

'... we may never know whose lives we touch ...'

Rosalind Bloomfield sees at first hand the value of the baby clothes knitted by MU members for premature baby units in hospitals.

When I was Action and Outreach Unit Coordinator for Connor Diocese, Barbara Turkington and I carried bags of lovingly-knitted matinee jackets, hats, booties and blankets - along with handmade snugglies - to the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital in Belfast. Never once did I think that anyone in my family would ever be in need of any of these items, so generously made and given.

On Sunday morning, 25th October 2015, our daughter, Clare, gave birth to a baby boy, Conor, at 32 weeks. His daddy, Graham, was in a state of shock, as we all were - the baby's due date was not until 16th December 2015. Three hours after he was born, Conor was sent by ambulance to an intensive care unit. Thankfully, mummy followed several hours later.

They received outstanding care and attention at both hospitals. Added to this was the support given by MU in generously supplying all the little knitted articles that premature babies need. My sincere thanks to you all. I can really tell you from my heart what a difference it makes to have these small, knitted clothes at what is a stressful time for new parents, never mind grandparents.

In photos I have seen, Conor was wearing a little, blue matinee jacket, with a blanket in a lovely shade of aqua over him. In another, he had a blue blanket covering him. Grandparents are allowed one visit to see the new baby and when we visited, he was only wearing a turquoise blue hat and matching booties, as he was having some light therapy. I can only imagine who knitted all these little items, but



Baby Conor keeping warm in hospital courtesy of MU knitters

whoever you are, your work was, and remains, very much appreciated.

In giving all these so very useful items, we may never know whose lives we touch, but each and every item daily makes a difference to someone's life.

The MU Prayer Circles have also been a source of strength at a worrying and anxious time.

Clare and Conor are doing very well, but, as I write, it will be a little while yet before he is ready to leave the Neonatal Unit; however, he has been handsomely dressed and is being well looked after while he is there.

Sooooo, keeeeeeep knitting, girls!!

PS: 12 weeks later ... Conor is thriving.


love




Moreen Rolston, Branch Chair of St Mark's, Ballysillan, MU, celebrated a very special 90th birthday in February. The surprise party organised by the branch was a wonderful evening filled with nostalgia and laughter.

Dates for the Diary

- APRIL 2016**
- 10th Connor MU Diocesan Festival Service, Belfast Cathedral, 3.15pm
- 20th North Connor Area Spring Service, Dunseverick, 7.30pm
- MAY 2016**
- 24th Young Members' Committee Fashion Show and Marketplace, St Patrick's, Ballymena, 7.30pm (see above)
- SEPTEMBER 2016**
- 3rd All Ireland Unit meetings: Action & Outreach and Fundraising & Communications
- 17th All Ireland Unit meetings: Finance & Central Services and Faith & Policy
- 22nd, 23rd MU General Meeting, Winchester
- OCTOBER 2016**
- 1st All Ireland Trustees (DPs)
- 15th All Ireland Council (VPs, Unit Coordinators and invited members)
- 25th North Connor Area Service, St Patrick's, Ballymoney, 7.30pm
- NOVEMBER 2016**
- 1st Mid Connor Area Service, St Catherine's, Killead, 8.00pm



 Christian care for families



 140 YEARS

The Young Members' Committee
 of Connor Diocese invites you to:

Here Come George's Girls!

FASHION SHOW AND MARKETPLACE


in St Patrick's, Ballymena,
 on Tuesday 24th May, at 7.30pm

Fashion by George at Asda

Come and bring a friend!
 Cost £5, inc. supper
 (all profits to Mothers' Union projects)

Charity Number: NIC 101658

Please confirm final numbers to Roslyn Graham on 028 2766 5076 or email: roslyngraham@talktalk.net by 14th May.



In Touch

with Connor Diocese MU

Mothers' UNION

Christian care for families

Spring 2016

MU Ireland website: www.mothersunion.ie



The Diocesan President writes ...

MU-optical illusions, images and body

Hello members,

This year, Mothers' Union is celebrating its 140th anniversary. How much the organisation has developed since it was founded by Mary Sumner in Winchester in 1876!! In September, the General Meeting will be held in Winchester as part of the anniversary celebrations. Do consider going - the General Meeting is great fun.

A SPECIAL BIRTHDAY

Last November, I celebrated a special birthday at the Diocesan Council meeting in Crumlin. As I was saying Grace, the lights went out, the fire alarm went off and in walked some members with the most beautiful birthday cake (see photograph below). I was also presented with a planter, which is still blooming.

I would like to thank you all for remembering my birthday and making it special.

OPTICAL ILLUSIONS

I also went to Edinburgh for four days. It is a really beautiful city. While visiting the Castle, I went into Camera Obscura, a building full of optical illusions, which is beside the Castle. You have all heard the expression 'Seeing is believing'. Well, the optical illusions that I saw certainly gave me food for thought. The photograph of my head on a plate without a body can't be true (see photograph below).

Of course, we know that a head can't exist without a body, so there must be a body, but we have no idea what that body is like. Is it complete? Are there parts missing or damaged? We don't know - we only see the head.

Do visit Camera Obscura if you are in Edinburgh; it is amazing how images can be distorted by mirrors and yet appear to be so real.

THE MU BODY

It started me thinking about what members and the public see when they look at images of MU. Are the images true or distorted? Everyone sees the head, but what about the body which supports the head? The Bible tells us that every part of the body is important and if one part is not active, then the whole body suffers.

How is the body in your branch? Are all the members supporting the branch and playing their part? Are the Diocesan Trustees receiving the support they need from members? I do hope so.

Our Worldwide President, Lynne Tembey, believes that every part of the MU's body is important and values each member's input, so I hope that every member had the opportunity to complete the Membership Survey.

As we are a grassroots membership organisation, it is very important that members' ideas are known. I would love to hear some of the ideas which were sent to Lynne.

SENIOR MEMBERS' PARTIES

I hope to see many members at the senior members' parties.

The invitation is for everyone, especially those who can no longer attend branch meetings, as they are part of the body of MU in the Diocese and need the support of the rest of the body.

SUMMER SUNS

Summer is on the way - we hope! Has your branch considered a social event in July or August? Perhaps a walk - come to Whitehead and walk the coastal path - or take the train or bus somewhere for shopping. It all helps to grow the branch.

I hope that you all will have a good summer and that each will feel part of the body of MU. God loves each part, whether it is a toe or the heart, and you are all valuable to our great organisation.

With all my love,

Valerie xx



The Diocesan President's birthday cake marking her special birthday



'Seeing is believing'

Derryvolgie MU branch celebrates 50th anniversary



Members and friends of St Columba's, Derryvolgie, MU branch marked the branch's 50th anniversary last October with a special service of thanksgiving, at which Helen Clarke gave the address, followed by a celebratory meal with an anniversary cake made by a branch member, Maureen Hughes. Connor MU Diocesan President, Valerie Ash, presented long-service certificates to a number of branch members, including one to a founder-member, Olive Courtney (pictured, right). Derryvolgie MU branch members are pictured (above) following the 50th anniversary celebrations, accompanied by the rector, the Revd Stephen McElhinney.

The love of a **FAMILY**
 is life's greatest blessing

Happy birthday to Mothers' Union!

By Fiona Thomas
MU Communications Manager

This year will see MU mark 140 years of faithful Christian witness, service and outreach to families of all faiths and none.

Since 1876, when Mary Sumner first brought together mothers in the rectory of her husband's parish of Old Alresford, Hampshire, to build their confidence in bringing up their children in the Christian faith, we have grown to an organisation of over four million women - and men - in over 80 countries throughout the world.

Why celebrate our 140th anniversary rather than wait for the 150th? In 1 Samuel, there is the story of Samuel marking an unlooked-for victory against the mighty Philistines by erecting a stone between Mizpah and Shen and naming it 'Ebenezer', meaning 'stone of help', as a permanent reminder of the leading and guidance of God: "Thus far the Lord has helped us".

Over the past 140 years, MU has faced, and will continue to face in the future, many challenges. Family life is under increasing pressure and the call on our resources is higher than ever, but we can look at how we



are meeting these challenges and say, like Samuel: "Thus far the Lord has helped us".

The same chapter in 1 Samuel recounts how, throughout Samuel's lifetime, the Lord helped both him and Israel to meet the challenges they faced. As we mark our 140th year, the future of MU is very much on our minds.

Our celebrations are about both marking how God has hitherto led and blessed our mission and how he is leading us into our future ministry and guiding us as we discern the needs in our communities that are necessary for stability for both families and

society as a whole.

This year, over 500,000 people will benefit from MU's support for family life. Many more will know the support of our membership without any tally being taken - because not only through our programme work but also in their daily lives our members support families in prayer, in voicing their support for policy changes and in their practical support.

There has never been a more challenging or exciting time to be part of MU - to be part of bringing positive change to family life. Our hope is to train more members to help more families and to encourage greater

outreach across those countries and communities where family life is under greatest threat.

To do this, we need the help of all our members to support MU in bringing positive change to family life through its work worldwide.

- To find out how you can help our organisation mark 140 years of faith in action, contact your local MU branch, our central Supporter Care line on 020 7227 0620 or email: communications@mothersunion.org.

(Fiona Thomas can be contacted directly at 020 7227 9734 or email: fiona.thomas@mothersunion.org.)



Cheques presented to MU at 'Good Samaritan' service

Connor MU Diocesan President, Valerie Ash, is pictured receiving two cheques from the comedian, Jimmy Cricket, at the annual 'Good Samaritan' service held in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, in February, when £195,000 collected during the pre-Christmas 'Black Santa' Sitout was distributed among 232 charities. MU received cheques for £800 for the Away From It All (AFIA) holiday project and £1,000 for the Overseas Fund. The Diocesan President thanked the Dean of Belfast, the Very Revd John Mann, and the general public for their generous support of the work of MU. (Photo: Karen Bushby)



Long-service certificates presented at St Mark's, Ballymacash

Last year, a number of MU members of St Mark's, Ballymacash, Lisburn, received long-service certificates.

They were Dorrie Christy (pictured), 62 years' membership; Isobel Stevenson, 55 years; Maud Fair, 51 years; Pat Jackson and Jean Morrison, both 45 years; Edith Patton, 40 years; Jean Dunn, 38 years; and Kaye Beck, 35 years.

Sadly, Dorrie Christy, the oldest member, died at the end of October, shortly after celebrating her 97th birthday. She had a long and healthy life and was a faithful MU



member. She will be sadly missed by her family and her many friends in MU.



Mary Sumner's personal prayer

By Lynne Colman
Connor Fundraising & Communications Unit Coordinator

For some time now, I have sat in NHS waiting rooms - too many to name - looking to take my mind off things. I looked through my MU diary and, for some reason, I kept going back to the personal prayer of MU's founder, Mary Sumner, written in 1876.

I kept asking myself: Where did she write it? What was going through her mind at the time? Is her prayer still relevant today?

With MU celebrating its 140th birthday this year, I thought it would be interesting to see how the prayer matches up today, so here goes, ladies:

*All this day, O Lord,
let me touch as many lives
as possible for thee;
and every life I touch,
do thou by thy
Spirit quicken,
whether through the
word I speak,
the prayer I breathe,
or the life I live.
Amen*

We touch many, many lives as we reach out to over 80 countries worldwide. We change women's



lives for the better, leaving behind women with faith, belief and love for MU. They, in turn, touch more lives.

Our prayers breathe life into many, especially the vulnerable and the sick. In return, our lives are enriched because we know that we are prayed for worldwide. We live with the knowledge that what we do at home and overseas makes us strong as an organisation, with faith woven through all we do and say.

Mary, may I call you that? I feel that your personal prayer is as relevant today as it was when you wrote it 140 years ago; it leaves us with a sense of belonging. I think I understand you a little bit better now - your struggle to touch and pray, strengthened by the Spirit, is now our struggle. Many things have changed, but some things never change.



When sending photos...

please note that the preferred format is from a digital camera, 300dpi and a good size (this would be one of the highest pixel settings on your camera). Alternatively, we can accept hard copy photographs, but we cannot guarantee that they will be returned.

The Iris Colvin Lifetime Achievement Award

By Valerie Ash
Connor MU Diocesan President

Iris Colvin was a former Chair (1988-1991) and Honorary Life Member of Women's Forum Northern Ireland and also a much-loved, highly-respected and matriarchal figure in business, professional and women's organisations and the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland.

Women's Forum Northern Ireland, to which Connor MU is affiliated, seeks to provide a forum for frank and open discussion on matters of common interest and concern to constituent women's organisations.

It also aims to facilitate and increase the contribution of women to public life in Northern Ireland, to promote equality of opportunity for women in all aspects of life, to attempt to ensure that women's interests are taken into account in all policy making and to promote and strengthen links between voluntary organisations.

Following Mrs Colvin's death in June 2013, the Forum wished to recognise her contribution to society and so set up this award in her memory.

It would be great if a Connor MU member were to be honoured with this award.

Connor MU is very fortunate to have a number of ladies who could have been nominated. We nominated Paddy Wallace and Roberta McKelvey; the winner will be



Connor MU Diocesan President, Valerie Ash (extreme left), is pictured with (from 2nd left) Joanne Woods; Ann Hill, Branch Chair of St George's, Belfast, MU branch; and Carol Bingham, Honorary Treasurer of Women's Forum Northern Ireland.

announced at a dinner on Saturday 9th April and we will have the result at the Diocesan Festival Service in St Anne's Cathedral on Sunday 10th April.

We send Paddy and Roberta our very best wishes and thank them for allowing

their names to go forward for nomination; perhaps you might like to think of others for nomination next year.

We are also delighted with this opportunity for publicity for the work of MU in Connor Diocese.

Derriagh MU branch activities

By Margaret Hanthorne
Derriagh MU branch member



Mona Latimer, who has been a member of Derriagh MU branch since 1986, recently celebrated her 90th birthday. A faithful parishioner of Christ Church, Derriagh, Mona spent her early years in the Mossley area of Glengormley, but since then, she has lived in the same house in Dunmurry. She worked for 25 years in the Inglis Bakery and latterly served for 20 years as a volunteer in the War on Want shop in Dunmurry, as well as being a member of St John Ambulance. Mona received a bouquet of flowers from branch members and everyone enjoyed a special celebratory supper and birthday cake. Congratulations, Mona.



Derriagh MU branch members came together during last year to knit a nativity scene for Christ Church. They thoroughly enjoyed it and would like to thank Dr Brian Neagle, the son-in-law of the branch's Enrolling Member, Irene Graham, for making a stable to display their work. The scene was in the church over Advent and right through to the Epiphany and was much admired and appreciated by members of the congregation and visitors to the church, especially over the Christmas season.

Presentation to Connor MU Honorary Secretary



Barbara Turkington (left), on behalf of the Connor MU Diocesan Trustees, presents Alberta Miskimmin with a planter in recognition of her nine years' faithful and dedicated service as Connor MU Honorary Secretary in view of her impending retirement from office.



PALACE LETTER