

Mothers' Union Winchester Diocese

Notes from the Information Day at St Gabriel's Church, Popley on Thursday 17th March 2022 at 10am

1. WELCOME and OPENING PRAYERS

Diocesan Secretary, Sue Murphy welcomed everyone to the meeting and the meeting opened with a Worship Song. 22 members attended the meeting in person, and 8 joined via Zoom.

2. The benefits of having an MU branch in your parish

Revd Arthur Botham started his presentation with a reading from Colossians 3 verses 12-15

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Before he was ordained, Arthur was a marketing manager for a large company and so he suggested that it would be interesting to look at the branding of Mothers' Union. He asked everyone what image came to people's minds when they heard the words "Mothers' Union" – and the answer was "tea and cake"! This is close to "jam and Jerusalem", so perhaps it is not surprising that Mothers' Union is sometimes confused with WI!

Longevity is very important with brands (think of Typhoo tea or Cadbury's), and so he urged us not to change our name. We should stick with the brand because it builds reputation. When Arthur thinks of Mothers' Union, he thinks of stability, reliability, care, compassion, prayer and fellowship. How do we get this message out to those who don't know about Mothers' Union? One possibility is to suggest that they look at the website for the central charity, which is excellent.

Mothers' Union's focus on families is so important. Arthur has been vicar at St Gabriel's for 18 years, and in that parish there is a massive need for support for families and relationships. There are 6 schools within the parish (which has an area of about 1 square mile), and a total of about 5000 youngsters up to the age of 16. The local estate has the youngest age profile of any estate in Hampshire, with an average age of only 40.

As we come out of the pandemic, we are finding lots of issues around relationships. There is a hunger for people to explore the deeper things of God. Arthur wondered why are we so fragile? Our culture is fragile because it is built on sand.

This fragility was also a feature of society when Paul was writing his letters. In his letter to the Colossians, he tells his readers to:

“As you have received, so live”
“As you are rooted, so be built up”
“As you have been taught, so be established”

Paul is encouraging people to grow in Christ (and this is something else that Mothers’ Union encourages). Paul also tells us to “overflow with thanksgiving and praise” – even when times are tough. Arthur mentioned that Christians in Ukraine are still thankful to God for all he has done for them, which is a fantastic testimony.

Arthur has been passionate about Mothers’ Union for many years, and their commitment to families. Some years ago Arthur saw that young Mums (especially single Mums) were missing out on café culture because of the difficulty and expense of travelling into the centre of Basingstoke. So he decided to start the Hope Café at St Gabriel’s and they invested in a barista machine and bought toys and play mats. 4 or 5 Mothers’ Union members came to help with the Hope Café and it grew from serving only 2 or 3 people to serving 50 cups of coffee in a morning. Jo and Maggie were employed to run the café and then Mothers’ Union members were able to chat with the people who came, and in some cases pray with them. As a result, 5 have since come to Christ. The MU members were there, providing a listening ear, sometimes acting as surrogate grandmothers.

Arthur told the story of Laura, a single Mum who brought her toddler along to the cafe – a child who used to terrorise the church, along with a group of other young children! Laura has now come to Christ and joined the church. She also met a Christian man and is now in a stable relationship. Sadly following mistakes made during a custody battle in court, Laura has been jailed for 4 months for perjury. In prison she is now converting people to Christ and has prevented at least two suicides. None of this would have happened without those Mothers’ Union members at the Hope Café giving their time to listen to Laura and to pray with her.

Some time after the Hope Café was set up, a Mothers’ Union branch was formed at St Gabriel’s with a core of committed members. They have been actively involved in St Gabriel’s and have enriched the life and worship at St Gabriel’s. Their most recent venture is a fundraising campaign for the Literacy and Numeracy campaign which has raised enough to educate 22 women at £18 per head (there is a report on this in Spring Archway). This is a great example of the way we serve our community with compassion in action.

Archbishop Justin Welby has described Mothers’ Union as “the heart and the love of the Church”. As Teresa of Avila said “Christ has no hands on earth but yours..” At the heart of what we do is prayer, and this can transform us and the people around us. Arthur thinks of Mothers’ Union as one of the rocks that support the church and he gives thanks for us.

Following on from Arthur’s talk, Linden Hansen said that we should not be shy about banging on vicars’ doors, and asking them what can we do to support their churches and their parishes! Jane Horne would like Arthur to go to a Diocesan Synod and speak to clergy about Mothers’ Union as so many of them know little about Mothers’ Union.

3. Trustee board for this Triennium

Sue Murphy showed a photo from the Commissioning Service at Winchester Cathedral in January, and introduced the five members of the Trustee board for this Triennium. They are: Jo Heath, Jane Horne, Linda Hoskins, Lou Scott-Joynt and Sue Tickell. No one has come forward to be Diocesan President and these trustees will run the diocese as a committee.

4. Award to Claudette Kigeme

Some members may remember meeting Claudette at Cathedral Prayers in Winchester in July 2019 during her visit to this country which was organised by Five Talents. Jane Horne told everyone that she met Claudette many years ago when she visited Burundi.

Claudette Kigeme is the national coordinator for Mothers' Union in Burundi and since 2000 has been involved in training people to run literacy and financial-education circles. In particular, she has encouraged groups to set up local credit banks. Local people save a small amount each week, and can then apply for a grant from the credit bank to start a business (eg to buy a goat). The funds from these businesses enable them to send their children to school.

Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world, so this work makes a huge difference to local people. It is estimated that Claudette's work has transformed the lives of 78,000 people in Burundi, and she has recently been awarded the Langton Award for Community Service from Archbishop Justin Welby.

5. Craft projects

Maureen Batten is now our contact with MSH for craft projects. She was interested to know what craft projects are being undertaken by branches. Sue Murphy mentioned that following an incident in another diocese when a needle was left in a toy intended for a child, MSH have asked everyone to test toys for children so that they meet the standards required for a CE label. The Trustee board had considered this some time ago, and felt that the testing regime was too onerous but that a second person should check toys to ensure that they are safe before they are given out to a child.

6. AFIA Holiday

Sue Tickell was unable to come to Popley for the Information Day, and instead joined the meeting via Zoom. She had prepared a report on the AFIA Holiday which was read by Sue Murphy.

The Trustees are very pleased that we can hold the Family Holiday at Lodge Hill again this year for a week starting 6th August. The team have had their first planning meeting via zoom and are raring to go! We welcomed our Chaplain, Rev. Kay, and her husband Sam. He is going to help lead the Worship Music during the holiday, as well as being part of the children's groups.

This year's theme will be 'Olympics' as it gives the team lots of scope for organising interesting activities for the families. There is also going to be a coach outing to Littlehampton on the Wednesday, and Chichester Diocese are helping us by booking a hall in Littlehampton for use by our families if it rains.

At the moment we have four applications, with the possibility of a few more in the pipeline. If you know of a family that could do with a break, then there is still time to contact Jane Chick our booking secretary.

Donations of toiletries, especially for men and children would be very much appreciated. These little touches help the guests relax. In addition, in order to save costs the team will be providing tea, coffee and cake to our guests instead of paying for Lodge Hill to do this.

Please keep the team and the holiday in your prayers.

7. RAF Odiham Families Day 2022

Linda Hoskins was also unable to join the meeting in person since she had recently had COVID, and instead joined via Zoom. Her report was read by Sue Murphy.

Linda is excited to tell everyone that the RAF Odiham Families Day will be held Friday 19th August this year and she is also excited that the RAF emailed us with this information to especially ask for the Mother's Union participation.

Every year is exciting for the MU to participate but, after a bumpy 2019 with the RAF admin side, last year 2021 was such a success for the MU and the Families that we are firmly on their list of preferred participators. Please watch out in E-news for the announcement of when we will start collecting cakes from your areas, or when you can bring them to cathedral prayers so they can be frozen in advance of 19th August.

This event could not take place without the great Mother's Union and our capacity to bake such wonderful cakes and biscuits and to be so willing to volunteer our services for the benefit of others. If you haven't volunteered before and you would like to – please let Linda Hoskins know or Sue Murphy or another Trustee. I know that you will enjoy the day even more than the Families who are eating the cakes you bake!

8. Child Contact Centres

Sue Murphy gave a report on the Child Contact Centres in Basingstoke. Both of our centres had to close in March 2020 during the first lockdown.

The centre in Popley reopened in September 2020 and is running well, and often has 4 families at a session (which was the maximum we allowed when the centre reopened). We have had to cancel a few sessions, once because volunteers were ill, but usually because families are not available. We are planning to relax the limit on the number of families now that all the restrictions are easing.

The sessions at the URC in the centre of Basingstoke didn't reopen until September 2021, and because of the shortage of volunteers is open only once a month (with additional sessions via Zoom once a month). A number of face-to-face sessions have been cancelled because families were not available or were ill.

Both centres will need to be re-accredited within the next 6 months.

We are short of volunteers, but the problem is much more acute for Basingstoke than for Popley. In Basingstoke the problem has been exacerbated by moving the time of the sessions earlier by half an hour, so that volunteers need to be there for 1pm. Many volunteers find this tricky, especially if they wish to attend church on a Sunday morning.

We started the year with a total of 5 families (7 children) who are attending the centre. However we have recently had two new families coming along – one only at Basingstoke and one using both centres. During 2021 we supported another 2 families (4 children) who have since moved onto other arrangements for contact.

9. Mid-day prayers

The meeting watched powerpoint presentations showing photos from the AFIA holiday, and from RAF Families Day in 2021. The meeting then paused for mid-day prayers, followed by lunch in the hall.

10. Theme for the Triennium

After lunch, Sue Murphy told the meeting that the theme for all the years in this Triennium is “Transformation – Now”. Branches are encouraged to request a free speaker on the theme, and groups of Diocesan members who meet together are also welcome to request a speaker.

Sue also talked about the options for opting in or out of communications from national Mothers’ Union.

The meeting closed with prayers and the Grace. Sue Murphy thanked the members of Popley branch for hosting the meeting and for their welcome. The bring and buy table raised a total of £111.08 for AFIA.