

IN TOUCH.....

.....with Mothers' Union in Connor Diocese

Dear Fellow Members,

It is with a great sense of joy and privilege - and not a little trepidation - that I write my first letter for *In Touch* as your new Diocesan President for 2025-2027. I would like to thank my predecessor, Sally Cotter, for her unstinting and faithful work over her six years in office and for her continued help and friendship.

At the time of writing, I am looking forward very much to the Annual Diocesan Festival Service in St Anne's Cathedral and my commissioning within that service as Diocesan President for Connor Diocese.



I am delighted to say that Moira Thom and Irene Gates will also be commissioned at the service as the new Diocesan Secretary and Unit Coordinator for Finance and Administration respectively. I am also delighted to announce the appointment of Rev'd Louise Stewart as our new Diocesan Chaplain, succeeding Archdeacon Stephen McBride who has completed his term of office. Louise will be commissioned at the Festival Service. I would like to congratulate each of them on their new roles and I look forward to working with them as part of the Connor MU Diocesan team.

I am also pleased that the service will include a celebration of the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Belfast Cathedral (St Anne's) MU branch. On behalf of the Diocese, I would like to extend our congratulations and warmest good wishes to the branch on this very significant and special milestone.

I became a member of Mothers' Union in 1991 following my marriage to the Rev'd Clifford Skillen in my home parish of Bangor Abbey, where he served his curacy. Greatly encouraged by my mother, who had been a member of Mothers' Union for many years and was, at the time of my marriage, the branch's then Enrolling Member, I always saw the organisation as being instrumental in upholding the principles of Christian marriage and family life, as well as promoting friendship, fellowship and fun within parish and diocesan life and beyond.

When Clifford became rector of Upper and Lower Kilwarlin, near Hillsborough, in 1992, I became Branch Chair there. Subsequently we moved to St Polycarp's, Finaghy, in 1996, on his appointment as rector and apart from a few years' break when he took early retirement from full-time ministry, I have been Branch Chair there ever since.

We continue to worship in St Polycarp's, where I sing in the choir and act as a parish server, lesson reader and intercessor.

In the course of my 33 years' membership of Mothers' Union, and during my many years as a member of Trustees and Executive, I have held a number of roles - Projects Officer, *In Touch* Editor, Action and Outreach Unit Co-ordinator and Action and Outreach Unit Vice-President. By virtue of these last two posts, I was a member of the All-Ireland Action and Outreach Committee which met several times a year in Dublin.

I have also held the roles of Area Secretary and Area Chair for South Belfast and am now Area Contact. All of these posts have broadened my knowledge of Mothers' Union and brought me into contact with members and clergy around the Diocese, enabling me to build up valuable links and relationships.

I greatly value the concept of a team-based approach to issues, with all members feeling valued, having an input and a part to play, not forgetting the importance of a healthy sense of fun, enjoyment and togetherness.

This year, our MU theme is 'Join us and Join in' and we are challenged to consider bringing our gifts and talents to MU within our branches, areas and Diocese; maybe this will involve taking on a new role or volunteering to help with some MU projects. We will also be looking to encourage new members into our MU family.

My vision for the future will be to put these ideas into practical action; to seek to raise the profile of our worldwide organisation; to strengthen and encourage members and their work in the branches; and to uphold the core aims and objectives of Mothers' Union.

I would very much welcome the opportunity to get to know you all better and establish and consolidate links and relationships, all of which I believe should be underpinned by worship and prayer, both individual and collective.

You are the lifeblood of our organisation at grassroots level and are to be congratulated not only on your faithfulness and work within your own parishes but also your outreach to local communities, particularly since the challenges posed by Covid.

Outside my MU role, I love working part-time in Phillips car showroom in Lisburn as the receptionist and in my spare time (what spare time?!), I go to a weekly Pilates class, exercise with a personal trainer, enjoy shopping, eating out with friends and travelling abroad!

As we look ahead to the future together, may I leave you with some words from the book of the prophet Jeremiah (29: 11, 12) which speak to us of God's love and care for us all:

For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

With love,

Alison x

PRESENTATIONS AT DIOCESAN COUNCIL

Presentations at Autumn Diocesan Council were made to Sally Cotter as she completes her term of office as Diocesan President, Irene Gates as she finishes her role as Diocesan Secretary and Emma Ferris as she finishes her role as Diocesan Treasurer. The diocese is very grateful for the dedication all three ladies have shown to their respective roles.

Thank you Sally, Irene and Emma!

(Irene will move to the Finance & Administration Unit as Unit Coordinator – Moira Thom, a former Diocesan President, has been appointed Diocesan Secretary to replace Irene).



(Sally)



(Irene)



(Emma)

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NEW LEADERSHIP IN THE MU WORLDWIDE BOARD OF TRUSTEES ELECTED FOR THE NEXT TRIENNIAL



Kathleen Snow, on being elected, said: 'I look forward, in fellowship with members around the world, to continuing to do God's work by serving the most disadvantaged in our communities, remembering that, with God, all things are possible'

Kathleen Snow – Worldwide President

BREAKING NEWS AS WE GO TO PRESS!



KAY CLARKE
ALLIRELAND PRESIDENT



JUNE BUTLER
ZONAL TRUSTEE - IRELAND

SOPHIE, DUCHESS OF EDINBURGH, HAS BEEN APPOINTED PATRON OF MOTHERS' UNION. SHE FOLLOWS IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE LATE QUEEN ELIZABETH II.



Calling out violence against women and girls.....

CONNOR MARKS 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

On Saturday 23rd November members braved the rain and the wind to gather at the Dunsilly Hotel for our Diocesan event to mark the “16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence”. Organised by our Social Policy Contact, Jacqui McLaughlin, the event brought together three key organisations working to respond to the issue of Domestic Abuse and Gender Based Violence.

We learnt how women can seek help from the Rowan Centre following abuse, how the PSNI is dealing with the issue through improved training for officers and specialist teams, and how Women's Aid continues to provide practical help and support to those in difficult situations. All Ireland Social Policy Rep (Northern) Cathy Doig stepped in for our All Ireland President to give a brief overview of the our **RISE UP** campaign and encourage branches to get involved and to apply for the bronze, silver and gold awards to achieve recognition of their achievements. DP Sally brought the morning to a close with Midday prayers, and all those present left feeling more informed, encouraged and equipped to continue our work in this area.

For more info: [RISE UP Against Domestic Abuse | Mothers' Union \(mothersunion.org\)](https://www.mothersunion.org/)

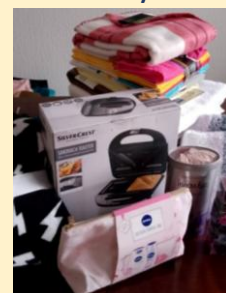


WOMEN'S AID SUPPORT FROM DERRIAGHY MU

Christ Church Derriagh Branch recently handed over 4 starter packs including air fryers to their local Women's Aid hostel. These items will make such a difference to women leaving the hostel.

CARNMONEY MU SUPPORTS WOMEN'S AID

Women's Aid, as always, were pleased to receive seven boxes containing towels, pyjamas, underwear, women's, children's and baby clothes, toiletries, cutlery, crockery, sandwich toaster and other miscellaneous items as well as 15 Christmas gift packs. Everything was gratefully received by the staff.



..... and helping hands from our branches



St Jude's Muckamore presented a quantity of essential goods to Women's Aid, Antrim – all had been provided by Branch Member Iris Maughan.

The members of **Eglantine Mothers' Union** presented the guest speakers from Women's Aid Lisburn with 12 starter cleaning packs for when the ladies move out from the hostel into their own homes. They also provided emergency soap bags for the hostels. A big thank you to everyone who generously donated.



AGHERTON BRANCH SUPPORTING WOMEN'S AID

Agherton Branch in Portstewart handed over 5 starter packs to Kate Coates from Causeway and Mid Ulster Woman's Aid. The packs consisted of cleaning materials and an air fryer - essentials for women leaving the local hostel to set up a new home. The branch members all very generously donated cleaning items and cash to buy the air fryers. What a generous project ladies!



Brilliant work, ladies!

CARNMONEY MOTHERS' UNION SUPPORTING LOCAL HOSPITALS

It was another busy year in 2024 for branch members at **Carnmoney Parish Church**, with 140 knitted baby hats, cardigans and incubator blankets delivered to the Neo Natal Dept. at Antrim Area Hospital. The staff at A & E, Antrim Area Hospital were also delighted to receive 100 Emergency Toiletry Packs, which they said are much needed as they have many patients coming through A & E for admission who don't have any families or friends for support.



APPRECIATION FROM OUR HOSPITALS – WE REALLY DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

From the Royal Victoria Hospital Emergency Care Village about emergency toiletries bags

'It is so good when the nursing staff are able to pass these lovely items on to patients at a time when they are so much needed and appreciated. Often there will be some patients who have no visitors at all and some who may be homeless with no means of getting personal belongings. I remember in particular a lady who had been very uncomfortable and sick overnight who was just delighted to have an opportunity to freshen up. Another lady who had burns to her face loved the beautiful soft facecloth, another stranded many, many miles from home. Thank you.'

This card from the staff at Meadowlands, Musgrave Park Hospital, read:

'Just a quick thank you for all your support and donations to Meadowlands 3.

It is all much appreciated and often makes a big difference to our patients.

Many thanks.'



CHRIST CHURCH LISBURN SUPPORTING BABY BASICS

Christ Church branch in Lisburn continues to support Baby Basics with regular supplies of knitted cardigans, blankets and other essential items. This is a snapshot of just part of a recent batch!



80 years young!

Naomi Nortcliff, a member of Christ Church Lisburn branch recently celebrated her 80th birthday with family and friends.

Happy Birthday, Naomi!



Meeting Bev, the Mothers' Union Chief Executive

A group of Connor Diocesan Trustees attended a special meeting at Kiltarnan Parish Centre with MU Chief Executive, Bev Jullien.

Pictured (l-r) are Joyce Bond, Alison Skillen, Cathy Doig, Moira Thom, Sally Cotter and Bev Jullien.



St Polycarps (Finaghy) Branch marks its 80th Anniversary

"A wonderful occasion of celebration and of friendships renewed and memories shared" was how Alison Skillen, St Polycarp's Mothers' Union branch chair, described a recent evening marking the 80th anniversary of the parish's Mothers' Union branch.

The branch was founded in 1944 by Dorothy Butler, wife of the then rector of Finaghy, Canon John Charles Butler. One of the special guests was Dorothy Anne Crawford, the Butlers' daughter, who represented a welcome and valuable link between past and present. Mrs Crawford cut an anniversary cake during light refreshments following the service.

(Photo: Mrs Crawford & Alison Skillen cut the splendid anniversary cake)



Connor Mothers' Union benefits from Dean Forde's 2024 Black Santa Sit out

The Connor MU Diocesan President was accompanied by members of the Trustees and Executive at the Good Samaritan' Service to receive an award towards the 'Away from it All' scheme (AFIA). The generous donation to Mothers' Union for the AFIA scheme was £2000. The scheme provides funding for short breaks to those experiencing stress, financial hardship or other trauma in their lives. It is also available to young people going to summer camps such as Crosslinks or Scripture Union.



MU Representatives with Guest of Honour,
Dame Mary Peters

DESSERT ANYONE?



Agherton Branch in Portstewart held a 'Pudding Party' which, needless to say proved to be very popular!

Well, who doesn't love dessert??

MOTHERS' UNION A.F.I.A. (AWAY FROM IT ALL) SCHEME

The AFIA Fund in Connor Diocese MU exists to provide short breaks, days out for those facing any kind of difficult period in their lives, or to provide financial support for young people going to summer camps.

Application forms may be obtained from:
mothersunion.connor@gmail.com

From the editors of this edition – Moira Thom & Cathy Doig

We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of In Touch. We are delighted to announce the appointment of **Cathy Doig** as Editor of In Touch so please send news and photos to Cathy at connorintouch@gmail.com

This is YOUR magazine so please send your branch news for the **Autumn 2025** edition. Send any news and photos **by 10th October 2025**, or as early as possible. Thank you!

'Big Sing' Finale in Ballymena

St. Patrick's, Ballymena was the place to be on Saturday 16th November as the fundraising year for the Mums in May Fund drew to a close. Members and friends from all over Ireland were joined by the Clare Chorale from Ballyclare for the final 'Big Sing' and it was clear that all the practising throughout the year had paid off as the singing was fantastic! The collection for the Mums in May Fund amounted to over £1700 – a phenomenal boost to the Mums in May Fund.

Those taking part included the Most Rev John McDowell (Archbishop of Armagh), Rev Canon Mark McConnell (Rector of St Patrick's), Ven Dr Stephen McBride (All Ireland Mothers' Union Chaplain), and June Butler All Ireland President. Special thanks to the members from St Patrick's Ballymena Mothers' Union and the Connor Trustees for providing a much needed cup of tea and sweet treat after the service.