



Mothers' UNION
Christian care for families

September Newsletter 2023



Summer Garden Party

50 members were joined by the Bishop of Huntingdon, fortunately in a marquee in the Bishop of Ely's Garden, as it was an afternoon of torrential rain. It was still a great opportunity to get together and £186 was raised for MU charities.

Della Fletcher, a past president, was presented with her certificate by the Bishop, marking 50 years of membership.

MU Diocesan Autumn Meeting on Saturday October 14th

Waterbeach Church Hall 9.30am for 10am start

Speaker: Revd. Matthew Bradbury on Modern Slavery

Reports from Task Group Leaders/Bring packed lunch/ Parking next to hall



Brampton Branch has raised £781 for Away from It All Holiday Scheme so far this year.

We have a sales table at our normal meetings where members donate and sell marmalade, jams or any homemade goodies. We held our Garden Party in June and asked for donations and finally we were at the Brampton Village Fete in July (on a wet day) selling cakes, jams, marmalades, cookies and flapjacks. The photo shows the table at the Village Fete with the table loaded with wrapped and labelled goodies. It was a slow afternoon but we sold out in 4 hours.

This is hopefully not the end of the fundraising in 2023 as we will continue to sell things at meetings in the autumn and we are planning to hold our famous pudding evening in October (7.30 pm 10th October in Brampton Church Hall). At the pudding evening we offer a range of homemade puddings with cream, ice cream or custard. People from the local area all come enjoy a pudding and make a donation to Away from it all Holiday Scheme. Please come along and join us.

Julie Barker

Branch Leader

mu@eastleightonstone.co.



Just one last picture of the
THREADS THROUGH CREATION
Exhibition which has now
moved on to its next Cathedral.
Such wonderful panels of textile
art.

**THURSDAY PRAYER in the Cathedral
and on Zoom 10.30am
September 21st**

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89729198133
?pwd=K1V0Vy83NmoxT2JLRDZPNdDdTHp
HZz09](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89729198133?pwd=K1V0Vy83NmoxT2JLRDZPNdDdTHpHZz09)

Meeting ID: 897 2919 8133
Passcode: 771395

St Neots Branch News

Liz Elson



Members of St Neots branch celebrated Mary Sumner Day with a morning Eucharist followed by coffee and cake served in church.

We have had a lovely summer attending garden parties, including our own on 6th July at which we raised over £340, most of which was for AFIA, with a donation also to the Overseas Fund. Guests joined us from Brampton branch and from the Gransdens. Small groups of us also attended the tea parties

held by Brampton branch and Shingay deanery branch, where we were made most welcome. The sun shone on all three occasions and it was a real blessing to be able to meet together, each time in beautiful gardens.

Two members of our branch also celebrated significant birthdays recently. Rosemary Darrington celebrated her 80th birthday on 14th June and Jill Henthorne celebrated her 90th on 20th August.

Haddenham Branch News Audrey Kirk



COMMUNICATION NEWS – NEW YouTube VIDEO. Debbie Tye - Co-ordinator

We have a new YouTube video link to share with you for **AUGUST THURSDAY PRAYER**:

“Following in Christ’s Footsteps”. Led by Revd Stuart Mitchell.

YouTube

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=py7yi_u0HZn0

Ely Diocesan Mothers’ Union
Charity no. 251394

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**Mothers’ Union afternoon tea to
celebrate Mary Sumner Day**

A REFLECTION – Mothers’ Union – September

Philip Baker (22nd August 2023)

This month I am departing from my usual formula in favour of a different subject entirely – the Mothers’ Union itself!

I started writing these pieces as a continuation of Susan’s contributions. Her passing is nearly three years ago and, as with other anniversaries, it is cause for a review on what has happened and the changes which have taken place. Susan was a great supporter, even passionate, about the Mothers’ Union and, as her successor as Branch Leader I have experienced life on the inside. And it is not all rosy (in my opinion).

The Mothers’ union was founded by Mary Sumner in 1876 in Hampshire, England, and is now a worldwide movement with millions of members spread through 84 countries. It does incredible work and is practically saving lives and improving the conditions for families wherever it exists. Put MU into your on-line search engine and you find Manchester United, Musicians Union and all manner of organisations abbreviated to MU, but not Mothers’ Union until you go down quite some way! Now in part that might be because MU is a common abbreviation, but it does not explain why we are so far down the list, even below Musicians Union. Put in “who supports families” and the list of groups is endless, but does not include the Mothers’ Union at all!

My Branch is growing older. This is a common issue in the UK, there is a shortage of younger people willing to join the work of a traditional organisation and we all suffer from it. But we work with and on behalf of younger women and families: supporting refugees, family holidays via AFIA and all manner of things involving younger people, so why are we so low profile? Is it really just us not making a fuss about what we do? I am having some success recruiting members, both men and women, to our movement, but, although they are generally younger than me, they do not qualify to be described as “youngsters”! (with apologies to my members – I say to them “you are as young as you feel and that is all that matters”). So, although the organisation is storming away in some countries, indeed many countries, in the country where it started we are struggling.

So what can we do? There are ways to “trick” internet search engines into moving you up the list, but that is not the solution. That will be found at Branch level, by and among us as members. We need to talk more openly about our work, be enthusiastic about our growth overseas, encourage our vicars to (a) join and (b) involve us in their services and parish work (and not just to make the tea, although that would be a start in some parts of the diocese). We can offer to lead services at appropriate times, such as Mothering Sunday and any other opportunities offering enlightenment of the plight of families around the world and in the UK. One such might be to talk about our 16 days of activism highlighting our response to domestic abuse. Uncomfortable, but very important to those who benefit.

Beating our drum is not a natural behaviour for us, but we need to learn to do it a little as otherwise fewer and fewer people will know about us and our work, which would be a shame.



St Mary’s Ely Branch Afternoon Tea Party.

St Mary’s Ely Branch held a very enjoyable Afternoon Tea Party in July which raised £300: £200 for the Summer of Hope Appeal, and £100 for AFIA (“Away From It All” Holidays).

We were pleased to welcome members and guests from other branches in the Deanery and surrounding villages. Many thanks to all those came along and supported the event, and to St Mary’s MU members for providing refreshments.

KIGALI VISIT

Three Mothers' Union members visited Rwanda recently. I am sure you will enjoy reading about their experiences.

MY RWANDA REFLECTIONS - MARILYN DEBBAGE

I went to Rwanda with the team from St Peter's church Yaxley, it was my first visit to Africa. I found Rwanda to be a stunningly beautiful country that certainly lives up to its name as the Land of a Thousand Hills. I had been forewarned by fellow MU members who had been on previous visits that the terrain would be a challenge and it certainly was just that, even walking around the ups and downs of the guest house grounds made me breathless!! On our journey from Kigali to our base at the Peace Guest House in Kamembe we stopped at a cafe to meet up with Bishop Frank and his wife Eva. Eva is the MU president for Cyangugu diocese, and when we introduced ourselves to her as MU members there was an immediate bond of warmth and friendship which I really appreciated having so recently arrived in the country.



On Sunday we went to St Peter's church in Kabahire. We were welcomed by people singing and dancing as they came down the track to meet us, two women were carrying a large blue and white Mothers' Union banner, it was so joyful and uplifting. At the church we exchanged hugs and smiles and took photos of us all together around the banner. One of my standout moments was our day on Ishwa Island. We took craft activities for the children in the nursery school. There were a large number of children on the island, many of whom were poorly dressed and looked extremely frail and vulnerable. During and after our first craft session in the school I felt quite hopeless about what we could do for these children to make a real lasting difference to their lives. However later in the morning two bins of porridge were brought into the classroom and our interpreter Maurice handed me a jug and said 'you can feed them'. The children all came up with their mugs and I was able to fill each one up to the brim, each child drank their porridge and then wiped the mug clean with their fingers - nothing was wasted. I was told that this highly nutritious porridge may well have been the only meal the children got each day and that in the years since this feeding programme had been introduced by Mission Possible UK the incidence of malnutrition and vitamin deficiency has greatly decreased. As a supporter of the Champion a Child scheme which funds this programme and various other projects on the island I was encouraged to see that there is hope for improved living conditions for these children and families. Pastor Bertha came with us to Ishwa, I was so impressed by her faith, energy, compassion

and empathy. She linked arms with me as we walked down the steep hill from the village to the lake. She told me about the project the MU is working on with unmarried mothers. She explained that these girls and women are usually rejected by their families and made to feel worthless. The project provides them with training in sewing and tailoring skills, this empowers them to grow in self respect and confidence and also enables them to earn an income. Later in the week we saw this in action when we visited another church, a group of unmarried mothers were sewing outdoors using Singer treadle sewing machines. I talked to some of the ladies about their work and one of them proudly showed me a child's skirt that she had made. One of our team leaders was asked to pray over the group and bless them and we all joined in with her prayer. It was a joy to be able to pray for these beautiful women.



I feel so privileged to have been able to meet up with Mothers' Union members in Cyangugu diocese and to see and hear about the various projects and community work the Mothers' Union supports. I thank God for the faith and love of the amazing women I met and am so inspired by their desire to bless and pray for us.

RWANDA 2023: ANGELA HILLIARD

This would be my first trip to Rwanda, for some coming with us it would be their third trip. I wanted to have first-hand experience of all I had heard from friends about Rwanda: see and be part of their daily life, hospitality, friendship, joyful singing & dancing and general happiness even owning so little.

I help with the 'Sparks' toddlers pre-school groups at St. Peters Church therefore my experience was going to be used as part of a small team teaching and delivering activities over five days in Nursery schools with a slightly larger age range than in the UK.

Prior to the trip three of us spent eight weeks of selecting and preparing craft materials and tools for our chosen Bible stories and songs we would share with the children. We spent many hours cutting out sheep masks, fish shaped finger puppets and crowns. The number we would see in each school seemed to just keep increasing which made me apprehensive about the class sizes, 50-75 we were now being told.

So after months of excitement and planning the 25th June arrived and our journey to Rwanda began; I felt our craft team was ready, and as prepared as we could be, to serve the Nursery children of Rwanda. After a wonderful journey from the capital Kigali, which took us through a rain forest and close to wildlife, we reached Kamembe and the Cyangugu Diocese area the schools were in.

We had over two suitcases full of materials with us! Was this going to be enough? How would the chosen crafts work for these children. After introductory songs and Bible stories it was time for the crafts. Very soon it became very clear what we have come to accept as basic materials and items had not been seen either by the children and in some cases by the teachers e.g. glue sticks, sellotape or colour pencils. Once demonstrated though in a short while we had lovely smiling faces holding up their masterpieces; fishes decorated with coloured tissue, sparkly crowns and woolly sheep masks. Everywhere we went happy children

could be seen going up the road baaing behind their masks or proudly marching in their crowns. The team fitting solar panels fed-back about what little they had at home; therefore, these items would be something they would treasure.

All the time spent serving these children has given me an experience that will stay with me forever

MY EXPERIENCE OF RWANDA – PAULINE WALLACE

I eventually decided to join the trip to Rwanda after much consideration and some trepidation. I had many reservations, some around what I could actually offer to the people of Rwanda and others around health, safety, travel, food, toilets, accommodation etc etc. A friend challenged me with the question – “How much do you really trust God?” And so, on 25th June 2023 I embarked, along with 13 others on the very memorable trip to Rwanda.

Over the next 12 days my life was enriched and changed – why had I been so anxious? God keeps His promises and His faithfulness is never lacking. I, along with the other two ‘older ladies’ found we had much to offer. Known as ‘The Grandmothers’ we entered into the world of Rwandan nursery schools with joy and excitement. I discovered that the experience I had acquired over 30 years of helping and leading in Sunday School, youth work, toddler groups etc was all that was needed to equip me with the skills required.

I consider myself, and have been told by others, that I’m essentially a practical and not an emotional person. However, I challenge anyone to visit Rwanda and not be moved by the welcome and enthusiasm of the people there. People who have so very little and yet willing to share what they have. Seeing children with absolutely no toys, barely enough to eat, no comfortable shoes or clothes, very poor housing, but happy, joyful and loving is humbling. Knowing we could do so very little was difficult, but changing just one day for over 500 children in total feels worthwhile – we made a difference to each one of those children in a very small way.

What We Actually Did

We served in four large nursery schools and one Saturday school at Kamembe Cathedral. The four rural nursery schools were all in the Diocese of Cyangugu and the children attending were extremely poor, particularly on the Island of Ishywa . We spent several hours with each group and with the help of our very able interpreter Maurice, were able to lead singing, tell and act out stories, play outdoor games with the huge parachutes we took with us, and provide many different craft activities.

It was immediately obvious that the nursery schools were equipped with little more than basic wooden tables and chairs, some chalk and a blackboard. There were no books, toys or resources for learning. The nursery on Ishywa had 74 children registered and one teacher. We took crayons, paper, paints, glue and the many resources needed for making sheep masks, fish pictures, hand painted under water scenes, crowns and general colouring along with a parachute and balls for each group. We were able to leave a supply of the craft materials at each venue for their continuing use. Sadly we know that once those items have been used up they will not be replaced. We were asked on more than one occasion if we would be able to provide resources for them in the future.

On several occasions we met with Mother’s Union members. MU is very active in Rwanda and we were shown a sewing project set up for single mothers to enable them to earn a small income by sewing. We also had some discussion with Eva, the wife of the Bishop of Cyangugu Diocese about the ways in which MU is trying to help with the education of young people. There is particular concern that teenage pregnancy is increasing, leading to girls being ostracised from their families and the father of the baby abandoning the mother. Education around relationships, sex, contraception, the treatment of women and healthy marriage is a high priority for MU in Rwanda.

WISBECH AND NORTH NENE PARISHES

Wendy Smith Branch Leader



After our June meeting we thought we would have some light entertainment by amusing ourselves playing some games, some old and some not so old!

It was to be the last branch meeting that Mrs Lillian Brigden attended as she died at the end of July 2023 aged 85. At her recent memorial service friends heard more about other parts of her life.



Her career began as a professional dancer. During that time, she became a tiller girl and also was included in the Esther Williams synchronised swimming shows, which travelled from Blackpool to London.

She was a good seamstress and when the current Venerable David Fleming left Wisbech St. Mary church as their parish priest she made a cope for him, which he wore at her memorial service.

Throughout most of her life she had a rock-solid faith in God, which shone from her. This led to her becoming a Lay Reader, through which she conducted many local funerals.

Lilian was a Mothers' Union member for many years and served on both branch and deanery committees. The last branch meeting she attended was less than three weeks before her death.

A lovely upright lady (due to her dancing skills!) and a privilege to know.



Faith In Action – September 2023

Coordinator – Jean Webb

It may have been “Holiday Time”, but items for the Refuges, Hostels and Mary’s Child have been delivered, as have knitted items to Hinchinbrooke Hospital.



Baby hats were enthusiastically received at the Maternity Unit when delivered by Audrey Kirk. The midwives expressed a particular preference for hats with rib, either entirely, or with a generous band as they stretch more easily to fit over a young head. Also they mentioned they have more larger babies being delivered, so 0-3 month size as well as newborn are welcomed.

We took 3 big bags of lap blankets, and bags cannula sleeves to dementia Specialist Sherly. than our usual teddies had been requested, so pleased to be asked. There will now be a need for these.



of teddies and These larger and we were continuing



I asked Sherly about the use of the sleeves and muffs-

*“When we use the sleeves to cover an intravenous cannula it's used as a **distraction therapy**, and stops them from pulling it out, It calms a distressed patient instantly and that's a huge success.*

The bright colours, on the blankets and the muffs promotes participation, stimulates appetite and promotes relaxation.

That is just some of the benefits from these knitted products. They are in great demand; as soon as you give them to us, we distribute them to the wards, and we keep getting calls for more!”

So, please keep those needles clacking knowing how much your work is appreciated.

Happy Knitting!