

MIAmnia

SUMMER 2023

ANGLICAN
MOTHERS UNION
AUSTRALIA



*Let every living, breathing creature
praise God! Hallelujah!*

Psalm 150:6 (The Message)



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Vision: Our vision is of a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful, and flourishing relationships.

Mission: Sharing Christ's love by encouraging, strengthening and supporting marriage and family life.

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

Its AIM is the advancement of the Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and family life.

Its FIVE OBJECTS are:

1. To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to 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.

MIAmia

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Have your say in Mia Mia

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and insights are welcome.

Please send all correspondence
to the editor.

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is at the editor's discretion.

No theme for next issue

Deadline for next issue:

22 January 2024

News from Mary Sumner House

Did you know you can join Mary Sumner House staff and others for Midday Prayers on Facebook at 12pm (GMT) every day? You can download the prayers and wave of prayer for the month from the Mary Sumner House website: <https://www.mothersunion.org/what-we-do/faith-and-prayer/midday-prayers-wave-prayer>

RISE UP
against
domestic
abuse



Do you want to make awareness of issues surrounding domestic abuse more than a 16-day wonder?

RISE UP Against Domestic Abuse is Mothers' Union UK's new campaign to raise awareness about domestic abuse. The letters of RISE UP stand for **R**espond, **I**nform, **S**upport, **E**mpower, **U**nite and **P**ray.

The aim is to make sure that activism against domestic abuse and gender-based violence happens 365 days a year and not just during the 16 Days of Activism campaign in November and December. Find out more at: <https://www.mothersunion.org/riseup>

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The Editor writes

Not long ago I was doing my usual wander around the local supermarket, trying to remember what I was looking for, when I was approached by another customer who asked the whereabouts of ...actually, I wasn't sure what she wanted. She repeated her request, all the while looking hopefully at me. Aha! I thought. She's wanting salt. So, I pointed her to the said item on the adjacent shelf. 'Food?' she asked. At least, I think that's what she was asking. I nodded my head in affirmation, assured her that we were looking at food-grade salt, she took it and made her way to the checkout. But was she asking for salt? Without an interpreter, and without being able to show her what was in the bag, I just had to hope for the best. How I longed to be able to communicate clearly with her; to be sure that we were on the same wave-length and that she did actually buy what she needed.

This little incident brought home to me the wonder of the Incarnation. It is Jesus's coming as a *man* that shows us how much God wants to communicate with us. As a man, Jesus gets us! Jesus understands what we are going through in our daily lives – he knows what it is to be misunderstood, to be let down by friends, to be the toast of the town one day and in fear for His life the next. He knows what it is to feel sad,

hungry, tired and thirsty. He knows what it is to be tempted to deny God in favour of satisfying self. But that's not all. Jesus knows how we long to be at peace with God, yet are completely unable to achieve this by our own efforts. But, hallelujah! As God-made-flesh, He has made it possible. As Paul puts it in Colossians 1: 19-20, 'For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.'

In this issue of *Mia Mia* a number of our contributors remind us of the glory of the event we call Christmas, when we celebrate that *God sent His Son*, and of the responsibility we therefore have to share the blessings of knowing and living in that truth with others.

As usual, we also have news from around the dioceses and from members of our Australian Executive. There are some recipes to try, some suggestions for ways in which to celebrate Advent and Christmas with children and some poetry and prayers to still the heart and focus the attention on the One who is 'the reason for the season.' May God bless you richly as you celebrate this wonderful event. I hope you enjoy reading the Summer 2023 *Mia Mia*.

Christine



Photo Credit: Rick Oldland on Unsplash



The President writes...

Emmanuel – God is with us

It is hard to believe that another Advent season is almost here, marking the start of a new church year. I pray you have had a great year in MU. I know I have enjoyed the opportunities to visit some of you and learn of your wonderful inwardly-nurturing and outwardly-focused work. I look forward to meeting more of you next year, especially when we are together to welcome our Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, and a person from the Mary Sumner House staff.

The season of Advent comes at a time when we are ready for a break from the demands of the calendar year but are also gearing up for Christmas festivities. Luckily, the church offers us a few weeks to reflect on the importance of Jesus in our lives and to help us prepare spiritually for his coming again. What does Advent symbolize or mean for you?

In some churches an Advent wreath appears and each week one of four candles is lit, accompanied by a short liturgy focusing on an aspect of joyous expectation and the assurance of Christ's presence in the world. Many acts of worship include hymns and songs that reflect Advent themes and specially selected Bible readings. Colour is also used to denote Advent – either purple or blue and some use pink on the third Sunday. While all these, and other activities, such as calendars, mark the season of Advent, this time also provides us with an opportunity to pause and reflect more deeply on the message presented each week.

The lectionary reading for the third Sunday in Advent comes from the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. This passage includes Joseph's dream in which an angel reassures him about Mary's pregnancy. Joseph is engaged to Mary, but when he finds out that she is pregnant (assumed soiled

goods), his culture dictates that he should dispose of her. Matthew 1:22-23 adapts the prophet's words from Isaiah 7:14, adding an explanation of the Hebrew term. *'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'* How wonderful is that – to be assured that God is always with us?

God is with us in various ways. Recently I was invited to speak at an afternoon tea in Toowoomba to raise funds for Anglican Overseas Aid's partners in the Diocese of Mt Kenya West. These people are enduring their fifth consecutive year of drought; a major disaster in the agricultural-dependent economy of Kenya and especially the Laikipia county – a desert nomadic community. The constant need for men to move livestock just to keep them alive means that women, children, the elderly and disabled are left behind, with little access to any food or water. Undernourished children have no energy to attend school and girls are walking long distances in search of water – risking their personal safety. Yet, God is with them in the midst of this terrible situation. School and family feeding programs supported by those of us with

an abundance enable many to experience the presence of God through our ministry. The afternoon tea function raised enough money to feed a school with one meal a day and 67 households for a month.

Through these seasons of Advent and Christmas may you and your families experience the close presence of God with you. May you also find opportunities to show Emmanuel – God with us – to those in your neighbourhood and among your social circles.

Robin Ray





Sharing God's love at Christmas

Christmas is a difficult time of year for many families in our communities. The rise in interest rates and the cost of living we have experienced recently will, I think, see more families struggle than ever before. It is so easy for parents to feel as if they are failing as parents if their children don't receive everything on their Christmas list, or if the lunch table is less elaborate than it was in previous years.

Over the years I've had many discussions with younger parents about the real *reason for the season*. Parents want the best for their children. However, I have witnessed parents being caught up in the commercialism of retailers wanting to increase their sales and profits. In most cases they believe that if their children don't have the latest toy or gadget they are failing as parents. This often results in ongoing financial hardship and in turn creates a season of stress and unhappiness which can last months or sometimes years.

As Mothers' Union members it is important that we remind the families around us what the season of Christmas is all about. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus with love, joy, hope and peace. We need to encourage families to focus on the joy, hope and peace that the season brings and teach children that God and love are most important in our lives. And, regardless of the gifts received and food that is eaten, without God and love our

lives may not be as joyful and peaceful as they could be.

Members can also be involved in planning Advent and Christmas activities within their churches. You can support your church to focus on involving families at this time of the year to share God's love and the story of Jesus' birth. This helps to remind families of the real meaning of Christmas. The Mothers' Union website has some great Advent and Christmas ideas and resources you can use in your church or branch. Please check them out if you haven't already! Mothers' Union also has a range of cards and merchandise that make great gifts for family members and friends at this time of year. Although an email or text message to wish someone a Merry Christmas is thoughtful, it is not the same as sending a Christmas card, making a telephone call or paying a visit to spend time with them.

Christmas can be a lonely time of the year for people who don't have family or friends around them. Can you reach out to others in love, joy, hope and peace? This is a great opportunity to make connections with those in your community who are homeless, alone or isolated. Christmas Day is a particularly difficult day for them. Most businesses in towns and cities close down and they essentially become ghost towns for a day.

We have a table in our church grounds which is often used by the local homeless folk as a place to meet, talk and rest. One of the most memorable Christmas Days I've ever had was when I went and sat at this table in the church grounds. It didn't take long for a few homeless people to join me. It quickly became apparent that they were keen for connection and conversation. They weren't at all interested in gifts or food; all they wanted was company. We sat and talked and it gave me great insight into their childhood and families. In essence, whether they knew it or not, we were sharing God's love with each other.

Kristi Day





Be joyful, keep the faith, do the little things

These words, in Welsh, are inscribed on the back of the processional cross used at the coronation of King Charles III in May this year. They are reputed to be the last words spoken by St David to his followers.

To me this inscription is another way of expressing the example that Mary Sumner set for us. I have been sharing it often with members of Mothers' Union as something that I believe we can aspire to – 'to be joyful, to keep the faith, and to do the little things. For if we accept that God sent his Son into this world in which we live to be our Saviour, if we accept that Jesus through his words and actions gave us an example of how we should live our lives while of this world, then we should also accept the calling to be of service in God's kingdom.

As members of Mothers' Union we are called to both prayer and to social action. So how do our fellow members in other places go about doing the 'little things', answering the call to be of service in branches, parishes and the wider community in which they are called to serve?

For Dorothy Sitae, and other leaders in **Papua New Guinea**, it has meant going down a mountain, across a big river and then up the mountain again, climbing over several obstacles along the way. This is what it takes for them to reach a remote village in order to give young mothers training. They left home at 7.00 am, arriving at 9.00am. They started with their usual Wednesday prayer meeting in the village chapel at 10.00am, then conducted a training session for the women of the village. At the end of the day, they travelled home the way they had come.

In the **Diocese of Kapsabet**, Mama Selline and members actively support community welfare projects, ranging from operating child care centres to teaching young women skills to allow them to be financially independent. Currently, Mothers' Union in the diocese supports the Kimngoror Health Centre, a faith-based Christian Health Association in Mosop. They give support to lactating mothers at the Centre and have undertaken repairs of water systems for the maternity wards so mothers can access clean water. They have also recently gifted the maternity wing with scales for weighing the babies and with curtains.



This year Mothers' Union in Kapsabet is intentional in focusing on addressing Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Nandi County, which is the geographical jurisdiction of the Diocese of Kapsabet. Under the leadership of Mama Selline Mothers' Union is running a 'Safer Communities' project that will address the issues from the church perspective.

In **Buganda**, a Bantu Kingdom within Uganda, the President of Mothers' Union, Josephine Kasaato, appears as a regular guest on Spark TV, a female-run TV station, speaking on marriage, parenting and relationships.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe had a Children's Ministry and Mothers' Union Fun Day for children with additional needs and their families. They had a time of celebration, music and story time, a short family-friendly reflection, and lots of fun activities.

Eshowe Archdeaconry Mothers' Union, in the **Diocese of Zululand**, make an annual outreach visit to Eshowe Correctional Services to support, motivate and build Christian relationships with the female inmates. Each year they bring gifts such as toiletries, a Bible for each person, clothing and fruit for the inmates.

In **Myanmar**, the focus of Mothers' Union continues to be on training, whether it be for business, parenting, bible study, Anglicanism or health. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic they made masks and distributed soap, hand sanitisers and thermometers. Community leaders are trained and empowered to go back to their communities and share their knowledge with the villagers.

I wonder what the needs are in your community? In your diocese? I wonder how you and your branch and diocese will respond to the call 'to be joyful, to keep the faith, to do the little things'?

Wendy Mabey



Flying asparagus



UN Climate Change Conference in 2015, nations have been working to develop strategies to reduce the production of greenhouse gases.

The General Synod Protection of the Environment Canon 2007 says: *'This Church recognises that climate change is a most serious threat to the lives of the present and future generations. Accordingly, this Canon seeks to reduce the release of greenhouse gases by this Church and its agencies.'*

As I walked through the fruit and veggie section of our local supermarket looking for a few items I needed to cater for some unexpected dinner guests, I noticed a basket of asparagus spears. I reached for a bunch and was delighted to find the spears fresh and crisp. My imagination went into overdrive. I could almost taste the delicious vegetable, lightly grilled and dressed with olive oil, lemon juice and freshly shaved Parmesan cheese.

The price was reasonable. Perhaps I'd take two bunches? But wait... I noticed the country of origin. Mexico? Why on earth was my local 'fresh food people' selling asparagus from Mexico? I put the bunches back in their basket and left the shop. My guests would not be enjoying grilled asparagus tonight.

Don't get me wrong. I have nothing against Mexico. However, I could not justify buying food with such a high level of embodied energy.

What is embodied energy? This phrase describes the energy required to create a product, and the energy used to transport it to the customer. It is important to account for this energy cost when assessing its effect on climate change.

Since the legally binding international treaty (Paris Agreement), to bring all nations together to combat climate change, was adopted by the

Many businesses and organisations are developing a plan, for example a Sustainability Roadmap, to do this. Such plans will incorporate commitment to the reduction of the use of consumable material by re-using and re-cycling, to the reduction of energy consumption and to the switching to renewable resources. This also includes tracking costs of production and to identifying and recording delivery costs.

Every organisation, be it a nation, government, business, church, or school has a responsibility to act to combat climate change, as has every person including politicians, farmers, you and me. Can we really justify transporting bunches of asparagus halfway around the world? While asparagus is tasty and desirable, it is not essential.

Asparagus takes a few years to grow and I cannot expect a crop from my own garden this year, but unless I find a source of locally grown asparagus, I'm sure my guests will enjoy their Chicken Oscar served with broccoli from the garden.

We acknowledge God is Creator whose first revelation is creation, and Jesus is the agent through whom all things have come into being and in whom there is life. ACSQ Sustainability Roadmap 2023 – 2030

Susan Skowronski



The heart of Christmas

I know that there is disagreement amongst Christian people as to whether Santa should be incorporated into our Christmas fun. When Michael, our first son, was born my husband, Peter, and I decided that we would give him the Santa experience. We remembered the excitement of Santa when we were children and wanted him – and our other children when they came along – to share it.

I suppose that the danger is that the story of Santa and the thrill of getting gifts from this unknown figure would become confused in young minds with the reality of Christmas. It could be that children will think that if Santa and his mysterious visits with real gifts was a fiction told to them by their parents, they would think that the Jesus story was also fantasy. And so, when Michael turned 6, Peter very seriously took him for a walk and a talk.

'Michael', he asked, 'Do you know that Santa is not real?'

'Yes, of course' he said, 'it's just you and Mum'. Then the conversation switched to cricket.

Now, I realise that some people have decided that they don't want to mention Santa at all. Parents must make up their own minds. However, what we do and say about Christmas is not determined on Christmas Day, or even in December. It is shaped every day of the year as children see what really matters to you and are aware of your real relationship with the real Jesus – that He is real and he is the head of your home. If you are not doing these things during the year nothing you do at Christmas will help.

Think of it this way. The people who play 'Santa' are all dressed up in bright robes and big beards. They look as though they belong in the shopping centre. Nothing could be more different to Jesus. He chose to come into this world, not pretending to be human – he was and is fully human. He is one of us. He belongs to us, and we belong to him.

The wonders surrounding his virgin birth, the shepherds, angels and wise men focus our minds on the glory of his coming. At the same time, the

Christmas story has the reality of a birth in very humble circumstances and the attempt by King Herod to kill him. Jesus and his family became refugees. There was nothing tinsel about him.

And then there was the reason for his coming. At Christmas, Santa gives out plastic gifts, gifts which do not last. The purpose of Jesus's coming was to become one of us so that he could confront evil. Evil brought him to the cross, but that cross saw the defeat of evil and the salvation of his people. And now he has been raised from the dead and reigns with his Father.

I, personally, would not mind if Santa disappeared. It may well be that, for many, he gets in the way of the reality of Christmas. Certainly, he is used by many to explain why we reach the end of the year with celebration. Instead of a happy by-product of the essential thing, he can become the essential thing.

But whatever we do with family celebrations, let us make sure that everyone present knows that Jesus is real, that he is one of us and that he has come to be the Saviour of the world!

We have been given the best Gift, the greatest gift of all. God has given us His Son who, unlike Santa, offers us not something which will fade, rust or break, but the gift of eternal life.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' John 3:16

Christine Jensen



Photo credit: David Orsborne from Pexels

Parenting with the time we have (Part 2)

As a mum who is in paid employment outside the home, parenting with the time I have left is something of a preoccupation. In the last issue of *Mia Mia*, I presented the first 3 of 6 ideas to help us do that (modelling, intentionality and togetherness). Here are the second 3!

Consistency

Consistency is the key with anything isn't it? If we're not consistent, it won't work. I am the proud survivor of about a million different diets that didn't work because I wasn't consistent!

But much of the Bible talks about steadfastness with the Christian faith and it's such a key attribute of parenting. How is our steadfastness worked out in the home, especially when we're so tired from work? By doing what you have intentioned to do and doing it consistently. James says in chapter 1 verses 2-4 *'Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.'*

James is writing to people who are facing very serious things that could steer them off course. The obstacles I'm talking about are being super busy and being time poor. But the sentiment remains the same. Busy-ness, juggling multiple needs, getting work done at the same time as parenting – these are the various kinds of trials that we are facing. And many of us will have other trials in the mix that nobody else knows about.

When we meet trials of any kind our faith is tested. Maybe for us it's not the kind of testing



Photo credit: Xavier Mouton Photographie on Unsplash

that causes us to just walk away from the faith, but it could well be the kinds of trials which cause us to drift away from the faith.

This is where we get to exercise our steadfastness. We need to be steadfast in our faith and our modelling. We all know that kids need routine and consistency. So in the face of our trials, we need to work out what we can remain consistent about and then keep doing it.

This can be as simple as having anchor points in your week that you don't have to think about, like church and youth and bible study. It could be the items you've developed in your intentionality¹ but whatever it is, it's looking to do those things consistently.

Help

But sometimes that takes help.

In Acts 2:42 we see that the disciples devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everything is done together. It's a community. It's a village. And villages help each other. In our communities of faith, we have friends, trusted brothers and sisters, youth leaders, ministers.

When you're in the moment it can be hard to remember that you can ask for help. We need to be OK enough with the chaos that work brings to be able to lean on the help and support that is present in the place where God has planted us.

It could be having a chat after church to get ideas about issues you're struggling with regarding the time that you have. Talking to someone about how you might frame your intentionality piece. It could be asking for prayer or joining other families for a meal.

It could be talking to the youth leaders to see how church and home can reinforce messages in both places. It could be more practical help. For example, I had a week where I just knew the deadlines we were facing meant there was going to be some crazy hours, and a lovely Christian friend organised for meals to be delivered that week. It was so helpful for me, but it also showed my children God's love in action too. It showed them what it looks like to be part of a family of God.

¹ *Mia Mia*, Spring 2023, page 15

Prayer

So finally, prayer. Sometimes prayer can feel like the lamest thing when we're in work mode. I know that's a controversial thing to say, but it's true, isn't it? When we're at work, we are paid, more often than not, to make decisions and be in control. We are paid to be the responsible person who will solve the problems. Whether we're stacking shelves or running teams, we're paid to be largely autonomous. So the idea of putting that on one side to lay things before God can be difficult. When you're in the zone of work and doing what you're employed to do, re-remembering that God still needs to be involved in this situation is really hard.

And some are actually paid to be the person in charge. So it takes a brain switch to put God in charge instead. And that can spill into our everyday life. Our 'employed' approach to prayer can become our learned behaviour in the home where we also have responsibility in the domestic sphere.

I can highly recommend Paul E Miller's, *A Praying Life*². It was a really practical book that helped me to change how I prayed for my children, particularly in the chaos I was feeling with work.

Miller says, 'We prize accomplishments, production. But prayer is nothing but talking to God. It feels useless, as if we are wasting time. Every bone in our body screams "get to work." But, he says, learning to pray doesn't offer us a less busy life, it offers us a less busy heart.'

But prayer is real and necessary and good and effective. We should pray without ceasing because this is the confidence that we have, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us (1 John 5:14).

The great Martin Luther said that to be Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing. God wants us to talk to him. We need to talk to him. Our kids need to see us praying. They are learning from us about communicating with God. And we are praying for them and their daily issues and triumphs. We are praying for them as they grow, praying for their protection and praying for their eternity.

After reading Paul E Miller's book, I started

2 Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life*, Connecting with God in a distracting world, NavPress, 2017

praying in conversation rather than in a formula I thought I had to follow. I told God about the kids' day and about my day, as if I was telling my dad. Except I can ask God for things that my dad would not be able to help with at all. I can ask for God's help in very specific ways. I can ask for his protective hand. I can ask for resolution.

We can speak to him about anything and everything and we can ask him for anything and everything. And the fuller our prayer life, the richer the relationship with God and the more intricately our kids see us animating our faith.

Ruth Baker



Many parents, grand-parents and other caregivers are concerned about the effects of television and other screen-based information and entertainment on children, but feel unsure about the best way to protect and guide them in the use of such media. Children and Media Australia exists to provide research-based answers to many of the questions we ask, and to help those who care for children to make good choices based on a child's age and/or developmental stage.

The website, childrenandmedia.org.au, has a host of very useful information. This includes comprehensive movie reviews (very useful for anyone planning to take children to the movies over the school holidays), app reviews, 'Top Tips', resources and research. For example, a recent issue of *Small Screen*, their monthly newsletter, featured research on the effects on children of scary content, including that which is shown in 'ordinary' news broadcasts, along with some helpful suggestions about dealing with the anxiety and fear that children experience when exposed to such content.

If you want to arm yourself with well-researched information about anything to do with children and the media, this is a great resource.

Celebrating Advent and Christmas with children

'At-home' travelling family

Using paper cut-outs or simple puppets, make figures of Mary, Joseph, a donkey, several other animals and Jesus. Each week during Advent take the appropriate figures on a 'journey to Bethlehem', stopping for a time at various points around the house and garden, coming to rest on Christmas Eve at a simple 'stable' in 'Bethlehem'. At each stopping point read one of the scriptures listed, talk about it and pray, thanking God for what you have learned.

The figures can be made at home by children and their parents or grand-parents, or as an event hosted by Mothers' Union in a central place, such as the church building.

Suggested Bible readings

Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-5; Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:22-32; Luke 2:33-40; John 1:1-5 and 14-18

Treasure hunt

This is a variation on the Travelling Family idea. Each day in the week before Christmas children follow a clue to find in turn the figures of Mary, Joseph, a donkey, shepherds, a star, other animals and finally, Jesus. Each is accompanied by a scripture reading for discussion as above, then the figure is placed in a simple 'stable', such as a shoebox.

Porch nativity scene

Construct large figures of Mary, Joseph, Jesus and as many other figures as you wish from heavy cardboard or plywood and display them on your front porch during Advent. Alternatively, figures could be painted on a banner which can then be hung between porch posts or over a window.

Card making

Cards can be made using new materials or upcycled cards, and can be done by families or individuals at home or by groups, such as Mothers' Union, at a central venue. Finished cards can then be used in many ways...

...in packs to give as gifts to family and friends. Why not include some stamps as well?



... to send to people unable to join others for Christmas worship.

... to say 'thank you' to local business owners, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, SRE teachers, school chaplains, clergy and hospital chaplains and staff.

Children's book or poster display

Children in the church could write poems or stories or draw a picture on the theme, "God sent His Son". If mounted on A4 paper or card, these could then be put on display in the church for the period surrounding Christmas Day, or, if the number of contributions is small, photocopied and stapled to form a book to be given to members of the congregation. Alternatively, each contribution could be scanned and used as appropriate throughout the coming year in the weekly church service presentations.

Create a personal Advent calendar

Draw up a blank template of the days of Advent and fill in each day with a Bible verse (some suggestions can be found above), a prayer of thanks or of petition for individuals (family members, church friends, neighbours) or groups. If appropriate, include Link Dioceses or local groups your MU branch is associated with. Illustrate with drawings, stickers, magazine cut-outs etc and use as a prayer resource in the days leading up to Christmas.

This idea can be used personally or with children in church or during a 'granny day' with grandchildren by working together to fill the spaces with ideas suggested by the children. Make sure you have the template and other supplies prepared in advance.

Reprinted from *Mia Mia*, Summer 2020

Prayers for children

As the school year finishes

As we approach the end of another school year, we pray for our children and young people; some completing their first year, others leaving school; many finishing exams that will lead to decision making and change.

We pray that they will be guided wisely and realistically, supported and encouraged as they tackle new challenges. Protect each one through the school holidays when they are free from the structure and security of a school day. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen

Lorraine McConaghy, Ramoan & Culfeightrin, Province of All-Ireland

Taken from "Dear Lord..." © Mothers' Union 2018
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As a new school year begins

All too soon the summer holidays will be over and children will be preparing to go back to school. Some will be going back to familiar surroundings and friends; others will be starting in new schools, maybe with new classmates. There will be a mixture of emotions and attitudes that children have as they consider the term ahead. The support and encouragement of family and friends will help to smooth their way and give them confidence. In all our encouragement let's remember the importance of prayer both with and for our children.

A handful of prayers – these can be prayed together with children, or for them. Use fingers to remember each prayer theme. With younger children draw round their hands then let them draw their prayer ideas inside each hand outline.

1. Pray for your child's wellbeing

Even if your child is headed back to familiar territory, the new school year can bring all kinds of questions and concerns. There are new friends, new teachers and new anxieties.

Pray for your child's happiness and ability to accept change.

2. Pray for your child's education

With every new school year, new curriculum and teaching styles await your child in the classroom.

Pray for an easy transition, focus and understanding.

3. Pray for your child's teacher

Teachers have one of the hardest and most important jobs. Your child's teacher will play a pivotal role in your child's life for this year and many years to come.

Pray for your child's teacher's patience, understanding and grace.

4. Pray for your child's classmates and friends

What your child absorbs from the world outside of your home comes in a large part from your child's classmates and friends.

Pray for their friendships, intentions and morals.

5. Pray for a happy home

As summer ends, chances are your home has a new schedule. There are early morning wake-up calls, long days of learning at school and extracurricular activities.

Pray for good communication, easy transitions, cooperation and sleep!

From www.tommynelson.com

Hand prayers - share this prayer idea with your child and encourage them to use the actions as a prayer when they need to throughout the school day.

Thumbs up – thank God for the good things

Thumbs down – ask for God's help with the things that are worrying

Entwine fingers together – thank God and pray for school friends

Stroke one hand with the other – a reminder that God is always with you

www.mothersunion.org/resources
Used by permission



Tell me the old, old story – a reflection

Jesus did not suddenly appear unannounced. His coming was promised in the Old Testament and a family was prepared for him to be born into – the nation of Israel. These readings, which could be used during the last week of Advent, remind us of the long story of why and how 'God sent His Son'.

Day 1

Genesis 12:3b The Lord promised Abraham, 'and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'.

Almost two thousand years before Jesus came, his ancestor Abraham received this astonishing promise. Through his family would come blessing to all nations. Today we see how the promise has come to pass, first through the coming of Jesus into the world, sent by his Father, and then through what he did for us, the blessing of the Gospel of Jesus going forth all over the world.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you kept your promise to Abraham and today we can see that the message of Jesus has gone to the nations. I pray for the work of sharing the gospel, especially (...name a country or some missionaries). May your good news continue to be shared everywhere. Amen.

Day 2

Isaiah 11:1 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse'.

Ruth, the Moabite, whose story is found in the book named after her, became the grandmother of Jesse, who is famous for being the father of King David. God kept working through this family to keep his promises. King David himself was promised a son who would occupy the throne forever, a true 'shoot from the stump of Jesse'. His name is Jesus and he is the King of Kings.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, thank you for the faithful witness of Ruth and of her great-grandson, David. Thank you that in due course Jesus was born and that he is the King of all Kings. Help us (...pray for your church) to worship him as we should. Amen



Photo credit: Ben White on Unsplash

Day 3

Isaiah 7:14 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel'

The Lord never gave up his plan to bless the world through the family of Abraham. We learn that he intended to fulfil his promises through a special man. His birth is here foretold with a name that signals who he really is – Emmanuel – which means, 'God with us'. When Jesus was born the Son of God became one of us, both human and divine. No wonder his birth is marked by the great miracle that his mother was a virgin.

Prayer

Father Almighty, thank you for the faith and obedience of Mary. Thank you for the coming of Jesus, our Emmanuel. Thank you that this means that you are with us. Today I pray for my family (... name family members), that all may know about your wonderful love that brought Jesus into our world. Amen.

Day 4

Matthew 1:1 Matthew begins his Gospel with these words: 'This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham'.

Jesus is the child of promise. Unlike us, when God makes a promise, he keeps it to the end. In Jesus all the promises of God come true. He is the one through whom all the nations are blessed, and he is the King of Kings. He is our only hope in life or in death and he is the mediator between God and humanity. How wonderful God is! We can trust him always.

Prayer

Thank you, heavenly Father, that you are a promise-keeping God and that your word is so powerful. I pray for my own community (...name) and ask that many people around us will put their trust in Jesus as the hope of the world. Amen.

Day 5

Matthew 1:21 The angel said to Joseph, 'You shall give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins'.

Most names have a meaning. The name Jesus means 'Saviour' and it also has the form 'Joshua', who was one of the great saving heroes of the Old Testament. But while Joshua saved God's people from human enemies, Jesus, the real Saviour, saves us from our sins. We are guilty and deserve judgement. Because Jesus came amongst us, because he lived a perfect life, because he defeated Satan, and especially because he died and rose again, he defeated the worst enemy which we could have – our own sins. In him we have the priceless gift of forgiveness.

Prayer

Dear Lord, I thank you with all my heart for our Saviour Jesus and for the forgiveness which he brings. I repent of my sins (especially...) and ask once again for your forgiveness. Help me also to forgive others and live at peace with them. Amen

Day 6

Matthew 2:11 'On coming into the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him'.

The wise men who came searching for the King who would be born found him at last. And what did they do? They worshiped. It is true that Jesus is our Saviour. But he is also our Lord, and we do not know him if we fail to worship him, speaking his praises and seeking to please him in all things all our life long.

Prayer

Almighty God, I worship you, Three Persons in One God, trusting in you each day. Help me to live my life seeking to please you in all things. Help me to seek and find the good works you want me to walk in each day. Amen.

Christine Jensen

THANK YOU

Sandra

When someone has been doing a 'job' for many years it is always difficult to know how to say thank you when the time comes for them to hang up their boots. That time has come for Sandra Chambers, our dedicated producer of the audio version of *Mia Mia*. Although mere words may be somewhat inadequate, I, on behalf of all Mothers' Union members, would want to say a very big thank you to Sandra for her tireless efforts in getting the audio *Mia Mia* out to those who prefer it to the hard copy of *Mia Mia*.

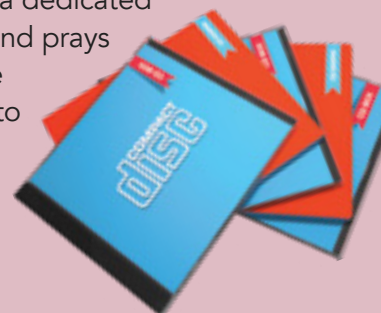
This project has been in existence for well over 20 years, having been started for a few members here in Grafton Diocese whose sight was failing. It quickly grew and soon became an Australia-wide project. In the beginning it was cassettes, and I recall Sandra having lots of trouble getting them done on the trusty old machine that she had acquired. Then it was CDs and life became much easier. Because it was basically for those with failing eyesight, we were able to post them using envelopes which were supplied by the Blind Society. This was very much appreciated.

In later years Sandra had the help of family members who would read parts of *Mia Mia* for her. She said that it was more interesting for those who listened than just hearing her voice.

Anglican Mothers' Union Australia says 'thank you' to Sandra for such a dedicated and wonderful service and prays that whatever the future holds she will continue to be blessed in all her life and endeavours.

Gae Shorten

Grafton



Spread the News!

**Our Worldwide President,
Mrs Sheran Harper,
is visiting Australia.**

You can meet with her at these locations;

13th May 2024 - Wollaston Theological College
5 Wollaston Rd, Mount Claremont WA

18th May 2024 - St Francis Theological College
29 Baroona Road, Milton QLD

22nd May 2024 - St Joseph's Retreat Centre
33 Barina Downs Rd, Baulkham Hills NSW

Book a holiday near one of the venues today.

Let's share the liveliness of MU in Australia.

More details coming soon.



Advent and Christmas intercessions

This Advent, as we wait for
the Hope of the World
we pray for God's hope to overcome
the despair of loss and loneliness.
God of light and hope,
Hear our prayer

This Advent, as we wait for
the Light of the World
we pray that the love of God would bring light
in the lives of our family and friends.
God of light and hope,
Hear our prayer

This Advent, as we wait for
the Hope of the World
we pray that the love of God would fill
us all with sure and certain hope.
God of light and hope,
Hear our prayer
Amen

This Christmas, as we remember
that there was no room at the inn,
we pray for all who are homeless,
and those who work to shelter them.
Wherever the world is in darkness Lord,
Let there be light

This Christmas, as we remember the birth
of Jesus in a stable,
we pray for all who are living in poverty,
and those who work to provide for them.
Wherever the world is in darkness Lord,
Let there be light

This Christmas, as we remember the violence
of the search for the Christ child,
we pray for all who are in danger,
and those who work to protect them.
Wherever the world is in darkness Lord,
Let there be light

This Christmas, as we remember those who
journeyed to the stable,
we pray for all who are seeking you,
and those who are leading the way.
Wherever the world is in darkness Lord,
Let there be light
Amen

Adapted from Advent and Christmas Intercessions <https://www.mothersunion.org/resources> Used by permission

Blessed to be a blessing

God sent his son to Earth to be a blessing to all humanity and through Jesus I believe we are now blessed to be a blessing to others. I also believe that through our work as members of Mothers' Union we are able to minister to others in our community.

Many years ago I was browsing through MU sites and came upon a site for Bunbury in Western Australia, where a description was given of Blessing Boxes being made and given to grieving people and other people in need of prayerful support. One of our members was in need of such support, so I made up my first Blessing Box to give to her. I continued to make up these boxes and passed on many over some time before I suggested we make these up together in our group. Different people offered to help, and so we continue to make these boxes, filled with love and blessings for the recipients in need.

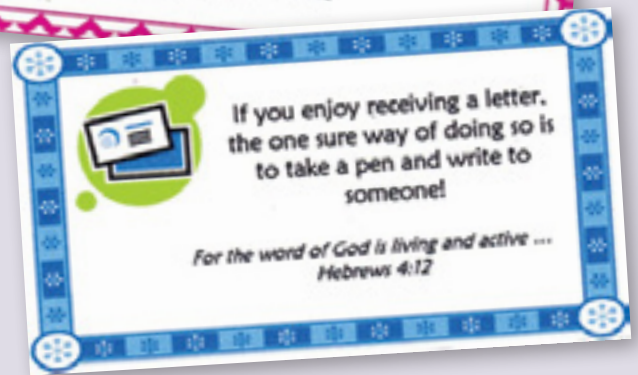
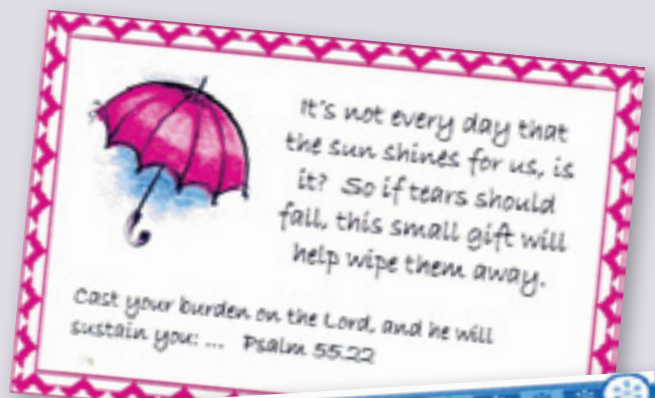
What has become a special project for our members has now been passed on to other members in England and New Zealand. In November last year we were visited by our link member, Sylvia Loder, from Church Streeton in Shropshire, England. Sylvia came bearing gifts for us, and we presented her with gifts also, including a blessing box. After Sylvia returned to England, we received a message from her to tell us that she showed the members of her branch the blessing box and they are now making and gifting these boxes to needy people in that part of the world.

At a similar time we had a visitor from Auckland in New Zealand, who was visiting family, as her son was struggling with brain cancer. We presented Christine with a blessing box and she assured us she would pass on the idea to her MU group in Auckland. Each blessing box contains 7 prettily wrapped small gifts, each accompanied by an appropriate Bible verse, a small tissue holder, an envelope with notepaper and a pen with verse.

As you can see by my testimony, in very quiet ways we can be a blessing to others as we are certainly so blessed ourselves.

Coral Mungomery

Hervey Bay



White chocolate Rocky Road

INGREDIENTS

- 500g white chocolate
- 20g coconut oil
- ¼ cup (35g) desiccated coconut
- 100g marshmallows, halved
- 150g Turkish Delight, chopped into small chunks
- 80g pistachios roughly chopped

METHOD

1. Line the base and sides of a 18cm x 28cm rectangular slice tray with baking paper.
2. Place the white chocolate and coconut oil into a heatproof, microwave-safe bowl.
3. Heat, uncovered, on 50% power, stirring every minute with a metal spoon, for 4-5 minutes or until the chocolate and coconut oil melts (if using a Thermomix, melt for 3-4 minutes, 80 degrees, Speed 2).
4. Remove from the microwave and stir until smooth.
5. Stir through the coconut, marshmallows, Turkish Delight and pistachios.
6. Spread the mixture into the prepared baking tray and place in the fridge for 2 hours or until completely set.
7. Use a sharp knife to cut into slices. If you are having trouble cutting the slice, run your knife under hot water and then dry completely before cutting – the heat will help to cut the slice evenly.



Peanut butter cookies

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup caster sugar
- ½ cup melted butter
- ½ cup peanut butter
- 1 egg
- 1½ cups self-raising flour
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

METHOD

1. Combine sugars.
2. Gradually add melted butter and lightly beaten egg.
3. Gradually add remaining ingredients and mix until just combined.
4. Roll teaspoonsful of mixture between hands to make walnut-sized balls. Place on baking-paper lined trays, leaving room for cookies to spread. Flatten slightly with a fork.
5. Bake at 160°C (fan-forced) for approximately 15 minutes or until golden brown.
6. Cool on trays until firm enough to remove to a wire rack to cool completely.

Makes about 2 dozen cookies.



Lumberjack Cake

INGREDIENTS

- 2 large apples, grated
- 1 cup dried or fresh dates, chopped
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup boiling water
- 125g butter, melted
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla essence
- 1½ cups plain flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder

TOPPING

- 60g butter, melted
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 cup shredded coconut



New Year security

With his nation at war, King George VI ended his 1939 Christmas message with the words of Minnie Louise Hoskins: *I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, give me a light that I might tread safely into the unknown. And he replied: Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be better than light and safer than a known way.* He then added, 'May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all'.

Though the unknown can be a cause of fear, even dread, we can be sure that we never need face it alone. The Christmas event secures this assurance for all who would turn to Christ. For Mary, an unmarried Jewish girl, fear of an uncertain future was allayed by Gabriel, the Heavenly messenger, with the characteristic words of the Godhead, *do not be afraid*¹ and then with the God-given explanation that what was happening was all in God's good purposes².

This is the way God continues to help us. The explanations of Scripture are always given, not to explain everything, but to assure us that He who is Sovereign can be fully trusted into the future. A month or so after Jesus's birth God spoke to Mary and Joseph through Simeon, with the further assurance that Jesus was God's promised deliverer, *and* with disturbing words about the opposition He would invite and the heartache Mary would endure watching her son go to the Cross.³ What she had been told would sustain her in her confusion and distress on that first Good Friday. A basic Biblical principle that will sustain us as we face uncertainties, our own or others', is summed up in the exhortation ***never doubt in the dark what you have learned in the light.***

There are some real advantages in facing hardships, whether they be national or personal. (I am given to understand that the personal unwelcome diagnosis of his own cancer was known to the king, but not to his

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 180°C (fan-forced). Grease and line a 22cm round cake tin.
2. Place grated apple, dates and baking soda in a bowl. Pour in boiling water, mix and allow to stand while preparing the batter (approx. 10 minutes).
3. Mix melted butter and sugar in a separate bowl. Mix in the egg and vanilla.
4. Add apple and date mixture and sift in the flour and baking powder. Fold all together until just combined.
5. Pour into prepared tin and bake for 55 mins. or until cake springs back when lightly pressed.
6. While the cake is baking, prepare topping by mixing all ingredients in a bowl.
7. When cake is baked (see step 5), remove from oven and gently spread topping mix over the cake. Return to the oven until topping is lightly browned (approx. 20 mins – make sure the topping doesn't burn).
8. Cool cake in tin for 15 mins, then remove to a wire rack to cool completely.

This is a deliciously moist cake and tastes even better on keeping. It makes a delicious dessert, served with cream, ice-cream or yoghurt. It can also be baked in a loaf tin or square tin (adjust baking times accordingly).

1 Luke 1:30; Gen 15:1; Deut 31:7-8; Jer 1:8; Matt 10:28; 28:10

2 Luke 1:30-38

3 Luke 2:33-35



Photo credit: Zack Silver on Unsplash

subjects). The prospect of another year causes us, if we are wise, to pause and take stock. The poem is a timely reminder that it is not knowledge of our future circumstances that brings comfort and security, but that the King of Kings can be known and trusted into 2024.

He who became a real live man with flesh and bones, needs and emotions, fully understands our frailty, temptations, fears and joys. Here is our confidence – we are welcome into the court of heaven, fully understood by Jesus, our sympathetic High Priest, whose atoning death and presence at our Father’s right hand, assure us that the throne of the Holy God is one of grace. Here is the basis for the encouragements to pray which come from our Lord and His apostles ⁴.

With so many of the Old Testament prophecies finding their fulfilment in Christ’s first coming there need be no doubting His ability or willingness to complete what He has begun. The birth of Jesus was the primary fulfilment, but so are all of us who have been drawn to Christ by the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the gospel. We are numbered among the Gentile beneficiaries, just as Anna and Simeon were among those believing Jews who responded to our Lord’s ministry. God is keeping His promises, so we can sing, and live, in confidence that the safest way to live is God’s way, with our hand in His and following Jesus who is the light of the world ⁵. We need not know every, even any, aspect of our future, save that, if we are bound to Him by faith, we are on the right track ⁶, with the right Saviour ⁷, with the right citizenship⁸ and assured destination ⁹.

4 Luke 11:1-13, 1 Peter 5:6-7; Phil 4:4-8

5 John 8:12

6 Matt 7:13-14

7 1Jn 2:1-2

8 Phil 3:20-21

9 John 14:1-6, 2 Peter 3:13

We can sing with joy-full confidence:

*Lord, for the years Your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, receive your peoples’ praise.*

Evoking prayer for our nation:

*Lord, for this land in this our generation, Spirits
oppressed by pleasure wealth and care: For young
and old, for commonwealth and nation, Lord of
our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.*

And for our own conformity to Christ and His gracious purposes in 2024

*Lord, for ourselves; in living power re-make us,
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne, Past
put behind us, for the future take us: Lord of our
lives, to live for Christ alone.¹⁰*

Peter Brain

10 Lord, for the years, © Timothy Dudley-Smith, Mission Praise #428

Christmas stars and angels’ song

*Curled in Mary’s womb
Fuse-eyed and finger-webbed,
Sucking Your tiny thumb
For comfort,
As You grew and changed,
Truly taking flesh upon You –
Creator God,
Did You look upon the silver stars
In Your mind’s eye,
There in the velvet dark
Of Your watery world?
Were Your tiny shell-ears
Still tuned to the glory
songs of Heaven?*

*In our Christmas rebirth
Tune our ears to angel-song
And focus our eyes on the
silver stars
That we might follow
And find You
O Babe of Bethlehem*

Geraldine E. Foster

When did it all begin?

Worldwide, Christmas is celebrated in many different ways and traditions. I do not wish to put any argument forward about the pros and cons of the various ways communities celebrate Christmas nor spend any time discussing the 'right' way for a Christian to celebrate Christmas and the recognition of the birth of the Christ-child. Instead, I want to look into the Bible to see if we can get an answer to my question – 'Where did it all begin?'

Come back through time with me some 2000+ years before the birth of the baby Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem – the event we celebrate as Christmas.

Before this celebrated birth, the baby's mother, a young lady named Mary, was pledged to be married to a man called Joseph and she was visited by an angel to tell her that she would give birth to this baby.¹ This in itself is the first of a series of miracles, but it is the end of an amazing set of historical statements made over the previous 500 – 2000 years. It started with one person, Abram (later renamed Abraham), who was appointed by God to become the father of a nation through which the whole world would be blessed.² This promise was reiterated by prophets, dedicated people chosen by God, who spoke for God to a select group of people – the Israelites (or the Jews).

But even before that, we know that before anything was formed by the breath of the Lord, there was a complete void.³ There was nothing!

Nothing! Can you imagine that?

We should say, 'Nothing – except God', who existed before all else began. And it is in this pre-creation void, in a timeless, eternal situation that we find the unfolding of the Christmas story before anything '...in the beginning'. It is the beginning of God's PLAN A. There was never to be a Plan B!

The Gospel of John starts this way – 'In the beginning was the Word, (Jesus) and the Word



was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.' (John 1:1-2)

We read in Colossians, 'He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth...For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things...by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour, was planned from before the creation of the universe. It was planned even before Adam and Eve sinned and were banished from God's presence. It was planned and started to be fulfilled when God called Abram to leave his home country with the promise of being the father of many nations – a family more numerous than the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the beach.

While Christmas is a joyous time, if we read down a bit in the Gospel of John, we come across what I believe to be the most heart-rending statement in the Bible, 'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.' (John 1:10). Thankfully, it doesn't end there – and this is what the celebration of Christmas is all about. 'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.' (John 1:11)



Happy Christmas! What a wonderful gift we receive from the One who made it all.

John Cronshaw

1 Matthew 1:18-25

2 Genesis 12 and following

3 Genesis 1:1

Hymn Workout

The Glory of God Incarnate

Reading: Colossians 1:15-20

*Hark! the Herald, Angels sing
"Glory to the new born King;
Peace on Earth, and Mercy mild,
God and Sinners reconciled."
Joyful all ye Nations rise,
Join the Triumphs of the Skies,
With th' angelic Host proclaim,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.*

Luke 2:13-14

Rom. 5:10

Luke 2:11

*Christ by highest Heaven ador'd,
Christ the everlasting Lord;
Late in Time behold him come,
Offspring of a Virgin's Womb;
Veil'd in Flesh, the Godhead see,
Hail th' Incarnate Deity!
Pleas'd as Man with men t' appear,
Jesus, our Immanuel here.*

Phil. 2:9-10

Gal. 4:4

Isa. 7:14, Matt. 1:23-25

Col. 1:19, Heb. 1:3

John 1:14

Phil. 2:7-8

Isa. 7:14

*Hail, the Heav'n born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Son of Righteousness!
Light and Life to all he brings,
Ris'n with Healing in his Wings;
Mild he lays his Glory by,
Born, that Man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of Earth;
Born to give them second Birth.*

Isa. 9:6

Mal. 4:2

John 1:4

Mal. 4:2

Phil. 2:5-7

Heb. 2:14

Rom. 8:21-23

John 3:7

*Come, Desire of Nations, come,
Fix in us thy humble Home;
Rise, the Woman's conqu'ring seed,
Bruise in us the Serpent's Head;
Adam's Likeness now efface,
Stamp thine Image in its Place;
Second Adam from above,
Re-instate us in thy Love.¹*

Hag. 2:7

Isa. 57:15

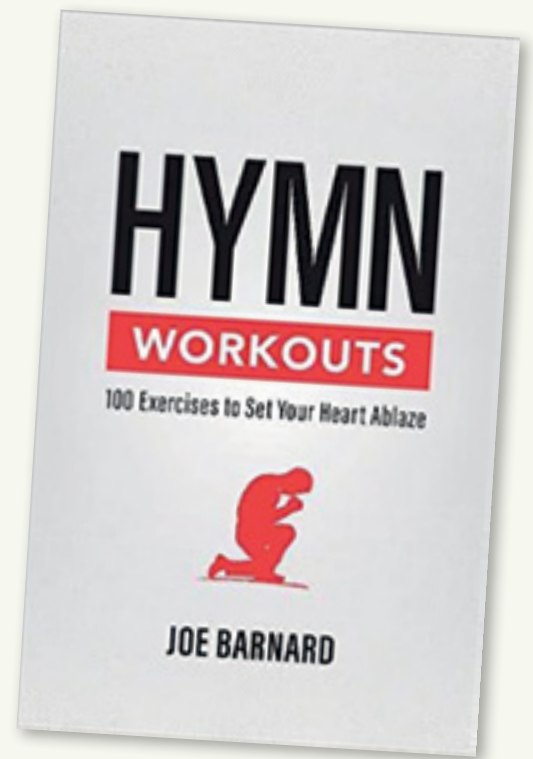
Gen. 3:15, Rev. 12:13

Rom. 16:20

1 Cor. 15:49

1 Cor. 15:45-47

CHARLES WESLEY



Reflection Questions:

1. Reflect on the line 'Veil'd in Flesh, the Godhead see'. How should this truth affect how we read the gospel stories? What difference does it make to recognize that Jesus is God-in-flesh?
2. C. S. Lewis famously said, "the central miracle asserted by Christians is the incarnation".² Why is the miracle of God becoming man an essential part of the gospel?
3. The coming of Christ is the fulfilment of numerous Old Testament promises and prophecies. How does the hymn demonstrate the way in which the birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of God's Word?

From *Hymn Workouts*, Joe Barnard, Christian Focus, 2022, p60.
Used by permission

¹ Another unforgettable hymn on the beauty of God revealed through the incarnation is 'God Worship at Immanuel's Feet' by Isaac Watts. Be sure to read the original hymn which has eighteen stanzas.

² See C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, chapter 14.

Party time around Australia

In the Diocese of Brisbane, Freshwater AMUA celebrated its 20th birthday on July 27. The morning commenced with a Eucharist officiated by our priest Rev'd Claye Middleton and assisted by Rev'd Doug Frith (a MU member). There were 12 long service awards which were presented by Jenny Bullock, our Diocesan President: one 60 years, four 40 years, two 20 years and five 10 years. Following this we enjoyed a High Morning Tea, after which our Speaker, Mrs. Marjorie Voss, told us about her journey through 60 years of service to MU!

Another highlight of the morning was the impromptu enrolment of our priest, Rev'd Claye Middleton, by Mrs Jenny Bullock! Congratulations Claye!

Carole Mullins

Branch President



North Pine

On July 19, North Pine Mothers' Union Branch celebrated its 70th Birthday.

Members from branches in the Redcliffe Deanery gathered for a Communion Service, followed by a morning tea party. Forty-eight members and friends gathered,



Presentation of 10 year Service Scrolls by Dr Robin Ray to Jean Beattie and Glenda Ebert with Ven David Ruthven

along with our Australian President Dr Robin Ray, who presented 10 Year Service Awards to Jean Beattie and Margaret Jacob. All priests from the past 20 years attended and spoke rewardingly of our helpfulness in the parish.

Memories of times past, as photos were perused, made the morning quite noisy. This year's memories were enhanced by the knowledge that we had provided a Red Bench in a nearby park and beanies and rugs which have been accepted



Four Past Presidents L-R: Joan Bird; Penny Smith; Judy Tainton; Margaret Jacob

thankfully by Mission to Seafarers and local hospitals.

The beautifully decorated cake was cut by four past presidents, Glenda Ebert, Penny Smith, Judy Tainton and Joan Bird.

Joan Bird

President North Pine

Perth

Mothers' Union began in Perth 125 years ago, and to celebrate, over 60 MU members from across the diocese came together on August 9 to share in a service of thanksgiving, renew old friendships, make new ones and, of course, enjoy great food, including a celebratory cake, which was cut by Mrs. Joan Shenton, a much-loved former president of MU Perth. AMUA Vice President, Elizabeth Parker, our guest for the day, in speaking about some of the issues facing families in the 21st century, reminded us that the raising of families has never been easy, with social, economic and moral issues facing every generation. However, as



she also reminded us, Mothers' Union's focus on prayer, Bible reading and informed action, appropriate 125 years ago, is still appropriate today.

Following hard on the heels of MU

Perth's 125th birthday celebration came the opportunity to join with our only 'country' branch, St. Peter's Wongan Hills, to celebrate their 90th birthday. On September 13, despite a dire weather forecast, approximately 30 Mothers' Union members, and the odd (!) husband or two travelled to Wongan Hills for a day of reminiscing and for giving God thanks for work done in the past, as well as looking forward to ways in which MU can serve the community into the future.



A 2-hour journey through beautiful countryside and a delicious morning tea were followed by an appropriately-attired Heather Stickland giving a presentation about the early years of Mothers' Union in Wongan Hills. Many of the photos reminded us all of how life used to be, and then Heather showed how St. Peter's Mothers' Union are working in their community today, with fellowship, outreach and support of the local church. A service in the church was led by Rev. Kathy Barrett-Lennard, who spoke about our founder Mary Sumner and the work she did in helping families. A beautifully presented lunch gave more time for fellowship, and later a celebration cake was cut by Pam Boekeman, a long-serving member of MU. The day concluded with visitors being treated to guided tours of the town and museum. It was gratifying to learn that the members of the St. Peters MU are very valued in the Wongan Hills community.

Jan Rose
President

From my bookshelf

Are you looking for a book to help equip you to support someone who is suffering in some way? Or to help yourself deal with your own difficult or painful circumstance in a way that honours Christ and builds your trust in Him? ***Behind the Tears***, by the well-known and highly respected Perth respiratory



physician and scientist, Dr. Bruce Robinson, may be just the book you're looking for. Dr. Robinson's Christian faith shines through as he gently leads the reader through such topics as understanding suffering, surviving suffering (including the suffering caused by cancer, chronic illness and pain, mental illness, conflict and

anger and disappointment), how to help someone who is suffering and growing through suffering. The author's style is warm, with several of his own painful experiences, as well as pithy quotes from numerous others who have walked the path of suffering, to illustrate his points. He is at pains to write 'from the inside' and to empathise with those who are hurting. Two features which stand out are the inclusion of 'huggy figures' (visual and textual representations of a 'virtual hug') and a succinct summary of the main points at the conclusion of each chapter.

This is a book which is well worth owning to build one's capacity to empathise with others who are suffering. Read it yourself and share it with others in your parish or small group if you want to 'understand, survive and grow from suffering'. A great book for a group in your church to read and discuss! Published by MACSIS Publishing, Perth, '*Behind the Tears*' was short-listed for the 2023 Australian Christian Book of the Year award.

Raising Tech-healthy Humans, also short-listed for the Australian Christian Book of the Year Award, is a great book to help parents negotiate the tricky questions about *when* to allow children to have access to technology and *how much* access to allow at any given point in their child's life. As a dad and productivity consultant, the author, Daniel Sih, is very well-qualified to speak on the subject of children and technology. He is also a Christian who believes strongly that parents must take responsibility for raising their children in a God-honouring way. One phrase he uses throughout the book which has stuck

in my mind is that *we are raising adults, not children.*

With this in mind he addresses such topics as what makes for a healthy brain, what are appropriate limits at different ages and stages of a child's development and what habits and attitudes underlie our own use of technology. As a busy parent himself, Daniel understands the pressures parents are under, so each chapter is short, but backed by well-supported research, and concludes with a summary of the main points and a question for reflection. This is a practical book (I especially loved his suggested *100 non-screen activities to do with children*), which parents (and other care-givers) of children aged between 5-12 'who are concerned about the effects of digital over-use on their child's development.' (p 9) would find helpful in their efforts to 'raise tech-healthy humans'.



The Air We Breathe (written by Glen Scrivener, published by The Good Book Company, 2022) is a book that helps us understand how much we owe to the Christian worldview. Looking at 'how we came to believe in freedom, kindness, progress and equality', Glen Scrivener has given us a clear explanation of

how dependant all these are on Scripture. Here is a book that can confidently be given to people who might be sceptical about Christianity to help answer their questions, as well as to those befuddled and hurt by the confusion and disappointments that have ensued from alternative worldviews and behaviours.

Scrivener writes with extraordinary clarity, with the ability to explain why we are where we are, whilst helping us celebrate the amazing benefits which have accrued to cultures that breathe the air of Christ's transforming influence in everyday matters like service, human dignity and equality, scientific discoveries, sexual fidelity and progress. This is an ideal gift to strengthen the believer and help others to understand what they are rejecting, along with the costs of what they are turning their backs on.

Christine Brain

Chosen

She loved to meet her friends each day.
They'd talk and giggle at the well,
Their only cares, the household chores
And boys.
Joe was her special one.
Betrothal all arranged.

The day that changed it all
Began the same.
But when the angel met her near the tree,
Her world collapsed,
Then slowly built back up,
As bit by bit
He spoke the mystery to her,
That she'd been chosen by the Mighty One
To bear a child,
The longed for Saviour of the world,
Messiah, King.

She thought her heart would burst
And ran to Joseph's arms
For comfort, and his strength.
The angel spoke to him as well,
And now they knew that soon,
Together they'd be strong enough
To do the Father's will.
United in their love,
Excited and enthralled,
Assured that all their plans would fall in place,
They'd said their YES.
The world would never be the same.

Meg Lane



Over the Fence

Birds

It wasn't even Spring. Despite the calendar still registering winter, the annual magpie swooping season was well and truly underway. And it wasn't just magpies. Peewees, Indian Mynas and Olive Honeyeaters had all jumped on board. As a dedicated bicycle commuter, I had flatly refused to adopt the practice of attaching cable ties to my bike helmet on the basis that a) they looked stupid and b) magpies seemed to make no distinction between attacking a normal-looking cyclist and one that looked like a balding echidna.

On this particular morning, the first bird came out of nowhere. Ready to defend its future hatchlings to the death, it screeched incessantly as I fumbled with the front gate latch. Torn between fending my attacker off and removing myself from its territory, I pedalled furiously, shoulders hunched, waiting for the next raucous scream to signal an incoming impact. My bike helmet took the full brunt, as the bird's nails clawed and scratched on each assault. My daily commute was normally a peaceful affair, involving wide streets and an enjoyable descent, with a spectacular mountainous backdrop. At this time of year however, these features gave prospective avian parents the ideal tools with which to perfect their reign of seasonal suburban terror. The wide streets, populated at regular intervals by telegraph poles and towering Alexandra Palms, coupled with a sloping geography, afforded them both a massive height advantage and a telescopic range. I arrived at my workplace and wearily removed my bike helmet. It was going to be a long few months.

My love of birds was being sorely tested that year by the insanely prolonged swooping season and another unfortunate avian encounter. The latter was a middle-of-the-night affair in a humid, northern, country town. The day had provided its fair share of

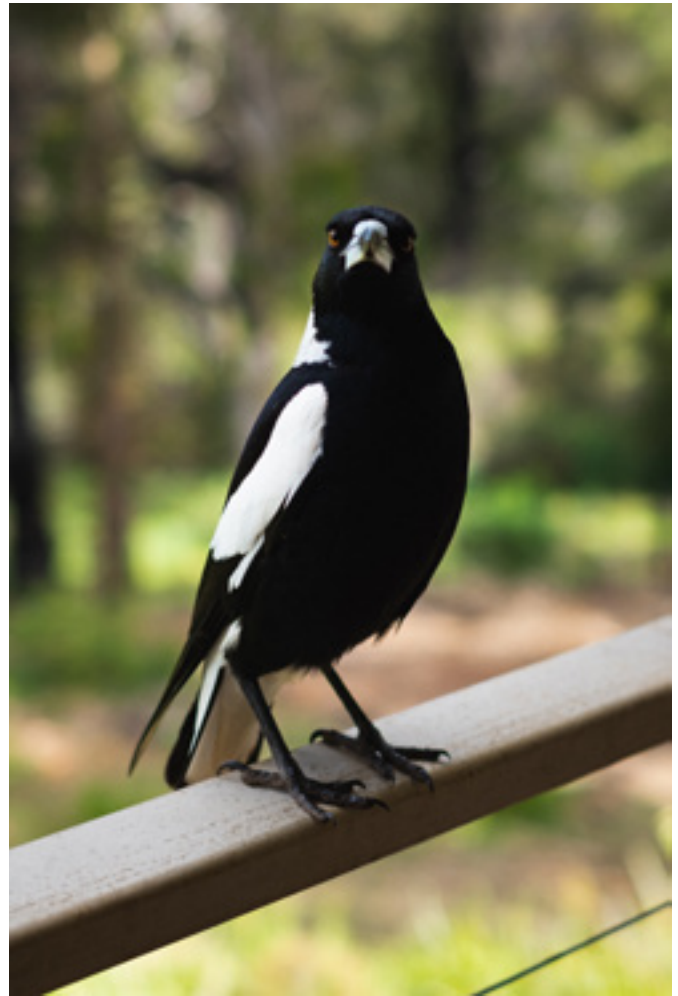


Photo credit: Chris Gresham Britt on Unsplash

challenges, beginning with an early start and a solitary 4-hour drive. At the other end of the journey, a missed turn and a period of complete disorientation coincided with a phone call from our roofing insurance company, advising that they had declined our claim for severe hail damage. I had then spent 8 hours on an iPad, using unfamiliar software to score 100 overs of representative cricket, before sourcing a meal for myself and my cricket-playing child before collapsing into bed at a local motel.

The migraine hit at 2am. As did the knowledge that, in my haste, I had packed neither Nurofen nor Panadol. I fumbled around for my phone, the light from the screen triggering a renewed wave of nausea. Narrowing my eyes to slits, I inwardly rejoiced. A 24-hour IGA was only 1km away. I

was in no fit state to drive, and my child was sleeping well, so I put on my runners. A 6-minute jog would do it. I quietly shut the heavy motel door and started to jog, pacing my stride with the hammering in my head.

In this trance-like state I proceeded. Then, through the aura of the migraine, I perceived a bird of the strangest dimensions jogging alongside me. It had impossibly thin legs bisected by knobbly knees and topped by a heavy body and over-sized eyeballs. If I slowed, it slowed. If I sped up, it sped up. The night had reached a renewed point of surrealism. I stumbled into the IGA, farewelled the bird, afterwards identified as a curlew, purchased both Nurofen and Panadol and then sat in the gutter and swallowed two of each. After a while I started a tentative walk back to the motel. As before, the curlew followed me. I muttered something in its direction about it being beyond weird and that I hated it – and closed the motel door.

The past bird season had given me pause. Normally, I like birds. I enjoy watching them go about their business, chirruping happily and adding a pleasant background soundtrack to daily life. But this season had been entirely different. I was still nursing a triangular wound on my ear incurred during a particularly vicious magpie attack, and I remained totally unhinged by The Curlew Experience. It was, therefore, no surprise that a Bible reading featuring birds attracted my full attention. The general sense of the passage read ‘...not one sparrow falls to the ground outside of your Father’s care...’ At a superficial reading, this seemed very acceptable. As Christian believers, we could rest comfortably in this knowledge, identifying ourselves with our small sparrow friends, inconsequential to the rest of the world, but deeply known to God. But there was a wrinkle. The passage mentioned the sparrows falling. Falling where? Falling to the ground wounded? Falling to their death? On reflection, and looking at the context of the passage, the unsettling answer was ‘yes’ on both counts. This was not a comfortable teaching at all. In this passage, Jesus spoke truth to His closest friends. As his ambassadors, Jesus’s disciples were told to expect that their engagement with the world would be hostile and brutal. And so it would

prove to be. Some would fall into prison, others would fall into times of isolation and suffering, and some would fall into the eternal arms of Jesus.

This is a confronting passage. This is by no means a light picture of God’s care for us. It reaches far deeper, into the times when our faith brings us under heavy fire from those who would oppose the gospel of Jesus. It speaks into the times when we ourselves have fallen victim to the metaphorical magpie or curlew, when on account of our Hope, we have been attacked unnecessarily. When we have been relentlessly pursued by a family member, watching greedily for anything we do that could fuel their attitude of derisive scorn. When we have been aggressively stalked on Facebook by fellow churchgoers who, with the worst of motives, have falsely slandered us or our spouses and shown no restraint.

At this point, I needed to reflect. Our passage simply reminds us that when a single sparrow falls, God knows. He knows, and He cares. During the height of Spring, I had become obsessed with ideas of snatching my avian attackers by the legs and bringing some unimagined judgement on them. This however, is not the way of our faith. God knows and cares for each one of us. And that is enough. There is no place for hatred or returned acts of aggression. The certain knowledge of God’s care leads us decisively away from damaging paths of revenge or despair and safely towards the peace that comes from our sure hope of God’s great and eternal love for us.

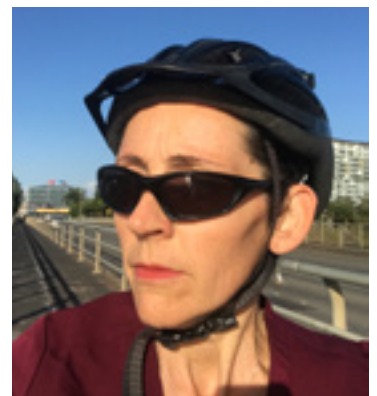
Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.

And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Matthew
10:29 - 31.

Virginia Grice



MU Adelaide makes a difference.

In 2021, MU in the Adelaide Diocese decided to offer a scholarship through the University of Adelaide – *The Mothers' Union Adelaide Augustus Short Scholarship*. This scholarship provides a full-time student with \$6,500 per annum for 4 years.

Augustus Short was the first Anglican Bishop of Adelaide, a fine scholar and very interested in education. He became the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide when that institution was founded in 1874. Bishop Short believed that tertiary education should be accessible to all students of high academic merit, regardless of their standing in life. In recent years the University has honoured him by offering Augustus Short Scholarships, which are funded solely by donations.

Leticia, our scholarship recipient, who hails from regional South Australia, has almost completed 2 years towards a Bachelor of Nursing degree, with excellent results so far. She has used the money to purchase textbooks, nursing equipment such as a stethoscope and a laptop, to contribute towards her city accommodation and much more. Her goal is to specialise in paediatrics, anaesthetics or midwifery.

Our Adelaide President, Marion McCall, corresponds with Leticia, who writes enthusiastically about her studies, her work placements and life as a tertiary student. 'I have just finished my second week of placement at the Women's and Children's hospital, in the paediatric outpatient department. I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience so far, and have been exposed to a variety of different clinics.'

The University of Adelaide provides an annual opportunity for scholarship recipients to meet their donors. President Marion and I had the pleasure of meeting Leticia, along with other donors and recipients. Marion and I were asked many questions about MU. It became a valuable opportunity to talk about our organisation.

Our scholarship gift makes a difference to the well-being of the student and their family. Who

knows what potential may be unleashed for the benefit of the community after their graduation? MU Adelaide has resolved to continue the scholarship.

Cynthia Kennedy



Marion McCall, Leticia and Cynthia Kennedy

Advent and Christmas prayer

To you O Lord we bring our lives
Troubled, broken or at ease
A sacrificial offering
For you to use
Take away our selfishness
And teach us to love as you loved
Take away our sense of pride
And show us the meaning of humility
Take away our blindness
And show us the world through your eyes
Take away our greed
And teach us how to give as you gave
Show us your ways
Teach us your paths
That we might walk with you more closely
Our hand in your hand
Our feet in your footsteps
From the baby in a stable
To eternity,
Amen

John Birch



Around the Dioceses

ADELAIDE, THE MURRAY AND WILLOCHRA

Mary Sumner Day celebrations in South Australia were extra-special this year with a visit from our Australian President, Robin. She joined with Willochra Diocese on Tuesday, Adelaide on Wednesday and The Murray on Thursday. In her usual efficient manner she melded the readings of the day into a meditation on Mary Sumner's Personal Prayer, with inspiring results. Each group followed their service with lunch and a time of questions, discussion and sharing of ideas. She no doubt went home feeling tired, but we hope also encouraged by AMUA happenings in South Australia. It was so worthwhile and we recommend that other dioceses put her knowledge and enthusiasm into a visit for your members. Personal contact was so appreciated and we realise that this is the way forward with outreach into our communities between ourselves and others.

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.

Jocelyn Williamson, Marion McCall and Roz Rowett

ARMIDALE

Inverell

In May our group was saddened by the death of our President, Belinda Brinsdon, following a very strongly-fought battle with cancer. Belinda's fighting spirit and her faith in Christ was very inspiring. In July we held a 'Soup & Damper' lunch which was very successful. We had a speaker from IAS (Individual Ability Supports), Alyssa Drew, who spoke about one of their day programmes,



Plastic Recycling. We learnt which plastics they recycle into vases, chopping boards and mobile phone holders to name a few of the items, through 3D printing. Those attending were very interested and committed to collecting the sorts of plastic bottles and containers they need.

BRISBANE

On Wednesday August 30, a group of AMUA members of the Brisbane Diocese was invited to attend a reception at Government House. Our Australian President, Dr Robin Ray, her Secretary, Mrs Sue Milright and the Brisbane Diocesan Secretary, Mrs Marcia Williams accompanied me to a reception for organisations that support women.



Prior to this event the Governor, Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM, presented the Brisbane Diocese with a Certificate of Patronage, Her Excellency having been a Patron of our organisation since November 2021. After the

presentation we chatted with Her Excellency and her Aide about the work of the AMUA and the history of Queensland's Government House.

Her Excellency deems it an honour to provide support and advocacy for organisations of which she is a Patron. To this end she hosted this reception which she described as a 'small, albeit significant, step' toward working collectively to address women's needs 'with renewed confidence and energy' and with her wholehearted support as Governor of Queensland. Representatives from the NCWQ, Thread Together, the Red Rose Society, the War Widows Association, the CWA, the Lady Musgrave Trust, Share the Dignity, the Lady Bowen Trust, Suited to Success, Foster Care Queensland, True Relationship and Reproductive Health, Challenge DV and the AMUA talked

and listened, exchanged information and ideas, planned to contact each other and generally familiarised everyone with the work and service of their own particular organisation. Delicious canapes and drinks were served throughout the event. The Governor departed the reception with a promise to hold another such event next year to see if there has been any collaboration between groups.

Jenny Bullock

Diocesan President

Bundaberg

With Bundaberg AMUA's August Eucharist and meeting falling on Mary Sumner Day, August 9, our focus was on our founder Mary Sumner. Our time of worship and the message given by Rev'd Robert linked the great faith, great courage, and vision of Mary Sumner with the Canaanite woman (the reading for the day). The reward for their unswerving faith and persistence was the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter and the creative flame that ignited to form The Mothers' Union in 1876.

Our guest speaker was Susan Skowronski who also added to our focus with her talk, *A box full of love*. Susan began by sharing the Mary Sumner story, which is always a good reminder for new, as well as for older, members. Susan shared the story of the contents of her box of love and how the love, support, and friendship of Mothers' Union members, during a tragic and sad time was such a wonderful, overwhelming, and long-lasting experience. Susan concluded by linking her experience with *Who we are* as Mothers' Union



Heather Tarr, Susan Skowronski and Bev Perry

members and *What we can be* when we share Christ's love with each other.

Our September Eucharist and meeting was held at St Peter's Bargara and after a time of getting to know each other better we went to lunch at the Sandhill Sports Club. During the lunch there was an incident when a member needed an ambulance, resulting in time spent in hospital. This is where I also experienced the loving action, support, and caring friendship of our Bundaberg members. Like Susan, I can also give thanks to Mary Sumner and to our Mothers' Union members whose love was so powerfully felt that day. Christ's love was indeed reflected in their actions, their patience and their presence. Thank you, Mary Sumner and thank you Mothers' Union Members.

Bev Perry

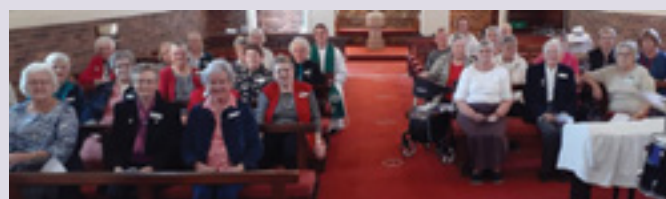
St. Luke's Toowoomba and Chinchilla Friendship Day

The Western Region Deanery of the Brisbane Diocese covers a vast distance, from Toowoomba, south to Warwick and Pittsworth, and west beyond Dalby and Chinchilla. Sadly, many branches have closed over the past few years, but Chinchilla, 200 kms west of Toowoomba, is still flying the banner.

Thirty-four members, including two Lone Members, travelled from the above-mentioned areas to Dalby on August 16, for a Friendship Day, which was held in the beautiful Anglican Church of St. John. Rev. David Brown led us in an inspiring service of music, prayer, sermon and Communion, before we gathered in the Parish Centre for lunch and much laughter, reunions and memories, resulting in a wonderful day.

MELBOURNE

Our Emmanuel Oakleigh MU shrank to very few, as age, death and the need to go into care reduced our numbers, so we had to close. Four of us have joined the MU group in the neighbouring





Left to right: Mabel Hibbert OAM (99), Ann Koch (91), Pat Brown (87) and Geraldine Foster (81)

suburb at St Peters Murrumbreena. The eldest of our four is 99!

Mabel, Ann and Pat have known each other for 60 years – supporting each other as they laughed, cried and shared together the joy of their marriages, bringing up children and then the sadness of burying their husbands. MU has been a strong connection in their lives as they have served their church and community. Mabel has an OAM to prove it! I am proud of these three wonderful women, and count their friendship a gift from our Heavenly Father.

Geraldine Foster

PERTH

A grand total of six members of East Victoria Park branch celebrated 60 years of membership in Mothers' Union in 2023. Since Joyce Wilkinson,



one of their number wasn't able to be present when her friends were presented with their certificates by Diocesan President, Jan Rose, Jan and secretary, Lois McGrath, made a special trip to visit her in her new home in Mandurah,

50 kms south of Perth, to present her certificate. Not wanting to miss the opportunity to share this moment together, all five of the other long-serving members, as well as several husbands, daughters and care staff and residents, joined in the celebration, enjoying cake and a singalong together.

WANGARATTA

For over 40 years Central Goulburn Mothers' Union have been hosting an annual fundraiser. This year it was to send funds off to Mothers' Union Australia for Gender-Based Violence and climate change projects. On Thursday, September 14 we hosted a successful Morning Melodies in the Christ Church hall in Seymour. The well-known entertainer, Noel Pearson, kept the audience on their toes with his popular evergreen songs and some novelty dances.

Over 70 guests, including Muriel Andrea, who at 97 is our oldest member, came along and were able to forget the winter blues and join other folk who like to socialise and sing along with popular songs. A delicious morning tea was made, prepared and served by the MU members and helpers and was enjoyed by all.

The annual fundraiser was a success thanks to the support of all concerned and the funds raised will go off to the MU national project

Diane Grant



Glenis Hageman, Marlene Brew (Nagambie), Margaret Andrea, Muriel Andrea Dorothy Eaton, Marie Maggs, Val Cooke (Seymour) and John Grant (Nagambie)

Luke 2



Mary had a baby boy

5 Joseph took Mary with him. She was his promised wife, and she was carrying a baby inside her at that time. **6 - 7** At Bethlehem they couldn't find any room to stay in, so they had to sleep in the place where the animals ate their food. Then the time came for Mary to have her baby. She had her baby right there, and she wrapped him up in bits of cloth, just like mothers always did. And she put him down to sleep in an animal's feed box.

Men that looked after sheep saw baby Jesus

8 Not far away, on that same night, some men were out in the grass lands looking after their sheep. **9** Suddenly, an angel messenger from God stood there with them, and bright light from God was shining all around them, and they were very frightened.

10 But the angel said, "Don't be frightened. I've got really good news for you, and good news for everyone in the world too. **11 - 12** Today a young woman had a baby boy over there in Bethlehem, in the place where David grew up. Go there, and you will find him. He is wrapped up in cloth, and lying in an animal's feed box. Then you will know that this message is true. He is the one that is going to save you people. He is the Christ, the man that God promised to send to you, to be your leader."

13 Then suddenly a big mob of other angel messengers came from heaven, and they all praised God. They said, **14** "God, you are really great there in heaven, and here on the earth, your people are quiet and happy. You are really good to your people."

Plain English Version translation for Australian Aboriginal people who speak English as a second language

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