**MOTHERS’ UNION SYNOD REPORT**

**TUAM, LIMERICK & KILLALOE DIOCESE, 2023**

**THEME FOR 2023 – “Transformation - Now”**

**MISSION STATEMENT –**

* Developing prayer and spiritual growth in families.
* Studying and reflecting on family life and marriage and their place in society.
* Resourcing our members to take practical action to improve conditions for families, both nationally and in the communities in which they live.

**DIOCESAN OFFICE BEARERS:**

**Diocesan President:** Being led by Former DP, Lucy Kavanagh

**Diocesan Secretary:** Jackie Eastwood

**Diocesan Treasurer:** Betty Delahunt

**Diocesan Chaplain: Canon Jane Galbraith**

 **All Ireland President: June Butler**

**All Ireland Chaplain: The Ven Dr. Stephen McBride**

**Worldwide President: Sheran Harper**

**January 2023:** Following the Christmas rushour January meetings are always a quiet affair!

**February:** Branches in February and through to March prepare their Annual Report and Returns to our Diocesan Treasurer, Betty Delahunt. Unfortunately, this has shown a decline in numbers over the last few years, however, we are holding our own and this is borne out in our very successful fundraising for the Women’s refuges that we support, our Away From It All project and our support of UDYC camps, and also in our fundraising efforts for MU Overseas projects. Our monthly meetings consisted of a demo on Quilting, a talk on tracing ancestors and much, much more!

**March:** Several Lady Day services were held in March around the diocese and many of our branches participated in or held World Day of Prayer services. Several delegates attended our Triennial Conference in An Grianan. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet other members and to share information. Stephanie Nunn from Mary Sumner House gave a key note speech when she asked us to “re imagine” Mothers’ Union membership and not to be restricted by “old” rules and regulations which might put off potential members! She also spoke about MU being at a crossroad in terms of falling numbers and trying to balance this with the amount of income that it receives from members. At this conference we had an opportunity to meet up with members from the Tuam end of our diocese and to discuss how best to complete the MU amalgamation of our two dioceses.

**April/May:**  MU staff and members were in (virtual) attendance at the UN Commission on the Status of Women 2023. The CSW is a key international framework for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women which is a huge part of what MU does around the world.

**Our Diocesan Council & Trustees** meetings took place at the end of April in Aghancon. At midday we moved from the hall to the church where Bishop Michael, assisted by Canon Jane Galbraith & Rev. Jim Wallace celebrated the Eucharist and commissioned the Diocesan Trustee Body who came into office at the beginning of this year. Branch meetings included a trip to the Curraghchase Garden Centre, a visit to St. Brigid’s Cathedral and a Book Quiz!

**June/July/August:** Many of our branches close for the summer months, however, some commemorate Mary Sumner, the founder of Mothers’ Union, with an outing.

**September:** Shinrone, Aghancon & Kinnitty Branch held a very special meeting to celebrate the 100th birthday of Mabel Wallace**,** a highly respected member of MU. Mabel has been a member for 70 years and she told us about a Mothers’ Union that was very different to what we are today. The guest speaker was Irene Boyd, All Ireland Indoor Member co-ordinator. Many of our branches held an Opening Service following the summer break.

Several members from Skreen Branch attended the Women’s Getaway Weekend which, as always, is very well attended. Members came home with a renewed sense of encouragement to continue the work that we do and support of each other!

**October:** Many of our branches do one main fundraising event in the year and one such event, a Harvest Supper, took place in Richmond Terrace, Limerick jointly organised by Adare MU and LC Branch. We enjoyed a delicious meal prepared by Rosemary Shier. Jessie did brisk business on her literature stall and there was great excitement as the first prize in the raffle was a beautiful painting by Patsy Pomeroy. The evening raised €685 for the work of Mothers’ Union Worldwide.

**November:** Our 16 Days Vigil Against Gender Based Violence this year was held in Roscrea. Noeleen Blackwell, retired CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre was invited to give a talk on her experience of GBV through her work with the Centre. This event was open to the public and was very well attended. Noeleen spoke about the very difficult issue of Gender Violence and its terrible consequences for many women and families. However, she did note that several Ministers for Justice have really begun to understand the problem and have put in place many supports either through the justice system or ongoing education of the Gardai and young people in schools. This was followed by a lot of questions and chat over a cup of tea.

MU also participated in **Bishop Michael’s Peregrinations** throughout the diocese. This was a wonderful initiative to raise funds for projects in Burundi and Madagascar for the empowerment of women through literacy.

Anchory Branch made up a huge number of Shoeboxes to brighten up some children’s Christmas in war-torn places.

**December:** As usual we sold lots of Christmas cards, MU diaries and calendars. The sale of these items makes up a huge part of our fundraising efforts and a grateful thanks to all those who purchase them.

**MU Amalgamation of the diocese with Tuam:** 2024 brings the finalising of the MU amalgamation of our two dioceses and we really look forward to working together with each other in the future.

**Our Diocesan Projects :** We continue to work with our **Women’s Refuges,** Thomond House, Adapt House, Esker House and also Adapt in Tralee supplying care packages, bed linen, toys, kitchen equipment and much more. This all helps when women, and their children, who having experienced violence in the home have to leave their home with nothing, to seek refuge. We also give gifts and a hamper at Christmas to the women in Thomond House, Christmas hampers to Brother Russell Men’s Hostel and Esker House in Athlone which Ballinasloe Branch work closely with.

**AFIA Project: A**way **F**rom **I**t **A**ll Fund over the past year was able to help several families to get a much needed break or treat, who wouldn’t otherwise be able to do so. Please keep this fund in mind if you feel that there is a family that comes to your attention who could benefit from this fund. We also are able to fund children going to Camp, swimming lessons etc.

**Knitting Project:** We continue with our Knitting Projectand have been able to supply the premature baby units in the Mid West Maternity Hospital and Portiuncla Hospital, Ballinasloe, with much needed items for babies, including little Angel Wraps for stillborn babies. Some of our members have also made Fiddle Blankets for the residents of nursing homes and knitted toys and jumpers for children in women’s refuges.

 **Emergency Hospital Bags Project** has supplied our hospitals with bags for patients who come into hospital in an emergency and have nothing with them. These emergency bags are very much appreciated by the staff and recipients.

**Changing the Story – Equipping the church to take action and end domestic abuse:** Facilitated by MU and in collaboration with Restored, Tearfund, Bishops’ Appeal, Mind Matters and several more agencies it is hoped that this ongoing project will equip and educate so many more people on the issue of domestic abuse which in so many cases is a hidden problem.

I would like to thank our **Diocesan** **Chaplain, Rev Canon Jane Galbraith** who, as a member, is a great support to us and always on hand to help. **Bishop Michael** has been very supportive of Mothers’ Union in the Diocese and it is greatly appreciated. Also, the support throughout the Diocese from parishioners, clergy etc. is very important to us and very much appreciated.

 We work hard to continue our support of our projects and a huge thank you must go to our **Branch leaders** who work with their members to achieve this.

Throughout the last year huge changes have taken place within Mothers’ Union as we continue to respond to the needs of others in a hugely changing world. Our core values remain the same and give us the strength to undertake all that we do.

**LUCY KAVANAGH**