



**Mothers' UNION**  
Christian care for families

# *Newsletter December 2024*



*CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO ALL FROM  
ELY DIOCESAN MOTHERS' UNION*

**MU RETREAT, HIGHGATE HOUSE, CREATON, NORTHANTS: 25-27 OCTOBER 2024**



A weekend away at this country retreat house was a real blessing at the end of October. Philip Baker was instrumental in arranging and organising the accommodation and the programme, with Revd Paula Spalding leading the Services. Highgate House became part of the Christian Conference Trust this year, which has two other centres serving churches and Christian charities and organisations.

We arrived on Friday afternoon and were warmly welcomed with afternoon tea, before settling into our rooms, and then gathering together for Evening Prayer. Then there was a chance to admire the lovely scenery and beautiful sunset before we had dinner. We had several Bible Study sessions throughout the weekend, with free time in between each session, to have some quiet time, read and pray, or explore the grounds and the historic Manor House – as well as enjoying lots of chat and tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits! A Nature Trail provided an opportunity to wander through the trees and fields around the hotel. Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner were also included each day, with a choice of menus and enjoyable food.

There were 20 of us all together, mostly from the Ely Diocese, with two joining us from the neighbouring Dioceses of Peterborough and St Edmundsbury & Ipswich. The Bible Studies were based on well-known Songs and Prayers from the Old and New Testament. Each day started with Morning Prayer, then Evening Prayer before dinner, and finishing with Night Prayer (Compline) at the end of the day. Sunday morning worship included Holy Communion and I found this very meaningful to share in this special time together. In between we had a few study sessions during

the day and evening exploring the passages and sharing together. Paula had created an interactive prayer corner in one of our meeting rooms.

The readings included: Psalm 103; David's Prayer (1Chronicles 29:10-14); Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55); the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10); and the Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79). Each different passage sparked thoughts and comments about our faith and the faith of the Bible characters involved. I learnt a lot about these passages and gained some new insights. If Philip thought we might be stuck for conversation during the sessions, he was proved wrong by how engaged we were with the subject matter and discussions. We readily enjoyed the suggestion of singing some hymns and songs. (I think I would have liked more music content as well.)

The weekend concluded on Sunday afternoon with a "Feedback" session which had positive comments for all the hard work that Philip and Paula had put in. Another time it would be nice to have one longer break with free time during the weekend, to allow opportunity for more extended reading/praying/quiet times or exploring our surroundings. Although we weren't a very large group, smaller break-out sessions might have given more people the opportunity to engage with the conversations and share our thoughts.



*Members of the RCI group who were also meeting at the centre. All very elegantly dressed compared to our much more casual wear.*

*We joined in part of a very energetic worship session including lots of music and singing.*



During the weekend another group from the Reformed Church International (Zimbabwe) arrived. We were invited to join in with one of their (lively) worship sessions. One of ministers sent me a video taken of a few of us dancing! I hope to be able to put together a YouTube picture video showing some of the photos taken over the weekend, and will try and include the RCZ video.

The Centre staff were so friendly and helpful which made for a pleasant atmosphere. The company had only taken over the premises in June this year, when refurbishment of the building was completed, they were keen to ensure we had a good time and that any comments for improvements or issues were taken on board.

We think this retreat might be a "first" for MU in the Ely Diocese. It would be great to have another opportunity to do something similar another year. A "Very Big Thank You" to Philip and Paula for leading the weekend so ably and thoughtfully. I came home feeling rested and spiritually refreshed, having enjoyed the fellowship of the group – with a chance to catch up with fellow MU Members and also be able to make some new friendships.

Debbie Tye

## Ely Diocesan Mothers' Union Board of Trustees

We have come to the end of this triennium and many of the trustees have finished the six years maximum that they are able to stay in one post. Only one person has come forward to join the trustee board. This means that there will be some familiar faces continuing on the board but in different positions and I will give a complete list in the January Newsletter.

No-one has come forward to take the president's position so the decision has been made that three trustees will work together to cover this role and will be called vice-presidents. They will be Jean Webb, Debbie Tye and Hazel Williams, all names very familiar to you. We are fortunate that, unlike some diocese, we will continue to have enough people to lead on all of the areas we presently cover.

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## CHRISTIAN HOPE INTERNATIONAL

This year, Joanna and I have been given many knitted donations to go in the container which goes to countries in need of them.

I received a letter of thanks from the office in Romford.

*'It is 30 years since Christian Hope International first came into being, as a result of the horrendous events of the 1994 Rwandan genocide.*

*The first things that were requested were blankets and knits for the children, as the children and babies were dying from the cold. This was how Stitches of Hope was born, to save lives in Rwanda. Since then, hundreds of knitted items have been sent to Africa and more recently to the poorest countries in Eastern Europe. When war broke out in February in Ukraine, many of our handmade items brought hope and comfort to those who really need to feel remembered.*

*Over the past 30 years Christian Hope International has grown and now works through the Anglican Church both in Rwanda and Uganda, now supporting both children and adults and many projects to help those in need.*

*The organisers appreciate our support and wish to pass on their thanks.'*

Maureen Haigh

Thank you from me to all our knitters, and please keep knitting so we can keep on donating to those in need.

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**Haddenham MU** branch this Christmas sent bags containing essential items to the Sick Children's Trust to give to parents who unexpectedly have to stay at the hospital with their child.



### Tell me what is happening at your Branch

**I would love to spread the news and /or photographs of anything that is taking place where you are.**

**It is always interesting and can give other branches and groups new ideas.**

**Hazel**

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## Faith In Action – December 2024

Lots of Thank You's this month

Gifts of toiletry sets and chocolate selection boxes have started arriving for me to take to Mary's Child next week (along with a huge selection of excellent bedding, and other items). The Local Management Group is determined that they will continue the work that the Rev Carol Avery so passionately started, as a Living Legacy to her.

The Diocesan Trustees will be saying Thank You to Di Sabel for organising the Afia Holidays I am extremely grateful to her for taking this on, and doing it with care, compassion and competency. Thank You Di from all the families you have been involved with over the last five years.

Bottisham Brownies have kindly collected about 20 wallets and purses for Afia pocket money next year.

Our contacts for the Refuges and Hostels are happy to receive vouchers, and other items. Thank you for your fundraising efforts and generosity.

Thank you Haddenham branch for filling the Christmas bags for the Sick Children's Trust this year.

2 bags of knitted hat/scarf and mitt sets are going to the Haven Shelter for homeless/ rough sleeper women (Thank you to the Ely St Mary's member who knitted them all) this follows the very interesting talk we had at our Autumn Diocesan Meeting at Waterbeach, by Diana, a supporter of the project. We amassed a staggering amount of toiletries for which they are very grateful. It is good for us to have another project to support, in Cambridge.

We are in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence until December 10<sup>th</sup>, and there is a display in the South transept of Ely Cathedral; with a prayer focus for each of the 16 days.

As we come to the end of this triennium, and having completed 6 years in this Trustee position, I will be moving on to other challenges in January (producing the Annual Report to start with!) Maureen will continue as Local Projects Officer (thank you Maureen) and happy to receive domestic items as usual.

I will still be the contact for the knitted items for the Dementia ward at Hinchingsbrooke.

It has been a very interesting six years, and I have learnt so much about the support needed for people in our community.

Jean Webb

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This is the only item from the **Banner Exhibition** that has not got a home. If you recognise it as belonging to your branch, please get in touch so that it can be returned.

Ely Diocesan M U Charity no. 251394  
<https://www.facebook.com/MUElyDiocese/>  
Ros 01223 861846 [roswright1@gmail.com](mailto:roswright1@gmail.com)  
Hazel 01638 743897 [hwill66@icloud.com](mailto:hwill66@icloud.com)

Thursday Prayer in Ely Cathedral and on Zoom  
10.30am on 12th October  
Deidre Milner  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85209298628?pwd=VDTrciGq12BVz8luyEa34M6BRLZDIK.1>  
Meeting ID: 852 0929 8628 Passcode: 080127

At St George's Church, Littleport we have once again put on a display in the church advertising 16 days of Activism against Gender based Violence.

The red chair is up, draped with red ribbons threaded with notes about Rise Up. We have also displayed white & purple ribbons with information cards on a small tree. On our MU notice board contact numbers have been given for those requiring help.

On the first Sunday of the 16 days prayers were led by a MU member and a basket was put out containing white and purple ribbons attached to information cards with the QR code on.

Our secretary is taking part in an art exhibition, 'Hidden' in The House of Smalls, Edinburgh the exhibition is about Gender based violence. She sent the Mothers' Union information about Rise Up with her artwork which the gallery will display at the exhibition.



**THE HOUSE OF SMALLS**  
ART GALLERY  
**HIDDEN**

21 NOVEMBER - 22 DECEMBER 2024

TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH 25 NOVEMBER - WHITE RIBBON DAY, THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, AND THE START OF 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE - THIS IS AN EXHIBITION OF ARTWORK BY 60 WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE IN ANY OF ITS MANY FORMS.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS EXHIBITION CONTAINS ARTWORK AND TEXT WHICH MAY BE UPSETTING. PLEASE TAKE CARE WHEN VIEWING.**

MON: CLOSED  
TUES - SAT: 11AM - 6PM  
SUN: 12PM - 5PM  
*(These times are subject to change at short notice, please check social media)*

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@thehouseofsmalls  
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BREAKING THE... 



**WAVE OF PRAYER    10th to 12th DECEMBER**

This year there will be a flexible approach to filling our time during the Wave of Prayer. With less branches to cover the three days, the time slots have become much longer and some days or times are difficult for branches to achieve. Branch leaders will have a suggested day for their branch, but no time slot.

To help fill our time of prayer, I have produced a word search of our Worldwide Links for members to do at home, **DURING THE THREE DAYS.** While searching for the Countries, Diocese and names, you will be thinking about them and perhaps saying a prayer for them when each is found.

*Irene Porter    Worldwide Links*

The wave of prayer documents were sent out to branch leaders the week beginning 17<sup>th</sup> November. If you are unable to meet with your branch to pray together, please use the information to pray at home.

**There are also two separate attachments with this newsletter.** One is the word search mentioned above and the other is information from Yaxley branch and their link in Cyangugu Diocese in Rwanda explaining the work that the Mothers' Union do in their area, with some lovely photographs.

Hazel

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**A REFLECTION – December**

As we approach Christmas our thoughts turn to the joy of welcoming the baby who would become our Saviour. It is a wonderful time summed up in the phrase "Goodwill to all men" (and women, children, of all races, colour and faith). Or is it? That joy seems to evaporate so quickly in the gloom of British winter weather. Yet everything that Christmas, and Jesus, stands for is still there, therefore so too should our joy be.

I recently came across these words, presented in the form of a joke notice in a library – "The post apocalyptic fiction section has been moved to current affairs." And this is, I think, the true cause of our depression. The worst thing to deal with is uncertainty and we live in a world in which we have instant notification of events worldwide but we do not know what calamity is round the corner. But we do know that far too many people have the power of catastrophic destruction. No wonder we are worried.

My prayer this and every day is for self-interest to be turned into love of others and into the search for peace so espoused by Jesus. There are so many well-known passages in the bible speaking of love and peace, perhaps none more precious than Jesus' words captured in John 13:34 "A new commandment I give unto you: love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another".

The mindset prevalent among leaders of nations puts me in mind of another light-hearted but pointed quip – "Before we work on Artificial Intelligence should we not do something about Natural Stupidity?" Might I suggest that we harness these thoughts to extend the joy of Christmas through January and even beyond? Just as the old saying "a dog is not just for Christmas" is true, so too is "Jesus is not just for Christmas"! His teachings reported so thoroughly and clearly by the gospel-writers apply to us today just as much as they did 2000 years ago. His birth arguably means even more now than it did then because we understand its significance better. What Joy!

*Philip Baker (21<sup>st</sup> November 2024)*

