

Mothers' Union Winchester Diocese

Notes from the Information Day at St Boniface's Church, Chandler's Ford on Friday 19th November at 10am

1. WELCOME and OPENING PRAYERS

Stella Roberts welcomed everyone to the meeting and opened the meeting with prayer. 34 members attended the meeting in person, and 7 joined via Zoom.

2. How poverty, climate change, modern slavery are linked

Helen Pain said that the focus of her talk would be Modern Slavery overseas, and how this is linked to poverty and climate change.

Climate change pushes many subsistence farmer-communities into being unable to feed and clothe their families. Because they are desperate to sustain their families, they are vulnerable to traffickers' false promises of good pay, and are then enslaved through threats of violence to them or their families; through psychological abuse; or through debt (often unjustified debts). This produces a vicious cycle where the slaves are forced to undertake work that further devastates the environment.

Helen presented a number of case studies. The first was in Ghana, where overfishing prevents fishermen from supporting their families and forces them to find work on illegal trawlers. 90% of these trawlers are owned by Chinese corporations, and workers suffer dreadful conditions and physical abuse. The official observers on these trawlers may also suffer from physical abuse (and some have disappeared) – so this is a very hard problem for the government to tackle.

In India there are similar issues with diminishing harvests forcing families to work in brick kilns. Brick kiln owners encourage whole families to move to the brick kilns as people are paid per brick. Firing the bricks leads to unregulated burning of wood and coal, and causes high emissions of greenhouse gases. Payment is desperately poor, and high charges for accommodation and food mean that families become enslaved by debts. It was estimated in 2018 that 8 million people are enslaved in India.

We all know that the felling of trees in the Amazon basin increases the level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and Brazil has pledged to reduce this. However, deforestation drives indigenous people from the forests into the hands of trafficking gangs. Then slave labour is used systematically to deforest the Amazon in order to sell timber but also to create new farms and pastures. All this is run by mafia-style big business, and the Brazilian government struggles to tackle it. From 1995 to October 2019, over 54,000 people were rescued from modern slavery in Brazil but this is only the tip of the modern slavery iceberg.

Helen then asked members to discuss amongst themselves whether poverty and slave labour were linked in the UK. Everyone felt that this was the case, and several different causes were given for this:

- we want high quality goods at knock-down prices, so we contribute to the problem.
- youngsters who leave the care system at 17 or 18 are offered a bedsit but very little other support. They are vulnerable and are often abused.

- Refugees and asylum seekers are also vulnerable. They may get the right to remain in this country, but with limited English and education they find it difficult to get employment.

Helen noted that refugees and asylum-seekers are often abused by people from the same country who speak the same language. The language barrier makes it hard to reach these people and to warn them. They need support and education to avoid being exploited.

What can we do? We can be less demanding and/or more discerning as consumers, and we can find out more about how our goods or clothes have been produced. International links are a valuable way to support each other. Helen suggested that we could set up links with Mothers' Union members overseas (although communication with them is often difficult as they may need to walk miles to an internet café to access a computer). Back in our communities, Helen suggested that school governors could check that school children are taught about the dangers of County Lines etc (some schools do this, but not all).

The Literacy and Development programmes run by Mothers' Union are very valuable. Education helps to prevent people being caught in the poverty/modern slavery trap. In this country, Mothers' Union and Clewer are working together to fight Modern Slavery. Helen encouraged members to visit the Exhibition on Modern Slavery which is currently touring Hampshire. In some venues where there is sufficient space the exhibition will include a sculpture made by Ruth Fielder. It uses transparent and disposable plastic punnets and bottles as a metaphor for the invisibility of modern slaves and how their abusers regard them as disposable once their financial usefulness ceases.

3. Gender-based Violence

Helen reminded everyone that the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence starts on Thursday 25th November with a vigil outside Winchester Cathedral between 12noon and 2pm. Helen encouraged members to join this. There are also a number of other events taking place around the diocese.

Helen said that for the last 6 years she has been the Mothers' Union lead for Modern Slavery in Winchester Diocese, and asked members to consider taking on this role for the next triennium.

Stella thanked Helen for a very interesting and informative talk.

4. President's Report

Stella reported that we were unable to hold a Mary Sumner Day Service at Old Alresford this year, and the AFIA Family Holiday was cancelled this summer, but we are now able to meet in the Cathedral for monthly prayers. We were also able to attend RAF Odiham Families Day and both Child Contact Centres have resumed meeting but have had to adapt to the COVID restrictions.

The Trustee board for next year will be small. Three current Trustees have been re-elected - Linda Hoskins, Sue Tickell, and Lou Scott Joynt, and Jo Heath has been elected for the first time. Jane Horne has completed 6 years on the Trustee board but has agreed to be co-opted onto the Trustee board for the next triennium. Since no-one has agreed to be

President, this group of Trustees will run the diocese as a committee, and the Trustees have agreed some changes to our constitution to allow this.

Stella thanked those branches who have managed to keep up your projects and meetings and pastoral care over the past few months. Regretfully several Branches have made the decision to close because there is no one wishing to be a Branch Leader. Members will become Diocesan members but are planning to continue to meet regularly.

Stella also thanked members who took part in a Reimagining Mothers' Union Coffee morning or Tea Party. The results for our Diocese have been collated and sent to Marian Pope the lead on this at MSH. There will be a Conference on Reimagining MU in January, which will be attended by Linda Hoskins.

Members will soon receive the Christmas Appeal from Mary Sumner House, and Mothers' Union have secured Match Funding for their work in South Africa. Mothers' Union is now majoring on Domestic Violence and Modern Day Slavery, particularly during the 16 Days of Activism. The Diocesan Prayer Vigil at the Cathedral will be on 25th November between 12.00 – 2.00pm, and Stella hoped that many members would join the vigil either outside the Cathedral or in the Epiphany Chapel, and if possible wear a purple scarf. Some branches are holding the three minutes silence on MU Global Day on Saturday 27th November from 1.03pm (the three minutes represents the 1 in 3 women affected by Domestic Violence in the world.)

It has been difficult to complete the Fixed Dates list for 2022 as venues for some of the meetings will not commit far ahead including Wolvesey and the Cathedral Undercroft which we have used for many years. The Commissioning of the Trustees and Speakers will take place in Evensong at Winchester Cathedral at 3:30pm on Sunday 16th January when Bishop Debbie will join us.

Stella attended a three Day Conference for Diocesan Presidents and Presidents Elect from 8th - 10th November. Sue Murphy accompanied her since we have no DP-elect. Stella enjoyed meeting up with many old friends for work and recreation especially the Worship but it was really hard work! Mothers' Union intends to focus on Modern Slavery and Domestic Violence all year round and not just the 16 Days of Activism. We learned how the Metamorphosis Scheme is working out in some Diocese. The Direct Debit Scheme should help both Dioceses and MSH in the future, and the finances of the central charity are now in a good position owing to the generosity of members, the reduction in Staff at MSH and the ability to let rooms in MSH. There is also a scheme to update Mary Sumner House which will make it more accessible through a reception area in the Old Shop and updated meeting rooms that can be let. Marian Pope spoke to us about Reimagining MU and the hope that the Conference in January will bring about some new ways of being Mothers' Union in the future. The Conference was well supported with regular worship times which both Sue and I found very uplifting. We also found time to enjoy a glass of wine at the end of the day!

Stella closed by thanking all the trustees and the members for the support they have given her throughout the past three years as President, and especially Sue Murphy who has been her right-hand woman and Terry who has been her right-hand man!

5. **Speakers**

Christine Clode mentioned that there is an updated Speakers list in the Archway packs. She thanked Sue Brinkman, who has now stepped down as a speaker, and also mentioned that Revd Robert Sandys has now moved away from the area and is no longer available.

The diocese is continuing the Free Speaker Scheme, and groups of diocesan members can also request a free speaker to come and speak to them. Christine encouraged branches and groups to ask for speakers even if they are small groups!

(Secretary's note: Some speakers are also available to give talks via Zoom, including speakers from other dioceses. Please contact Christine for details if you are interested.)

6. **RAF Families Day**

The meeting enjoyed watching the video from RAF Families Day put together by Neil Jones from Yateley. Stella commented that it had been an excellent day and they had a lot of help from members of Yateley parish. We had received lots of cakes for this event, but there were none left over at the end of the day! Stella thanked Sue Tickell and Linda Hoskins for all their work in organising this project.

Stella also noted that we would be asking for lots of cakes for RAF Families Day again next year, and also for the AFIA Family Holiday. In order to reduce costs, we are going to take our own cakes to Lodge Hill instead of paying Lodge Hill to provide coffee and cake in the morning, and tea and cake in the afternoon.

7. **Mid-day prayers and lunch**

The meeting then paused for Mid-day prayers followed by a lunch break.

8. **Other projects**

Sue Murphy talked about the position for a number of our diocesan projects.

8.1 Away From It All Holiday

As Stella had mentioned, we were not able to hold our usual Family Holiday this year. However we were able to provide treats for 13 families which included trips to Marwell Zoo or the cinema and vouchers for family meals out. Lodge Hill is booked for our usual family holiday from 6th to 13th August, and many of our old team of helpers have agreed to be there. The families who were booked to go on the cancelled holiday in 2020 will be offered places on the holiday for 2022. Sue said that if branches wish to nominate a family for a place on the holiday they should contact Jane Chick.

8.2 Child Contact Centres

Both centres are now open although the Basingstoke centre is open for face to face contact only once a month. We are still running Zoom sessions once a month. Both of our centres are currently short of volunteers and will also need to be reaccredited next year. Our financial position is healthy at the moment, but grants from CAF/CASS are likely to be smaller in the future so this is a concern.

8.3 Angel Tree

We have been asked to help with the Angel Tree project again this year, but Sue said she had not yet received a list of the presents required. We still have plenty of funds to support this project.

8.4 Invisible Walls Project at Winchester Prison

Stella invited Gill Watkin to talk about the Invisible Walls project at Winchester Prison, which is run by Spurgeons with support from Mothers' Union members. Gill told everyone that she had recently attended an event to celebrate 10 years of work by Spurgeons at Winchester Prison. It was held in the Visitors Hall at Winchester Prison and included a number of VIPs including the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire. Ex-prisoners talked about how much they had been helped by the programme run by Spurgeons. One ex-prisoner is now working in another prison supporting Spurgeons with their programme for preparing prisoners for release. Some prisoners at this event wore orange t-shirts with the words "Dad's volunteers" because they work with Spurgeons on the activities to improve the relationships of the prisoners with their families.

The Invisible Walls project in the prison is funded by the National Lottery and there is no guarantee that this will continue, so they are currently doing a lot of fundraising. Gill said that they need more volunteers to help in the Visitors' Centre, and suggested that members contact Gill if they are interested. You need to complete a training course before getting involved with this.

9. Close

Stella thanked everyone for coming and wished them a safe journey home. She then closed the meeting with prayers.