuge to a branch meeting and were given an in-depth account of her role and ways in which the refuge functions on a daily basis.

Irish Guide Dogs came to speak to our branch about the fascinating and vital work that they do and she brought along her 'puppy in training.' We had an excellent time hearing about their work and ways in which the dogs are enabling so many to lead richer and safer lives.

Knitting – several of our members continue to knit for Kerry University hospital Neonatal Unit and Mission to Seafarers in Dublin.



## **SKREEN & ACHONRY BRANCH:** In November members and friends

put together Christmas Shoeboxes for Team Hope and we also made up Emergency Hospital Packs with items donated from parishioners from our five parishes in the group. This was very well supported and our thanks to all who donated.

MU was well represented in the 'Avenue of Light' Tree exhibition at the rectory in Skreen. Our tree was beautifully lit with an array of blue lights and MU logos.



## **LIMERICK CITY BRANCH:**



Over Christmas Limerick City Branch entered a tree into the St. Nicholas Church Tree Festival in Adare. The tree was brightly decorated with little prayers written by our members and with bright blue lights! While we did not win a prize it was really lovely to see MU represented and viewed by so many.

Thanks to the huge support of so many in Limerick City Parish and MU we were able to donate hampers of toiletries, clothes, food, and toys to Adapt House and Thomond House Women's Refuges and to Br. Russell House, Men's Refuge.

In January we started our year with a service of Holy Communion followed by a tour of St. Mary's Cathedral with Noreen Ellerker, Cathedral Archivist. We then enjoyed a lovely lunch together.

In March we will be joined by Adare Branch for our jointly held Lady Day Service in St. Mary's Cathedral when Dean Niall Sloane will lead the service.

# 2024 Getaway Gallery



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