



Diocese of Down and Dromore

Annual Report

For the year ended 31st December 2023

Charity Number NIC 105094

Legal and Administrative Information, with addresses for correspondence

Charity Name: Mothers' Union Diocese of Down and Dromore

Charity Number: NIC 105094

Principal Office Bearers

Diocesan President – Mrs Mavis Thompson, 203 Ballynahinch Road, Dromore BT25 1EU

Diocesan Secretary – Mrs Phyllis Whiteside, 5 Moyra Park, Saintfield BT24 7BG

Diocesan Treasurer – Mrs Lynda Bremner, 40 Garnerville Park, Belfast BT4 2NY

Trustees:

Mrs H Arnold, Mrs E Briggs, Mrs P Burrell, Mrs M Edwards, Mrs H Leckey, Mrs E Lester, Mrs R Macartney, Mrs S McCurry, Mrs C Stewart, Mrs R Teggarty, Mrs L Thompson, Mrs M Thompson, Mrs P Whiteside

Bankers:

Ulster Bank Ltd, Connswater Branch, Arches Retail Park, Belfast BT5 4AF

Independent Examiner for Accounts: Mrs Wilma Cathcart, 7 Grange Crescent, Saintfield, Co Down, BT24 7NE

Purpose, Aims and Objects of Mothers' Union

The Purpose of Mothers' Union is to be concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life.

The Aim of the Society is the advancement of the Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and family life. In order to carry out the Aim, its Objectives are:

1. To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and promote its wider understanding.
2. To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church.
3. To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service.
4. To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
5. To help those whose family life has met with adversity.

Mission Statement

The Mothers' Union is a Christian organisation which promotes the well-being of families worldwide. We achieve this by:

- Developing prayer and spiritual growth in families
- Studying and reflection 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.

The Trustee Board

The Byelaws for MU in the Diocese of Down and Dromore require that the Trustee Board shall be elected triennially by Diocesan Council and that nominees for membership of the Trustee Board must be or have been members of Down and Dromore Council.

The Trustee Board is comprised of the Diocesan President, four elected Vice-Presidents, Diocesan Secretary, Diocesan Treasurer, four Unit Coordinators, Hospital Visitor, Indoor Member Contact, Links Correspondent, Media and Public Relations Representative, Worldwide Representative, Prayer Representative and Young Members Representative. There are also ex officio (non-voting) Members including the Diocesan Chaplain, the Bishop's spouse, Social Policy Representative, AFIA Representative, Area Representatives and the immediate past Diocesan President.

The Trustee Board meets at least twice a year and at such other times as the Diocesan President may deem necessary; half the membership constitutes a quorum. It has the power to form sub-committees and may co-opt a number of persons who might not be members of Mothers' Union to act in an advisory capacity.

Accounts are passed annually by the Trustee Board and an Honorary Auditor/Independent Examiner is appointed by the Trustee Board.

Unit Committees

There are four Unit Committees, each concerned with an area of activity or interest on behalf of the Trustee Board.

- Finance and Central Services – deals with finance and matters related to administration and governance
- Action and Outreach – primarily manages projects and campaigns, and provides links with members and projects worldwide
- Faith and Policy – focuses on underpinning all our activities with prayer and Bible study and provides resources for services and meetings
- Fundraising and Communications – prepares publications and leaflets on relevant matters, coordinates media activity and publicity, and leads on fundraising activities.

Diocesan Council

The Council comprises: Members of the Trustee Board, all Branch leaders and Secretaries, Diocesan Members, All Ireland Office Bearers resident in this Diocese (ex officio), all Past Diocesan Presidents (ex officio). Diocesan officials are elected to serve for a three-year period and shall be eligible to serve for one further three-year term whether consecutively or at intervals. Retirement for any reason during a three-year period of service shall be considered as completion of such a three-year period.

The Council meets at least twice each year and thirty-six members constitutes a quorum.

In cases of unavoidable absence of Branch Representatives, substitutes are eligible to attend. All Diocesan Council meetings include a time of worship, the Mothers' Union Prayer and Wave of Prayer.

Method of Election

Office bearers (the Trustees) of Down and Dromore MU are elected triennially, in accordance with the Constitution of Mothers' Union in Ireland and the Diocesan Bye Laws. They must stand down from office after three years but may be re-elected to that role for a further consecutive triennial, after which they are no longer eligible to be re-elected to that position. All roles commence at the beginning of January, with the Diocesan President being elected the previous year to take up that role i.e. in 2025, 2028, with the other office bearers a year later 2026, 2029 etc.

Administration

As required by law, the annual report from the Trustees for Mothers' Union in the Diocese was submitted to the Charity Commission (NI) in October 2023 in respect of 2022. The Trustees have

continued to improve the governance of MU in the Diocese and in Branches in various ways during 2023.

Achievements, Performance and Public Benefit

The Trustees have complied with their duties in line with the Charity Commission's Public Benefit statutory guidance.

All the activities of Mothers' Union in the Diocese, as demonstrated below, have been conducted throughout the year to fulfil our statement of Public Benefit.

Finances

Our finances are managed with the Finance and Central Services Unit, primarily by the Treasurer who liaises closely with the bankers and prepares and presents reports and interim statements to each meeting of the Trustees and Diocesan Council. The Treasurer also reports to meetings of the Finance and Central Services Unit as required. Any cash received within branches or centrally is counted under dual control.

Formal Meetings in 2023

Diocesan Trustees met on 9 March, 7 June and 12 October with other meetings with DP, VPs and Unit Coordinators held as necessary.

Diocesan Council met on 26 April and 25 October.

The **Unit Committees** met as necessary throughout the year.

All Ireland meetings were attended by Diocesan President Mavis Thompson by Zoom and in person.

All Ireland Unit meetings took place by Zoom and were attended by the Unit Coordinator or representative.

Britain and Ireland Diocesan Presidents Update Meetings took place by Zoom.

Services and Special Events

AI Diocesan Presidents' Awayday – 28 January in CITI Dublin

Annabella Hayes Day - 7 February by Zoom

AI Worldwide Service – 16 March Speaker Chantale Mbanda, a Bishop's wife from Rwanda

AI Training Weekend – 24 – 26 March held at An Grianan, Termonfeckin

Annual Festival Service – 30 March held at St Mark's, Newtownards

Prayer Walk -9 August Mary Sumner Day from Bangor Abbey

Indoor Members Holy Communion Service and Tea Party – 7 September at St Donard's Parish Church Belfast

16 Days of Activism Breakfast – 25 November at Temple Golf Club

Advent Carol Service – 4 December at Knockbreda Parish Church, Belfast

Mothers' Union Branches – Newcastle, Gilford, Annahilt and St Mark's Newtownards were visited and also Willowfield and Dromore Area Services

Service and lunch to celebrate Seagoe MU 100 years

Throughout the year at Church services and other events, members were supported by the Diocesan Chaplain, Rev Duncan Pollock.

Members attendance at External Events

Commissioning service of Diocesan President Sally Cotter and Trustees for Connor Diocese - 12 March attended by Diocesan President Mavis Thompson.

Presbyterian Women's Annual Conference – 4 May attended by Diocesan President Mavis Thompson

AI Chaplain's Commissioning Service – 11 June at St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh.

AI MU Conference – Changing the Story - 15 September Seagoe Parish Centre

Women's Getaway Weekend – 6/7 October at Hotel Kilmore, Cavan. The speaker was Melanie Douglas. Several members attended and found it very encouraging.

MU Service of Holy Communion in Christ Church Dublin 2 November. Four members travelled from Down and Dromore, but because of travel restrictions after floods, did not arrive in time for the meeting but joined members from Dublin and Glendalough for coffee after the service.

All Ireland Council meetings were attended by Diocesan President and Trustees on 22 April by Zoom and 21 October in person at Seagoe Parish Centre, Portadown.

The Women's Refuge in Newry was visited by Diocesan President Mavis Thompson and a few Trustees in December.

Elections in 2023

There were no elections held in 2023, but in November one of the Unit Coordinators stood down from her position due to beginning training as a Diocesan Lay Reader.

Project work in support of our Aims and Objects

Action and Outreach

Prisons Outreach – we are pleased that once again Mothers' Union volunteers from throughout the Diocese have been able to resume the craft classes in Hydebank Wood College – the Women's Prison for Northern Ireland. They meet on a weekly basis to make various items of craft that can be kept by the women. At Christmas each female resident received a gift of shower gel, chocolate and a Christmas card.

AFIA – in 2023 we were able to help one family, whose son has severe autism, have a short break at the Roe Park Resort.

Support for Women's Aid Newry and Bangor - donations of groceries, clothing, toiletries, toys and other basic necessities are made by members and branches and are distributed to the two Women's Aid shelters in Newry and Bangor. This year we were once again able to host an afternoon tea party with the ladies and children in Newry.

Emergency wash bags – filled emergency wash bags were distributed to all three hospitals in our Diocese. These items are stored in the ED and Children's Department to use when an unexpected stay in hospital occurs. In the Children's Department, parents think of their children when they are taken into hospital, but don't think of themselves when they have to stay with their children.

Knitted baby clothes/blankets – knitted items were donated by members and distributed to Neonatal departments in hospitals and were gratefully received.

Twiddle muffs and knee blankets – the Ulster Hospital is particularly grateful to receive these items for the many elderly patients, including those with dementia, who have to wait in the Emergency Department for treatment or admission.

Outreach to Foodbanks – in 2023 the Trustees again agreed to support six foodbanks around the Diocese by donating groceries and other essential items to the value of £100 to each of them. Trustees contacted the foodbanks in Dromore, Kilkeel, Portadown, Banbridge, Bangor and Belfast to confirm their needs and delivered the items to them. This year we were awarded a grant of £600 from Mums in May to match the amount the Diocese had donated so we were able to supply the foodbanks a second time. Gifts of food and some seasonal treats were very much appreciated by the foodbank managers.

Worldwide – this year Down & Dromore hosted a Worldwide Evening on 16 March at Seagoe Parish Church when we heard from Chantale Mbanda, a Bishop's wife from Rwanda, about the work Mothers' Union is doing there.

Faith and Policy Unit

Prayer Chain – members of the Diocesan Prayer Chain are united in giving prayerful support when urgently required. Those who are ill, bereaved, in despair, those with depression or anxiety or any other needs feel the support of those who are praying.

Indoor Members – indoor members in the Diocese are not forgotten, receiving birthday cards and reflections sent from Mary Sumner House and on 7 September we once again were able to have the Communion Service and Tea Party at St Donard's Church, Belfast. It was great to see so many members present and everyone enjoyed the afternoon.

Diocesan Visitor – visits to members at home or in Nursing Homes are made during the year. Where it isn't possible to visit, cards are sent.

Social Policy – Saturday 25 November was when we marked the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. A Prayer Breakfast was held at Temple Golf Club where the speaker was Detective Chief Inspector Heather Campbell of the Rape Crime Unit in the PSNI and head of the MARAC team, a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment organisation relating to Domestic Abuse. Also in attendance were representatives from the two Women's Aid refuges in the Diocese, Baroness Ritchie, Lady Eames and Bishop David and Mrs Hilary McClay.

Fundraising and Communications

Midday prayers are available through Facebook and on Down and Dromore's Facebook page members can follow what is happening in the Diocese and keep up to date with the latest news. The All Ireland website is regularly updated with news, prayers and upcoming events as well as a monthly letter from the All Ireland President. "Focus" was once again available in print.

Membership

Mothers' Union membership is 851 including 19 Diocesan Members. Sadly we had a few branches close, but some members joined other branches or became Diocesan Members. Some branches welcomed new members.

Planning for the Future


We look forward to 2024, our fundraising year for Mums in May – an All Ireland Fund which provides grants to the Dioceses and Mothers' Union Branches for projects. Big Hymn Sings and tea parties are planned and it is hoped that these might encourage new members to join Mothers' Union.

Signed on behalf of Trustees

Mrs Mavis Thompson – Diocesan President

.....  Date 1/8/2024

Mrs Heather Leckey – Diocesan Secretary

.....  Date 1/8/2024

Mrs Marion Edwards – Finance and Central Services Unit Coordinator

.....  Date 1/8/2024