



# FOCUS



ALL IRELAND PUBLICATION

SPRING 2024



The Getaway  
Weekend  
2023



## The Editor Writes:

I am going to begin my ramblings for this edition of Focus with a beautiful prayer written to celebrate Annabella Hayes Day 2024.



### Annabella Hayes Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for the life and service of our Mothers' Union founder in Ireland, Annabella Hayes  
As she showed her willingness to serve, may we serve.  
As she devoted herself to helping others, might we do the same.  
As she used her faith to overcome her tragedies, help us to trust in you.  
As she set an example of love and gratitude, may we emulate these qualities.  
As she cared for all families, may we follow her example.  
Just as she lived her life for you, may we always do the same. Amen

The prayer was written by Eleanor Orr, who is the current Branch Leader of Loughgall and Grange Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Armagh. If we could all live our lives by the sentiments expressed in this simple, poignant prayer what a wonderful world it would be!

Sadly, we continue to live in a world where there is so much turmoil between wars, human-caused disasters, and natural disaster. Mothers' Union continues to be to the fore in helping families in adversity both here in Ireland and overseas. 2024 will be a busy and challenging year for Mothers' Union as we face into elections for a Worldwide President, a Provincial President, Unit Coordinators at All Ireland level, and Diocesan Presidents in some areas. We ask for your prayers for those who are tasked with choosing the right person for these positions and pray for those who are willing to let their names go forward to serve and work for the good of Mothers' Union both here in Ireland and around the world.

2024 will also be a busy year as our triennial fundraising for "Mums in May" will be taking place. Plans have been put in place for "**Big Hymn Sing**" services throughout Ireland and a puzzle book is being produced. Many projects have been funded by grants allocated from the "Mums in May" account i.e. schoolbook and bursary schemes, grub clubs, providing school bags etc for those in need, stock pots for Ukrainian Refugees, food, or fuel vouchers for those in need and many more worthwhile projects. Funding these projects is only achievable by the generosity of all the Dioceses, branches and individuals who support Mums in May Fundraisers so we urge you please to help us replenish the pool of money available for distribution whether it is by attending a "Big Hymn Sing" service, buying a puzzle book or holding a tea party... every little helps.

As we now only produce one edition of Focus annually may I wish all those who will be completing their time in their position in Mothers' Union every blessing for the future and our grateful thanks for all their time and commitment to Mothers' Union during their term of office.

Every blessing,

*Margaret*



## A Letter from June Butler:

Hello Everyone,

I am writing this at the beginning of January on what must be one of the coldest days of this year – a really sharp frost, almost resembling snow, is on every surface outdoors. Last year was very strange weatherwise – a mild spring, a lengthy period of heat and then rain, followed by named storms.....sorry I seem to be falling into the obsession of those who live on this island of talking about the weather! However, I cannot help but think that we are blessed by living here when one sees the extremes faced by our Mother's Union colleagues across the world.... drought, hurricanes, floods...and of course shortages of food and drinking water. Please pray for all who are afflicted by such dreadful conditions.



The past year has been one of travel for me – both across Ireland and further afield. Here, I think I have placed my feet (or at least directed the tyres of my car) in every diocese in Ireland and I have been privileged to be able to attend Mothers' Union services and events in many of them. Three which are particularly memorable for me are a CFO event and service in Kilkenny in February, the Cork MU conference in Garryvoe in November and the Women's Getaway in Cavan (KEA) in October. You will be reading about all of these in this edition of Focus, especially the Getaway, which was a wonderful, inspirational (and fun) event.

Our key speaker, Melanie Douglas, took as her theme for the weekend **“Living an Abundant Life”** and encouraged us through prayer and action to do just that. She based her talk - and songs - over the two days on John 10:10: **“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”** All of us left Cavan knowing that we had had an abundant experience and thinking about how we might carry that into the future. Our lives cover the full spectrum of what Shakespeare called the **“Seven Ages of Man”** and in each of those we should take what opportunities we have been given to live life to the full. We in Mothers' Union certainly do that as we work to help those in adversity in our communities. Again, much of that will be in evidence in this magazine. In Ecclesiastes 3 we read **“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven”** reminding us that the purpose and order behind everything we do have been ordained by God.

Bishop Michael Burrows had a very focussed purpose when he planned his “peregrination” across his Diocese of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe in November and I was privileged to join him on the last stages of his marathon. In the tradition of supporting overseas mission work in the period before Advent, Bishop Michael was raising funds by undertaking a musical marathon – visiting each of the parishes in his Diocese where he was playing the organ and getting everyone present to join him in singing Hymn 86 (**“Christ is the King, Oh friends rejoice.....”**).



As one of the two projects he was supporting was the MU Literacy project in Burundi, he had kindly invited me to join him, which I did for two days. It was wonderful experience for me as I was able to visit churches big and small in Co Galway, some in places of which I had never heard, and I was overwhelmed by the welcome and kindness of the clergy and parishioners. To quote from the final verse of that hymn “...**new lamps be lit, new tasks begun.....**” Could this be a theme for Mothers’ Union in the future? Just to add a footnote – Bishop Michael collected donations of over 20,000 Euro during his expedition and we thank him sincerely on behalf of those people in Burundi whose lives will now be improved immeasurably as they learn how to read and write.

So where will our Mothers’ Union journey take us in 2024? You may know that this year we will experiment by holding the monthly Holy Communion services in every diocese, rather than in Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin on the first Thursday of each month. The programme of those services is on our website. Everyone is invited to attend whatever services they wish to, wherever is convenient for them, and in some cases it will be possible to join from your home if the service is being live streamed.

This is the triennial year when we are due to replenish our Mums in May Fund and our focus to do this will take three strands. The first involves holding events such as coffee mornings and tea parties to enable members and friends to spend time together. Then there is the new puzzle book for everyone to challenge themselves; our thanks to all who have contributed to and designed it – Margaret Jacob led that team. Thirdly there is the “**Big Hymn Sing.**” Each diocese will hold at least one BHS service to include those hymns which have been voted as the favourites within that diocese. I will attend as many of those services as I can and am really looking forward to our voices raising a few church roofs! Again, every member - and their friends and family - are welcome to attend any service. We will launch the “Big Hymn Sing” in St. Canice’s Cathedral, Kilkenny on 2nd March and end the series of services with a rousing finish in St Patrick’s Parish Church in Ballymena on 16th November. The collections at all those services will go towards the Mums in May Fund which enables Mothers’ Union in Ireland to make a difference in so many ways to those in our communities who are struggling.

That “**Big Hymn Sing**” will be my final All Ireland event – I find it difficult to believe that I am in my sixth year as your All Ireland President! It has been a privilege to work with you all over those years and to spend quality time with so many of you. We must all pray earnestly about finding my successor and for potential inspirational leaders to come forward in those dioceses which will be conducting elections for a new Diocesan President.

I was at a service recently where the Gospel was taken from Luke 4, about Jesus was preaching in Galilee, and it occurred to me how appropriate His words were for all of us as members of Mothers’ Union:

***“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”***

My prayer for 2024 is that it will be a year in which we can continue to proclaim His good news, that we can endeavour to help all those who may be struggling or suffering, and that the Holy Spirit will remain with us and into the future.

With every blessing and much love,

*June*



## Mothers' Union Changing the Story of Domestic Abuse in Ireland

The arrival of covid highlighted the plight of women locked in their homes with their abuser. The need to understand, to highlight and to signpost took on new significance. During this period Ireland forged stronger partnerships with local domestic abuse services, *Safeguarding Church of Ireland*, produced a *16 Days Prayer Diary* highlighting church supports, worked with *Bishops' Appeal and Tearfund Ireland* to create a 5 part gender justice programme, and with Restored edited an Irish edition of '**A Guide for Churches to address Domestic Abuse**'. Survivors spoke of the long term effects of trauma on emotional, mental, and physical well-being, and this led to training with Kintsugi Hope and the creation of '**Changing the Story**' wellbeing groups.



To celebrate these initiatives and to bring the issue of 'domestic abuse' into the foreground, many months of planning came to fruition with a '**Changing the Story**' Conference in Portadown and Dublin.

### The Bible Does Not Tell Me So ..... Speak Up

The keynote sessions were fascinating, informative, and brilliantly led by Bekah Legg of Restored and Revd. Dr. Helen Paynter, Biblical Scholar, and author of 'The Bible doesn't tell me so.' In exploring the biblical context, they encouraged delegates to seek to uphold God's plan for relationships between men and women, to answer his call to seek justice and defend the oppressed. So engaging were these sessions that one delegated wished she '**could bottle their message and have it shared in every church in Ireland.**'

### 'Equipping The Church to take Action and End Domestic Abuse' Programme

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



Archbishop John McDowell and Archbishop Michael Jackson pledged their support and emphasised their encouragement to as many people as possible, and in particular to as many men as possible, to undertake the programme and bring the issue to the forefront of their parishes.

### The power of a survivor

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

The Revd. Mike Buchanan, a Deacon Intern and retired Garda stated that in his experience '*people who experience domestic abuse know that it is insidious, engenders fear, is disruptive of life, menacing, undermines security, and destroys confidence and self-esteem.*'

The chairperson of the Church of Ireland's Mind Matters programme, Bishop Pat Storey, agreed that the Church should be entirely visible and vocal in positively supporting the MU campaign. She noted that Mind Matters research into mental health is encouraging in that it has found people do appreciate support from their faith and their church community.



Bishop George Davison found the message of the Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing groups a helpful message to the church as *'we are all broken and therein lies beauty. Out of brokenness good can come. We are called to be communities of love for all our children, communities of hope.'*



### RISE UP

It was a great privilege to welcome Emily Brailsford, MU Domestic Abuse Manager to Ireland. Emily expertly guided delegates through the **Rise Up Challenge** and branches and parishes were motivated to take on the Bronze challenge in coming months.

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



Karen Devlin, Women's Aid NI and Mary McDermott, Safe Ireland affirmed that conferences like Changing the Story are a gift beyond measure in bringing the message to the wider community, whilst, in describing domestic abuse as a social responsibility, Detective Superintendent Lindsay Fisher, noted that the PSNI are contacted every 16 minutes in relation to domestic abuse.



### Our Christian response in Moving Forward to change the story.....

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



He thanked Mothers' Union for being the heartbeat in parishes and, the stone in the shoe, the one that makes people uncomfortable and makes them think. *'It calls us back to our Christian calling and our need to do something – to speak up, speak out and respond. This involves men and women working together for the betterment of our society.'*

Delegates left feeling empowered and meaningfully engaged. *'Many seeds were sown, and we pray that in time all people will come to know that 'in their culture, in their community and in their church that they matter, that they deserve to be safe, valued, empowered, and equipped.'* (Revd Graham Hare)

### Some sample quotes in the feedback forms:

*'This was an excellent conference. Very encouraging to witness the envisioning and equipping of the church in ending gender based violence.'*

*'A wonderful powerful experience. We need to act now!'*

*'All church ministers and church committees should attend talks like this.'*

*'Great insight into theology and how we interpret – powerful speakers – learned a lot.'*

*'I am struck by the life and energy in your church, being led by women' (a male participant)*

## The Getaway Weekend 2023

Our MU Getaway this year was on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> October in the Hotel Kilmore, Co Cavan. 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 Hazel Speares, VP Action and Outreach. Our bookings were up on the previous year, and we had a total of 167 attend either part or all the Getaway. It was great seeing new faces and welcoming back our regulars.



Our guest speaker was Melanie Douglas, a retired assistant lay pastor from Bangor, who spoke to us on “Living an Abundant Life”. Mel was a very inspirational speaker and we had lots of fun, fellowship, food and laughter, together with some armchair aerobics which was led by Leila Beatie.

On Friday evening, our All Ireland Chaplain, Archdeacon Stephen McBride and his wife Helen joined us and after dinner, we had a session on getting to know our All Ireland Chaplain better. The Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh Diocesan President, Ann Howard and Young Members Representative, Diane Stuart organised Pauline Howard to show us some dance moves. We were very quick learners and the dance floor was alive in no time. Diane also made lovely keepsake bookmarks for everyone who attended, it was the host diocese's way of sending love and fellowship from KEA back to all the other dioceses in Ireland. The Friday evening closed with an Epilogue led by our All Ireland chaplain and a short reflection by Mel.



The next morning after breakfast, June Butler, All Ireland President welcomed everyone to the Getaway. During Saturday Mel covered 3 sessions in the morning, What is this abundant life, How can we have this abundant life and then time out for personal reflection which included the use of the lovely gardens at Hotel Kilmore. The sun shone which made it more pleasant to walk, sit, and share stories, while at the same time enjoying the Cavan autumn colours around us.

Mel played her guitar and sang some of her own pieces as well as singing several praise songs which we all joined in with. The singing was amazing by all present. During the Getaway, Mel gave everyone the opportunity to talk to her privately and to pray with them if requested. Mel was an inspiring lady who glows with positivity and the Christian faith, it was such a joy to have Mel as our guest speaker. Mid-day prayers were led by Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh's chaplain, Revd Richard Waller, who is always supportive of Mothers' Union events.

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

A huge thanks to June, Hazel, and Ann for their support, and valued expertise along the way to make this event happen. Thanks also to Violet Magee, Leila Beatie and KEA helpers for providing the MUE stall which was available over the entire Getaway.

Save the date for our 2024 Getaway. **Venue Armagh City Hotel, Armagh on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> October 2024.** See you all there!

## A Letter from The Most Reverend Francis John McDowell:

Dear Friends,

Sometimes I ask myself why is it that the seasons we have just celebrated, Christmas and Epiphany, appeal to church goers and non-church goers alike far more than the season we are moving towards- Easter? Possibly it is because Christmas and Epiphany are unequivocally about generosity and gift giving. There is a tangibility about Christmas which is very difficult to replicate in the shape of a few chocolate eggs, no matter how superior they may be.

Or is it that Lent (as its name implies) is just a bit too long and somewhat overshadows the joy of Easter morning.

One of the features of the life of the family (and I think by extension) the life of the Mothers' Union is generosity. The generosity of those who give voluntarily of their time in parishes to organise the yearly programme and to make sure that indoor members feel included in the life of the organisation. A generosity of sympathy which I see in my own limited perambulations to services and events. Two national initiatives stand out in this regard.

First the sixteen days activism against gender violence which must make the MU one of the biggest witnesses against all sorts of gender based violence-whether in the home or in solidarity with those in other Anglican Provinces where the place of women in society is precarious and where women often subject to all kinds of official violences against their dignity. I have on two occasions in the past two years experienced a very open generosity from people who shared their stories in a way that was both realistic and inspiring, although costly.

Secondly Mums in May, the triennial fund raising effort that helps resource so many generous projects, not least assisting families who have very limited means to enjoy a bit of a break in the summertime.

No doubt there are times when we need to be prudent and cautious with our substance and with our lives and energies, but it is the nature of God and of those who he has adopted as his children to be marked by generosity, and this generosity is as much to do with time and talents and encouragement as it is to do with money. It has been my good fortune throughout all my life to have seen that spirit of generosity from Mothers' Union branches and gatherings.

In that same spirit I hope you won't mind if I share some hopes of my own about expressing the generosity that God has shown to us in his Son, in a way that is as tangible as Christmas and as powerful as Easter.

As people who are used to being in and around churches, we feel at ease in them. Our parish churches are comfortable and I hope homely places to us. However, to people not used to being in one of our churches (believers and unbelievers alike) they can seem rather formidable and forbidding. Gothic architecture may not be as attractive to them as it is to us! I am thinking here about people who come to Ireland north and south from other countries whether as workers, refugees, or migrants. I don't see very many of such people as I travel around and I can't help thinking that the natural human warmth of women gathered together would be a way of breaking down those barriers and of lowering the step into church a little.

I wish I had more practical ideas on how this could be done (perhaps an invitation to simple meal?) and I know that, as generous people, some of you will have been working at this sort of initiative for a long time. We can only try with generous hearts.

In Christ

**+John Armagh**





## The 16 Days RISE UP call

Our heartfelt thanks for the wonderful work you do in supporting survivors and victims and in our growing partnerships with domestic abuse services.

We are very aware of the statistics - Worldwide, 1 in 3 women can expect to be affected by gender based violence during their lifetime. It is sad that whilst both men and women may experience incidents of inter-personal violence and abuse, women are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of abuse, including sexual violence. We know the effects are widespread and damaging across all strata of society. Thanks to your outreach, the carpet is being lifted and these effects are less hidden and more widely spoken of than in any other decade of our lifetime.



During the 16 Days of Activism our Mothers' Union 'RISE UP against domestic abuse Challenge' was launched, thus prayerfully and practically ensuring our outreach will stretch throughout the year.

### What is the RISE UP Challenge?

At the core of **RISE UP** is an acronym, **RISE UP** encourages parishes and communities to **R**espond, **I**nform, **S**upport and **E**mpower as they **U**nite in Prayer and hope filled action to change the story of domestic abuse in their communities.

The RISE UP challenge aims to achieve this goal through its RISE UP Bronze, Silver, and Gold Award Scheme. This Challenge has been receiving a positive response, with many parishes already undertaking the three tenets required to achieve the bronze award.

### To achieve the Bronze award a branch and/or parish should:

1. **Place RISE UP posters** raising awareness about domestic abuse in an appropriate public space e.g. churches, parish halls, toilets, community centres, medical centres etc.
2. **Commit to pray** for those affected by domestic abuse, including the victims, survivors, perpetrators, and those who work in the field of domestic abuse.
3. **Make a connection with the local domestic abuse support organisation** and see how one can support them.

### Awareness raising - the RISE UP call during the 16 Days of Activism?



During the 16 Days Armagh, Clogher, Connor and Down & Dromore hosted Prayer Breakfasts with speakers ranging from a moving survivor's story to informative and heartfelt pleas on behalf of victims and survivors expressed by Women's Aid, Tearmann and the PSNI. Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe welcomed Noeline Blackwell, former CEO of Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, whilst Dublin & Glendalough hosted a diocesan Prayer Walk in the Phoenix Park led by Rev Kevin Ronné, whose meditations reflected his pastoral experience in South Africa. In Meath & Kildare Lynn Buckle, author, compellingly spoke of a variety of victims' personal experiences interspersed with passages from her acclaimed novel, 'The Groundsmen.'

In new ventures Derry & Raphoe held an engaging 16 Days RISE UP Roadshow with stands manned by the Diocesan Youth Officer on mental health, the PSNI, PCSP, Souls of Our Shoes, the MU RISE UP team and Omagh Women's Aid. Cork, Cloyne, and Ross engaged with the general public who visited their 16 Days stand raising awareness of domestic abuse in Douglas Village Shopping Centre. They are now encouraged to think about doing something similar in other shopping centres.



## Lisburn and Derriaghy Area created a helpful 16 Days leaflet.



Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh compiled a Prayer Walk for town, village or townland with members encouraged to walk alone or in small groups, walking the familiar streets and places, stopping to intercede for those under threat of gender based violence.

Daily 16 Days social media posts were created by Connor and Cashel, these, and other relevant social media posts were shared across the country. Cashel hosted three zoom services and services took place across the island. 16 Days intercessions were forwarded to parishes and branches. Members were encouraged to spread the word far and wide. All dioceses liaised with their local domestic abuse services and items and food vouchers were generously supplied as appropriate.



In Northern Ireland schools noted how heightened their awareness of the lived experience of domestic abuse in the home has now become following the introduction of Operation Encompass. This is a partnership between the PSNI, Safeguarding Board NI, the Education Authority and schools aimed at supporting children who witness domestic violence or abuse in the home.

If Police attend a domestic abuse call, and children are present, Operation Encompass allows the officers to pass on relevant information to the safeguarding team at the child's school early the following morning, so the right support can be put in place. The information shared by Police is treated in strict confidence.

### How may we engage with this issue in 2024?

- **Take on the RISE UP Challenge** – visit RISE UP Against Domestic Abuse | Mothers' Union ([mothersunion.org](http://mothersunion.org))
- **The MU Equipping the Church Programme to take Action and End Domestic Abuse** runs from Wednesday 10th April to 8th May and from Wednesday 25th September to 23rd October 2024
- **Safe Place, Tier 1 Training** - Tuesday 1st October 7.30pm to 9pm with ONUS
- **The Changing the Story Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing** Group runs for 12 weeks starting on Monday 12th February 7.30pm to 9pm
- **Helpline stickers and RISE UP posters** are available for parish and community noticeboards.

You may contact [muchangingthestory@gmail.com](mailto:muchangingthestory@gmail.com) for further information. In the meantime, it is wonderful to see parishes taking on this growing and challenging issue. We leave the final words with Bishop Andrew Forster, spoken at the close of the Changing the Story Conference in Portadown last autumn...

***'We all like and appreciate respectability, which is good, but it means that we ought not shirk our responsibilities and allow things to go on that should be named and called out. Our Christian responses to domestic abuse and gender based violence need to be joyfully and wonderfully embedded in our ministry, to become an intrinsic part of our culture and in the life and culture of our church. It calls us back to our Christian calling and our need to do something – to speak up, speak out and respond. This involves men and women working together for the betterment of our society.'***

Let us be encouraged to be the change we wish to see in the world and to love **'in action and in truth.'** In 2024 let us **RISE UP and Respond, Inform, Support and Empower** as together we Unite in Prayer and hope filled action to change the story of domestic abuse in our communities.

# Mothers' Union All Ireland Conference 2023

The Mothers' Union All Ireland Conference took place in An Grianán, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth from Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March until Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> March. It was a wonderful weekend of prayer, fellowship and working with some inspirational speakers.

On the Friday evening delegates were welcomed to the Conference by June Butler, All Ireland President. Our newly appointed All Ireland Chaplain addressed those gathered, Olive Good told us all about MU Enterprise and we were also introduced to Stephanie Nunn, Head of Membership, MSH.



An inspirational prayer walk was organised for the morning of Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> by Mrs Claire Smith, Faith & Policy Unit Coordinator & Prayer Representative Armagh. Claire brought along her mandolin and accompanied us with the singing of hymns.

Later in the morning delegates assembled in the Kellog's Hall to watch a video message from Sheran Harper, Worldwide President of Mothers' Union, and Steph Nunn spoke to us about Reimagining Mothers' Union and some of the ideas that had come out of the Reimagining Conference in Liverpool. We broke into Diocesan groups to discuss and reflect on what Steph had said. We were delighted to welcome The Most Reverend John McDowell who gave a Reflection and said Grace before lunch.



On Saturday evening before Compline there was a fun filled entertainment section during which members divided into groups to create cocktails. The room was filled with a great buzz of chatter and laughter as the various "concoctions" were created. The groups then were invited to give an account of their cocktail and the "reports" were enjoyed by everyone .... we are not sure, however, that the resulting cocktails were fit for human consumption.



Sunday morning began with a service of Holy Communion led by Revd. Canon Katharine Poulton, Rector of St. Mary's, Julianstown Union of Parishes. Following reports from June Butler, Iris Suitor, and Irene Boyd we all dispersed to different rooms to hold Unit meetings and a meeting of the Diocesan Presidents.

Following lunch everyone headed home enthused by the speakers and all that they had heard over the weekend. It was lovely to meet again in person and to renew friendships over the weekend.

## Connor News

### A brand new information leaflet for Connor Diocese!

Connor diocese has designed and produced a brand new leaflet for members in the diocese. A small team, Irene Gates, Wendy Halligan and Moira Thom worked on the design and contents.

Entitled, 'Your membership makes a difference', the leaflet aims to explain to members how their subscription to Mothers' Union is spent and the difference it makes to women, girls and families at home and across the world.



1000 copies have been printed and distributed to branches with enough for every member. The format is an A5 4-page, full colour leaflet professionally printed. It details everything that is covered by members' subscriptions and features examples of the lifechanging work of Mothers' Union.

### A Night at the Movies – MU style!



'Mrs Harris goes to Paris!' was the film choice for the Younger Members Committee as they held their annual Movie Night at All Saints' Parish Church, Antrim. Around 80 ladies (and a few gents!) from across the diocese enjoyed a fun evening together. The film proved to be very entertaining.....and of course movie night wouldn't be movie night without popcorn and ice-cream! A challenge to 'dress to impress' saw ladies donning their best couture for the night! All in all, it was a fantastic night of fun and fellowship which raised £390 in donations for the Diocesan AFIA Fund.

### Maundy honour for Joyce Bond!

Connor Faith & Policy Coordinator and Mid Connor Chair, Joyce Bond, had the great honour of being awarded the Maundy Purses from King Charles at York Minster in April.

Joyce has held many roles in Mothers' Union, both at Diocesan and All Ireland level, as well as devoted service to Guiding and many other organisations within the wider church and beyond. Reflecting on the wonderful experience of being at the service in York Minster, Joyce described the King as having 'warm hands and kind eyes' as she placed the red and white purses of coins into her hands.

Joyce, Connor Mothers' Union is very proud that you were chosen for this very well deserved honour!



### Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse:



Mid Connor Area held a Prayer Breakfast during the 16 Days Campaign to raise awareness of the issue of Domestic Abuse. Members from various parts of the diocese enjoyed a luxury continental breakfast with all the produce having been generously donated by local supermarkets. Arlene Creighton from Women's Aid addressed the gathering, outlining the increasing challenges faced by her organisation. Donations from those attending topped £300 - this will be used to purchase items for the local Women's Aid hostels.

## Derry & Raphoe Diocese

### Summer Gatherings:

The summer of 2023 saw the return of our summer gatherings; one in Convoy in Raphoe Diocese and Errigal (Garvagh) in Derry Diocese.

In a summer where the good weather was hard to find, both days we were blessed with beautiful sunshine. There was a great buzz and lots of laughter as members and friends came together, uplifted by the words of Bishop Andrew and Irene Boyd (All Ireland Indoor Members Contact) at the respective services. We enjoyed the sumptuous and delicious tea parties; everyone rejoicing in coming together, the freedom of giving and receiving hugs and handshakes and chatting with friends.



### Mary Summer Day:

To celebrate Mary Summer Day we gathered for our Prayer Walk in the See House Garden. The garden itself had undergone much transformation over several years and was a very fitting location for the 'Transformation' theme of the day. The Very Revd Liz Fitzgerald opened the afternoon reflecting on how, as was evident in the beautiful surroundings of the gardens, with a bit of toil and effort we can make great things happen. As music filled the air (thank you Andrew!) the prayer walk began. Each stop along the way was centred on one of our four units – Finance & Central Services, Action and Outreach, Fundraising and Communications and Faith and Policy – giving thanks for all the work that had been done and praying for strength and encouragement as we move forward in this time of change and hopefully new growth.



### Clondehorkey and Clondevaddock Branches – celebrations galore!

Clondehorkey Mothers' Union members presented Eva Wright, Diocesan Overseas Representative, with a cheque for €1,000.00 for the Literacy and Numeracy programme. The money was raised by a Sponsored Walk and Soup Lunch.

Reverend Shiela Johnson and Margaret McKinley received certificates for 50 years as members in Mothers' Union. The service was held in St. John's Church, Ballymore and was conducted by Reverend David Skuce. Clondehorkey Mothers' Union and Clondevaddock Mothers' Union celebrating the 80th birthdays of two of their members namely Reverend Shiela Johnson and Anne Peoples at a lunch held at the Board Walk Resort, Carrigart, Co Donegal.



Roberta Merrick, Branch leader from Clonderhorkey was presented with the Livingston Award by Bishop Andrew Forster and Diocesan President Jacqui Armstrong. The Livingston Award is presented annually for the branch programme that best reflects the vision of Mothers' Union.

### Ukrainian Outreach:

Like many communities throughout Ireland since the start of the war in Ukraine, Londonderry has become a temporary home to a significant number of Ukrainian families. Some of these families use Foyle Child Contact Centre as a meeting place for adults who are learning English and their children get to enjoy some play time. Through this contact it was identified that they might benefit from art therapy to help them deal with some of the traumas they have experienced. It was with great pleasure that Derry & Raphoe Mothers' Union were able, through the Mums in May summer grant scheme, to provide some funding to the families for this to take place.



### Down & Dromore News

On Thursday 30th March, the Festival Service took place in St. Mark's, Newtownards. A wonderful occasion with approximately 21 MU banners displayed and around 180 people in attendance. Followed, of course, by a wonderful supper and time of fellowship.



As the cost of living continues to affect our communities, MU Trustees agreed to make further donations to the following food banks. Each one was contacted prior to the shopping trips to ensure we provided items that would be of the most help. All donations were gratefully received and each one extended their gratitude to all MU members for their generosity.



Down & Dromore Mother's Union Prayer Walk on Mary Sumner Day - Wednesday 9th August and was organised by our Faith & Policy Team. Around 45 members went to the Walled Garden at Castle Grounds, Bangor. Supper was provided by our host branch, Bangor Abbey.

North Down & Ards Women's Aid were extremely grateful for the donation of women & children's clothes as well as vouchers from our Knockbreda branch.





What a wonderful afternoon at the Down & Dromore Mothers' Union Indoor Members Communion Service & Tea Party in St Donard's Church, Bloomfield Road, Belfast. Well done to everyone who helped to organise and provide such a lovely spread of food. Great to see so many of our indoor members!

## Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe News

### Special Birthday Celebrations:



In September Shinrone, Aghancon & Kinnitty Branch held a very special meeting to celebrate the 100 birthday of Mabel Wallace, a highly respected and much loved member of Mothers' Union. Branch leader, Eleanor Wakefield and her team of ladies, had organised a wonderful gathering of members and friends to celebrate with Mabel.

Mabel has been a member of MU for nearly 70 years and she told us about a Mothers' Union that was quite different to what we are today. The guest speaker was Irene Boyd, All Ireland Indoor Member co-ordinator, who congratulated Mabel on her wonderful achievement. It was a wonderful afternoon of fellowship and celebration!

**16 Days Vigil:** Our vigil this year, which was very well attended, was held in the Muintir na Tíre Hall in Roscrea, being central in the diocese. It took the form of a talk by the wonderful Noeleen Blackwell, newly retired CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. The vigil was organised by Canon Jane Galbraith, Diocesan Chaplain and Jessie Griffin, F&P Co-ordinator. A huge effort had been put into the promoting of this event which was open to all.

Many posters were put up around the town and Jessie had done an interview on Tipp FM to encourage as many as possible to attend the event. Noeleen is a wonderful speaker and she said that in recent years she has noticed that several Ministers for Justice have really begun to understand the problem of domestic abuse and have put in place many supports, either through the justice system or in other badly needed supports. Noeleen also said that much more needs to be done in schools to educate young people on respect for each other. Noeleen's talk was followed by plenty of chat over a cup of tea.



### MU Amalgamation of the diocese with Tuam:

2024 brings the finalising of the MU amalgamation of our two dioceses and we really looking forward to meeting and working together with each other!

To that end a visit of June Butler has been organised for 25th May in Ballinasloe to meet up with members from all branches in the diocese.



**Achonry Branch:** The opening service, was held in Rathbarron church, and led by Rev Canon Doris Clements. Members from Skreen Branch joined also to witness June Coulter, being enrolled as a member of Skreen Branch, by Myrtle Nairn, Diocesan President. As usual, members made up 'Shooboxes' and prepared many others for their long journey to brighten some child's Christmas in war-torn places.

In December we were invited to the Dioceses of KEA to meet and listen to their DP, Ann Howard, who gave a very interesting talk on Mental Health Matters, on which she is an expert. At a Christmas dinner in the Coachhouse Hotel good food, fun and fellowship were enjoyed by all.

**Skreen Branch:** The Women's Getaway Weekend is a great weekend and to be recommended, with good fun, fellowship, food and friends. Everyone was warmly welcomed by June Butler. We got to know our All Ireland Chaplain, Ven Dr Stephen Mc Bride. We were encouraged to "Live an Abundant Life", with interesting and encouraging words from Mel Gibson throughout the weekend. There was Line Dancing, with Pauline Howard, for anyone who wanted to give it a go. Midday prayers on Sat were with Rev Richard Waller and after lunch we were introduced to Chair aerobics with Leila Beattie. By 3pm on Sat we were back on the road to our homes. What a fantastic 24 hours! Roll on our next Getaway weekend, to take place in Armagh City Hotel, on 11th – 12th Oct 2024.



## Cork, Cloyne and Ross News

### Supporting Staff Wellbeing at Cork University Hospital:



The knitting needles have been very active amongst members as we supported a very special project. In October 2023 we were approached by Canon Daniel Nuzum, the Church of Ireland Chaplain at CUH (Cork University Hospital) to ask if members could make some red hearts for a staff wellbeing event they were planning. When asked how many would be needed, the answer was about 500!! Of course, we said yes – why not! By mid-January the 500 hearts were completed, with the amazing support of members, friends and a local stitchers' group who had heard about the initiative. The hearts were duly delivered and our Diocesan President, Hilary Dring, was delighted to be invited to come to one of the short events at the hospital. This beautiful staff wellbeing ceremony to honour staff hands and hearts happened several times during the day. On arrival each person was given one of the red hearts which were held while listening to John O'Donohue's Blessing of your Work, two minutes silence, and beautiful and moving piece played on the cello. The hearts are the work of many members and friends over the past few months. To all who made them, you have contributed to a ceremony to honour the hands and hearts of staff at Cork's largest hospital. Thank you. It is a wonderful way of offering gifts of love in our community.

## Getting away from it all:

Looking back, we in Cork are thankful for the wonderfully relaxing 'Getaway Weekend' that we had in November at the Garryvoe Hotel in East Cork. Our speakers were Lydia Monds from The Churches Ministry for Healing, and June Butler our All Ireland President. The conference overall felt a lot less 'rushed' than last year, maybe that was due to the lovely hospitality of the hotel staff and our wonderful speakers who were so gracious with their time and expertise. Even the weather, which started off very wet and windy, improved on the Saturday so that many members were able to blow away any cobwebs with a brisk walk along the beach. The trustees had been wondering if we should space out our conferences (perhaps every two years), but those who attended were of one mind that we should come back next year! We're so glad that members value this special time together, and huge thanks to all those who organised it for us

## '16 Days of Activism':

On December 1st, some of our Trustees braved the bitterly cold weather and set up an Information Point at Douglas Village Shopping Centre as part of our activities for **the '16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence'**. We had cards with emergency numbers on, and other information for people to take away. We also placed take-away information in the Parents Room, and also in some of the shops, who were happy to accept the literature. We made ourselves available should anyone want to stop and talk. A few people did stop, and conversations were moving and sometimes quite painful to hear. It was a very worthwhile exercise, and many stopped to look at the pop-up banner but did not engage. If our presence there helped just one person or made them reflect on a subject that unfortunately we hear so much of, then it was worthwhile.



Carrigaline church also hosted its own version of the 'Souls of our Shoes' exhibition (see picture) and Ross Cathedral hosted the MU exhibition in August '23, which was opened by Marie Mulholland of the West Cork Beacon Project.

## Mary Sumner Day outing to Youghal:



On this special day for our members, the day was marked with a visit to St Mary's Collegiate Church in Youghal, East Cork. About 25 members were welcomed with coffee and scones by MU members there. Revd. Ivan, our chaplain, (thank you, Ivan) came and led a short service of thanksgiving and remembrance before we had an amazing tour of the church, which is one of the oldest in the country and has been a place of Christian worship for over 1,300 years.

Thank you to Wayne who showed us around and shared so much of the history of the church with us. We enjoyed lunch together and then had a tour of the Clock Tower which was fascinating. Thank you to Shirley for bringing us on that amazing journey through time.

Thank you especially to Deirdre for coordinating it all.

It was a very enjoyable day. All of these amazing activities were of course in addition to our normal efforts as members and trustees, Mums in May and AFIA, and all held together by branch gatherings and especially our prayers. We give thanks to God always for giving us the abilities to be able to make a difference in the lives of so many people.

## Kilmore Elphin and Ardagh News

A year of fellowship and fun has just passed here in Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh (KEA). We were back in full swing and it was so pleasing to meet in person at our branch meetings. Out of Covid, we emerged with a new gratefulness and even easier practises. Meetings on Zoom were one such activity which has become a regular process for diocesan and all Ireland meetings. They have their place, but indeed can be hard work too, especially if you are the Chair. On the positive side, they cut out the long drives on winter nights.



We obtain our information these days in Mothers' Union mostly by online means. It has more clarity than the old fashion snail mail. We are living at a great time for communication. Most branches have a WhatsApp group which allows for rapid information sharing and even prayer response when needed. The All-Ireland website has all the dates of up-coming events and links to all the activities going on in Mothers' Union.

Just looking back on our past year, I recall the festival services as being very memorable which were held in The Cathedral in Sligo and Ballintemple Church, Co Cavan in the month of May. We were blessed with lovely sunny evenings and great welcomes in both churches.

Another event was the Get-Away Weekend held in Kilmore Hotel, Cavan. Organisation of this event starts just as one ends. From my vantage point, it looked seamless and it certainly was uplifting, spiritual and friendship building. Here's to the next one in Armagh City Hotel in October 2024.

### RISE UP Against Domestic Abuse

KEA participated in a well-planned campaign set up my Mothers' Union to change the story of domestic abuse. 'RISE UP Against Domestic Abuse' is a Mothers' Union's campaign to raise awareness about domestic abuse. The letters of RISE UP stand for Respond, Inform, Support, Empower, Unite and Pray. We worked on this project to help members ensure that as many churches as possible have information about their local domestic abuse helpline. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone from any walk of life. We held a prayer walk and invited members of the public to join branches during the 16 days campaign from 25th November to 10th December. We also put up posters containing important phone numbers and information on all church notice boards with consultation the church vestries and clergy. The campaign now runs all year round.



## The Branch Meeting:



The branch meeting is the most important part of our organisation. Meetings provide a valuable forum for a range of different 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. The filling of branch offices no doubt be our greatest challenge for the upcoming year, please pray for leadership. Our members are getting older and it's difficult to attract new members. This is not unique to KEA and is a concern for us all. Mothers' Union is like a large jigsaw involving members, the clergy and the wider community. We encourage our branches to share their programme of events widely and invite the wider community in a lovely completed picture.

Finally and most importantly, ongoing support of local branches is critical in our Dioceses. For example, the branches in the West hosted a wonderful dinner in early January which included: excellent food, the best company, a MU table quiz, some poetry, singing and a challenge from Psalm 33 – the perfect way to start the new year.

The Prayer Circle is active with thirteen members committed to ensuring a steady flow of prayer on behalf of those in need. We are indebted to the ladies who willingly give of their time to pray, knowing that our God hears and answers.



## 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 World Wide Mothers' Union family.

## Armagh Diocese News

We have been blessed with 4 new Trustees this year, Davina McAllister as Worldwide Rep, Lynda Galway as Young Members Rep, Eleanor Orr as Database Co-ordinator and Jennifer Pillow as Faith and Policy Unit Co-ordinator. We welcome them onto the team and are delighted with how they have become so involved with everything we do in Trustees.

We said farewell to 4 of our faithful Trustees, Betty Williamson, Jennifer Hagan, Alyson Scott and Evelyn Love as they stepped down after many years of service. We thank them for all their hard work and for their commitment to MU.

We had a wonderful speaker at our Overseas Meeting in Armagh in March, Diane Graham from the charity 'Days for Girls' which aims to end period poverty. The following day some of the Trustees went to the Triennial MU conference in Termonfeckin. We enjoyed a busy weekend of learning, planning, prayer, worship, fellowship, fun, meeting up with old friends and forming new friendships. As a result of discussion at the weekend, we planned Information Get-togethers in each of the 5 Rural Deaneries; we provided information for the branches, learned about Trustees and their role in MU and the structure and work of Mothers' Union. A wonderful Communion Service led by the Archbishop for the Indoor Members, this was followed with beautiful Afternoon Tea in Killyman Parish Hall. It was a fantastic treat for everyone and they enjoyed catching up with each other.



Our Festival Service took place on Wednesday 10th May in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh when our new VP's and Trustees were commissioned. The Sermon was delivered by The Revd Charles Eames, Diocesan Chaplain. We had a great attendance, and most branches carried their banners into the Cathedral.

Debbie our DP was invited to Grosvenor Road PSNI station along with Ann to meet some of the staff who received our toiletry bags for girls and ladies who are rescued from abusive home or trafficking on the streets of Belfast. This was a great opportunity to hear about the work the PSNI do to support those who are abused or trafficked, it really was an eye-opener. The toiletry bags were greatly received and the people who are given these certainly appreciate them.

Also in May we had a fabulous social event for the Diocese in Killyman Parish Hall, when the Military Wives Choir of Northern Ireland entertained us with their fantastic singing, they also encouraged the audience to join in the communal singing which was a wonderful time of fellowship. Our Chaplain Rev Alan Cross was compere for the evening and certainly kept the laughs coming, he is always ready to help and we appreciate all he does for MU. We enjoyed the beautiful singing from Sarah who is the granddaughter of our Treasurer, Yvonne McFarland and the Trustees came out of their comfort zone, reciting poetry, and performing a sketch. This all-showcased MU in a very positive way and we are hoping to have more Diocesan events for times of fun and fellowship.



We had a very busy day at Armagh Show in June when we provided Baby Feeding and Changing Facilities for parents. This has become an annual event for MU and parents really appreciate having a clean, dry place to attend to their little ones.

On Sunday 11th June we had a terrific service in St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh when our new All Ireland Chaplain, The Venerable Dr Stephen McBride was commissioned followed by a delicious meal in Armagh City Hotel. We are looking forward to getting to know Stephen and welcoming him to the MU family. Widow's Day on 23rd June was marked in different ways, some had services, some had reflections online and prayers were said for all who have lost loved ones.



We received a grant from Mums in May to support families in our Diocese who are struggling in the Cost-of-Living Crisis. The deserving recipients have been referred to us by their rectors. We are delighted to be able to help in some small way with the support of MIM. On Mary Sumner Day we had a great turnout of walkers in Gosford Forest Park to celebrate our founder. We had a lovely time of praise and worship, enjoyed beautiful readings and singing prepared by our Prayer Rep, Claire Smith and led by Rev Alan. We finished with a cuppa and some treats.

Our new season of MU got underway with our Rural Deanery Services. These were well attended and we had great messages from all the rectors who took part, great singing, uplifting prayers and lovely to see the banners on display. The MUE stall was present at all the services and was a great opportunity for everyone to stock up on cards etc. Thank you, Heather, for all your hard work with the MUE stall and attending so many MU events. A massive thank you to all who donated items for Women's Aid at these services, we were overwhelmed with your generosity and Women's Aid appreciate your support. 'Changing the Story' Conference in Seagoe Parish Centre in September was well attended and a time of learning from the inspirational speakers. Debbie is involved with the 'Equipping the Churches' group which is doing excellent work with the fight against all forms of abuse.

On 16th September we had a fantastic day out, Lynda Galway, our Young Members Rep planned everything so efficiently and we all had a wonderful day. Over 50 ladies boarded the bus at different pick-up points on the way to Kildare Shopping Village. After a day shopping we all enjoyed a delicious meal at Monasterboice Inn on the way home.

On 28th September the ladies had a wonderful time at their Indoor Members Tea Party in Brantry Parish, the attention to detail was outstanding by the MU members in Brantry and everyone enjoyed the delicious treats. We had a good representation from the Diocese at the Women's Getaway on 6th & 7th October in Kilmore Hotel, Cavan, with some members staying overnight and some travelling down for the day. As always, this was a wonderful time of fun and fellowship with Mel Douglas and all her inspirational life stories.

Our annual Prayer Vigil and Breakfast on 25th November in Armagh City Hotel brought our Diocesan events to a close for the year. Debbie our DP was our Speaker, and she opened her heart to all those present, raising awareness and supporting those who have been abused in any way.



During the year, Debbie was invited to many Branch meetings, and events. We were delighted that two Branches had special anniversary Services – Woodschapel on their 100th Anniversary and Milltown on their 90th Anniversary.



2024 commenced with the first of the All Ireland Holy Communion Services which was livestreamed on 10th January 2024.

The Archbishop was the Celebrant and All Ireland Chaplain, The Venerable Dr Stephen McBride delivered the sermon. Branches were invited to display their Banner at the front of the Cathedral and the Diocesan Banner was carried in during the opening hymn by our DP Debbie. Tea was served to conclude the evening.

## Clogher News

The Trustees of Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union facilitated a breakfast in Maguiresbridge Parish Hall on Saturday 25th November to mark 16 days of activism against gender based domestic violence. Valerie McMorris, MU Faith and Policy coordinator organised the event. The Rector of Maguiresbridge and Derrybrusk, the Rev Lindsey Farrell said grace and welcomed Mothers' Union members.



After a delicious breakfast served by Barbara Pinkerton and her team from Omagh, Heather Ellis, Diocesan President introduced the first speaker - Sergeant Ann Lavery from the Community Planning and Vulnerability Department of the PSNI, spoke of her work as the designated Sergeant for Fermanagh and Omagh Council area. We were made aware of the significant numbers of domestic abuse cases and how the PSNI works with agencies to help victims. They work with other agencies in a Multi-Agency Support Hub. Their work is also extended to schools where they have introduced the 'Operation Compass Programme' and they make young people aware of how to identify healthy relationships.

The second speaker was Michelle Alonso, a training coordinator with Women's Aid in Enniskillen. Their staff work with the police and also local church and community leaders. Michelle went on to tell us that the most dangerous place for many of the women they help is in the home. Last year they supported 368 women and 350 children. They have a waiting list of women waiting for support. They manage many cases where women experience coercive control behaviour, have money withheld from them, are belittled or inflicted with physical abuse. Siobhan McKenna from Tearmann Domestic Abuse in Co Monaghan then spoke about her work and how plans are in place to progress a 'Safe House' in Co Monaghan which is very much needed as families in Co Monaghan often have to travel to Sligo and Co Meath for safety.



Members of Mothers' Union Branches in the Diocese brought and donated items for Women's Aid and Tearmann and vouchers were donated to be given to families who have insufficient funds to buy basic items. Closing prayers were led by Irene Boyd, Joy Graham and Linda Keating.



Those attending were provided with literature published by Mothers' Union and the PSNI to raise awareness of domestic abuse. All clergy in the Diocese will be offered the opportunity to learn more about the newly launched Mothers' Union RISE UP campaign.

### **A message from the Diocesan President:**

As you may be aware Mothers' Union was founded in 1876 and is a women-led movement with 4 million members across the world who are passionate about transforming and improving family life. We are a very inclusive organisation, and we pray for a future in which everyone in our community can thrive. Mothers'

Union membership is a privilege. Our membership only costs us the price of 10 cups of coffee per year. With these monies seek to build resilience in individuals, families and communities at home and across the world. For example, our overseas contributions have enabled projects such as the 20 years of work in Burundi on literacy and financial education which has benefited over 165,000 individuals, helping us to lift families out of poverty. Mothers' Union continues to reach out to disadvantaged women across the world, support widows and advocate against child marriage.

I believe a key challenge facing us today in many aspects of church life is leadership. How do we engage with our leaders? How do we support and encourage them? Are we helping to identify leaders in different areas of our church or community organisations? It is a problem for us if we don't view people in our community and in our churches as potential leaders. So, it is important to engage with willing volunteers and encourage them. Remember that you are all leaders in one way or another in your own parishes.



Being a leader takes courage, discipline, and determination. The Bible speaks of so many wonderful leaders and how God blesses them for their work. As we are striving to be better leaders, we must continue to seek inspiration from the Bible and to pray constantly for those in leadership, constantly. We, in MU Trustees have some roles vacant at present if you would like to join us in our valuable work at Diocesan level do get in touch and help make a difference! Thank you for your continued support.

## Cashel, Ferns & Ossory

### Triennial Training Conference:



At the end of March several Trustees travelled to Termonfeckin in County Louth for the Triennial Training Weekend. This had been a long awaited event, having been originally booked for 2020, but then had to be cancelled due to COVID 19.

It was a great weekend, built around the theme for this triennium, Transformation, and we were led in the Friday evening and Saturday morning sessions by Stephanie Nunn, head of membership in Mary Sumner House. We also heard a very uplifting reflection from Archbishop John McDowell, and Dr. Canon Maurice Elliott, Principal of the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, spoke about Jesus, as the servant.

### Garda Go Purple Day:

And on Saturday the 29th April Lesley Bayley, Valerie Power, Cecily Jones, Naomi Besanson and Dorothy Stedmond joined with Community Garda Carol Byrne, from Gorey Garda Station, to host an MU-Garda Go Purple Day joint event in Christ Church, Gorey. Go Purple is a nationwide, annual initiative by the Garda Síochána, which aims to raise awareness of domestic abuse and the local domestic abuse support services that are available. The 'Walk a Mile in My Shoes' exhibition was on display along both sides of the main aisle and had a huge impact on all who visited us on the day.



Thank you to all who visited, and to Archdeacon Mark Hayden for allowing us to hold the event in Christ Church, which to the best of my knowledge has a unique position within the diocese, of being directly opposite a Garda station. We hope to hold a similar event again next year.

### Mary Sumner Day:



On Wednesday the 9th we marked Mary Sumner Day with a wonderful afternoon of fun and fellowship at the marquee in Bunclody Rectory. This began with an uplifting prayer service, followed by lovely finger food and lively chat. But the highlight of the day was the Great 'Victoria Sponge with a Twist' Bake-Off competition.

There were 11 cakes entered, which were judged by Rebecca Allen (Tinahely Farm Shop), Revd. Ger and Canon Trevor. After an initial tasting each baker had to explain what the twist to their cake was, before the judges made their final decision.



### The Ploughing Championships:

The diocese manned the baby changing and feeding facility at the National Ploughing Championships. It was a busy three days and we are grateful to all who gave their time to help out. The facility is greatly appreciated by the parents / guardians of babies and toddlers attending the ploughing championships

### Women's Getaway:



Some members of the Trustee Board attended the Women's Getaway Weekend in Cavan. They had a wonderful weekend of fun, laughter and fellowship

### Mothers' Union Harvest Festival:

On Sunday the 5th of November we held our first MU Harvest Service in St. Peter's, Portlaoise. Thanks to Revd. Alec and the parishioners for their hospitality, to Sarah Foyle the organist, Shane Reynolds for recording the service (it should be on the Mothers' Union YouTube channel shortly), Valerie Power for co-leading with me, and to our wonderful preacher Beverley Barbour from Portlaoise Methodist Church. Thanks also to all of you who came on the day and made the service such a great success, and especially to those who brought displays, floral and other, based on our theme of hymn 602 (CC Kerr d.1964):

***'Two little eyes to look to God,  
two little ears to hear his word,  
two little feet to walk in his ways,  
two little lips to sing his praise,  
two little hands to do his will,  
and one little heart to love him still.'***



## Meath & Kildare News



We held our Indoor Members Tea Parties in June; the first one was held in Kingscourt Parish Hall on Tuesday June 13, 2023. It was great to have Mrs Irene Boyd, All Ireland Indoor Member Contact join us. The second was held in Geashill Parish Hall. Both parties were very well attended and we were entertained with singing, telling stories etc. We finished both parties with a Communion Service. Thanks to all who came; those who set up the two halls; those who supplied food etc and lastly to Daphne Rowntree and her helpers for organising and getting the halls ready.



On September 10, 2023 we held our Overseas Service in St Mary's Church, Navan. Mrs Clare Stewart, All Ireland Action & Outreach Unit Co-Ordinator joined us and told us all about Mothers' Union work overseas. It was wonderful to hear what is going on from Clare. Thank you, Clare.



We had our final Diocesan Council Meeting in Edenderry Parish Hall on Saturday November 04, 2023 and our Service for 16 Days of Activism. Our speaker on this occasion was Ms Lynn Buckle who told us of some of her experiences and read passages from one of her books.

## Dublin & Glendalough News

### International Widow's Day:

Thank you to Greystones Mothers' Union branch for hosting the International Widows' Day Service in St. Patrick's Church Greystones on June 23rd, 2023. The Rector Canon David Mungavin conducted the service, giving a warm welcome to the members of Mothers' Union, especially Mrs. June Butler Provincial President. Daphne Townsend and Olive Good read the lessons from the book of Ruth. Members of Dublin and Glendalough Mothers' Union read prayers which had been prepared by Avril Gillatt. We were delighted to welcome members of the Irish Country Women's Association who were interested in hearing about the prayer support for widows.



The service was aimed at providing comfort and support for widows. Provincial President, June Butler in her address focused on the need for everyone in our world to demonstrate hope, kindness and friendship. She related such outreach to the Bible reading from the book of Ruth when Naomi was shown compassion and support by Ruth, herself a recent widow. June referred briefly to the oppression suffered by widows in some other cultures and how blessed we are to live in Ireland.

She spoke about her own personal journey, saying, while the process of grieving was different for everyone, it was a very personal experience and the relationship with God was constant and supportive. June spoke enthusiastically about her life and spoke of the times when she felt led by God. She concluded by encouraging those present to show kindness to others, in whatever small ways possible, as this would reap untold benefits for both the giver and the receiver. She also mentioned the importance of sharing our innermost thoughts and concerns with family and friends - and with God in prayer

### Mothers' Union Festival Service:

The Mothers' Union Festival Service was held on Thursday 14th September 2023, in St. Andrew's Church, Malahide, the celebrant was Archbishop Michael Jackson the preacher was Rev Colin McConaghie. Rev. Colin gave a very stimulating address on Micah Chapter 6 verse 1-8. The New Trustees were commissioned at this service. It was great to see Mothers' Union Members out and about catching up, there was plenty of chat over a cup of tea.

### Dublin & Glendalough's new "Three Year Project":

The Mustard Seed Soup Run is an outreach service of Trinity Church, started in 2008 and which provides warm food, clothing and comfort to Dublin's homeless people every night of every week of the year. This is Diocesan Mother's Union's new 3-year partnership to provide practical support replacing Home Start. Dougie showed an emotional video showing a group of walkers in the city distributing hot food and clothing to their "friends" living on the streets of Dublin. There was also a table displaying the items which can be given by Mothers' Union.



### Dublin & Glendalough Mothers' Union Spring Gathering:

Our Spring Gathering (formerly Mothers' Union Breakfast) was on Saturday 4th March 2023 in the Springfield Hotel Leixlip. It was a morning of Fellowship, chat and laughter. Diocesan President Ada

Lawson welcomed everyone and Canon Leonard Ruddock, Chaplain opened the meeting with a very thought-provoking reflection on Hymn 517, "Brother, Sister let me serve you".



The morning started with an Ice Breaker, each table was given a bag of marshmallows and a bag of spaghetti tasked with building a tall structure keeping in mind that an organisation needs a good foundation for it to grow to its heights. Jesus told a parable about the man who built his house on rock with solid foundations and the man who built his house on sand, with soft foundations, Matthew Chapter 7 Verses 24-27. Needless to say, the various structures built were very interesting and everyone had fun and laughter.

**Mothers' UNION**  
Christian care for families  
Province of All Ireland

**Save the date!**

**Women's Getaway**

**11 - 12 October 2024**  
(mid afternoon Friday to mid afternoon Saturday)

**Armagh City Hotel,**  
2 Friary Rd, Armagh BT60 4FR

**Guest Speaker:**  
**Ruth Garvey-Williams**

**For more information contact: [allirelandym@gmail.com](mailto:allirelandym@gmail.com)**

## General Synod 2023

General Synod in 2023 took place in Clayton White's Hotel, Wexford, from Friday, 12<sup>th</sup> May, to Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2023.



***“Mothers' Union are the backbone and the heartbeat of our parishes across this island, but also the stone in the shoe” ...***



Mothers' Union presented their new Gender Based Violence resource at the General Synod in Clayton White's Hotel, Wexford on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> May.

A huge crowd attended the presentation which took place at lunch time on the first day of General Synod. Our thanks to Jacqui, June and all involved in putting the presentation together.

Mothers' Union also had an information stand and an enterprise stall at Synod. Our thanks to those who looked after the stands and to Naomi Besanson from Cashel, Ferns and Ossory Mothers' Union who brought her enterprise stall to Synod.

## The Media Awards

The presentation of the Media awards also took place on the first day of Synod and we were delighted that “Focus” was awarded the Runner's Up prize in the category for organisations affiliated with the Church of Ireland.

The Judges had the following to say about Focus:

This magazine, the judge concluded, is “clearly put together on a small budget but more than makes up for it in heart and the dedication of its members to serve Christ.” The Ukrainian Teddy Bear project and the campaign to raise awareness of violence against women “show how this organisation remains endlessly relevant.”

