

# MIAmnia

AUTUMN 2024

ANGLICAN  
MOTHERS UNION  
AUSTRALIA



*...anyone who belongs to Christ  
has become a new person.*

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

ISSN 1326-7701



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**Vision:** Our vision is of a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful, and flourishing relationships.

**Mission:** Sharing Christ's love by encouraging, strengthening and supporting marriage and family life.

The PURPOSE of Mothers' Union is to be especially concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life.

Its AIM is the advancement of the Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and family life.

Its FIVE OBJECTS are:

1. To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding.
2. To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the church.
3. To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service.
4. To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
5. To help those whose family life has met with adversity.

# MIAmia

A quarterly magazine of  
Anglican Mothers' Union Australia.  
Mia Mia is an Aboriginal word for 'home'.

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**Cover Photo:**

Fronde by Sandy Miller on Unsplash  
The Maori word for this tightly furled frond is "koru", and it signifies new life, new beginnings.

## Have your say in Mia Mia

Suggestions, comments, contributions and insights are welcome.

Please send all correspondence to the editor.

Publication in *Mia Mia* is at the editor's discretion.

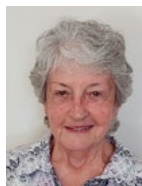
**Theme for next issue**

Lord, transform my mind

**Deadline for next issue:**

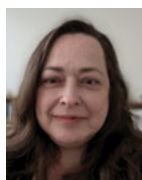
April 22, 2024

# Meet Our Contributors



## Heather Brightwell

Heather is married to Bob, and they are parents to two adult children and grandparents to three boys. They live in suburban Perth and worship at St. Luke's Anglican church in Maddington. You can read more of Heather's story, and of God's faithfulness, in her article, *My journey through cancer to remission* on page 15.



## Sharon Hird

Sharon also lives in Perth and worships at St. Peter's Anglican church in Wanneroo. Sharon says, 'The Lord called me into his kingdom at the age of 22. At that time I was working in a bank and studying for a business degree part time. Coming to know God changed that; I resigned, switched university courses and have since been blessed to work for more than thirty years in Christian education.

I started writing poetry as a teenager – and these years were my most prolific. Since becoming a Christian most of my poetry has been reflections on my faith and my Saviour. It is often a way for me to summarise what I have learned during times in God's word or to meditate on key truths. 'It should have been me' was a poem I wrote early on in my Christian walk. It states the essential truth that Jesus took my justly deserved punishment for me so I could be reconciled with my Creator. What an amazing truth! Eternally grateful!



## Barbara Hyam

'After a long time away from church I attended St Peter's, Bribie Island, in August 2022 following a bereavement. I was feeling very alone, but the warmth, love and compassion of the other parishioners and Father Steve made me certain this is exactly where I wanted and needed to be in order to be encouraged in my reawakened faith. I was surprised when I was asked if I'd like to join MU, as I'm not a mother! But last April I did join and enjoy it immensely; I am inspired by the example of the women around me. I pray daily that the fruits of the Spirit will develop in me more each day. I am very much a work in progress and I thank God for his patience, grace, mercy and love and for giving me a place to grow. I enjoy writing, or more accurately feel compelled to write, poems that express my faith.

The *Poem for Australia* was written in response to my questions, 'Where are we going? What can we do?' and I was overwhelmed by the need for prayer individually, as family, as church, as nation. I believe the Holy Spirit inspires me to write poems. Some are happy, some sad, but always with hope and I hope you can enjoy reading this one. Thank you, and God bless.'

# Contents

## From the Editor's desk

Christine Brain ..... 4

## The President writes...

Dr. Robin Ray ..... 5

## Hand in hand with God

Kristi Day, Promotion and  
Communication Coordinator ..... 6

## Change my heart, O God

Christine Jensen, OAM,  
Prayer and Spirituality Coordinator ..... 7

## Loneliness transformed

Susan Skowronski, Social Issues  
and Action Coordinator ..... 8

## Together in prayer

Wendy Mabey, Overseas and  
Northern Outreach Coordinator ..... 9

## A candid conversation with

Sheran and Jeanette ..... 10

## Building bridges through literacy

Wendy Mabey ..... 13

## My journey through cancer to remission

Heather Brightwell ..... 15

## A Worldwide Fellowship of Prayer

Say 'Yes' ..... 16

Gae Shorten ..... 17

## Connecting with kids

Rev'd. Zan Daniels ..... 18

## Transforming for the future

Glenda Mc Sorley ..... 19

16 Days of activism against  
gender-based violence ..... 20

## Stepping over the cliff

Liz Hampel ..... 22

## How to stop worrying about your family and bless them instead

Elizabeth Parker ..... 23

## Where two or three are gathered together

Christine Brain ..... 24

## Over the Fence

Virginia Grice ..... 26

Around the dioceses ..... 28





## The Editor writes

Welcome to the Autumn 2024 issue of *Mia Mia*. By the time it reaches you Lent will be almost over, and Easter will be close at hand. How have you used this time of preparation for that most wonderful event? This opportunity to reflect on our lives and to recommit ourselves to serving Jesus can be likened to a 'spiritual spring clean', where we toss out useless or damaging habits and replace them with spiritual disciplines which bring us closer to God and strengthen our faith. Transformation of our work as members of AMUA begins with transformation of us as individuals. As the song-writer Eddie Espinosa wrote way back in 1982,

'Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.  
Change my heart, O God, may I be like you',

or, as King David prayed, 'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me' (Psalm 51:10). When we humble ourselves before God and pray for a changed heart, transformation occurs in our lives and flows outward to others.

In this issue a number of our contributors look at ways in which this heart-change will transform the way we view those around us, the way we respond to life's challenges, such as sickness, and the way we fulfil our AMUA Objectives, particularly in relation to our sisters and brothers worldwide. To enable us to do this better, I prevailed upon our Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, and the Zone C Regional Development Coordinator, Jeanette Lawrence, to tell us about themselves and their day-to-day work in a 'candid conversation'. I hope you enjoy meeting these dedicated servants of Jesus (and us).

During the week I received news of the death of Sandra Chambers, who recorded and posted Audio *Mia Mia* for many years. We in AMUA owe Sandra a huge debt of gratitude for her tireless work in allowing our vision-impaired members access to MU news. Her work was much appreciated by those who received the CDs. As Gae Shorten, President of MU Grafton, reported,

'So many people over the years have been very grateful for the Audio, going by the notes I've come across in what Sandra gave me when she handed over her records'. We thank God for Sandra's life and service to MU, and offer our condolences to her family.

As always, I invite you to sit down with a cuppa, perhaps with pen and paper at hand, to read of the exciting work members are doing in their communities to fulfil the Aim and Objectives of Mothers' Union, to thank God for his work in and through individuals and to recommit ourselves to following Jesus with transformed hearts— hearts made new by the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

I leave you with the prayer set down in Anglican prayer books for Ash Wednesday:

*Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, Ash Wednesday)*

### Christine

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:3-7





# The President writes...

## Living as people of the resurrection

The morning summer sun streams over our side fence and lights up the garden outside our breakfast window. The glory of a new day brings the nectar birds to the blooms, generating a fresh approach to appreciating God's creative work in our world, albeit the yard of the Ray residence. By the time you read this article, the sun will have moved, changing our outlook, and heralding the next season.

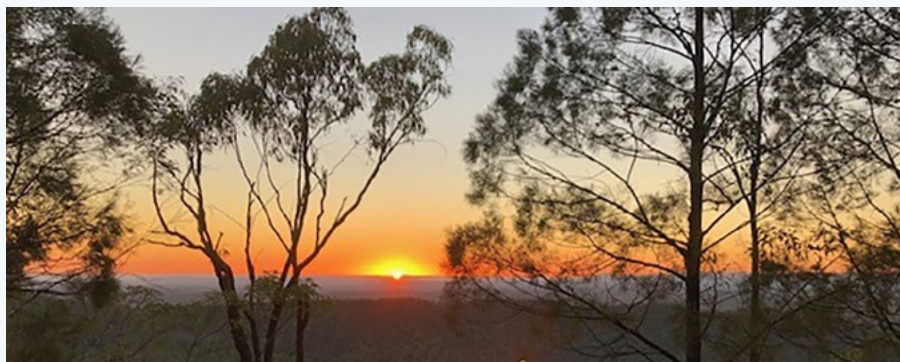
The date of Easter is a northern hemisphere construct based on the March equinox and the full moon cycle. For our northern hemisphere MU members, Lent is a time when the environment is thawing and awakening to Spring. For us in the Southern hemisphere, the reverse is the case as we progress into Autumn. Days grow shorter, leaves begin to change colour and other vegetation prepares itself for colder temperatures. From a human point of view, research has shown that less daylight and more artificial light have a negative impact on mental health. Additionally, diminishing daylight increases depression in some people; hardly a time to look forward to rejoicing in the glory of Easter! However, our Lenten disciplines and the opportunities we take to strengthen our faith and nurture our spiritual growth are essential, even amidst the challenging times of life. Some years ago, we had a visiting preacher at the Easter Day service. He said something like, if you are at the same place in

your faith development as you were this time last year, you have cheated God! A salient reminder of the purpose of Lent to help us live our Christ-centred lives.

One of the great things about this time of year is the promise that after Good Friday comes Easter Day. That wonderful news, brought by the angels' proclamation to the women visiting Jesus' tomb early on Easter day, 'He is not here; he has risen...' (Luke 24:6). We are people of the resurrection! Jesus died for us and rose again so that we might have new life in him. Living the resurrection brings us joy and the assurance that Jesus is with us in a new and living way. Like these women, and the other disciples who could not keep silent about the resurrection, we are called to spread the good news to others, to live out that resurrection faith.

Our Mothers' Union Objectives and the inwardly-nurturing and outwardly-focused model give us a framework for applying Jesus' teachings and modeling Jesus' behaviour in our lives. One way you have all contributed to demonstrating the outward focus of Jesus' teaching is the money you raised in 2023 for the Northern Outreach and Training for Indigenous Women Funds. Contributions to both Funds were up on 2022 figures; well done.

We can also work on applying Jesus' teaching to the inward part of ourselves. Perhaps considering what we might think, say, or do if Jesus was in the room, on the bus or at the MU meeting, could help us develop a more Christ-centred approach to the way we interact with others.



As members of Mothers Union, we need to live this new resurrection life in whatever form that is for each one of us, every day. Like the summer sun streaming in the window, let's take a positive approach to life and live into new possibilities for the work of MU in God's world.

**Robin Ray**





# Hand in hand with God

Our relationship with God changes and grows during our lifetime. I remember seeing a poster in the classroom when I was in high school, that said something like:

He is my God, I am His Child.  
He is my King, I am His servant.  
He is my friend, I am His co-labourer.  
He is my Shepherd, I am His sheep.

However, it took me many years to understand that each of these relationships is not only a reflection of who He is, but also of how He loves us.

Transformation isn't always noticeable to us; however, it is often noticeable to others. Transformation can also take time as we become more willing to respond to the word of God and act on the gifts He has given us. Do you share your personal relationship with God with others? How does this allow you to reach out to others in your community? When we share the personal relationship we have with God, we are also encouraging others to seek the Good News. We don't always realise that transformation is taking place when we share our experiences through prayer.

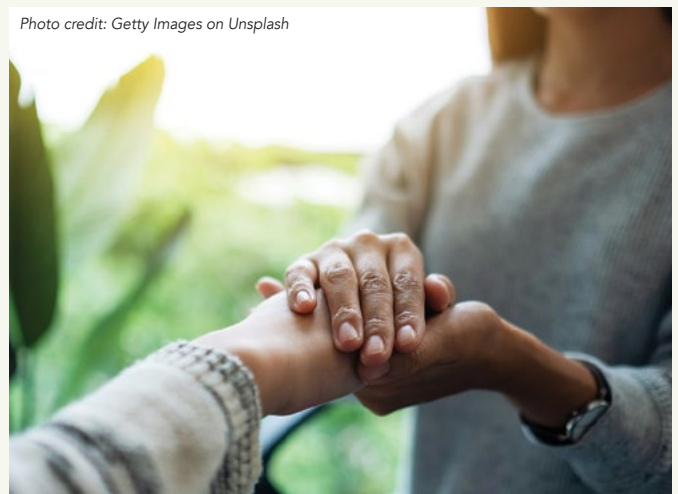
I'm sure that many members would agree that being a member of Mothers Union helps us to grow our relationship with God. The aims and objectives of Mothers Union encourage our members and friends to expand their relationship with God and our understanding of who He is. Mothers Union is a welcoming organisation for people who are seeking a better understanding of their relationship with God. When we meet or pray together, we are giving ourselves and others the opportunity to learn more about God and our relationship with Him. Prayer and worship are important parts of AMUA and play an important role for people who are seeking to learn about God and their faith.

Being a member of Mothers Union also gives us a purposeful relationship with God. With help and encouragement from other members, we gain a greater understanding of how we can actively engage with God's plan for us as we aspire to make a positive impact on families in our own communities and around the world. When we gather together for events and meetings, we gain great strength from each other. This strength enables us to serve others, either as a group or individually. The transforming power of God allows us, as Mothers Union members, to serve in ways that we may have found difficult in the past. This transformation enables us to actively reach out to people in our community who have met with adversity. Mothers Union also provides an opportunity for people to connect with a supportive spiritual community.

Becoming a member of Mothers' Union gives you the opportunity to support and understand people in your own community and all over the world. This gives us insight into other cultures and transforms our heart to respond to families in need around the world. I encourage you to be mindful of people who are seeking a better understanding of God and their faith and invite them to your gatherings. You too could help transform their lives through your support, encouragement and prayer.

## Kristi Day

Photo credit: Getty Images on Unsplash





# Change my heart, O God

A few years ago I had a heart valve transplant. I am so grateful, since this has given me life and works so well that I am hardly aware of any problem. My heart is doing its job! But, of course, this is not my main 'heart problem'. The prophet Jeremiah summed it up like this: 'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?' (17:9) Jesus himself said the same thing. Before giving a list of specific sins he said, 'For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come.' (Mark 7:15)

We need to understand the seriousness of our own spiritual heart disease if we are to see the beauty and wonder and grace of the forgiveness brought by Jesus. Jesus does not just correct us – he gives us what we really need: a transformed heart. I have seen this happen in the lives of others, and of course, like all who belong to Jesus, I have had this experience myself.

I did not come from a church-going family, but my parents sent me to Sunday School. There I learned that we all need forgiveness and a new heart, and at quite a young age I gave my life to Jesus. My parents thought I would grow out of it! I remember learning the Bible verse, John 3:16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' This did not mean that my spiritual heart problems were all over! There is still sin in my heart. But there is also the presence of the Holy Spirit who is slowly changing me to be more and more like Jesus. As the Bible also says, we are being changed from one degree of glory to another by the Lord who is the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Of course, our spiritual histories differ from each other. As far as I can tell, two of my children always knew the Lord; two had a clear conversion experience; one has come gently into the kingdom of God. The important thing is to be born again and to know the Lord and his transforming power.

Sometimes we make too much – or too little – of the conversion experience. What it is really referring to is the way in which we come to Christ, namely through repentance and faith. The experience itself will differ from person to person. Some people will be able to put their finger on the moment when they began their life of repentance and faith. Others will not have such a story. The story does not matter as much as the reality. Are we living a life of repentance and faith? Is Jesus Christ our Lord? Whenever it happens, we begin a life of transformation. There is one person who we all long to be like: Jesus. The goal of our life is so to please him that we will grow like him. This prepares us for the day when we go home to be with him eternally, and our transformation will be complete.

I always think that one of the most wonderful descriptions of Jesus in the New Testament is to be found in Paul's great words on the nature of love. It is hard not to see Jesus as Paul tells us about love: 'Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things' (1 Corinthians 13:4-6).

Our continually-being-transformed lives are meant to be like that. It is interesting to see how other-person-centred the description is. As we become like Jesus, we become more and more people who love others and look after their needs. When we see this, it is not surprising that the Christian story has been such a powerful force for good. It gives us a heart to follow Jesus.

**Christine Jensen**

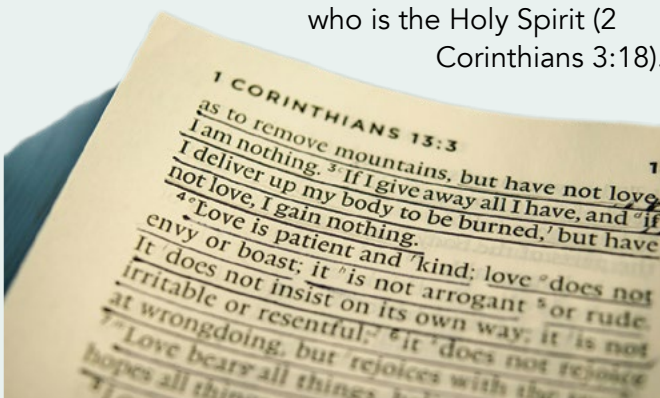


Photo credit: Jonathan Meyer on Unsplash





# Loneliness transformed

Photo credit: Getty Images on Unsplash



I placed the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle into place and looked at the clock. Too soon for morning tea. What to do next? The unit was clean and tidy and I had baked enough biscuits yesterday to last for weeks. Phone someone? I'd spoken to everyone I could think of a couple of days ago. I'd finished my library books and crossword puzzles. My husband would not be home for another seven hours, fourteen minutes. The gardens in the complex were maintained by a gardener and I had been forbidden to touch anything. I picked up my knitting and did a couple of rows.

I realised I was lonely. This was a new experience for me. Being brought up on a farm with thirteen siblings meant I always had plenty of kids to fight with. We were allowed to wander anywhere on the farm, but always in groups, never alone. I'd led a busy life. There had always been someone to talk to, something to do. My husband and I worked together in our small business. Then came the drought. We closed the business and my husband accepted work on-site in Brisbane. We planned to go home on weekends, so didn't seek out a parish to join.

An idea sprang to mind. Surely there were weekday services in some of the parishes nearby? Perhaps a Mothers' Union branch? The first parish I rang yielded no results. No weekday services, no Mothers' Union. The second had a Mothers' Union branch but they had broken up for the year and wouldn't resume until February.

The next call struck gold. They had a Mothers' Union branch. The ladies usually attended the Wednesday service. I was most welcome. Did I need a lift? Could someone contact me? Two hours later my phone rang. Would I like to meet for coffee?

Bible verses such as Matthew 28:20<sup>1</sup> and John 14:16-18<sup>2</sup> remind us that we are never truly alone. God will never forsake us. I praise God for those members of Mothers' Union who welcomed me. My loneliness was short lived, but there are those who know long periods of isolation. Your friendship can transform their lives.

**Susan Skowronski**

1 '...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

2 'And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,<sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.<sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.' ESV

## A Poem for Australia

Come Holy Spirit,  
Come to our need-filled land.  
Come Holy Spirit,  
Fill hearts with yearning.  
The need is great, Lord,  
Take each hand.

Cleanse us and heal us,  
Holy fire burning.  
Make my heart cry  
For the lost and the lonely.  
Let your truth set us free,  
Let us worship you only.

Cleanse us and heal us,  
Let all see our need  
For the love that sustains.  
Plant in us the seed  
Of the love that sustains  
And eliminates greed.

Speak to our leaders,  
Comfort our poor.  
Turn hearts to our God,  
Show that less can be more.  
Pour out your Spirit,  
Set captives free.  
Show our country, our planet  
That all can be free.

And if just one must start praying,  
Lord, let it be me.

**Barbara Hyam**







# Together in prayer

***I believe that prayer is one of the most powerful tools for transformation.***

*(Sheran Harper, 2024 Mothers' Union Prayer Diary)*

**E**arly in the new year a copy of the 1998 Members' Prayer Diary came into my possession. It is a much trimmer publication, without daily prayers, and the Wave of Prayer was prominent down the side of each page. Dioceses were each prayed for over five days (six on months when there were 31 days). On February 26-28 the staff and work of Mary Sumner House were covered.

In her introduction, Maureen Kyle, then coordinator of Prayer and Spirituality wrote:

*The more I pray the more aware I become of the many varied and different ways of coming closer to God and allowing Him to come closer to me. Through the world I see around me, the objects I use in everyday life, the people I meet, the actions I take each day, and the thoughts I have during times of quiet, it really is possible to LIVE a life of Prayer.*

Our current diary has as its introduction a letter from our Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, who also encourages us in our prayer life through her words. She concluded her message, part of which is quoted above, with these words: *When we pray, we invite God into our lives; we open ourselves up to His love and His power for positive change.*

The Wave of Prayer is now much less prominent in the diary, appearing in small print at the bottom of each page. First commenced in 1921, the year that Mary Sumner died, the continued importance of this daily prayer guide is summed up in the opening paragraph of the introductory article 'Joined-up prayer' in the 2024 diary.

*Running throughout the year, the global Wave of Prayer expresses our commitment in prayer to each other, in all the places we work and reside. We focus on the vision of a future where everyone can thrive. By joining with and sustaining this Wave of Prayer, we can be part of something*



*bigger than ourselves. As we pray, we know that we, too, are being prayed for by others around the world.*

Through our use of the Wave of Prayer we intentionally pray for all Mothers' Union members around the world and we know that for three days each year we, and the other members in each of our dioceses, are intentionally prayed for. Stop and reflect for a moment on that. Over the course of 72 hours you will be embraced by up to 12 million prayers. 12 million prayers, over three days. How awesome is that. And how humbling. To think that you matter that much to four million other people that they will take the time to pray for you!

Sadly, it is not always possible to have communication with the other dioceses with whom we are joined-up through the Wave of Prayer and thus form a 'link' with them. We can, however, bring our members closer to the dioceses with whom we are connected by gathering information, to the best of our ability, from other sources such as the Mary Sumner House website, the Anglican Communion website, Facebook, YouTube, and similar resources. If we do this, we can make our prayers just that much more intentional by being able to focus on the particular circumstances and environments in which Mothers' Union exists in those countries.

As I read through the 1998 and 2024 Prayer Diaries, alongside Mothers Union Service Books from 1948 and 1978 produced by Mary Sumner House, and our own 1996, 2005 and 2009 Service and Prayer Books, one thing is clear. Changes in language, updates to liturgy, differences in wording of vision and mission statements, of aims and objectives, are an ongoing part of our continual transformation as an organisation which seeks to be relevant in its time while never losing

sight of the call to prayer and action that Mary Sumner gave us.

In the words of Maureen Kyle: *'I believe that by combining the new with the traditional we can deepen our awareness of God within us and around us and learn from the experience of those Christians who lived before us'*

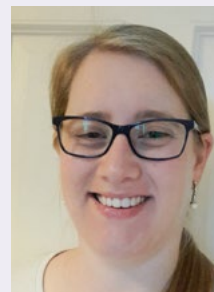
## Wendy Mabey

**How do you use your copy of the Mothers' Union Prayer Diary? Here are some ideas you might like to try to make your prayer times more creative.**

- Make personal prayer cards by copying prayers which touch your heart onto card then decorating and/or laminating them. Carry them in your handbag so you can use them to pray when waiting for an appointment or sitting on the bus.
- When you have finished with them, you could share your cards with others. Use them to encourage your bishop or parish priest or someone who is lonely, unwell, bed-ridden or worried.
- Make a cumulative group prayer book for use in MU meetings even after the current year is finished, by inviting members to take turns in choosing one (or more) prayers from each month for inclusion in a booklet. Perhaps this could be photocopied and shared with other members of your church or family.
- If you are musically talented, why not put some of the monthly prayers to music, then share them with others.
- Any of these ideas can be adapted for use with children in your church, or with Bible study or other groups.



## A candid conversation with Sheran and Jeanette



The names Sheran Harper and Jeanette Lawrence are well-known to MU members in Australia, but how well do you know what they actually do and how that relates to us in Australia? Grab a cuppa and spend some time getting to know them as they answer a few pertinent (and impertinent!) questions about themselves and their roles we prepare for their visit to Australia in May.

### Some fun questions to begin with:

**Mia Mia: When you were a child, what did you want to do when you grew up?**

**Sheran:** I wanted to be a chef ... just loved helping my mother in the kitchen.

**Jeanette:** *I had my heart set on being in the Royal Navy*

**Mia Mia: Do you like surprises? Why?**

**Sheran:** I love organising surprises for everyone but when I am on the receiving end, I get all shy and don't know what to do with myself. So, the answer is no, I do not like surprises.

**Jeanette:** *Yes good ones! It's nice knowing that people care about you to want to surprise you.*

**Mia Mia: What would be your perfect holiday?**

**Sheran:** Somewhere peaceful to relax and enjoy the beauty of creation.

**Jeanette:** *Walking coastlines anywhere!*

**Mia Mia: What is your favourite book or film?**

**Sheran:** My favourite book is *City of Joy* by Dominique Lapierre (Set in Calcutta, India – gives us a fresh want for God and the true values of life). My favourite film is *The Way – El Camino de*

Santiago (a pilgrimage that helps you discover new meaning in life).

**Jeanette:** *Science Fiction*

**Mia Mia:** *What's your favourite food or meal?*

**Sheran:** A nice Guyanese curry and roti

**Jeanette:** *Christmas dinner – roast with extra trimmings.*

**Mia Mia:** *What was your favourite subject in school?*

**Sheran:** Biology

**Jeanette:** *Music*

**Mia Mia:** *What sport do you like to watch or play?*

**Sheran:** Swimming

**Jeanette:** *I like watching diving at the Olympics, but I would never attempt it.*

**Mia Mia:** *What item of clothing do you wish would come back in fashion?*

**Sheran:** Beautiful hats

**Jeanette:** *Jeans without holes or rips!*

**Mia Mia:** *What makes you angry?*

**Sheran:** Injustices – discrimination, prejudice, and unfairness that affect the lives of women and children around the world.

**Jeanette:** *How much hatred and lack of willingness there is currently to agree to disagree in the world. You can disagree but that doesn't mean you have to hate each other.*

**Mia Mia:** *What makes you laugh?*

**Sheran:** Mr. Bean (Johnny English) Even before the movie starts, I am laughing.

**Jeanette:** *My budgie!*



**Now for some more serious questions**

**1. How long have you been involved with Mothers' Union?**

**Sheran:** I have been a member for over 36 years.

**Jeanette:** *Since 2013 so 11 years.*

**2. What attracted you to Mothers' Union in the first place?**

**Sheran:** I was invited to attend a Branch meeting and asked myself what will I be doing with a group of older women? So, I thought I would attend the meeting and then escape, but instead I was impressed by the way members supported young mothers and families, cared for the vulnerable and elderly, and participated in the Church.

**Jeanette:** *The idea of working for a charity that helps people and allows those involved to express their faith.*

**3. What roles have you filled in Mothers' Union?**

**Sheran:** At branch level – Assistant Secretary Treasurer, Secretary, and acted in all other positions.

Diocesan Level – Diocesan Public Relations Officer, Asst. Secretary Treasurer, Vice President, Diocesan Parenting Trainer, Diocesan President.

Provincial Level – Public Relations Officer, Vice President.

Worldwide Level – Worldwide Parenting Trainer, Worldwide President, MU Representative at several international fora, including UN Commission on the Status of Women, Abrahamic Faiths Initiative and Religions for Peace.

**Jeanette:** *I was employed as the Worldwide Development Administrator in July 2013, moved to Regional Development Coordinator in 2018 and was enrolled as a central member by Lynne Tembey a few years before the pandemic.*

**4. Can you please describe your current role in Mothers Union.**

**Sheran:** The Worldwide President is the most senior elected member/volunteer within Mothers' Union, and the role is broad. It includes 3 key areas: acting as a figurehead for members within, and an ambassador beyond Mothers' Union; Chairing the Board of the Central Charity, which is subject to the laws of England and Wales; and line-managing the Chief Executive and acting as the key link between the Board in defining strategy, and the Chief Executive and staff in implementing strategy.

**Jeanette:** *As Regional Development Coordinator my main roles are being the liaison for Zone C with Mary Sumner House and the wider charity. Coordinating the Worldwide Parenting Programme/ Flourishing Families. A lot of my time*



is also taken up with grants management, story gathering by coordinating MU Live, Global Calls and work with Provincial Presidents.

## 5. What does a 'typical' week look like for you?

**Sheran:** Zoom calls to stay connected with MU global leaders and members; Meetings with Trustees, CEO and Staff at MSH; Prayer and Worship; writing inspirational and encouraging addresses, homilies, and articles for magazines; writing messages or recording videos of congratulations to Provinces and Dioceses; representing MU at meetings of the Anglican Communion or at international meetings; resolving challenging issues in Provinces; pastoral care for Trustees and Presidents...All this and more while squeezing in quality family time and exercise.

**Jeanette:** *One of the best parts of working for MU is how changeable a week can be. I can go from being on Zoom with the West Indies to discuss Parenting, to working on grants the next day. This may be followed by design development work on MU Live and database work, or a call with the Worldwide President, company and team meetings, a call with a Provincial President from any Province, and finding time to answer emails! Though I do really enjoy the weeks when we have our monthly Global Call.*

## 6. Can you please tell us about some of the things you really love about your work with Mothers' Union?

**Sheran:** MU is a way of life for me, and I love every aspect of it – so I'll put a few in a nutshell for you.

- Worshipping, praying and walking hand in hand with members.
- Conducting training programmes to empower and enable women.
- Inspiring and encouraging members to flourish in the ministry of MU.
- Creating opportunities to transform the lives of women, families, and communities.
- Making a difference in the poorest communities through vital MU projects and programmes.
- Promoting peace and reconciliation where there is conflict.
- Addressing large gatherings on a number of issues including increasing awareness of MU.
- Sitting with a worldwide Board of Trustees,

representative of MU members around the world to define and implement strategy to ensure MU flourishes for generations to come.

- Engaging with and having the necessary conversations with Primates, Bishops and other leaders throughout the Anglican Communion.

**Jeanette:** *Our members are what make working for MU fun and different to other paces I have worked. With the majority of members being involved in the first place because of their faith, seeing that in action is inspiring and a privilege. Mary Sumner House being located behind Westminster Abbey is also a nice perk, as its one of the nicer areas of London to be in plus you can hear the bells!*

## 7. What do you like to do in any spare time you might have?

**Sheran:** Depending on the time I have I would either watch a movie or dream up any excuse to invite family and friends over for a fantastic home-cooked meal.

**Jeanette:** *I started bell ringing last year when a call went out for volunteers to train and ring for the King for King Charles' Coronation. I'm in the worship band at church and I also have way too many books on the go at any one time!*

## 8. Is there anything else you think might be of interest to Australian members of Mothers' Union?

**Sheran:**

1. It is truly an honour and a privilege for me to visit AMUA as Worldwide President. From the time I attended the Special Regional meeting in Toowoomba in 2007, I have felt the love and warmth of Australian members, and their passion for making a difference, and this continues to overflow. I cannot thank you enough for making all things possible for me to be here with you in Australia! I appreciate you!
2. I am forever grateful to AMUA for caring for and supporting families for over 125 years; for their ongoing prayers, love, support, and generous giving to Central MU, especially during the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic; for supporting and enabling the work of MU locally and in overseas Provinces; for ensuring the Gospel reaches not only the four corners of Australia, but throughout the Pacific, so

all experience the love of Jesus Christ; for the passion and commitment of AMUA's Presidents, Leaders and Members to advancing MU, upholding the 5 Objects and global/provincial priorities, and so much more. May God continue to bless AMUA to be that beacon on the hill, shining light in the darkest corners, so all may experience the amazing love of Jesus Christ.

3. Whenever I meet an AMUA member, I usually expect a question about MU. Almost all of the time, I am asked about a cricket match that happened years ago or about one that is currently being played, especially if it involves Australia, England, and West Indies. This makes me smile because my husband Roger Harper played cricket for West Indies in Australia 5 times including the World Cup in 1992. We have been married for 36 years and are blessed with 2 sons, 1 daughter-in-law, and we are looking forward to a wedding soon.

**Jeanette:** *I believe that the MUs around the world can do anything they put their mind to, as long as we keep smiling and believe that God will set us on the right path.*

## 9. How can we pray for you?

**Sheran:** Please pray that God gives me wisdom, good health, and all that I need to continue leading this amazing movement to the end of my tenure in 2024, with my Worldwide Board of Trustees leaving MU a legacy that future Boards can build on for generations to come. I am praying for you as you do the same for me.

**Jeanette:** *I am always so grateful and humbled to know members around the world are praying for me.*



Photo credit: Mothers' Union Used by permission

## Building bridges through literacy

***Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development... Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.***

**Kofi Annan**

While each state may have slightly different rules regarding the starting time for formal schooling, in Australia there is a general expectation that every child will be in formal schooling by the start of the year in which they turn six and that they will remain there until they turn 17, with a few exceptions. Yet it would be naïve to think that this is a reality, or that all children will become literate, i.e. have the ability to read and write.

In June 2023 one survey put Australia's literacy rate at 99% while the Australian Government Style Guide states that, with regard to reading level, 'about 44% of adults read at literacy level 1 to 2 (a low level), 38% of adults read at level 3, about 15% read at level 4 to 5 (the highest level)'. It further states that 'the effect of literacy on people's lives is profound. It influences how they interact with each other and how they approach education, work and government'.

Mothers' Union has long recognised the importance of literacy as fundamental to

its missional work of stopping violence, stopping poverty and stopping injustice – long before these words became the catchphrase of our social action initiatives. For over 20 years Mary Sumner House has been coordinating training in various countries, equipping volunteers to run literacy circles in their communities, offering community members the opportunity to transform themselves and their communities through participating in these learning opportunities.

The Literacy and Financial Education Programme (LFEP) was first begun in 2000. Partnership with agencies such as Comic Relief and Five Talents has seen projects prosper in Burundi, Sudan/South Sudan and in Ethiopia, where both women and men have gained basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The transformational impact that Mothers' Union is able to have through its literacy circles, wherever they have been used, can be attributed to the approach that is taken in program planning and implementation. Rather than attempting to use programs developed in one country for use in another, staff at Mary Sumner House work with local leaders in countries where programs are to be implemented to adapt existing formats. This is to ensure that what is being introduced is culturally relevant and presented in a format which will be accepted by the members of the communities where a literacy circle is to be established.

As the programs have developed they have broadened their scope and become the tool



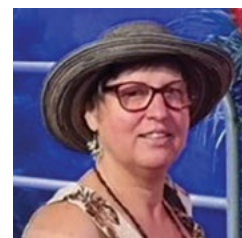
by which other programs can be introduced. In Burundi the functional literacy and numeracy education programme evolved over the years to offer financial literacy and business development education and then parenting education. In South Sudan the literacy circles have become a tool to address and educate communities on gender-based violence. In Papua New Guinea they are seeking to adapt the South Sudanese model as a way of implementing their parenting program, part of which is funded from Australian donations made during the time that this was our Overseas Target Project.

In the synopsis of the book 'A history of the Mothers' Union: Women, Anglicanism and Globalisation 1876-2008' it was written of Mothers' Union, 'Today it is hailed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and international development practitioners as an outstanding example of global Christian engagement with poverty and social transformation issues at the grass roots.'

I pray that we may continue to be recognised in this way as we seek to contribute to the world envisioned by Kofi Annan, a world where literacy brings hope and builds bridges to a better future.

*More about the literacy circles and their associated programs and the impact they have had in our member countries can be found on the Mary Sumner House website.*

**Wendy Mabey**





# My journey through cancer to remission

I spent my first 29 years living in Sydney. During that time I went to Sunday School and Christian Endeavour at another church. Later, after having gone to church occasionally, I returned to the church where I had gone to Sunday School, and at 19, I started teaching Sunday School there.

In 1975 my husband and I, with our two children, moved to Perth and when the children were old enough to start Sunday School we joined in too – as teachers! During this time we both felt that God had His hand on us in shaping our lives for Him, so we were confirmed in the church we were attending. Since then I have been in many women's Bible study groups, sometimes as a leader.

Workwise, I am now retired after working as an occupational therapy assistant in aged care and with the MS Society in Perth. Since retiring I have been mentoring children who need help with reading and sometimes other areas of their work.

However, on the morning of June 6, 2022, everything changed. The first phone call of the day was my sister, Jane, ringing from Queensland to inform me that her husband, Neil, who had been battling cancer for some time, had just passed away. The next phone call, an hour and a half later, was the one that turned my own life upside down. That call was from my doctor. My recent blood tests had delivered the diagnosis of Multiple Myeloma – a blood cancer that starts in the bone marrow in plasma cells. There is no cure for it at this time. However, it can be controlled.

My GP referred me to a, who conducted a bone marrow biopsy and ordered a full CT scan to check for any bone damage. These tests confirmed that I did indeed have Multiple Myeloma, so the haematologist/oncologist started me on a regime of multi-drug chemotherapy which was designed to attack the cancer.

When only three weeks into the first cycle of my 'chemo', I had a severe reaction to the



medication. One morning I collapsed while showering and did not have the strength to get up off the floor. My husband called for an ambulance, which took me to the hospital emergency department. I had no strength at all. I had a fever, diarrhoea and a chest infection. What a mess I was in! I have never felt so chronically fatigued.

After this episode I went on to complete nine, five-week cycles of the 'induction phase' and I am currently on the fifth of six cycles, each of four weeks, which is called the 'consolidating phase' and I am heading towards remission. For this I can really praise God for His strength and faithfulness

During all this I have had some low times. Having to take so many medications has affected my body, physically and mentally. 'Chemo Brain' is very real. Having a blood test before each injection, plus having bone infusions intravenously, have not been things I have looked forward to! Currently, my haematologist has halved the dosage of my medication for the cancer and the nursing care has been good.

But it has been in looking to God and remembering some of His promises, in trusting His strength, not mine, which has got me through those times. Although so much of what I had been able to do has come to an end since my cancer diagnosis, even at 78 I am looking forward to what God has in store for me.

I thank God for the friends and people in the church where I was a chaplain for girls in the Girl's Brigade. These people were all praying for me and I am sure God will honour their faith.

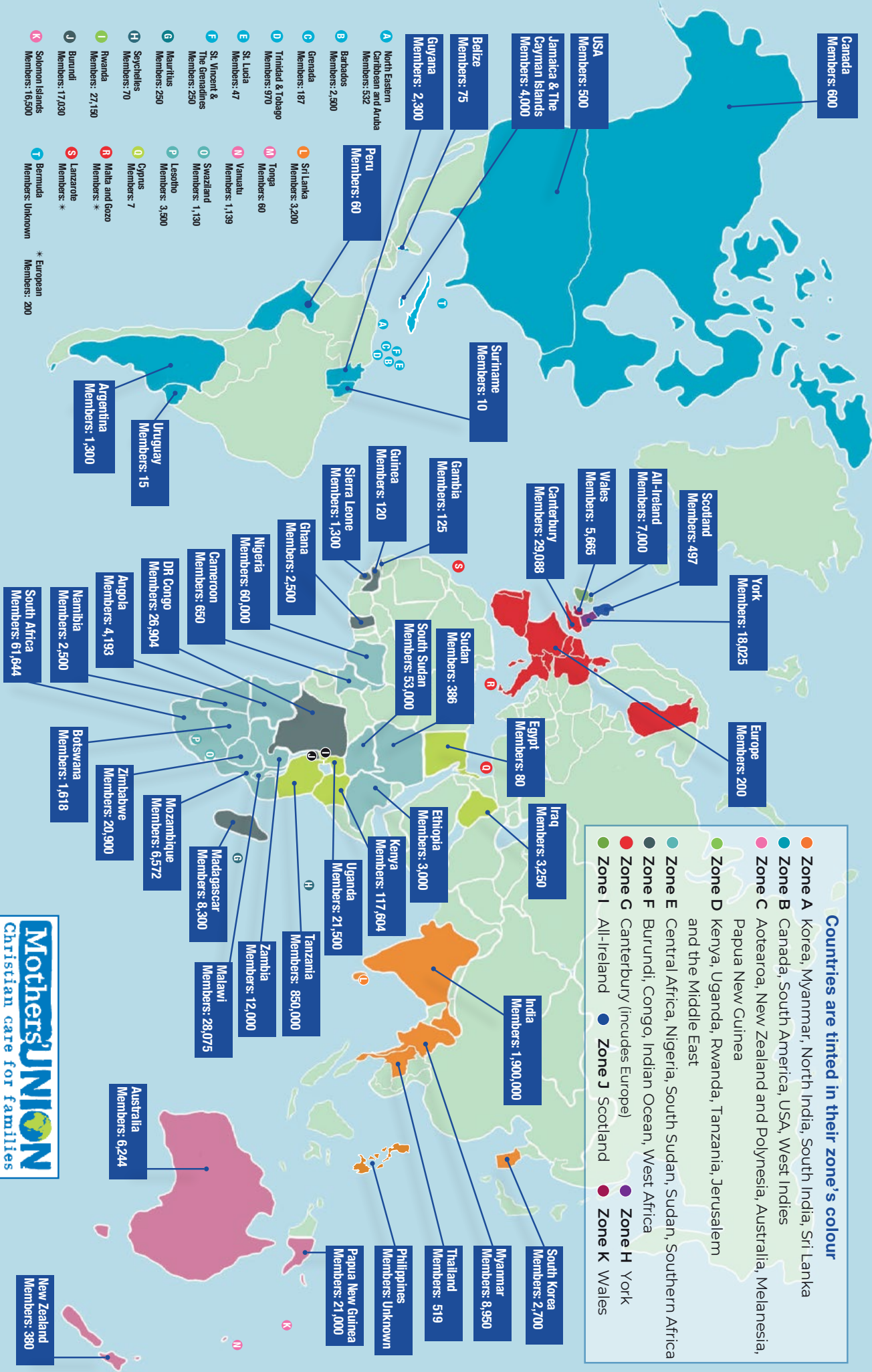
The Bible verse that came into my mind while writing my story was Proverbs 3:5-6, *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will make your paths straight.*

**Heather Brightwell**



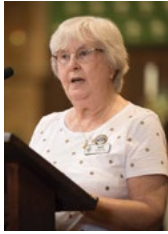
# A Worldwide Fellowship of Prayer

## Mothers' Union – 4 million members around the world



# Say 'Yes'

On December 2, 2023, Grafton Diocese held a wonderful Celebration Eucharist to honour the ordained women priests of our diocese, it having been 30 years since our first two priests had been ordained. I was asked, on behalf of Mothers Union, to thank the guest speaker, the Venerable Dr Colleen O'Reilly, who had come from Melbourne to be with us.



Not knowing Colleen O'Reilly, I had to think for a while about what I would be able to say in my vote of thanks. Well, after much thought, I knew I knew me, and I also knew another woman who has inspired me over many of my adult years. So, I shared about my life growing up as the eldest in a family of girls. I shared about how, although my mother didn't have the opportunities which she so much wanted, she always encouraged me and my sisters to strive for whatever we were called to do, in whatever field of life that was.

Thankfully, I can now say, as I enter this latter part of my life, that I can look back with much happiness and joy to what I have been able to achieve; at my three children and all they have achieved; and at my seven grandchildren as they grow into young people going into the world today.

As both my mother and grandmother were Mothers' Union members, and being an avid reader, I would read copies of *Mia Mia* when they arrived for my grandma or mother. I started to learn about Mary Sumner. Now, after many years as a member myself, I've had the opportunity to read much more about this very special lady. Her bravery in standing up before a hall full of clergymen, after being asked to speak to them by her bishop on what was dearest and nearest to her heart, and on reaching out to those in need, has always impressed me.

I have had the privilege of speaking to many groups over the years and I always remember Mary Sumner, and what she was able to achieve by being brave and willing to share what was on her heart. So, too, it's been very special when I've had feedback from someone who has felt blessed after my sharing a small snippet of my life.

I have had the privilege of both walking alongside and working with quite a few lady priests and deacons over many years, but I think the courage

and determination of Mary Sumner has always been there for me. I hope that by sharing with those at the Cathedral that day, and now sharing these few words in *Mia Mia*, others, when asked, to speak, be it a talk or a vote of thanks, may be encouraged to say 'yes'. By being willing to do so, one can learn so much about oneself and be a joy to others.

**Gae Shorten**

## A Hymn to the Risen Christ\*

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us:  
So let us celebrate the feast,  
Not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness:  
But with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:7,8)  
Christ once raised from the dead dies no more:

Death has no more dominion over him.  
In dying he died to sin once for all:  
In living he lives to God.  
See yourselves therefore as dead to sin:  
And alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Romans 6:9,10)

Christ has been raised from the dead:  
The firstfruits of those who sleep.  
For as by one man came death:  
By another has come also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die:  
Even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

(1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

APBA (Shorter Edition), Broughton Books, 1995, pages 6-7

*\*How might you use this hymn creatively in your personal or group worship this Easter? Perhaps you could take turns reading each verse, or read antiphonally, with one reader reading to the colon and the group responding, or half the group reading to the colon, and the rest responding. Perhaps you could copy it out and decorate and laminate it to keep by your Bible or display in your home. If you are musically talented you might try to set it to music and then teach the others in your church or group. Share your efforts with other Mia Mia readers!*



Photo credit:  
Anuja Tilj on Unsplash





Photo credit: Aaron Burden on Unsplash

## The Church Begins

The book of Acts tells the history of the early church as the disciples sought to continue the work that Jesus had begun. It is often read in church during the season of Eastertide, that is the 40 days between Easter Sunday and Pentecost. Below are some ideas for how your church or family can be inspired by this significant book of the Bible.

### Nibbles

The story of Jesus doesn't end with his resurrection. It has carried on throughout time, and in places right around the world, by the actions of His disciples. This even includes us! However, it began with the first disciples and their stories are found in Acts. Who were those courageous people? Can you name them? Draw them? What did they do? Can you find a story in Acts about one of them?

Here are some suggestions: Mary, Jesus' mum, chapter 1:12-14; Peter, chapter 3:1-10; Saul/Paul & Ananias, chapter 9:1-19; Barnabas, chapter 9:16-28; Tabitha, chapter 9:36-42



Photo credit: Ben White on nsplash

### Bites

How about digging deeper into one particular story? Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-40) works well as a short skit. There's an angel, Philip, the Spirit and the eunuch. There's travel between towns, including in a chariot. There are enlightening conversations and a quotation from the Old Testament. And that's not to mention a spontaneous baptism! But there are many, many more stories in Acts about the way Jesus' friends spread the good news about Jesus, so go looking and reading to find out more.

After you've read over the story and adapted it to suit your family, practise it together by imagining all of the various emotions experienced by the people you have chosen. For example, surprise, weariness from travel, relaxed while reading, perplexed, confident proclamation, excitement, awe, rejoicing. Make some simple costumes and perform your skit for one another or a group you know.

### Chomps

There are 28 chapters in the book of Acts and 40 days between Easter and Pentecost. As a family, or a church, make a plan to read through the whole book in that time, together if you can. How will you track your progress? By marking it off on a calendar? Circling the places that are mentioned on a biblical map of Acts (Google images has loads)? Assembling lists of the people, actions and places ... first to 10 gets a box of Smarties?!

Then decide how you might celebrate together when you've read the book and Pentecost arrives. Make it a joyful time of thanking God for sending Jesus and then enabling others to share this wonderful news over and over again down through the centuries to us.



**Rev'd. Zan Daniels**

Adapted from *The Spirit*, Anglican Diocese of Bendigo, February 2023

# Transforming for the future

When I ask, 'What are the greatest concerns for us in Mothers Union Sydney as we look to the future?' the answer is, 'aged membership, dwindling branch numbers and the need for younger members.' It is a real and natural response and is usually followed by 'but how can we fix this?' In Sydney, we have been grappling with these challenges for years and strangely, COVID gave us an opportunity to re-focus and make decisions we had only been talking about. We looked at what we were doing and why. We needed to be bold, to take a risk and move many activities online, not just the Festival Service and AGM, Council and Executive Meetings, but our parenting courses, branch meetings and gatherings. Zoom became the norm and email our best friend. Those who weren't connected were not forgotten and were contacted by phone and letter. Our Membership Coordinator, Vice Presidents and Branch Leaders took this task to heart and members worked hard to keep connected.

We used the quiet time of COVID to revamp our website and printed materials, we made short videos about Mothers Union Sydney ministries so that we presented in a clear and relevant way. We set up Christian Parenting Australia and updated Mothers' Union Sydney Facebook pages and the MUSE page. Our parenting courses and short sessions were presented in person and online.

Since 2011, our February Seminars have gained traction and given us connections with some 1500-plus people who have come to hear Christian speakers on topics of interest to Christian family life. This wonderful ministry is the basis, we believe, of the transforming future of Mothers' Union Sydney. In God's provision, in the four years of COVID, the February Seminars were the one activity that continued in person as well as online at the cathedral each year. The people who attend want to be good parents in today's world and we seek to support them through this ministry.

So, what does all have to do with membership? Firstly, we recognised that we needed to transform to accommodate the needs of today's families.



We now ask those with whom we have had contact the question, 'If you support what we stand for (our Aims and Objectives) then why not join us?'.

Secondly, we are providing another model of membership, not neglecting our wonderful and faithful existing members, but adding another way to be a member. We are looking at online membership, where new members can easily connect with us to pray and support our mission. We are hopeful that new members will join a Mothers Union Sydney online 'village' where they might be able to meet up with other parents to encourage each other online. We are investigating how we can encourage small local groups of members to meet on a regular basis. These groups will be overseen by Mothers Union Mentors. To this end we have made a Membership Video to show at this February's Seminar and we are trusting that it will be the beginning of a new model of membership.

Thirdly, we have also sought to future-proof our organisation by inviting younger women to join us to specifically contribute to planning activities and to discussions on the future. This has been fruitful. We also encourage our traditional members to speak up about Mothers Union Sydney in a positive way and to continue to ask their peers and friends to come and join.

Above all we are praying. Change is never easy and there will be challenges, but if we do nothing, nothing will be the outcome. 2024 is going to be a membership-focus year. We are mindful that we have opportunity, resources and people to connect with, for which we are so grateful. We want to transform to the future because we are convinced that God has a plan for us and it is good.

**Glenda Mc Sorley**





# 16 Days of activism against gender-based violence

## BALLARAT

Ballarat Deanery held a service to mark the 16 Days of Activism, led by the Dean of the cathedral, the Very Rev'd Michael Davies. The suggested daily and other prayers and intercessions were used. Guest preacher, the Rev'd Bill Peacock, included in his sermon his experience of having helped a victim who had suffered terrible abuse at the hands of her husband.

Hand-knitted purple comforter hearts, made by St. Paul's Bakery Hill knitting group, were blessed before being given to those present or taken to other people who hadn't been able to attend the service. Gemma, the granddaughter of our Diocesan President, Jill, made lovely white origami doves which adorned the pews.

All priests in the Ballarat Diocese were contacted and encouraged to observe the '16 days...' in their churches, and Mothers' Union branches in our other deaneries also held their own observances.

**Denise Lay**



## BRISBANE

St Marks Anglican church, Buderim, with support from the AMUA branches of Buderim and Caloundra, held a service of lament and hope on Friday December 8. One of the prayers from the service was '*Lord of justice and mercy, draw us close to those that hurt. Let us reach out our hands in your name to share the sorrow and lessen the pain. Clothe our feet with your living Word to trample the works of unrighteousness.*'



Those present viewed an art installation of shoes; white ones representing those who have lost their lives to gender-based violence and coloured ones representing those people who have survived the violence to create new lives. We gave thanks for those who have survived and mourned those whose lives have been lost.

**Sue Milwright**

## BUNBURY

Mandurah branch of Mothers Union is very active, with many projects on the go, but in 2023 we decided that our major project would be to install a 'red bench' in the gardens of Christ's Church as part of our commitment to the UN '16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence.'

The presence of a red bench in a public location aims to raise awareness of domestic violence and keep this important issue visible. We contacted a local Men's Shed, who were contracted to build and paint the benches. We now have two in the church grounds, one facing the community and one facing the church. Funds were raised by donation, and we were grateful for the involvement of our local Zonta Group who co-



funded the project. Our fund raising was so successful that we will be installing a third bench at our local Anglican School!

Our benches have engraved plaques with the Mothers Union logo, Red Rose Foundation Logo and Zonta logo and carry the words 'Change the Ending – Let's stop domestic violence.' They are very visible and have already engaged members of the public in discussion about the issue of domestic violence. The benches were installed in November by Bishop Ian Coutts and many guests from local service agencies attended, as well as congregation members, the choir and members of the public. Bishop Ian noted that two of the issues surrounding domestic violence are silence and secrecy. So two very red benches really stand out and cause people to remark 'what's that about?'

At the same time, we had an exhibition in the church, 'Souls of our Shoes', which were photographs of different shoes with an appropriate motto, such as 'these are the shoes I wore to run away in' and children's shoes with the message 'when they fight, I get really scared.' Arranged down the central aisle of the church, these were very visible and many congregation members paused to ponder the messages.

The project drew our branch members together for this important purpose, causing us all to reflect on the many different lives in the community around us and not to take our privilege for granted. I hope that there will be many more red benches in view before too long!

**Isobelle Shortreed**



*Isobelle Shortreed and Bronwyn Jones use the Mandurah red bench*

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## NEWCASTLE

At our Swansea M.U meetings, the subject of the increase in domestic violence in Australian homes had very much concerned us, therefore, when the information concerning '16 Days of Activism...' reached us, I, as secretary, felt the need to promote that cause and most members encouraged some action. I prepared many copies of the '16 Days of Activism' scripture notes – a set for each of our M.U members, and copies to place inside our usual pew sheets for weekly church services. Each Sunday I reminded our people about the significance and purpose of the scripture notes and invited them to pray. In this way our M.U. members and Sunday congregations became well aware of the '16 Days of Activism...' campaign.

**Carol Leist**



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## PERTH

'Shine light into the darkness' was the theme of a gathering of about 60 MU members and friends from across Perth on Saturday, December 2, as part of our participation in the '16 Days...' campaign. Our preacher, the Rev'd Rebecca Bydder, spoke on the reading from Ephesians, encouraging us to be Christ-like in the darkness of domestic abuse, exposing abusers and encouraging those

who are suffering, including children, to come into the light.

Those present were then invited to write a prayer request on a paper leaf, which was added to a 'prayer tree'. After the service the prayers were taken by members of MU so these requests could continue to be brought to God in prayer.

**Sandra Boylan**

# Stepping over the cliff

Greetings, everyone, from the members of Mount Barker Mothers' Union. Our church is in the Adelaide hills, in the diocese of The Murray. In agreeing to take over the production of the audio version of *Mia Mia* we have taken yet another step 'over the cliff', (although I should probably say that we have taken this step 'in faith'). The motivation to answer the call to this ministry is that several of us have had personal experience with low vision. Liz, our president, has received two corneal grafts, and Margie, who was in charge of the Eye Bank at the time, was the one who retrieved those corneas! So, our whole group looks forward to 'meeting' those who receive the audio *Mia Mia* and hope that we can provide a meaningful service for them. We are not wonderful with technology, but our chaplain, Rev'd Daniel Irvine, is. It's highly possible that he will be called upon as chaplain to help us in a new capacity!

There is not space here to name all of our members in detail, but it's important to say that their commitment to God and His word is paramount and their willingness to answer His call as a group is inspiring. We are truly blessed.

## Here are some ways in which we have answered His call.



Mary and Joseph and the donkey are seen here with Ann Ross at our Wave of Prayer/Christmas lunch, held on the croquet lawn at Auchendarroch, then in their restaurant. Ann, a past president of the diocese of Adelaide, had just been acknowledged for her 50-years of membership. Every Advent Mary and Joseph travel around the parish from house to house, experiencing life to the full with medical, supermarket, garden and restaurant experiences to mention a few.

Our knitted and crocheted angels, which are hung on the rectory fence just before Christmas, is an outreach we all enjoy; this year our members made more than 100 angels. Within three days of their having been attached to the fence all had



been taken by passers-by. Each angel carries a special Christmas message. Usually we don't know where they have gone, but every now and then we hear things like, 'her husband never goes to church, but he collects an angel

from the fence every year' or 'a young woman sat down next to me on the bus and she had just collected an angel from the fence'.

Our most important focus at the moment is 'Food



and Friendship on Fridays'. Margie and Emma felt strongly called to serve a free meal weekly for people in need, not just financially, but socially as well, and our members totally supported them in answering this call. We serve about 40 people a week now, and our volunteers are not all MU members. Businesses in the community value this initiative and donate potatoes, vegetables, bacon, etc weekly. We are very grateful for the generous financial donations we receive and for our members who provide food on a regular basis.



So as we look back at where God has led us, we realize that five years ago we would never have believed we could do this. It is with this confidence that we look forward to our new venture, recording the *Mia Mia*. At the moment we plan to share the reading together over one day, but wonder how are we going to keep everyone quiet enough not to interrupt the recording!

Please keep us in your prayers!!!

**Liz Hampel**



# How to stop worrying about your family and bless them instead

Recently I was talking to a woman whose primary-aged grandchildren had come to help her take down the Christmas tree after Christmas. The woman related how distressed she was when her youngest grandson held up one of the Christmas decorations, an ornamental cross, and said, 'Nanna, you've got a grave marker on your tree!'. He had no knowledge of the account of Jesus' death and resurrection which gives significance to the symbol, nor of Jesus' birth. The parents of these children are not Christian, but the woman had read Bible stories to the older grandchildren. It was a shock for her to realise that she had not had the same access to the younger grandson and he had in fact missed out on stories about Jesus. This is now a matter for prayerful planning on her part.

I am sure that all of us have had much to reflect on about our families following Christmas and holiday season interactions. Families are potentially a source of much joy, as well as much pain and worry. You may be reflecting on your frosty daughter-in-law, or the grandson who was preoccupied with his mobile phone, or the grandchildren who didn't turn up at all, or the father-in-law whose memory has definitely deteriorated further since last visit and your mother-in-law is obviously struggling, or the obvious tension between one of your children and their spouse, or the fact that family interactions were limited or non-existent. It's also possible you had a seamlessly joyful family time and all your reflections are happy!!

As we worry about our families, it is easy for our concerns to centre on their social and material needs. While these are good things to bring before God in prayer, it is our family members' relationship with God and acceptance of their need for forgiveness through Jesus that matters the most. As MU members, our personal faith and trust in God is at the centre of all we do, and it manifests first in our concerns for the spiritual welfare of our own family. Our concerns should lead us to prayer, and then perhaps practical action as God makes possible.

As one whose children have all left home, I have started praying very specifically for the times when we talk on the phone or have holidays or visits together. I have adopted into my prayers the Apostle Paul's words to the Romans, 'that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you' (Romans 1:11). I pray that I will be a spiritual blessing to my family, an encouragement to their faith if they have one, and a loving challenge if they don't. I want my witness to God's work in the world to have a particular impact on my family. This doesn't mean we have super-charged relationships and conversations, but I'm asking God to take my ordinary Christian faith and use it to bless my family – to convey a spiritual gift to them which is real, whether I see it or not. Through this prayer I'm trusting that God will use me in the way he thinks is important for my family, rather than the way I think my family needs my input!

We all need to keep praying for our family. If they are Christian, pray that the churches they attend will provide good teaching and fellowship. Pray that they will not give into temptation. Pray for your children and grandchildren, that they will see through the lies of the world and trust God.

Pray for family members who are not Christian – that they will remember Bible verses and stories told to them as children; that they will meet plausible Christians in their schools and workplaces; that God will make them aware of their need for





Him through good and bad experiences; that you will have an opportunity to say to them what your faith means to you.

I personally know at least three people who became Christians knowing that their grandparents prayed for them, even though their own parents had rejected the faith of their upbringing. I knew a lady whose difficult husband turned to God and apologised to her in the last year of his life. I have seen God at work answering prayers in families for all kinds of situations, even apparently hopeless ones.

As you pray that all your engagements with your family would impart a spiritual gift and draw them closer to God, it may be that you will in turn be blessed by their response of faith and experience the mutual encouragement that the Apostle Paul anticipated.

***For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you - that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. Rom 1:11,12***

**Elizabeth Parker**



## Easter

Christ is risen, Alleluia!

Lord Jesus Christ, in dying you conquered death and rose again in glory.

Through your great love and abiding grace, we will one day be with you in your heavenly kingdom.

Lord, we pray that we may make each day of our earthly life worthy of your great sacrifice on the cross. Thank you that we can find sanctuary in your love because you have chosen to love us just as we are, with all our faults and failings and that, if we truly repent, you will forgive our sins. Amen

**Margaret Delvin,  
Diocese of Newcastle, UK**

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## Where two or three are gathered together

### ALSTONVILLE

Our Small Group has been meeting regularly each month for four years now and in that time we have gained three members – one who transferred from another branch and two who were new, but had long-standing family connections with Mothers' Union. We enjoy our meetings and have found that as a group we are able to provide great support for each other, especially at times of great sadness, and as we did during those difficult COVID years, when we would meet outside or keep in touch by telephone.

For each meeting a different member takes a turn at arranging the venue, which could be in their home or in a local café, and organises the meeting format. We always start with a service from our MU prayer book and a Bible reading, followed by an interesting discussion, either sparked by the Bible reading or on a topic provided by the organiser. Morning tea concludes our morning.

For our September meeting, Christina, who is over 90 and is also one of our newer members, arranged for us to meet in her home. It was a perfect spring day and we were seated on her patio, overlooking a green expanse of lawn, surrounded by Christina's beautiful, natural woodland garden, with spring flowers adding touches of colour.

Christina's daughter, Lucy, was there to welcome us. After our MU service, Lucy brought out a delightful morning tea of sandwiches and slices, with tea or coffee, and then she stayed to join us, adding to our conversation. Christina used her beautiful



70-year-old, wedding-gift Wedgewood tea service, which added to the specialness of the occasion.

Our whole morning was enhanced by the loveliness and peace of the outdoor setting and the wonderful sounds of bird-song from every part of the garden and the farmland beyond.

We thank God for friendship, MU groups everywhere and spring gardens.

**Gerri White**

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## MURRAY BRIDGE

Following a meeting with our president, Jocelyn, we five decided to become Lone (Diocesan) Members. For the past few years our meetings have been erratic, due to health, vacations and other commitments.

Commitments?? We are aged 80-86 and keep very busy. Our 80-year-old member has just relinquished her position as Diocesan Promotion and Development Coordinator. One member does Justice of the Peace duty once a week, is Pastoral Care leader, is on church Council and the Inter-church Council, facilitates fashion parades of Op Shop clothing, knits toddlers' clothing for our local hospital and is rostered for Bunnings BBQs for our church. Our longest-serving Murray Bridge member has been doing school Breakfast Club for 17 years, is church sacristan and a pastoral care team member. Another member works at the Op Shop and is a toddler knitter. Lastly, I work at the Op Shop, volunteer at a local nursing home, I am on church council, knit for prem and stillborn babies and recently raised \$1100 for the palliative care ward at our hospital. I also work on Saturday mornings at the Bunnings BBQ.

We celebrate Evening Prayer once a month and, when we can, share a Mothers' Union service, both followed by food and fellowship in a home.



Finally, we are all rostered for readings, prayers, flowers etc at our cathedral, St. John the Baptist.

So that's us, with our aches and pains, doctors' appointments and so on, still doing what we can, working, praying and serving God through Mothers' Union.

**Margaret May**

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## WANGARATTA

The Diocese of Wangaratta has quite a few Lone Members of MU and each year some of them gather together to enjoy a social time, lunch and fellowship. Lone Member Coordinator, Robyn Aulmann from Rutherglen, organised a lunch for some of her members to meet on Thursday, October 26 at 'The Northo' hotel in Benalla. Members came from various towns in the diocese, including Alexandra, Yarrawonga, Yackandandah, Benalla, Rutherglen and Wangaratta. We were also delighted to have guests from Nagambie and Albury.

A very special guest was Diocese of Wangaratta MU President, Jan Craig, who made the three-hour trip from Corryong to meet the Lone Members for the first time. Jan welcomed everyone to the get-together, and opened the time with the MU prayer. She spoke about how Mothers' Union members might encourage new folk to join the ranks of this worldwide organisation, and thanked the members for their loyalty and commitment to MU.

Everyone present, some of whom have a history of many decades as members, spoke briefly about their connection with MU. Chit-chat and laughter abounded over lunch and each person enjoyed socialising with their fellow MU members. The afternoon closed with prayer and best wishes for the Christmas season for all MU Lone Members and their families.

**Diane Grant**







# Over the Fence

## Unbalanced

In typical Queenslander style, our laundry was downstairs. Perched on cyclone-friendly, spindly legs, 'laundries' in our part of the world often consist of a Westinghouse washer positioned proudly on a small concrete square on otherwise-bare dirt under the house. Items of washing hanging listlessly on a length of clothesline strung up beneath the home's timber flooring in the languid heat afford the only obstruction to a clear view through to backyard life.

I had estimated a laundry drying time of approximately 48 -72 hours, depending on my alertness to the local washing nemesis, the Unannounced Torrential Downpour. This was a radical mathematical departure from our previous wind-swept coastal-desert situation, where I could confidently hang out school uniforms at any time of the day or night, count slowly to 100 twice, and declare all items fit for folding. In this new, tropical, setting however, I carefully calculated the Laundry Run, not wanting to expend unnecessary energy stumping up and down the timber stairs in the stifling heat and humidity of late summer that can make your eyeballs sweat.

Wiping the slowly-moving trickle of perspiration off my glasses, I loaded the machine, hit 'start' and headed upstairs to complete some routine office work. Some time later, I looked up. An unfamiliar noise had disrupted the usual cheerful tropical chorus of parrots and galahs. I listened again, more carefully.

There it was again. A pleading arpeggio, a digital distress signal. I peeled myself off the office chair and clumped downstairs. A quick investigation identified the sound to be emanating from the washing machine. The digital display read 'Unbal'. Unbal. Unbalanced. Sweat ran down behind my knees. I reached into the machine and redistributed the responsible doona cover, thrown hard-up against one side of the tub mid-spin cycle, amusement-park 'Gravitron' style.

I headed upstairs again, sweaty footprints now visible in both directions. I had barely re-settled at my task before the digital cheeping sounded again.

I felt a rising wave of irritation. The humid months, known locally as Mango Madness, rob people of sleep and drain energy for all but the most basic tasks. Frustrations rise and tolerances plummet. 'I'll give you Unbal,' I muttered as I approached the complaining appliance. I lifted the lid and inspected the load. The exact same thing had happened. Clearly, simply redistributing the doona cover was not the solution. I thought hard. I fetched three or four smaller items and added them to the tub as a sort of cotton-polyester ballast to the heft of the doona cover. I shut the lid with unnecessary force and resumed the cycle.

I tentatively resumed my upstairs task with a half-ear out for a cry for help. Nothing. Twenty minutes later a cheerful electronic broken major triad announced the completion of the cycle. Load balanced.

I have long recognised that I do my best thinking at the clothesline. Over the years, whole women's conferences have been envisioned whilst pegging out the family smalls. Now, on our third rural-remote appointment, my thoughts went down a meandering path. Unbal. Unbalanced.

With no specific ministry situation in mind, the question re-surfaced: why is the ministry load so often unbalanced? And what – besides the implementation of realistic boundaries, regular days off, physical exercise and outside hobbies – can be done to prevent any one person shouldering a load that becomes unbearable?

I clearly remember the advice of a person who turned up at our much-loved small rural parish one unexceptional Sunday. I don't know what struck the visitor most – the deep bags under our eyes or the fact that my husband had swung between welcoming, leading, preaching and playing music during the service. Whatever it was, after an hour of observation the visitor felt armed with enough information to issue us with a fail-safe life-hack. 'All you need to do is to delegate,' he said brightly. By way of a response, I realised that two equally good choices lay before me. I could either poke him in both eyes at once, or kick him hard in the shins. Mercifully, my husband responded with a gracious answer, saying something about prayerfully working



with the resources we have, before the visitor gave us a cheery wave and sailed off in his car.

The potential for the weight of ministry to fall heavily on the shoulders of a few is by no means new. Exodus 18:1-27 is an unparalleled record of an over-burdened servant. This extraordinary passage records a family visit from Moses' in-laws. Moses and his father-in-law Jethro (also engaged in priestly ministry) spend the first night of the visit doing what ministers love to do – talking shop. Moses speaks of the enormity of his task (delivering the Israelites from Egypt, no less), the multitudinous hardships he encountered along the way and the over-arching goodness of God in enabling and sustaining him. Jethro, a model reflective listener and engaged senior clergyman, simply listens to his son-in-law. When Moses finishes speaking, Jethro rejoices in what he has heard God has done, and they share in a solid family feast of good food served with thankfulness before brushing their teeth and switching off the light.

The morning however, reveals a problem. Jethro had opportunity to observe his son-in-law going about his regular duties. And what he saw was unbalanced. The load Moses was bearing was unsustainable. Jethro saw his hard-working son-in-law being the sole legal arbitrator for the entire community. Jethro saw unending, overwhelming demand and he saw a clear trajectory to total burnout. Jethro sees the urgency of the situation. He may have envisaged his next visit to his exhausted son-in-law, where conversation may have been more directed towards Moses thinking about packing ministry in altogether. After wisely asking Moses to describe the situation as he saw it, Jethro offers counsel that came from a place of deep concern and understanding: delegate to your lay people.

Thankfully, Moses neither acted defensively nor took offence – kicking his father-in-law in the shins would never have entered his godly mind. He accepted that his father-in-law had his best interests and that of the faith community at heart. And thus, a remarkable process of identifying suitable and willing people began, such that Moses

fully retained his God-appointed responsibilities as leader, whilst delegating smaller tasks to competent individuals. We do not know over what time frame this happened. We do know that Jethro remained present until the system showed itself to have legs. His advice to delegate was no throw-away line with zero intentionality of being part of the process. In fact, there is a clear hint that he intended to stay for however long it took. We read that once the machinery was in place, Moses himself gave Jethro leave to return to his own country.

I thought back to my recalcitrant washing machine. It had not required another doona cover to balance the load. The Unbal problem was relieved by the addition of several much smaller items. Similarly, whilst pastors and congregations alike may rightly yearn for just one more ordained clergyperson (doona cover as it were), the reality is that advertisements for such positions often remain unanswered for long periods of time. During these times, the faithful service of trained lay people is of incalculable value. The load is shared, the fatigued minister is supported, God's people are nourished and God's mission is furthered.



Photo credit: Getty Images on Unplash

If our breezy visitor had stayed a little longer, say 7 years or so, he might have been privileged to see something remarkable. He might have seen people grasping that their conversion called for a radical commitment to the body of Christ. He might have witnessed people being convicted by Scripture to tentatively, then more assuredly, use their unique gifts to serve the congregation. Memorably, he might have witnessed a godly senior member of the congregation approach my husband asking what she could do to help shoulder his load of more than 50 funerals annually – and then go on to do just that for many fruitful years.

I removed the laundry items from my Fisher and Paykel which now sat quietly, fully ready to accept any task to come.

Load balanced.

*Now you are the body of Christ. And each one of you is a part of it.* 1 Corinthians 12:27

**Virginia Grice**

# Around the dioceses

## BALLARAT

The members of the **Hamilton** branch, a vibrant and active group of 21 members, were thrilled to receive a Community Service Award at the Shire of Southern Grampians 2024 Australia Day Celebrations. This award recognised the 32 years the branch has organised an Annual Community Book Fair, usually run over the six weeks of Lent.

The Book Fair is a major Outreach and Mission project for the parish and the main work load is undertaken by the MU members and the Parish of Hamilton. The wider community of Hamilton also supports the event by donating and purchasing the hundreds of books that are received every year, assisting with the running of the shop and the huge task of setting up, dismantling and packing up of the books at the end of the six weeks.



## BENDIGO

'Developing relationships', 'reaching out to our community', 'transformation' and 'celebration' are some of the words and phrases that spring to mind as the year 2023 for the **Eaglehawk** Mothers' Union group in the Diocese of Bendigo is reviewed.

It included hearing part of the 'journey' as our new Diocesan President, the Rev'd Suzannah (Zan) Daniels shared with our group. Our new parish priest, the Rev'd Dale Barclay, also shared a little of his story. At a couple of our monthly meetings our members had the opportunity of sharing how their faith helped them in some 'winter' experiences in their lives. A 'show and tell' of memories and treasured possessions also helped to unwrap some of the life experiences of our members.

MU members had the opportunity of reaching out to our community and to the members of other churches in Eaglehawk as the local 'Minstrels', led by one of our MU members, Judy Hasty, held a Sing, Munch and Chat afternoon in our church and hall. We welcomed around 100 people, had a brief interview with one of our local school chaplains, enjoyed listening to and joining in with a wonderful variety of songs and concluded with a cuppa and fellowship. We were able to pass on to the Bendigo Chaplaincy Support Group Treasurer just on \$1,000 in donations given during the afternoon.

In November, Eaglehawk hosted the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Bendigo. At this, one of our new Eaglehawk MU members, the Rev'd Lauren Lockwood Porter, was commissioned by our Bishop, the Rt. Rev'd Matt Brain, as our new Diocesan MU Chaplain. Three other younger women, including Rachael Brain, were officially welcomed as new MU members. We were delighted and very honoured to have as our special guest at the celebration, our Australian President, Dr. Robin Ray.

In our Eaglehawk December 2023 parish newsletter, Lauren commented, 'Looking around the room at the 120<sup>th</sup> celebrations I was reminded of how much wisdom and valuable experience there is amongst the members of MU in our Diocese. I think there is a great opportunity for this wisdom to be shared with younger women, who are starting to rediscover MU. Every mother knows the value of feeling cared for during the busy years of motherhood and I'm sure this will be a valuable part of MU's ongoing ministry as more members



*Mark and Lauren Lockwood Porter. Lauren, a newly ordained Deacon, new MU member and mother of 4-year-old Hattie, is the newly appointed diocesan MU Chaplain*

seek to join. I look forward to sharing in the spiritual and prayer life of MU and the many thoughtful conversations to come over a cuppa.'

Eaglehawk MU group will be involved in the 'new look' MU diocesan executive and diocesan council as with other MU members in the diocese, we strive to be transformed in our desire to 'share Christ's love by encouraging, strengthening and supporting marriage and family life'.

**Jenny Rainsford**

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## BUNBURY

Greetings from St Mary's, **Busselton**, WA. Our big event in 2023 was hosting of the Country Rally in October. Menu planning and the provision of gift bags containing useful and thought-provoking items took up some time!

We observed the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence with a quiet vigil in St Mary's church. Prior to this purple and yellow ribbons were distributed and we were encouraged to wear them in public to create awareness of the problem.



Our joyful end-of-year Eucharist was held in November. Diocesan Chaplain, Cathy Broome, led us in the service and joined us for the delicious Christmas lunch at Nova Village. We were also delighted to have the company of the Diocesan President, Wendy Mabey, and other guests. We are thrilled to welcome our new Parish Priest, Fr Nick Freeland, who attended our January planning meeting. Who knows what God will call us to in 2024?

**Priscilla Broadbent**

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## MELBOURNE

### Altona

'Share the Dignity' is a project carried out through Bunnings across Australia, where handbags are filled with personal care essentials. These are donated to registered charities which support women fleeing domestic violence, who often leave home with only the clothes they are wearing. Recipients may be women fleeing domestic violence, experiencing homelessness or just doing it tough over Christmas.



*Frances von Kalm and Jill Stewart*

Last year our branch supported this project, and we have again this year. Over a period of time members collect the toiletries, such as shampoo and conditioner, toothpaste and toothbrush, soap, face washer, roll-on deodorant, hair brush, hand cream and period products, to fill the bags. The bags, most of which are new, are donated to us from many people, as well as from our parish Op Shop.

On October 19 we held our AGM, which was followed by a pizza lunch. Our president, Sandra had previously laid all the collected toiletries for distribution on tables in the church hall. We all adjourned to the hall after lunch and worked together to pack 38 Dignity Bags. Each bag has the power to give someone a little bit of love, a little bit of hope and the dignity they deserve.

**Lyn McDonald**

### Ormond

It was a beautiful day and the sun was shining as our MU ladies' choir, supplemented by four lovely gentlemen who joined us, sang Christmas carols to the residents of the Nursing Home in the Glen and the Village. It was a gift of hope that we shared with them, helping prepare their hearts for Christmas. The managers and the staff of Hammond Care





welcomed us with open arms and it was a great joy to sing to them all. We were delighted that so many residents, though elderly, feeble and bed-ridden, joined us in singing the traditional carols.

**Renee Joganathan**

## NEWCASTLE

In addition to our participation in the '16 Days of Activism...' **Swansea** M.U contributed to the St. Peter's Church 'Donations to Local Charities Christmas Tree' in December. The tree became surrounded with wonderful gifts for adults and children of all ages!! Our Mothers' Union group also invited interested friends to join us at our annual celebration Christmas luncheon. Our much-loved Rev. Alison led us with a Christmas prayer and then, of course, we had a very happy time together celebrating Jesus' birthday. We look forward to promoting the 'Transformation Now' theme for 2024!

**Carol Leist**

## NORTH WEST AUSTRALIA

**Geraldton/Bluff Point** members gathered for their Christmas finale in mid-December at the home of Elizabeth Parker, celebrating with a festive afternoon tea and reflections on Simeon and Anna's welcome of the Christ (Luke 2:22-38).

During the afternoon gifts were collected for the local Women's Refuge and Mrs Val Patten was



acknowledged and presented with a certificate for her 50 years of MU membership by Mrs Jenny Jamieson, Branch and Diocesan President.

## PERTH

### Malaga and Whitfords Sudanese branches

It was good to have another year together as community of believers. We give God the glory for keeping us safe and helping us to continue working among his people. It has been a difficult year for some of our Sudanese families, but we thank God for our women; they have been one in spirit working together to help families, especially the young ones, after Covid 19 and beyond. In 2023 the women concentrated on visiting families, praying and conducting Bible studies. Emergency prayer for those who need support here or back home is done via the phone (on WhatsApp).

### Rev'd Frida Lemi

### Melville

Our branch of MU is smaller in number and older in age than in the past. However, we are all still very active in our church and community life and wish to continue contributing to the activities of MU. We now need to think outside the box! We wanted to raise funds, in particular for Northern Outreach in Western Australia. With this in mind we asked the Parish Council if they would join us in organising a Mini Spring Fair. The parish and MU members came together, all contributing to raise funds for different projects. Everyone worked hard for weeks beforehand to ensure that we delivered a great event, which we hoped would be enjoyed by many within the wider community. The day came with everyone having a job to do. It was great to see Jan Rose, our MU President, who dropped by to support us.



Our parish family is a caring, loving group who work together well. The outcome was that the Melville MU branch raised \$800 for the MU Australia Project.

By thinking differently, being inclusive of others we are still able to fulfil our '5 Objectives'.

### Betty Rushforth

#### Quinns-Butler

Our MU branch meets and worships in the chapel that is part of Peter Moyes Anglican Community School. We have two groups; one meets on Monday morning and the other on Tuesday evening. We have a combined membership of 24, including Rev'd Peter Hotchkin, our Parish Priest, who became a member of MU when he joined the parish nearly three years ago.

Two of our members, Judy and Polly, visit local nursing homes and lodges monthly to take a short service. It was decided last year to give a small gift to those attending the December service in the hope that it would help them to feel especially remembered. Thus, at our November 2022 meeting we made book marks and Christmas cards. These gifts were very well received, so we decided to repeat the activity in 2023! This is a particularly enjoyable way for us to send our Christian love and special best wishes to our very important and respected older neighbours during the season when we remember the birth of our Lord Jesus.

### Janet Allsworth



## THE MURRAY

#### Southern Vales

Our small group gathered in the café at Seaford Christian Churches on Monday December 4 for our monthly meeting. MU members have been involved



in the recent '16 Days of Activism...' campaign and also in Operation Christmas Child by packing boxes of gifts for distribution by Samaritan's Purse.

### Helen Cook

## THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

MU members in Darwin ended the year with our Thanksgiving Service and lunch.

The service was a very special occasion as we admitted two new members, Jenny Martin and Natalie Watson. We also presented Rev'd Annette Bailey with a certificate to commemorate her 25 years of membership – a big achievement. We then enjoyed a very pleasant lunch at local restaurant.

### Pam Powell, President



Jenny Martin and Natalie Watson with Bishop Greg



Rev Annette Bailey with Pam Powell and Bishop Greg



# *It Should Have Been Me*

It should have been me,  
so guilty was I—  
It should have been me,  
condemned to die.  
It should have been me, my  
punishment due.  
It should have been me, but  
instead it was you.

It was you they scorned  
and abused.  
It was you they  
wrongly accused.  
It was you they nailed to the tree.  
It was you, but it should  
have been me.

It should have been me,  
but your love said, 'No'.  
It should have been me,  
but you said, 'I'll go'.  
It should have been me,  
what I say is true.  
It should have been me,  
but instead it was you.

It was you who  
belonged up above.  
It was you, with your infinite love.  
It was you, with your  
mercy so free.  
It was you, because  
you first loved me.

**Sharon Hird**

