



Diocese of Down and Dromore

Annual Report

For the year ended 31st December 2024

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 Heather Leckey, 2 Clara Park, Belfast BT5 6FD

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

Trustees:

Mrs H Arnold, Mrs P Burrell, Mrs M Edwards, Mrs H Leckey, Mrs E Lester, Mrs R Macartney, Mrs S McCurry, Mrs L Thompson, Mrs M Thompson, Mrs P Whiteside, Mrs E Walker

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 2023. The Trustees have

continued to improve the governance of MU in the Diocese and in Branches in various ways during 2024.

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 2024

Diocesan Trustees met on 11 April and 7 October with other meetings with DP, VPs and Unit Coordinators held as necessary.

Diocesan Council met on 17 April and 28 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

Annabella Hayes Day - 7 February by Zoom

Annual Festival Service – 21 March held at Dromore Cathedral

Indoor Members Holy Communion Service and Tea Party – 16 May at St Mark's Parish Church, Newtownards

Down & Dromore Holy Communion Service – 1 August at Down Cathedral, Downpatrick

Down & Dromore Big Hymn Sing – 8 September at St Finnian's Parish Church, Belfast

Meeting with Mothers' Union CEO – 2 November at Kilternan Parish Centre, Dublin

All Ireland Big Hymn Sing – 16 November at St Patrick's Parish Church, Ballymena

16 Days of Activism Event – 23 November at Seagoe Parish Centre, Portadown

Advent Carol Service – 2 December at St Mary's Parish Church, Comber

Mothers' Union Branches – Annahilt, Bangor Parish, St Dorothea's and Ballywalter were visited

Saintfield Branch Mums in May Tea Party, a 102nd Birthday party, Connor Diocese Holy Communion Service and the Funeral Service for Down & Dromore's oldest Mothers' Union member were attended

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

Members attendance at External Events

Craft Community of Interest – 8 March by zoom

Connor Diocese Festival Service – 21 April attended by Mrs Phyllis Whiteside Vice President as The Diocesan President was attending another event

MU Service of Holy Communion in Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin – 2 May

Connor Diocese Holy Communion Service – 6 June was attended by Diocesan President Mavis Thompson

Diocesan President attended several meetings to produce a Mothers' Union Worldwide Powerpoint

Women's Getaway Weekend – 11/12 October at City Hotel, Armagh. Several members attended and found it very encouraging

A few Trustees visited the Critical Pregnancy Unit in the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald where members support the Emergency Department by providing Gynae Packs for those who have had a miscarriage

All Ireland Council meetings were attended by Diocesan President and Trustees on 13 April at Kiltarnan Parish Centre, Dublin and 19 October at Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin when the new MU Chapel in the Cathedral was opened

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

Elections in 2024

Elections were held in November 2024, for the position of Diocesan President, Mrs Mavis Thompson having completed her three -year term. In September one of the Unit Coordinators stood down from her position due to family health matters.

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 continue 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 2024 we were able to help two families – one to have a midweek break and the other an evening meal out.

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.

Gynae Packs – a new way of supporting the Emergency Department at the Ulster Hospital Dundonald by providing items needed by those who have had a miscarriage.

Outreach to Foodbanks – in 2024 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. Gifts of food and some seasonal treats were very much appreciated by the foodbank managers at the beginning of the school holidays when supplies were low.

Worldwide – this year MU All Ireland produced a powerpoint depicting MU work around the world. Down & Dromore Worldwide Representative Mavis Thompson was a member of the committee producing this.

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 16 May we once again were able to have the Communion Service and Tea Party at St Mark's Church, Newtownards. It was great to see so many members present and everyone enjoyed the afternoon. The All Ireland Indoor Members representative attended this.

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 23 November was when we marked the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. An event was held at Seagoe Parish Centre where, after tea/coffee and scones we heard from Mrs Melanie Douglas, a survivor of Domestic Abuse. Melanie told her story and sang some poignant songs. At the end those who were at the event took a white or purple heart from the tree to remind them of the one in three who suffer Domestic Abuse. Representatives from the two Women's Aid refuges in the Diocese and Lady Eames also attended the event.

Fundraising and Communications

Midday prayers are available through Facebook and 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 750 including 18 Diocesan Members. Sadly we had a few branches close, but some branches welcomed new members.

Planning for the Future

We look forward to 2025 under the leadership of our new Diocesan President Mrs Lynda Thompson and to meeting with members around the Diocese at various events.

Signed on behalf of Trustees

Mrs Lynda Thompson – Diocesan President

..... Lynda Thompson Date 21st October, 2025

Mrs Heather Leckey – Diocesan Secretary

..... H. Leckey Date 21st October 2025

Mrs Marion Edwards – Finance and Central Services Unit Coordinator

..... M. Edwards Date 21st October 2025