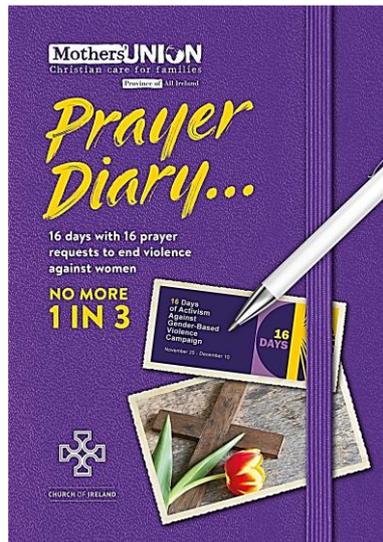


Focus

Spring 2021
An All-Ireland Publication

Images from the Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence 2020



June Butler writes:

When I wrote for the autumn edition of “Focus” we were all hopeful that the Covid-19 Pandemic was receding but six months later nothing much has changed and, in fact, we are in some ways more confined than we were last year. However, with the advent of the vaccination, the coming of spring and our aspiration to spend time again with friends and family, we can all work to rebuild our hope and confidence, to use words of the Mothers’ Union theme for 2021.

That process of rebuilding will not be easy for any of us. Our confidence in being with others - in homes, in shops, in large arenas and even in church environments - has been shaken and we will have to rebuild it, slowly but steadily. But we will through time, by being steady and sensible in our approach, and with God’s help.

As you will see from the Diocesan contributions to this edition of “Focus”, Mothers’ Union certainly hasn’t gone into hibernation over the past year. We have had to adapt and to reimagine much of our work and certainly our ways of maintaining contact with members. That has been innovative and very productive in most areas and our members know, and love, that they are still connected to our wonderful organisation. In fact, the new MU publication for Britain and Ireland, which will be available after Easter, is called “Connected”. I do hope you will enjoy reading it.

Those who can use internet - a considerable percentage of our members - have been able to join live streamed or recorded diocesan services and participate in the many seminars (now called webinars!) offered by the staff of Mothers’ Union and other bodies. In the past weeks I have participated in two really good MU events - one called “Praying with Purpose” which gave lots of ideas about pointers for prayer and how it might best be structured, and another on how we might prepare for the reopening of branch meetings after the pandemic. Many different thoughts were offered by the participants - but we were all unanimous in our desire for branches to reopen sooner rather than later.

Since last spring, we have organised several competitions among our members in Ireland - photography, poetry, Christmas card design and, the most recent, a mascot or logo for “Mums in May”. The amazing talent we have among our members was shown in the earlier competitions and now those members who are crafters have the chance to demonstrate their skill and innovative ideas.

The funds in our “Mums in May” account, which are used primarily to initiate and support outreach projects in dioceses throughout Ireland, need to be boosted every third year so that we can continue this important work in our parishes and communities. 2021 is the next year to “top up” the MIM Fund so, pandemic or no pandemic, this will occur! There are three main strands planned for this fundraising effort. We have printed a new cookery book, “Mums Marvellous Meals”, which will go on sale later in the year when we can distribute it to dioceses and branches. There is a “Count Your Blessings” calendar for the month of May which anyone can use during the month, putting a small amount aside each day when you thank God for the blessings in your life. The card can be downloaded from the website and your branch will collect your donations later in the year.



Then there is “21 in 21”. The main element of this is walking and I plan to complete three walks, each of 7 kilometres, in each diocese in Ireland before the end of 2021 - hence the name of the initiative! By my calculations that is total of 252 kilometres (or, in “old money”, nearly 160 miles). With current restrictions I certainly will have to begin the walks, accompanied by only one other MU member, close to my home in Northern Ireland but I am hopeful that I will be able to travel to the Republic of Ireland by the summer. We will have a short time of prayer at - or even in - a church at the beginning and/or end of each walk.

I began planning this back in 2019, long before anyone had heard of Covid-19, or the concept of “staycation” was prevalent, but seeing more of Ireland on foot will certainly be my holiday in 2021. All of us who walk each “leg” of this MU journey would love you and your friends to sponsor us and this can be done either by committing money on our sponsor card which will be available in April or by giving on line through our page on the “Just Giving” website - www.justgiving.com/fundraising/MumsinMay21

Of course, you don’t have to walk 21kms to join us in this important fundraising effort for MIM! Everyone can play a part in “21 in21”. You can do 21 steps, yards, furlongs (remember those?) or you can walk virtually..... or perhaps you might prefer to read 21 books, bake 21 cakes or buns, plant 21 flowers, swim 21 lengths, knit 21 prayer squares ...use your imagination - please be creative to get sponsorship! It is so important that we boost the MIM funds significantly this year to enable our innovative MU work to continue throughout Ireland.

Being able to walk - be it a short “dander” or a significant walk on a planned route - has been my salvation over the past year. I try to walk at least two miles every day to clear my head, to give me a welcome break from zoom meetings and from the claustrophobia of four walls. I often pray while I walk, especially thanking God for my ability to be able to do so and for the beauty of His world which I see around me.

The words of my father’s favourite Psalm 24 are often in my head and I will leave them with you as I wish you every blessing for Easter and for good health and mental strength as we emerge from the bleakness of these difficult times into the sunlight of spring and summer, with hope for the future.

***The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.***

Enjoy God’s earth wherever you may be!
God bless and keep safe.

With love
June



MU member Nan Ferguson (Aged 103)
from
Down & Dromore
delighted to receive the vaccine!

ZOOM Breakfast 2021

Very well done and a big thank you to Liz Greer, Wendy Halligan and all involved in organising the ZOOM breakfast on 6th February. This was organised instead of the annual “Getaway Weekend”. It was a wonderful morning with two inspiring guest speakers, Lydia Monds who is the Education Advisor to the Bishops' Appeal and Karen Gray who is an eco-trauma therapist combining therapy and nature. 96 participants joined in the mornings activities which closed with Midday Prayers including Annabelle Hayes Celebration.



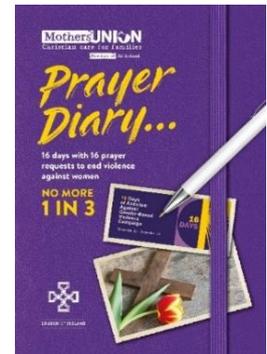
'NO MORE 1 in 3'



Tackling domestic abuse in Ireland and challenging gender-based violence worldwide has been a dedicated campaign and priority focus for Mothers' Union since 2013. One in three women worldwide experience abuse in their lifetime. Thus, the theme, 'No More 1 in 3' echoed throughout the 16 Days of Activism.

Across Ireland the incidence of domestic abuse surged in pandemic times, with services supporting women and men across the island receiving a 70% increase in visits to their websites and a 40% increase in calls. Throughout 2020 Mothers' Union connected with individuals and organisations across the country in support of those living in fear through prayer and action.

Central to our All-Ireland 16 Days outreach was the publication of a '**Mothers' Union 16 Days Prayer Diary**'. This paved the way for a meditative journey throughout the 16 Days, highlighted issues involved and included reflections and supports available to families by Church of Ireland organisations. This resource is available online at www.mothersunion.ie



Dioceses hosted online services, reflections and events, whilst prayers were provided for church service intercessions.

In 2020 five women lost their lives as a result of a domestically motivated homicide. In Northern Ireland **The Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill** will become law in 2021 – thus making domestic abuse a crime in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, Naomi Long, Minister of Justice, has introduced separate legislation to make stalking a specific offence in NI. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK that does not have anti-stalking laws.



In the Republic of Ireland, *three women died violently during 2020.* Mothers' Union has called for enhanced resourcing to ensure that systems and supports are in place to permit the fullest implementation of *The Domestic Violence Act 2018.*

An Garda Síochána and PSNI now have trained domestic abuse teams in every division which gives them the ongoing independent capacity to intervene proactively in domestic abuse situations. This has been a tremendous support through Covid-19.



Throughout 2020 Diocesan Links with refuges were strengthened and generously supported. The differing needs were reflected in the array of items requested. Home starter packs including kitchen utensils, bed linen, clothing and toiletries were supplied, Food and fuel poverty has rocketed, and, for the first time, many refuges requested food vouchers. In Cork and Sligo Mothers' Union have engaged with CRITiCall who, among a variety of initiatives, offer practical help to local refuges, individuals and families affected by domestic abuse.

A ripple of conversation took place around the dioceses as each MU member handed a **16 Days' bookmark** to a friend or neighbour, together with a conversation highlighting and outlining the steps being taken counteract domestic abuse. Bookmarks were offered to final year students in secondary schools that had previously hosted MU led workshops or assemblies during previous 16 Days' campaigns.

Moving Forward in 2021



Currently, we look forward to participating in UNCSW65. **The 65th UN Commission on the Status of Women is the world’s single largest human rights body dedicated to women.** It is the UN’s principal inter-governmental body for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. Between 15th - 26th March 2021, the Commission will meet virtually, and

Mothers’ Union will be participating in critical discussions on the reality of women’s lives throughout the world. This is a golden opportunity to help shape global standards on gender equality by influencing our governments, to promote gender justice, and in particular issues relating to gender-based violence.

As the UNCSW 65 is virtual any member can register to participate in the many side events.

Further information on UNCSW and its history is available through the link:

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>

REFUGES as HOMELESS PROVIDERS

Many victims of abuse who leave home, go to a refuge as a first port of call. They are, in effect, homeless, but refuges, in the Republic of Ireland, are not regarded as **HOMELESS PROVIDERS**. This means that the upkeep of refuges and the cost of additional accommodation options such as B&B when refuges are full, and when clients / families need to find other secure accommodation options, is borne by individual refuges, rather than by a government agency.



During Covid, this situation has been temporarily eased by government agencies but there is no guarantee that this will continue post Covid. What would help is a **cohesive approach to funding homelessness whereby refuges take in their clients funded by relevant government agencies e.g., TúsIa and local councils in the Republic of Ireland.** If you would like to help, please contact your TDs to ask for their support in ensuring the Department of Housing give local authorities the mandate to support homelessness when it involves domestic violence.

This situation does not exist in Northern Ireland, as there, Women’s Aid accommodation services are considered homelessness providers and are funded as such.

Finally.....



Out thanks to Mothers’ Union members who, year on year, tirelessly continue to build on our 16 Days campaign. In 2021 Mothers’ Union will continue to work towards ending poverty, justice and violence wherever it occurs in society. Through praying, engaging and campaigning we shall continue to call for and promote meaningful engagement calling for an end to injustice and provides

support for men, women and children affected in our communities.

“Let us not love, not just with words, but with actions and in truth.” 1 John 3:18

Report by: Jacqui Armstrong

Connor Diocese

In mid-January Connor MU received a request from the C of I Chaplain in the RVH and Musgrave Park Hospitals, Sanna Mallon, to help with providing emergency wash bags for patients. Sanna said “more and more patients are coming into these hospitals and have not even a toothbrush with them. Sometimes they have to wait a week for their loved ones or a family member to bring a wash bag.” The MU members around the diocese responded quickly with 75 packs ready to deliver and are continuing to collect items to supply more bags. Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Connor MU Chaplain, kindly agreed to hand over the wash bags to Sanna at Musgrave Park Hospital.



Members from Connor Diocese have been very busy knitting lately:



These teddies, knit by a lady from St. John's in Ballyclare, have been delivered to Antrim



23 Baby Blankets sent to Baby Basics from Christ Church MU Lisburn



A member from Lisburn Cathedral Branch, Jean Hughes, knit 50 baby jumpers which were given to Baby Basics



50 Wash Bags (25 female & 25 male) were delivered to Lagan Valley Hospital A& E Unit from Christ Church Lisburn MU along with 4 Fiddle Muffs

Cashel, Ferns & Ossory

Like every Diocese we have had to adapt and reinvent how we have communicated with members and conducted our business.



In August/September we launched our School Book & Bursary Scheme with the help of a grant from “Mums in May”. The support was greatly appreciated by families who benefitted from the scheme, many of whom were struggling financially due to job losses or restricted income as a result of COVID-19. We helped many families in need through our AFIA Fund too.

Our Autumn Council was held via zoom and it was lovely to connect with Branches through this media. We were delighted that two members from the United Diocese, Naomi Besanson and Tania Hanan, participated in two of the services organised by Mary Sumner House. Even though we could not organise our usual service for the Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence many Branches collected toiletries, gifts and children's toys for their local refuge. This support was greatly appreciated by the refuges.

We are delighted to welcome Rev. Canon Ian Cruickshank from Killanne, Killegney, Rossdroit & Templeshanbo Union of Parishes as our new Mothers' Union Chaplain in the Diocese. We wish him every blessing in this New role.



As Ballycanew, Leskinfere, Monamolín Branch could not hold their annual lunch to raise funds for Mothers' Union Overseas projects they instead decided to hold a very imaginative “Invisible Dinner”. People were asked to contribute €10 to this fundraiser.

Dublin & Glendalough

MU 16 Days of Activism against Violence towards Women and Girls.

During the Service of the Word on Advent Sunday in St Brigid's Church of Ireland, Castleknock, which was led by Canon Paul Houston, there was a focus on the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. Ms Karen Nelson, Diocesan President gave the opening address. The guest speaker was Ms Ifrah Ahmed, Irish Citizen and Gender Advisor to the Prime Minister of Somalia. Ifrah was interviewed by Rachel Devlin, Vice President, due to Covid-19 restrictions. See YouTube https://youtu.be/bFhSOx_XAHk.

The subject discussed was Female Genital Mutilation, a barbaric procedure that mostly Muslim girls are subjected to, mainly in Africa. This subject was chosen in order to increase awareness of the practice and the fact that so many immigrant women to this country suffer the effects of FGM. It has long term detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of women who have endured this practice as children in their own country of origin. FGM is illegal in Ireland since the Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act was passed in 2012. Ifrah, with others, worked to bring about this change in the law. See: <https://www.ifrahfoundation.org>

MU Dublin & Glendalough Project 2020-2022.

Extracts from 'A letter of Thanks' from Home Start, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.
Date: 16th October 2020

Dear Rachel,

We would like to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to both yourself and the "Mother's Union" for the beautiful "Care Packages" delivered today to us here at Home-Start Blanchardstown.

We are overwhelmed at how much thought has gone into putting these packages together for some of our most vulnerable mothers. We know these beautiful gifts will be much appreciated, all so unique but with the same message "Care" "Empathy", "Creativity", from one mother to another. We love the coffee vouchers; this is a lovely idea to get a mum out of the house and have an hour to herself.

Home-Start is a voluntary organisation in which volunteers offer regular support, friendship and practical help to families with young children in their own homes, helping prevent family crisis and breakdown. Home-Start is available to any family with at least one child under 5 years of age. As well as supporting parents in the home, we also support these families outside the home, by providing child care in our respite creche here at Home-Start, where the children are looked after by our fully trained and professional Early Years Educators.

Our mission is to support parents, helping them to grow in confidence and therefor helping to strengthen their relationships with their children and broaden their life experiences.

We would like to wish you all good health and please stay safe as we head into an uncertain winter. We look forward to seeing you all in the future.

Kind Regards,

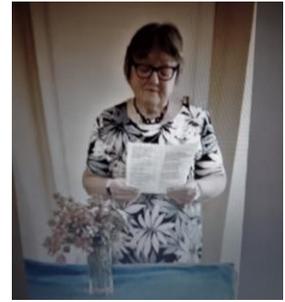
Cathy Kelly
Co-ordinator for Volunteers and Family Liaison.
Ann Murray – Creche Service Manager.



Meath & Kildare



Unfortunately, like everyone, due to Covid-19 we had very few meetings or Services. However, thanks to online, we had our first Service on Saturday December 5, 2020 to celebrate Mothers' Union 1st Global Day against Gender Based Violence. The Service was conducted by our new Chaplain, Revd Ruth O'Kelly and her husband Revd Martin provided the music on his guitar and sang the hymns.



Bishop Pat Storey gave us a very meaningful address about violence towards people. Some of our members did readings. Daphne Rowntree is pictured on the right.

Our leaders have been in constant contact with members, older folk in the Church family and generally anyone who is isolated or vulnerable. An Post issued post cards entitled "send love" and our leaders and Sylvia Wheatley, Diocesan President, have been sending these out to our members, parishioners, neighbours etc post free.

Sylvia also hosted her first Zoom meeting and stated "What a learning curve that was but I now feel a little more confident for the future".

Down & Dromore

New banner for St Paul's MU in Gilford:



All social distancing regulations were in place on Sunday 20th September which was a memorable day in the life of St Paul's MU in Gilford. During the service of Morning Prayer, a beautiful new branch banner was dedicated by the Rector, Rev. Denise Caddoo. The new banner was presented to the branch by Mrs Dorothy McClory in memory of her mother Mrs Gretta Higgins. Diocesan President Roberta along with her husband Gerald, D&D Chaplain as well as Phyllis Burrell Dromore Area Secretary and Diocesan Trustee attended.

Young people and the '16 Days' campaign:

MU did not have an opportunity for contact with the lovely young people at St Colman's Sixth Form College Ballynahinch this year due to COVID-19. However, following on from last year's input, the school has once again made a donation to MU for our support of Women's Aid. Raising awareness among young people on issues to do with abuse and gender justice is accepted as a worthwhile thing to do. Joy Silcock has recently made a socially distanced call to the school where she accepted their cheque for £250.



Derry & Raphoe



Congratulations to Rev. Canon Katie McAteer, on her appointment as St Columb's Cathedral's first female Canon in its 400-year-history.

Canon Katie is, at present, our MU Chaplain in Derry and Raphoe, having already served as the Diocesan Young Families Representative, Diocesan Action and Outreach Unit Coordinator, All-Ireland Action and Outreach Coordinator and Diocesan Faith and Policy Coordinator.

Katie hopes this new chapter will bring her closer to the heart of God and deepen her understanding of God's will for her life.

Mothers' Union AFIA Pandemic Scheme

The King said, *"You did it for me."* What a privilege we have as Mothers' Union members to serve others and know we are doing it for The King of Kings. During the month of November and again in February, Mothers' Union in Derry & Raphoe operated an AFIA Pandemic Scheme, with the approval of Bishop Andrew and Mothers' Union Trustees. The scheme proved a lifeline to families who are experiencing the financial fall-out from this pandemic. This situation could not have been imagined a year ago; successful businesses closed; secure jobs lost. People found themselves in a financial crisis they never imagined, and resources disappeared.



Aware that families in this Diocese were in financial crisis, MU took a leap of faith, sought approval, and obtained grants to offer a confidential, anonymous scheme to reach out and comfort others, as urged in Matthew 6:3 *'do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing'*. Rectors were informed of the scheme and given an application form, those who responded were able to bless families and be blessed themselves. Families spoke of the unexpected kindness and thoughtfulness of Mothers' Union who organised the gift, which for many, helped with grocery shopping and essentials at the beginning of December amidst all the other pressures in their lives. During February (the month of love), we added an extra category to the scheme. Clergy could identify parishioners whose problems were so vast that the scheme could not help them, but a gift of love (not a necessity) would let them know that someone cared about their situation. Gradually we are emerging out of this dark place. We hope for a brighter future, as we continue to support those in need and endeavour to be kind to those we meet, placing our trust in God who richly provides us with everything we need.

Limerick & Killaloe

Christmas Card Competition: We were absolutely delighted that Jackie Eastwood's (Ballinasloe branch) card won first prize in the Traditional Card section and that Jackie Gardener's (Kilcornan Branch) card came Highly Commended in the Children's card section. Both are very talented ladies and we send huge congratulations to both.



Fundraising & Communications: Jessie Griffin and Mai Clare were on top of their game at Christmas time as a staggering number of cards, calendars and diaries were sold on the run up to Christmas. Restrictions here were not as strict at the time and this enabled Jessie and Mai to get items to all those that needed them by hook or by crook!



Action & Outreach: As usual on the run up to Christmas many items were collected for the women’s refuges that we support. Some were able to accept the hampers and some were not, because of restrictions. Also, we managed to give a huge bag of children’s clothes to Adapt House Women’s Refuge and Christmas gifts and hamper to the residents of Thomond House Women’s Refuge. To the ladies that run Thomond House we gave extra special goodies by way of a “thank you” for all that they do for their residents.



Faith & Policy: Like every other diocese we have been keeping in touch with our members on a regular basis. We knitted prayer squares which went to several nursing homes and Indoor members and they are a constant reminder that God is always near us and a comfort to us. Our **Diocesan Chaplain, Canon Jane Galbraith,** is writing an Easter Reflection to go to all our members with a message of support and encouragement and looking forward to a time when we can meet up again safely.

Finance & Central Services: Thanks to our Diocesan Treasurer, Betty Delahunt, our Annual Accounts have been completed. Margaret Schutz will oversee the DP election which will take place later this year. As in every other diocese this work continues quietly in the background and keeps us up to date and above board!

Sympathy: In our diocese during the past few months several of our much-loved members have passed away. We remember them with gratitude for their dedicated support of Mothers’ Union and know that they will be remembered with love.

Branch meetings: We are all so looking forward to a time when we can meet up again, hold our branch meetings, and enjoy the fellowship that they bring when we can “rebuild with hope and confidence”.

Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh

A Service to mark the 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence was recorded in St Columba’s Church, Corrawallen, Co. Leitrim. and broadcast via You Tube on Sunday 6th December. Messages were received from Sheran Harper, Worldwide President and June Butler, All Ireland President. Diocesan President, Hazel Speares also spoke about Gender Based Violence. The Service was conducted by Rev. Capt. Richard Waller, Diocesan Chaplain. Right Rev Ferran Glenfield preached the sermon. The lessons were read by Mary Geelan, Faith and Policy Unit Coordinator and Marlet Hunter, Social Policy Rep. Prayers were read by Vida McCauley, Vice president for Faith and Policy Unit.



Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh Diocese support three Charities on an ongoing basis. The diocese has a large spread from Longford, Cavan to Sligo and thus three separate locations are desirable and these are:

- (1) **Sleep Out Cavan** supporting the homeless locally & preparing clothes for those sleeping rough in Dublin, also supporting local families through social workers.
To Sleep Out Cavan members have supplied countless bags of clothes. Recently, forty-two pairs of men's track suit bottoms were provided for the centre
- (2) **DVAS ~ Domestic Violence Advocacy Service** in Sligo and in Carrick- on-Shannon. It provides phone support, one to one support, accompanies women to court and has a referral service. As a result of Domestic Violence women starting out in a new home need kitchen ware, bedding, small appliances & toiletries. Members generously donated a large amount of toiletries & sanitary wear and these were greatly appreciated.

- (1) Third charity is **Longford Women's Link**, which helps in many ways, women & children who are subjected to Domestic Violence.
Schoolbags and school materials...pens, pencils, copybooks etc. were generously donated and gratefully received.

Seven families under stress were helped by the AFIA scheme (financed by Mums in May) Two of the families enjoyed a day out in between "lockdowns". The other families hope to, as soon as is feasible. All were presented with a food voucher for their local supermarket before Christmas



Our Action and Outreach Coordinator, Mrs Leila Beattie initiated & invited ladies to knit, crochet or sew knee rugs, twiddle muffs & fiddle blankets for residents in Nursing Homes. This is proving to be a resounding success. What better could one do than to brighten someone else's day? So far over 60 knee rugs and 35 twiddle muffs have been delivered to Care Homes.

Over 50 baby hats were presented to Cavan General Hospital. Some premature hats and matinee coats went to Temple Street Children's Hospital. Many trauma teddies were presented to Longford Women's Link and to Sleep Out Cavan

The Zoom Breakfast Organised by Liz Greer and Wendy Halligan proved to be a thought proving challenging and relaxing morning. It was well supported and thoroughly enjoyed by members from Kilmore Elphin and Ardagh

Tuam, Killala & Achonry



Since the last issue the diocese held its first zoom Council. Despite the tight COVID-19 restrictions it managed to disperse all the relevant hard copy materials to the branches via human chains within areas. It continued its support of the campaign against domestic abuse with an online service for Global Day led by our chaplain Rev Canon Jen McWhirter and with diocesan coordinators participating.

The diocese continued in its maintenance of links with agencies working with the victims of domestic abuse by enabling the purchase of a kitchen starter kit for those trying to establish an independent existence apart from an abusive home.

It also supported the need to make household purchases and generate some confidence building for victims by way of making shopping vouchers available to them.



Branches also have long established links with relevant agencies in support of this campaign by supplying clothing and long-lasting foodstuffs for the many who have to leave an abusive situation in a :eds are always considered in these supports

Cork, Cloyne and Ross

Spring has sprung, and unfortunately the Coronavirus is still with us a year later. However, we are not discouraged despite the restrictions; we continue to pray and are encouraged that God is still in charge as we walk with Him on our various journeys. Our theme 'Rebuilding Hope and Confidence' continues to inspire us to keep on fulfilling our aims as Mothers' Union members.

Last autumn, we were forced to be creative by doing our Festival Service online. Restrictions meant that instead of gathering together (a small number of participants) in the Carrig Centre in Cork City, we pre-recorded the service online via Zoom™, and released it to the public the following Sunday. It went quite well, so we have decided to do it again, this time celebrating Lady Day (25th March). Plans are underway, and we hope to iron out some glitches from our previous offering. All of us are on a learning curve, but we're enjoying it!

Our AFIA scheme is evolving. In the absence of being able to send families away for a break, last year we gave specialised hampers to those in need. This spring, with inspiration from Derry & Raphoe MU, we are adapting their Voucher Scheme to suit our needs here. We will run the scheme from 15th March to 31st May in conjunction with Rectors, School and Healthcare Chaplains, and our Youth Officer. The scheme will be carefully monitored and administered. We hope that this will be of some assistance to those who have been directly negatively affected during this difficult time, and we hope it will be a blessing to them.



Our more 'creative' members continue to knit and sew hearts and prayer crosses for our healthcare Chaplains and Rectors to distribute; and teddy bears/vouchers/'Curry in a Hurry' cookbooks for donation to CRITiCALL, an initiative which was set up by SAFE IRELAND in the wake of the pandemic to support women and children affected by domestic violence. We were also able to donate funds from Mums in May to assist with our work in Cork Prison and in The Glen Family Resource Centre.

For all charities fundraising has been a challenge in 2020. 3 members walked in the Virtual Women's Mini Marathon, raising funds for Mothers' Union work in the dioceses. We were also fortunate to get some grants through the Mums in May fund which helped us in our efforts to keep in touch with our members who are geographically very dispersed in a very large County!



We are grateful that despite all the challenges members have faced we have found ways to make a difference to families and individuals in the past year. It is testimony to the ability of Mothers' Union to adapt and rethink how to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

Armagh

We have tried to keep in contact with our members during the difficult times we are living through and did manage to get our diocesan magazine MUST printed and delivered to members with the 16 days prayer diary and the new Annual Prayer Diary.

On the last Saturday in November the Faith and Policy Unit put together an excellent Prayer Breakfast which went out on armagh.anglican.org website. We shared breakfast, listened to prayers and reflections and two excellent speakers namely Karen from Nexus who spoke about the counselling work she did with victims. This was followed with inspirational singing by Kirsten and another speaker Maggie from Foundation Ministries who also spoke on her work in counselling and building hope on shattered lives. The breakfast had 228 views on the website which was more than double the number of people who would have attended if the Prayer Vigil would have been held in an Hotel.

Clogherny Mothers' Union Celebrate 60 Years



On Sunday 13th December Clogherny Mothers' Union were able to celebrate their Diamond Anniversary in a very worthwhile and meaningful way. The Enrolling Member Sarah Cathers had produced a booklet entitled the History of Clogherny Mothers' Union and this booklet was issued to members at the special service conducted by the rector Rev Amelia M'Williams. Members spoke of the work Mothers' Union do today in Ireland and around the world. It is interesting to note the first enrolling member was Dorothy Jackson, wife of the rector, Rev Jackson whose son-in-law is our Archbishop the Most Rev John McDowell. The Diocese had sent a special birthday card to mark the occasion.

Welcome

The Diocesan President and Trustees and members extend a warm welcome to our new Chaplain Rev Alan Cross rector of Lissan Parish Church in the north of the Diocese as he takes up his role of new Chaplain. We are really looking forward to working with the Rev Cross in the year ahead as he brings his enthusiasm and expertise to the job.



Clogher

With the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic we are sadly still not able to gather for branch Meetings and Services but Clogher Diocesan Mothers Union Branches have been busy keeping in touch with members through phone calls, emails, newsletters and personal Blessing Bags. Some branches meet regularly through ZOOM to share news about Mothers' Union.



A small number of Mothers' Union branches have been fortunate in receiving grants for online technology, crafting activities and food hampers. In December, one branch provided 'Celebration bags' to all families in their parish with children 16 and under. The response was surprise and delight that they had been thought about. The Trustee Board have been blessed to receive two grants from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, one to provide PPE to all branches which will help when branches open in the future and the second to publish and post newsletters to all members and clergy in February and March. Some monies from the Diocesan Funds were used to support these projects.

On the 5th December Mothers' Union held its first Global Day, it centred around the disturbing figure that "1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced domestic and sexual abuse", and that Mothers' Union as a leading women's organisation believe this to be unacceptable.



A Global Day Service by the Reverend Charles Eames was available on the Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union Facebook page and the Clogher Diocesan Mothers' Union Trustee Board recorded the "16 days of prayers" which were uploaded for each day of the campaign. Mothers Union also donated vouchers to Fermanagh Women's Aid and to Tearmann in Monaghan.

Report on some of the activities of National Women's Council.

The National Women's Council (NWCI) is the leading national women's membership organisation in the Republic of Ireland, representing more than 190 member groups of which Mothers' Union All Ireland is one. NWCI members contribute to Women's Equality by:

- Promoting women's leadership
- Campaigning for better childcare, long-term and social care
- Seeking better representation of women in politics and decision making
- Working for a health care system that meets the needs of women, including their reproductive needs
- Ending violence against women
- Placing women's concerns at the heart of economic recovery
- Building a strong women's movement

NWCI launched a new online campaign ~ EveryWeekCounts, urging its supporters to write to their TDs to call for the immediate extension of paid Parent's Leave by three weeks. <https://www.nwci.ie/action/now>

Gender-based Violence and Harassment:

Young women have a lot to deal with. From peer pressure, to body image and misogyny. These experiences can impact young women's mental health and wellbeing.

Often young women find it hard to express their thoughts, anxieties and worries. It's easy to minimise them as being "not a big deal", "not worth mentioning" or "just in your head".

NWCI has launched a "Not Just in Your Head" A Mental Health Campaign for young women.



Harassment and Abuse:

Orla O'Connor, Chair of the National Observatory on Violence against women and Director of NSWCI says the following of Harassment and Abuse. 2020 was a year like no other! Domestic violence rose significantly during the COVID-19 restrictions. Frontline services have reported significant increases in calls to helplines. The move to work and socialise online has highlighted the increasing online harassment and abuse that women and girls are experiencing.

'Harassment and abuse have a devastating impact on women's and girls' lives, limiting their freedoms and preventing them from participating in society in the way they would wish. We know, for example, that the fear of online abuse is one of the key factors that is preventing more women, in particular younger women and women from minority backgrounds, from running for public office.

IN 2020 for the 16 Days of Activism, the Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women, an independent network of grassroots and national organisations, convened by the National Women's Council, put a spotlight on gender-based harassment in all its forms so that we, as a society treat the issue with increased seriousness and sanctions. The understanding of what constitutes violence has, thankfully, evolved considerably. Ireland now accepts that violence goes far beyond broken bones and bruises. Psychological violence, in the form of coercive control, has been a criminal offence for three years and has had one successful conviction to date. Gender-based harassment fits within this broadened, more accurate, understanding of violence and is a key part of it.

Harassment takes many forms and varies in the harm it inflicts on its victims. It happens both online and offline. It occurs between intimate partners, ex-partners and strangers. It can target your friends and family or you alone. It is possibly the most widespread form of violence that has received the least amount of attention. Perpetrators of harassment are disproportionately men and boys whereas the victims are disproportionately women and girls.

The lack of attention paid to gender-based harassment so far shows just how normalised this form of violence is within our society. The harasser may be viewed as a ‘pest’ or a ‘nuisance’, or worse as just very ‘eager’. Only in the most severe cases are perpetrators seen for what they are – dangerous, violent and criminal individuals. Unfortunately, it has taken courageous women to come forward and speak publicly about their personal experiences and the devastating consequences of harassment on their lives before society and particularly those in power take notice and are moved to act.

This is why organisations tackling violence against women are calling not only for legislation for the specific crimes of online harassment, stalking and image-based sexual abuse but for a broader understanding that such activities can be part of a wider pattern of gender-based abuse and hate. Specifically, including gender as a protected ground in the forthcoming Hate Crime legislation is a critical area for change. This would make it more culturally acceptable to object to the behaviour and would recognise the additional harm caused to the individuals. Crucially, it would send a strong societal message to any potential perpetrator that gender based harassment is unacceptable. The improved data collection that would follow would allow us to develop more targeted responses to offenders.

While we have come far, there is still a long way to go. In 2019 Ireland ratified the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women, which is regarded as the gold standard in the fight against gender-based violence. As a country we have therefore committed to addressing all forms of harassment. Action is needed to systematically prevent, tackle harassment and hold perpetrators to account. This means that we will not just have to answer to the countless women and girls who will continue to be subjected to this behaviour. We will also have to account for our actions internationally. Ireland's obligations under the Istanbul Convention will be judged objectively and, without action, will expose the lack of care, attention and commitment that has been shown to safeguarding and protecting the human rights of Ireland’s women and girls.

The National Women’s Council (NWC) announced an important new campaign Beyond Exploitation – Defending the human right not to be bought or sold for sex. The campaign is led by the National Women’s Council with partner organisations Immigrant Council of Ireland and Ruhama and aims to bring together civil society organisations to campaign for equality and freedom of sexual exploitation. A first step will be the recruitment of a Coordinator for the campaign.

Orla O’Connor, Director of NWC said,

“We are looking forward to leading this important new campaign that will support the most vulnerable and silenced people in prostitution to have a voice. We know that prostitution cannot be the answer to women’s poverty or precarious immigration status. We are advocating for policies and measures that give all women and girls a real choice not to be bought or sold for sex.”

Submission on the National Economic Plan was published on Wednesday, November 11, 2020

with proposals to ensure that the National Economic Plan takes account of the needs of women in Ireland and is capable of driving an equal recovery, including investing in the care economy, decent pay and worker’s rights, a feminist, green new deal, fair allocation of resources and investment in public services.

Download file: [Submission on the National Economic Plan](#)

Compiled by Rachel Devlin,

Mothers’ Union All Ireland Representative
of National Women’s Council.



The Editor writes:

One of my favourite modern-day hymns is **“In Christ alone”** which was written by Stuart Townsend and Keith Getty. Not only has this hymn got a wonderful tune but also the words throughout it are very powerful even from the opening two lines:

***“In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song”***

Life, as we know it, has been very different for the last twelve months and for many it has been a struggle. We have missed meeting up with friends and family and on many occasions also the fellowship of joining in a live church service. The Mothers’ Union theme this year is **“Rebuilding Hope and Confidence”** and we will all have to do this in our daily lives as we continue to adapt to the strains and constraints covid-19 has put on our daily lives. However, we pray and hope that God and our faith will be our strength in these endeavours.

While, as a Mothers’ Union “family”, we may not have been able to meet up in person the work of Mothers’ Union has continued in supporting families, the lonely and those in need. Some initiatives such as AFIA have been reimagined to give much needed support to families and to say thank-you to those working on the front line. Some of our Dioceses operate a School Book and Bursary Scheme and were shocked at some of the stories of those seeking assistance but heartened by their gratitude for the support they received. Sometimes we tend to think that Mothers’ Union only supports projects overseas and from a recent meeting we had in our Diocese those participating were taken aback when they heard of all of the initiatives spearheaded and supported by Mothers’ Union ~ AFIA, School and Book Bursaries, supporting local refuges, grub clubs, prison visits, knitting and sewing projects to name just a few. This year our triennial fundraiser **“Mums in May”** takes place and it is as a result of money raised through this event that we are able to financially support many of these initiatives. By the time this edition of Focus is uploaded you will have heard a lot more about June’s sponsored walk **“21 in 21”** and the **“Count your Blessings”** calendar. We do hope that you will support these fund raisers so that Mothers’ Union in Ireland can continue the great work which is undertaken to help those in need in our communities.

Life is difficult and challenging at the moment but as the hymn **“Brother, sister, let me serve you”** says in the second verse:

*“we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load”*

We have all valued and appreciated the love and support we have received and continue to receive from our Mothers’ Union family during these “COVID times”. We need to be kind to ourselves and each other and perhaps look at the **“Count your Blessings”** calendar and see all the different reasons we have to be grateful for and give thanks.



Every blessing,
Margaret