

MIAmia

SPRING 2023

ANGLICAN
MOTHERS UNION
AUSTRALIA



Jesus said, "I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you"

JOHN 14:16, CEV

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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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Anglican Mothers' Union Australia.
Mia Mia is an Aboriginal word for 'home'.

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Have your say in Mia Mia

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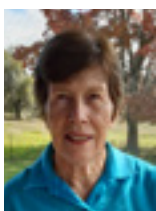
Meet our contributors



Ruth Baker lives in western Sydney with her two little boys, a spoodle and a schnoodle. She is an environmental consultant by day, working full time but, in God's blessing, mostly from home.

She blogs as Meet Me Where I Am in her spare time and speaks at various women's events and seminars. She studied at Sydney Missionary and Bible College and continues to pursue theological study as a hobby because she has a passion for building confidence in women – confidence both in the Bible, but also in what they believe and why they believe it. As relational beings, women can be the hub of our churches and communities, so building confidence in them has influence in circles far beyond themselves. Ruth also writes regularly for The Gospel Coalition Australia and other online platforms and is author of *Are We There Yet?*

Ruth knits badly, but enthusiastically, and crochets appallingly. Her children praise her for her organisation and preparedness, even though she does just enough housework to get by. She is an avid history nerd and can often be found immersed in a historical biography or bingeing an historical drama. More than anything, she adores her children, who are funny, sweet, kind and faithful boys who are also first-rate tea-makers.



Penny Clementson sees herself as having a blessed life. While there have been plenty of challenges and tears, and failures through the years, she and her husband Richard are grateful for the way God has grown

them and blessed them. They have 3 precious children and 7, also precious, grandchildren. She loves the beauty of God's creation and feels blessed to have lived in places in the country and coast where there is space to appreciate and enjoy that beauty. She has enjoyed, but also been challenged by good education options and work as a pathology scientist and in various types of farming. She and Richard are now retired and growing out a few cattle on their small hobby farm. They're seeking to serve our Lord and His people in whichever areas He reveals a need in which they're able to help.

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The Editor writes

Spring is such a lovely time of year, isn't it? Here in WA we are treated to a most glorious display of wildflowers, not only in the wild, but also in parks and gardens. This new life which we see bursting around us in spring is just one sign of God's creative activity in the world. In this issue of *Mia Mia* we celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus to teach us and then help us remember all that he taught (John 14:26). In her article, Robin reminds us that 'the Holy Spirit at work in our lives is like Spring, except that you don't have to wait for the seasons to roll around'. Several of our contributors point to ways in which the Spirit of God empowers and renews us, giving us a new heart to follow Jesus and share our God-given gifts in whole-hearted service.

In this issue we meet Ruth Baker, a working mum-of-two, who has some tips to help parents balance the competing demands of work and their responsibility to 'train up your children in the way they should go' – helpful for older readers to be reminded of the challenge this is for busy parents as well! We also meet Penny Clementson, who shares how the Holy Spirit has opened her eyes

to the truths of the Bible and Meg Lane, who uses her God-given skills in many ways (just read her biography!). In this issue she shares her re-telling of Jesus' miraculous feeding of a great crowd.

Instead of our usual 'Connecting with kids' page, we have an innovative way to celebrate Jesus' coming with any children in your life— a game of Snakes and Ladders! (Thank you Archdeacon George and Rev'd Zan from Bendigo Diocese). You have it early, so you can think about how you might use it. It's in the middle, so pull it out, laminate it, photocopy it to share with others, cut it up to make a jigsaw that turns into a game – let your imagination run wild. Elizabeth Parker has some tips to help us get ready for Christmas by being on the front foot, and we have some interesting and encouraging reports from MU members around Australia.

I hope you find much to encourage you and to share with others in this issue of *Mia Mia*.

Yours in the service of King Jesus through Anglican Mothers' Union Australia,

Christine





The President writes...

I grew up on a farm in Victoria. Our winters were often very cold, mostly generated by wind off the snow on the nearby mountains or frosts that froze the water in the outside taps. I remember pulling my school clothes, especially the cotton shirts, into my bed to warm them up before getting dressed. I looked forward to Spring, with its promise of warmer weather. New life in the form of colourful blossoms, calves and lambs in the paddocks, and the calls of smaller birds, brought a vitality and a sense of fun to life. It was like Spring was waking us up to new possibilities for enjoying life, encouraging and energizing us to get going.

The Holy Spirit at work in our lives is like Spring, except that you don't have to wait for the seasons to roll around. Jesus, as recorded in John's gospel, promises that the Advocate (Holy Spirit) will help us forever (14:16). Additionally, we are assured that God sends the Holy Spirit to teach us all things and remind us of Jesus teaching (14:26). Knowing that we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit gives us courage to meet daily challenges and reach out to explore new possibilities.

The words of Elizabeth Smith's hymn, 'Holy Spirit go before us', remind us of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Holy Spirit, go before us, every mind and heart
prepare
for good news of life in Jesus, for the joyful hope
we share.
Gently lead the lost to safety, gently teach them
wisdom's way,
till they come to seek you gladly
till we find the words to say. (V1)

The third verse speaks of our words being grounded in love. This is not always easily achieved. Yet, when approaching new or difficult situations, one strategy that I have found very helpful is to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In my working life I frequently prayed as I walked the university corridors on the way to meetings. When I reflect on times when things

didn't go quite right, or worse, went badly wrong, I realise that these are the times when I thought I could handle the situation in my own strength and did not spend time in prayer. Praying for the strength of the Holy Spirit calms my mind, enabling me to focus more fully on the tasks and situation in hand. This frees me up to put my energies into being and doing rather than in trying to control the outcome.

The second verse begins with the words, 'Holy Spirit come and help us, give us words to speak of Christ,' and the third verse includes the words, 'show us how to serve as Christ served us.' Sharing our faith and being Christlike as we reach out to families and those in need are important components of our MU Objectives. However, we don't do this alone; the Holy Spirit is with us.

As you focus on the Holy Spirit while you read this issue of *Mia Mia*, I encourage you to find this hymn by Elizabeth Smith¹ or search for it on the Internet and use the words for your own reflection. Such a reflection could also form a branch activity or discussion. May the Holy Spirit guide you as you live into your call to be an effective MU member.

Robin Ray

1 Together in Song, 420



Photo credit: Holy Spirit by Alex Shute on Unsplash



Passing on our wisdom

When we look back on our lives and reflect on the times we have met with adversity within our own family, MU branch and community, there is no doubt that God has given us all gifts for service. I think it's safe to say that sometimes we are not aware of the skills and gifts we have until we need them, or are called to use them.

The journey of some of our Mothers' Union members has been long and active. Planning and working at fundraising events may now be just a memory. Coordinating Bible study groups or leading the baptism team may be a thing of the past. However, all members still play an important role in Mothers' Union.

One of the most important gifts God gives us is wisdom. Long-serving members of Mothers' Union have gained wisdom and insight into the ways we serve our communities throughout their many years of service. Sharing their wisdom with younger members is important for the growth of our ministry.

James 3:17 says, *'the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.'*

Do you remember attending your first Mothers' Union meeting or gathering? Why did you go? Were you invited, or were you seeking support and connection with other parents? Were you newly-retired and looking to contribute to your community? Or, did you see an advertisement in your pew sheet or local newspaper and become interested and supportive of the Mothers' Union



objectives? Everyone becomes a member for different reasons and at different stages in their lives.

I live in the Diocese of North Queensland and we have a vast Mothers' Union history. The traditions of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities play a significant part in our celebrations and the way we do things. These traditions have been passed down through many generations of members and families. The gifts of wisdom and history taught through storytelling have contributed to the success of Mothers' Union's ministry in our Diocese.

By encouraging, guiding and supporting younger members you will help foster the gifts they already have so they serve others. Also, their confidence to step outside of their comfort zone and do God's will in ways they didn't think they ever could, or ever would, will grow. Younger members serve in all kinds of ways and they are often willing to contribute when guided and encouraged. Events that have a beginning and an end may appeal more to the younger generation in your branch or community rather than ongoing projects. The timing of meetings and events is important when considering attendance of younger people.

You may have reached a time in your life where you're no longer able to do the things you once did. However, your gifts are still very much valued. If you look back on your earlier years as a member of Mothers' Union, you may remember the value the elders had in your branch. The wisdom, prayers and encouragement you received as a young member are still an invaluable way to support Mothers' Union today. Many of our members are aging and getting tired. Can we motivate them to look within their branches or churches to identify people's gifts and abilities to plan gatherings and projects?

Wisdom doesn't end with knowledge, but is expressed in transformed hearts, lives and service to all.

Kristi Day



Using our gifts

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity.¹

Two years ago, when our granddaughter turned one, Ian and I gave her the gift of a rocking dinosaur. Within a few moments of sitting in the seat she had worked out that, with some effort on her part, she could get immense enjoyment from the rocking of her dinosaur, and share that joy with those of us privileged to know her. However, any time she stopped rocking, any time she walked away from her new toy, it became static, unable to give joy as it was designed to do. The gift that we had given was still there but it was not all that it could be when it was not being actively used.



So it is with the gifts that have been lovingly given to each one of us by God. Freely given, we have the choice of what to do with the gifts we have received. We can choose to play with them for a little while and then set them aside, perhaps to come back to them from time to time. We can choose to completely walk away, to not use our gifts, to let them lie dormant.

Or...

We can take a hold of those gifts. We can explore how to use them and how we can share them with others. The joy we find in our undertakings can be spread to those around us as we share what God has bestowed on us.

Many years ago, when undertaking a unit of our diocese's Bishop's Certificate, I undertook a questionnaire aimed at determining the gifts that I had which I could offer to my church community. My identified strength was administration. I can certainly attest that in my work, my community volunteering and my church participation I have had a strong leading toward administrative roles.

I also have a passion for sewing and for crochet. I have made many of my husband's clergy shirts and robes and in our previous parish made a

series of thematic lectern-banners for the church. In my current parish, along with other members of our local Mothers' Union branch, I have taken up the challenge issued to us all by Denise Lay, our previous AMUA Promotion and Development Coordinator, to crochet angels for distribution at Christmas and other times to share the message of God's love throughout the community.

Administration, sewing, crocheting – these are my comfort areas – skills that give me pleasure which I share with others. But God doesn't always want us to just do what is comfortable.

When the Covid pandemic hit, I suddenly found myself having to step into roles in ways that I never envisaged. I do not often allow my photograph to be taken and have always requested that my image not be posted to Facebook or other social media. In March 2020 our nation was sent into lockdown the week of Lady Day. Our cathedral service was cancelled. Along with several other churches around Australia I arranged for Ian and me to broadcast our diocesan service from our church, using a tripod and Ian's mobile phone. From then on, each Sunday during lockdown, I assisted in the broadcasting of a service from our church. Suddenly I was on Facebook in a very public way. Today I am in front of the camera once a week as part of a parish roster as we continue to broadcast Morning Prayer each day. I still do not have a social media account of my own.

I am just one. In May this year I was privileged to attend the Queensland and Northern Territory Provincial Conference in Mackay. There I experienced Mothers' Union members using their God-given gifts, sharing their skills and abilities with the gathered community. Gifts of administration, of hospitality, of leadership, of prayer, of teaching, of giving, of knowledge, of mercy, of service, of wisdom, of caring and compassion, of worship, of music, of storytelling, of creativity.

We have so much to give, if we are willing to accept and use the gifts given to us.

Wendy Mabey

¹ SDA, North America Division



My box full of love

I have a box full of love which I keep near my chair where I often spend my quiet time with God. I like to hold it, and sometimes open it for a while to let some love come out and surround me. The love in this box is very special, and can be traced back to Mary Sumner, who called women together to support each other.

What do we know about Mary Sumner? Mary Sumner's mother was a woman of personal piety who held mothers' meetings in her home in Herefordshire. Her mother's faith and the loss of her infant son at six weeks may have influenced Mary Sumner decades later to begin the Mothers' Union. Educated at home, Mary learned to speak three foreign languages and to sing well. She travelled to Rome to complete her musical education. There she met her future husband, George Sumner. George was ordained, and in 1851 received the living of Old Alresford, Hampshire, where Mary raised her children and helped her husband in his ministry by providing music and Bible classes.

In 1876, when her eldest daughter, Margaret, gave birth, she felt it would be beneficial for young mothers in the parish to be offered support. She reflected on the importance of motherhood and envisaged calling women of all social classes together to support one another. She called a meeting in the Old Alresford Rectory, where George Sumner spoke about giving religious teaching and leadership in the home.

The Mothers' Union was limited to her own parish until, nine years later in 1885, she was asked by the Bishop of Newcastle to address the Portsmouth Church Congress. She spoke of women's vocation as mothers to change the nation for the better, to be a good example to children, and to keep prayer central to the life of the family. A number of women initiated mothers' meetings in their own parishes and soon the Bishop of Winchester made the Mothers' Union a diocesan organisation. By 1892, after just seven years, the movement had spread around the world, with 60,000 members spread across 28 dioceses. In 1897, Queen Victoria became patron of Mothers' Union. On August 9 1921 Mary died, at the age of 92. She

is buried with her husband in the grounds of Winchester Cathedral.

Mary Sumner's vision lives on and inspires women today. Prayer continues to be at the heart of the MU as members continue to promote family life, advocate for conditions in society to support and protect families and at the same time uphold families affected by homelessness, poverty and relationship breakdown.

So where does my box fit in with this story? It's not the box, but what it contains. In it are over 700 cards and messages of love and support I received when my six-year-old grandson drowned. Most of this love came from Mothers' Union members around the world; some from members I knew, some from members I had corresponded with and some from members I had never had contact with, but who reached out in love at that devastating time. Without Mothers' Union in my life this box full of love would never have existed.

At the Queensland and Northern Territory Conference in Mackay, I spoke about my box full of love, and I was overwhelmed by the number of members who later approached me to express their love and support. Again, I give thanks to Mary Sumner who founded the Mothers' Union. I give thanks to members who reached out to me. While we are called upon to share Christ's love by supporting Mothers' Union work, never underestimate the power of sharing that love with each other.

Susan Skowronski



The Birdwing butterfly for transformation and the pink carnation for a mother's unending love



It's all about love

As we watch television and read the newspapers we see a constant stream of 'gifted' people; people who seem far more gifted than we'll ever be. We admire gifted people. Often, they admire themselves – especially if they gather disciples.

We forget that every Christian is gifted by God (1Corinthians 12). But how does He help us face the problem of feeling we don't have any gifts? The church in Corinth was gifted, but had huge problems. Some were jealous of those who seemed more talented or gifted than themselves. Some were proud and puffed up and known for their selfishness and self-centredness.



Photo credit: Emmanuel Phaeton on Unsplash

But right in the middle of Paul's discussion of the issue of gifts lies chapter 13, a passage that is one of the most famous ever written. (How many weddings have you been to where this passage has been read?) Here Paul tells us that no matter what gifts we have, if we don't have love, they are nothing. Love is to be at the centre of the use of the gifts God has given us. We must use our gifts for others, not for ourselves or to be noticed. Paul shocks us by saying that some of the things we admire most, including faith, martyrdom and generosity, are absolutely worthless if done without love.

But what is love? If love is so essential for our life together as Christians, we need to know more clearly what it is.

*Love is patient,
love is kind.
It does not envy,
it does not boast,
it is not proud.
It does not dishonour others,
it is not self-seeking,
it is not easily angered,*

*it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
It always protects,
always trusts,
always hopes,
always perseveres.
Love never fails.*

These verses pack a punch! What strikes you about these verses? Sounds easy? Sounds doable? And yet they are definitely not me.

I read them and I think of Jesus.

Here is an essential of the local church. If there's no love, there might be spectacular gifts, great programs, even good teaching, but in the end the church will fail.

Why is love so important? Let's think for a moment. Don't these verses describe our Lord? God is love – this is how He loves us and this is what He wants us to be like. Our church-relationships should reflect the love of God. Our gifts that He has given us, no matter what they are, should reflect the love of God.

Christian love is about the good of your neighbour. It is not about you. If we want to be people who love, then we need to realize that love is not about itself. When you love, your attention is focused on who you love – not on the act of loving.

But we are sinners. How can we be loving?

First, by constantly remembering that God is love. We are preschoolers in God's eyes, but he continues to love us, forgive us, overlook our sinful ways.

Second, by turning to God in repentance and faith and seeking the blessing of the fruit of the Spirit. Remember, God is love.

We might need to remind ourselves of this truth every day. We are saved by grace and we live out the Christian life by grace. This is a wonderful, glorious, liberating truth. I can fail in what I do and God won't love me any less. I am always his beloved, precious child. When we remind ourselves *that* God loves us and *how much* He loves us – if we think and ponder upon this truth – it will change us, and enable us to begin to love others and use the gifts he has given us by the power of His Spirit in the same way that He loves us.

This is what Paul wanted the church in Corinth to do. He wanted them to realize that those gifts of prophesying, tongues and knowledge will cease and pass away – but love will remain forever. Paul tells us that the spiritual gifts they are so busy exercising will one day come to an end. The need for these gifts will be no more.

One of my favourite verses is Philippians 3:8, *I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ.*

No matter who I am or what I have done it's having a true relationship with Jesus that counts – for everything.

Christine Jensen

Empowering AMUA for service in this triennium

Over the last weekend in April your Australian Executive met in person for a visioning weekend. We prayed, listened to each other, engaged in discussion and exchanged ideas. We began by sharing analogies and metaphors to describe where AMUA is at presently and then considered where/what AMUA could become under God and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

We gave thanks for the wonderful work of the past and present as we care for families and reach out to those in need, knowing that we are inspired and upheld by God. We also talked about the importance of looking after our members and being connected with one another locally and worldwide. On the downside we noted that AMUA can be a bit rusty, unseen or invisible, stuck and lacking direction. Yet, AMUA members are powerful women of faith, with capacity to move forward.

At the beginning of each session, we focused on a reading from scripture to help us discern the next steps. Your Executive identified many attributes to illustrate what AMUA could become such as: grounded but aspirational, variety of involvement, seen, purposeful, fluid and God's messengers, to name a few. When we distilled our conversations, discussions and insights from the weekend, we landed with a framework that we hope will help AMUA at all levels, from Australia-wide, to dioceses, to branches and to members, to plan and focus their work over this triennium and beyond.

The AMUA framework

We envisage AMUA as being centred on God and focused on the Objectives, and which, as well as being open to new ways, continues to be inwardly nurturing and outwardly focused right across the organisation.

Inwardly
nurturing

God
Objectives

Outwardly
focused

Centred on God

As Christians, God our Creator is the essence of our being; on Jesus we pattern our lives and the Holy Spirit strengthens us for God's work in the world. Mary Sumner was grounded by her belief in God, and her faith guided her actions.

Our Objectives

We ascribe to these five statements when we are enrolled. Our Objectives must be the focus of all we do in the name of AMUA. Sometimes members have ideas for action that are difficult to align with our Objectives. It is important that we regain our focus and evaluate our decisions based solely on the Objectives.

Inwardly nurturing

This is something we mostly do well from a relational point of view. We meet together, pray together, eat together and so uphold each other. 'Inwardly nurturing' is also about learning more, personally or collectively, making sure we attend to Bible study, share information or choose guest speakers who will help us to grow as members of MU. It may also be about gaining skills and confidence to step forward or outward.

Outwardly focused

For AMUA to be relevant and grow, we need to be outwardly focused. This could be as basic as being more intentional about how, what and who you pray for or about, learning more about our overseas members, using the Prayer Diary daily and being aware of what MU does outside your diocese or country. It also includes sharing the work of AMUA with others in the parish and community, raising money for AMUA projects, engaging in community action or supporting local initiatives that aligned with our objects.

Using the AMUA framework for planning and evaluation

These examples of the framework in action are only a beginning. As your national executive, we will use this framework to continue

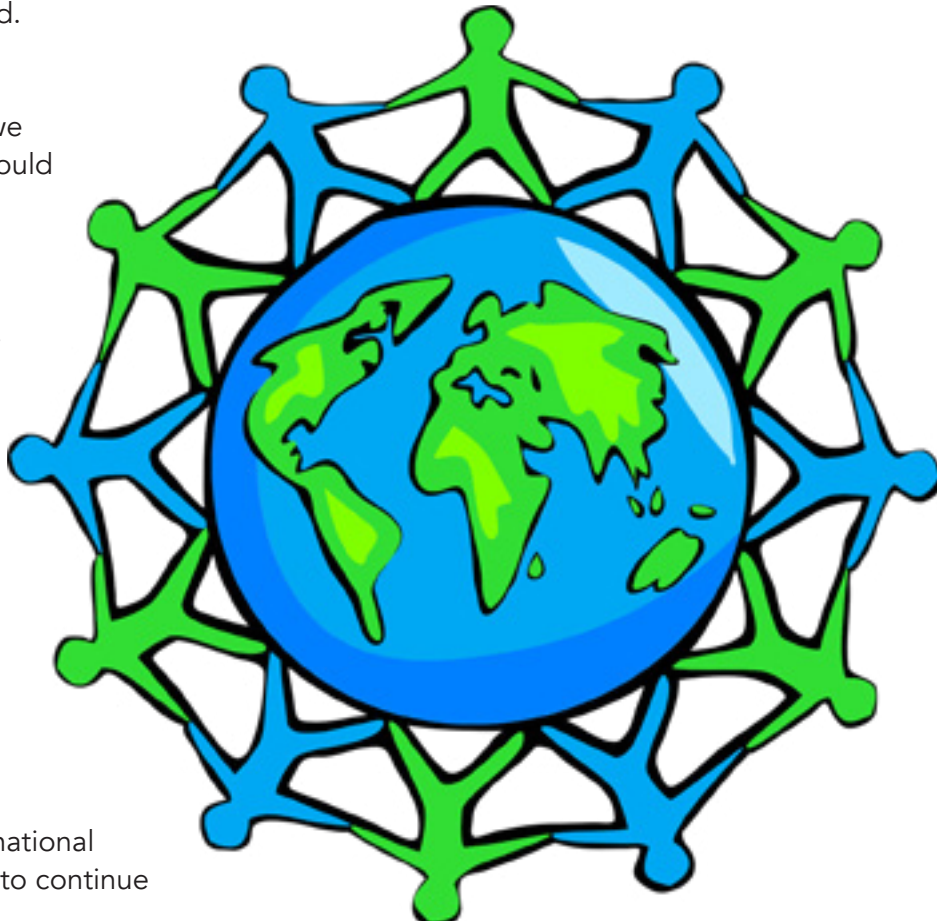
planning and regularly evaluate our contribution to supporting you to be effective members of AMUA.

In your own diocese or branch, the framework will be a useful tool when you are **planning your program each year**. Ask the members to prayerfully consider each section of the framework. How do your current activities align with the Objectives? In what ways could members be further nurtured and equipped? What is God calling individuals, branches and dioceses to do and to be as AMUA?

I suggest brainstorming each section, encouraging everyone to contribute their ideas and insights. You may also consider using the sections of the framework when compiling your annual report. During the year you could use the framework to evaluate what you are currently doing and look for ways to tweak and refocus your branch or diocese.

Through using this framework, I hope you will feel empowered to go forward with God throughout this this triennium and beyond.

Robin Ray



Reaching out in the Torres Strait



We have been able to visit each of our Branches in the Torres Strait thanks to the Northern Outreach Grant. Travel around the area is very expensive, as is the accommodation, so we are grateful to have AMUA provide the funds to make this possible. It is important to gather, to pray together and to encourage one another. Mothers' Union in the Torres Strait is a valued and respected organisation and has the ability to reach out into the Communities and to serve those who need comfort and help.



Archdeacon Chris Wright and Rev Christine Reedman accompanied me and were able to contribute in a positive way to the workshops and the gatherings.



Our visit commenced with participation in the Service and the Celebration of the Coming of the Light, which is both a solemn and joyous occasion. It is organised by the Anglican Ministry Unit Council and the Mothers' Union, who work well together on Thursday Island. It is an Ecumenical Service with all the Island coming together to celebrate the coming of Christianity to the Islands – the Light of Jesus.



After the service, all gather for the Feast which is provided by the families. Singing and dancing with lots of fellowship and laughter complete the night.



Bamaga

With the Vice President, Pauline Ah Wang, we travelled by ferry from Thursday Island to Bamaga and were able to do two workshops – one in the morning for our older members, with another in the evening with younger members of the congregation, supported by elders. They have been without a resident Priest for quite a while and have only had irregular services and seemed

a little despondent and lacking in direction. After the workshops and the consultation with the Archdeacon they appeared energised and could see a way forward, where, as lay people, they could still be effective in outreaching to their Community.



Thursday Island

On Thursday Island we were able to have a casual meeting with some of the members of Mothers' Union, one of whom is the Vice President of the Torres Strait, and were able to talk frankly about concerns and promising things that are happening on Thursday Island. These faithful women truly serve God in this place.



Mer (Murray) Island

A small plane was our transport to Mer, the most easterly island in the Torres Strait, where we were welcomed by our members all in uniform. They had set up for morning tea when we arrived, and also provided us with lunch. The venue is a lean-to in the church grounds, right on the beach. Christine swears she saw two sharks chasing sardines about 20 feet from the shore! It is a slice of heaven! The ladies were willing to participate

and responded to the Reaching Out workshop and worked out a few activities to outreach to their community and also having events and regular programs within the Church.

Moa Island



It was a very relaxed and much quieter time under the lean-to near the church at St Paul's, the members having just had two of their Elders who were long-time MU members pass into God's care. When the workshop began they responded well, coming up with many outreach projects away from the church building, as well as two ongoing activities: a Bible study and Fellowship Night at the church.



For the weekend we were able to deliver the workshop to 35 people. Archdeacon Chris was able to connect with many Councillors, who also appreciated the practical outreach opportunities that were explored by the members. We saw the possibility of being able to deliver the *Transformation Now* and the *Reaching Out* workshops to Ministry Units. We were also able to talk to the branch leadership about their having a Gathering in the Torres Strait next year. Transportation is expensive in this area, so it would be great to have the opportunity to have as many members as possible to meet for encouragement and exploring ways forward.

Viv Feltham

Parenting with the time we have

Would it surprise you to know that in the latest census there were 4 million families with children (a quarter of which are single-parent families) and of those 4 million, 70% had both parents in paid work? I have to admit I had assumed it would be lower, with more mums at home with the children. I myself am a mum-of-two in full-time work, but I had assumed I was in the minority. When you break it down further, for children aged 0-4 years old, 67.5% of mums work and for children aged 5-9 years old, 82.4% of mums work. It's just a bit less than that for kids in their teen years up to early 20s.¹

I thought perhaps the numbers would be different in church circles, but that doesn't appear to be the

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 2022, Labour Force Status of Families



Photo credit: Mark Zamora on Unsplash

case. The NCLS data for 2016 showed that nearly 50% of church attendees were in some form of employment, with 8% in the home and caring for the family.² Those employed are relatively evenly split between men (52.5%) and women (47.5%)³ and so there doesn't seem to be much of a gender bias in the employment statistics for church-goers.

What this means is that we have a lot of women in our churches struggling to 'do parenting' at the same time as fulfilling their employment obligations (and probably feeling mum-guilt about both!).

Proverbs 22:6 says we should 'Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.' We know that God is sovereign over our salvation, but Proverbs shows that we still have a responsibility, and that responsibility is not discharged just because paid employment adds a level of chaos and poverty of time.

We often think that 'showing our kids the way' is to teach our children to pray, read Bible stories and generally be Christian. What we do might encompass those things, but it's not what we're actually trying to teach them. What we are showing them is so much bigger. It includes: what a relationship with God through Jesus looks like; what a relationship with God's people looks like and why it's important; we are teaching them to be faithful disciples; godly men and women in character and behaviour, and to be faithful and bold witnesses.

How do we do that when we have to work? It can be a source of great distress to mums trying to balance parenting and work. But here's the key issue – it's not how much time you have, it's what you do with it. If you have 5 days, 5 hours, or 5 minutes, it's what we do with it that really counts.

Here are the first 3 of 6 ideas to help us think about how to use that time (you'll have to wait for the other 3 in Part 2, which will appear in the next *Mia Mia!*).

² <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/employment-changes-things/>

³ <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/attenders-in-employment-have-distinctive-characteristics/>

Modelling

It all starts with us. Our kids are learning by *our* speech, behaviour and non-verbal cues. So, do our kids see us reading the Bible even when we're tired from work? Do they see us *eager* to read the Bible, not treating it like a chore? Do they hear us praying? Do they see us engaging with other Christian books, thoughts and ideas?

The key to modelling is 'even when you're tired from work'. We will be communicating to them what we think of God's ways by **what** we model and **how** we model it.

This might take work on ourselves. What we model needs to come from our hearts. And if our hearts aren't there, then we have some work to do. It could be that we get so busy that we forget to model what we believe and value, so it could be a question of making things explicit for the kids. We forget that what is often implied may not be obvious to them.

Intentionality

Intentionality is a bit of a buzz-word at the moment, but it is important. What I mean by this is, thinking through what you want Christian parenting to look like in your specific context. I'll give you some of mine as an example:

1. I want Jesus to be present in our day-to-day discussions. So, I made the decision to talk openly about God-moments and pray for the little things, and so on.
2. I want Jesus to underpin how we face issues. So, I make sure I pray with the boys when they are feeling anxious or scared and ask God to help us with difficult situations.
3. I want Jesus to shape our weekly and annual rhythms. So, I prioritise Friday night youth, Bible study and church on Sunday, even when things have been crazy at work.
4. I want a generosity of spirit to permeate our lives so they see that work is not the be-all and end-all. So, I set up their pocket money so that part of it goes to church each week and they understand why; we will join meal rosters when we can for people at our church and we will build close relationships with other Christian families

and support each other in spiritual, emotional and practical ways.

Togetherness

Because it is in a family context, togetherness is an important aspect. With the previous point about intentionality, it's profound if you agree on those points with your kids (and, of course, your husband if he is a Christian). Then they are engaged in the process, they can see and understand you building your home in the Lord and crafting your working life with God at the heart of it.

But how are the children to know we are allowing God to build the house unless we talk to them about it?

There are lots more I'm sure you can think of that relate to our bigger 'what are we teaching them?' themes. All the things I just mentioned are real-life ways of focusing on those bigger questions in whatever time that you have. Modelling, Intentionality and Togetherness are just three ways to support what we are actually trying to teach our kids – what a relationship with God through Jesus looks like; what a relationship with God's people looks like and why that's important; teaching them to be faithful disciples; teaching them to be godly men and women in character and behaviour; and to be faithful and bold witnesses.


























Think through the time you have available, what you want to achieve and how you might go about that in a way that works for your context and the rhythm of your family – and write it down. I'm not saying that to make parenting another to-do list!



Thinking through these things prayerfully and writing them down actually helps clarify and solidify what it is that you want to see in your family context, under God.

Ruth Baker

This article is edited from a talk given by Ruth Baker at the MU Sydney Annual Seminar 2023.

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What is that in your hand?

You have heard of the expression 'Red sky at night shepherds/sailors delight, red sky in the morning, shepherds/sailors warning'. Or if you have used a fuel stove or a wood fire, you know that ironbark burns hotter than stringy bark timber. Moses, as a shepherd for 40 years, would have been aware of many natural occurrences which he had plenty of time to observe while tending his father-in-law's flock. And that is how God got his attention. In semi-arid lands there are numerous small bushes of saltbush, blue bush and spinifex, and I am sure you have seen the 'roly poly' grasses blowing across the plains. If lightning struck one of these tinder-dry bushes, there would be a flash of fire, and then nothing but ash. It would happen all the time. But a bush burning that did not burn up? Now that was something unusual that attracted Moses' attention. A natural phenomenon that was a little unnatural.

When God heard the cry (prayer) of His people in bondage to the Pharaoh of Egypt His means of answering their prayer was to delegate the job to Moses.¹ As C.S. Lewis wrote

He seems to do nothing of Himself which He can possibly delegate to His creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye.

But Moses was very hesitant to accept the job God was giving him. Despite being schooled in the Pharaoh's court, he had spent the previous 40 years simply caring for someone else's sheep. He did not even have the ambition to be a share-farmer with some sheep of his own. Moses was an 80-year-old broke bloke with no drive nor ambition. 'Who am I?' was his question.

Many of us feel the same way when asked to accept positions of responsibility in our community or in our church. We have a sense of inadequacy and a sense that someone else is better suited to the job. But we need to learn, as Moses needed to learn, that if God calls, He also enables. 'I AM WHO I AM' is God's reply.

With Moses still doubtful, the Lord asks him a question that I believe He still asks us today – 'What is that in your hand?' For Moses it was a stick. A piece of timber from a tree, possibly with whittled carvings on it (after all, you have to do

something to pass the time away while the sheep are just eating grass) and possibly a hook on one end to catch the sheep's legs to do whatever shepherds do when they catch their sheep. It was an everyday, practical, piece of normal working equipment. Nothing fancy and nothing special.

As an exercise, please read through Exodus chapters 4 to 17, especially Chapter 17:8-13. Count the number of times reference is made to 'Moses' staff'. It is Moses' stick, this piece of everyday working equipment from his day-to-day activity, that God used. But take special notice in 4:20 as Moses leaves his father-in-law to face Pharaoh, and, much later, as he stands on the hill overlooking the battle led by Joshua against the Amalekites (17:9). His stick is called the 'Rod of God'! Use of an everyday thing in the service of the Lord consecrated that mundane piece of stick into something dedicated to God that could be and was used by God.

What is that in your hand?

It may be a kettle and a few cups you can use to invite friends and neighbours around for a chat and a listening ear. It may be your car that you can use to give someone a lift to the shops or to church or to a meeting. It may be a sewing machine or a needle and thread that can be used to help someone repair clothing or make something beautiful with cross-stitching or embroidery. It may be a backyard garden with a few spare lettuce or tomatoes. Use of an everyday thing in the service of the Lord consecrates that mundane thing into something that God can use as a means of answering another's prayer.

Following a lengthy discourse on death and the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul concludes with a 'therefore' – *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.*

So, what is that in **your** hand?

John Cronshaw



Photo credit:
Mahdi Joban from Pixabay

¹ Exodus 3:1-4:17

Prayer reflection on using our gifts from God*

Opening our gifts

God's gifts are not to be left wrapped, put on the shelf and admired from afar.

The wrapping is to be eagerly torn off, the contents examined, instructions read and the purpose of the gift thoroughly explored.

We come to our Heavenly Father
with spiritual hands open.

We receive with thanks
the gifts he places into them.

With gratitude we receive our gifts.

In faith we open our gifts
looking to God to show us their use;
trusting in him to explain
his loving instructions.

In faith we open our gifts.

With joy we learn to use our gifts
delighting in their function;
employing them to serve others;
doing all for the glory of God.

With joy we use our gifts. Amen

All of the gifts are produced by one and the same Spirit.



He gives gifts to each person, just as he decides.
1 Corinthians 12:11 (NIRV)

Eagerly using our gifts

Our loving Father has chosen his gifts to us for our delight and his purposes.

Let us eagerly embrace the plans he has for their use; not holding back or envying the gifts of others.

Loving Father,
we delight in the gifts you have chosen for us;
we readily place them at your behest.
Eager for opportunities to use them;
to play our part in your loving plans.

We will not hide away our gifts like talents buried underground, never to see the light of day.

We will seek out ways to employ your gifts
to enhance the lives of your people;
to lessen the sufferings of those in need;
to contribute to making a better world.

We will uncover our gifts; eagerly bring them into the light, ready to be used for the glory of God. Amen

Love should be your guide.

Be eager to have the gifts that come from the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:1 (CEV)

*Taken from a longer prayer resource on using our gifts from God, originally posted on <https://www.mothersunion.org/resources>, published 19 September 2019, and used by permission. The longer version could be used as an activity for a Quiet Day or before a planning meeting.

Lady Day in Bendigo – listening and transforming

This year, in partnership with the Curnow Centre and St Paul's Cathedral, Bendigo Mothers' Union tried a new format – informal 'armchair chats' in four groups on a day of listening and hearing stories of challenges and opportunities. Everyone and anyone was invited. Exploration of key topics affecting our communities was shared by speakers. These included stories about flood recovery in Rochester, youth challenges, mental health and family violence.

The chance to simply listen meant we could better hear the challenges being faced as we considered the best ways to help. Three members of the Rochester and Bendigo communities told how they or family members had been impacted by the October '22 floods and the ongoing challenges in supporting community members to return to their homes.

The participants at the workshops were both informed and challenged by Chaplain Julie Harris, who has been employed at Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre, and the Rev'd Tracey Wolsey, who has recently concluded a parish ministry and now, along with the Rev'd Fiona Preston, ministers to people 'on the street' and at Tarrengower Women's Prison.

The Rev'd Zan Daniels, President of Mothers' Union Bendigo, gave a bird's-eye view of how the Anglican Church, Mothers' Union and secular organisations are working to respond to and prevent family violence locally and globally. She encouraged us that every small step is an important piece of the puzzle, and by working together across organisations sustainable change will occur. In our diocese, Orange Door is the best 'first port of call' organisation.

The day concluded with serene music as harpist, Jill Findlay, played some of the 'old' hymns prior to and during the service of thanksgiving and celebration. We were also treated to the Cathedral parish organist Stan Jackson's wonderful repertoire. Our service was led by Mothers' Union Chaplain, the Rev'd Peter Dyke, with our President, Zan Daniels, preaching on the important role of Elizabeth in Mary's 'yes'.

The aim of the workshops and the whole day was to inform and challenge. It was also seen as an opportunity to consider how to bring light into the lives of others. There were many responses from those who had attended. As well as being uplifted and informed, those present commented that it was so encouraging that the Church had provided something that the 'ordinary' person in the street could attend and relate to.

Jenny Rainsford

Jenny Rainsford leading her discussion group in prayer - March 2023.



The Holy Spirit – at work in my life



Photo credit: Laura Ohlman on Unsplash

My first real awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in my life was when our new minister, Rev. Charles Marrett, and his wife, Val, moved to Tenterfield to lead our church. They were God's instruments in turning my spiritual life upside down. Val held a morning tea for the women of the church, and asked us what sort of activity or ministry we would like to be involved in. Her question continued, 'Would you like a Bible study?' Well, I don't know what other options she gave because those few words triggered a surge within me, a rush of certainty of 'that's what I want!'

I'd never even thought of doing a Bible study! I'd grown up going to my church in Queensland with my family, attending Sunday School, being baptised and confirmed, a member of GFS, and spent four years at a private Anglican girl's school, where we studied Scripture as a subject. I'd worked with Roman Catholic nuns as an adult and had attended church most weeks of my adult life at a number of different churches, so that amazing surge of feeling of certainty that this was what I wanted was not from me. I am convinced it was the Holy Spirit at work, and He has been faithfully at work through my life since that time, giving me a deep hunger to know God through His word. He wants me to know Him personally, to have a deep personal relationship with Him.

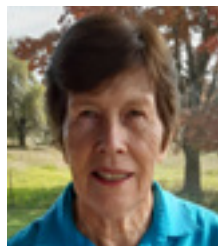
This study of God's word has been a wonderful adventure for me as the Holy Spirit has brought it to life, challenging me, comforting me, helping me to grow in wisdom and understanding. Here

in the Armidale Diocese, I've been privileged to enjoy the teaching of good, faithful preachers and teachers. I've been encouraged to push myself to see the big picture of God and His work as well as to ponder and meditate on smaller passages by doing studies, using a number of different resources including distance education from a theological college. Above all, He's teaching me to apply the truths I've learned to the way I live my life, in my thoughts, attitudes and opinions.

The greatest treasure the Holy Spirit has helped me to find was the wonderful news that I can be sure of God's love for me, that He accepts me just as I am, that I am assured of His forgiveness and that I will be safely forever with Him in this world and when I die. I have this assurance not because of what I've done but because I know that Jesus suffered and died, taking the punishment I deserved for the many and various ways I've gone my own way (my sin), rather than living God's way. A righteous God must punish evil, and so God the Son came to take the punishment I deserved. Learning that all I could contribute to my salvation was to trust that Jesus had loved me so much that He had done this for me, was the most wonderful gift I've ever received.

And it was the Holy Spirit at work in me who gave me that understanding and trust. Gift upon gift, or grace upon grace already given.

I've found that the Holy Spirit always points me to Jesus and Jesus always points me to His and my heavenly Father, and what a wonderful Father we have, to have given us His own beloved Son at such great cost to Himself. He did that, so that Jesus could then send us His Spirit to make it possible for us to truly know Him through His Word. As we grow up in our faith, and as our relationship with Jesus develops, I've found a deep and satisfying joy in seeing Him honoured and glorified as I serve Him by serving others. My prayer is that you too will know this joy.



Penny Clementson

Holding the light in Melbourne

The church bell tolls at the beginning of the annual ecumenical service – one for each woman who has died in the current year as a result of family and domestic violence. We remain seated for this opening period of remembrance, silent prayer and meditation. After the last toll of the bell, the service leaders light the Paschal Candle together in silence – a symbol of hope in the midst of pain and suffering; a very sombre reminder of the consequences of family and domestic violence.

At our service in November 2022 we remembered, named and prayed for the 39 women who had been killed as a result of domestic and other forms of gender violence since January 1. In 2019 the bell tolled 69 times!

The litany of remembrance was used during the service:

O God of compassion, you feel our pain and cry with us in our passion.

God of justice, you rage with us against the injustice of our experiences of violence and abuse. Be with us today. As sisters and brothers of faith and hope, gathered here today, we remember:

Our mothers, who had few choices; did what they had to; who resisted quietly, sometimes loudly; who carried the secrets of their abuse silently in their hearts.

Our sisters, who were made the scapegoat; who said, 'No!' but to no avail; who thought they were protecting us; who were given tranquillisers to quiet their rage; who carried the secrets of their abuse silently in their hearts.

Our neighbours, whose cries we heard in the night, whose bruises we saw in the day, who fought back and paid the price, who carried the secrets of their abuse silently in their hearts.

Our girlfriends, who spent so much time at our house, not wanting to go home; whom everyone thought were just shy and quiet; who carried the secrets of their abuse silently in their hearts.

Ourselves, who may have tried to tell but were ignored; who were not protected by anyone; who were not believed; who carry the secrets of our abuse silently in our heart.

We remember and mourn the loss of childhood; the loss of creativity; the loss of vocation; the loss of relationships; the loss of time; the cost of resources required for healing; the enormous waste of humanity caused by sexual and domestic violence.

We remember and mourn those who have not survived; whose lives were taken by someone's violence; who died in despair, never knowing justice.

In Melbourne, we have been holding this ecumenical service, 'Holding the Light', for some years during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, with a Mothers' Union representative on the organising committee. MU members have been actively involved in the service as well as providing the afternoon tea!

A range of speakers have participated, including some family members speaking of how domestic violence has affected them. Last year we had a teenage boy telling of the impact on his young life.

The number of police-recorded victims of FDV-related sexual assaults increased by 13% in 2021, to 31,118 victims, an increase of 3,500 from 2021. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 61% of them were under the age of 18. The rate of victimisation for sexual assault has increased from 69 victims per 100,000 in 1993, to 121 in 2021. This is the highest rate of victimisation for



sexual assault recorded by police across a 29-year time frame. Over a third (37%, that is, 11,367 people) of sexual assault incidents were domestic-violence related. Of the 84 victims of homicide in Victoria in 2021 almost two-thirds were domestic-violence related.

Every week in Australia at least one woman dies at the hands of a spouse or ex-partner. Police across Australia are reporting that they are dealing with a domestic violence incident every two minutes. 1 in 6 women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since the age of 15. As we know, it is not only women who are the victims of domestic violence. However, Australian women are almost four times more likely than men to be hospitalised after being assaulted by their spouse or partner.¹

These are shocking statistics.

Knowing how to respond when people are experiencing violence is the first step.

In the Diocese of Melbourne, the *Preventing Violence Against Women* programme has been initiated, with strong participation from the parishes. The diocesan website has a number of resources, including the booklet, *Bystander Action: Shifting the culture that drives violence against women through small, courageous actions in daily life*.

Check your Diocesan website to see what resources are available. Learn more about the ways in which gender inequality creates a social environment that enables and excuses violence against women and what you can do about it.



This is just the beginning. We are called pay attention to the statistics and to stop the injustice of violence before it starts.

Elaine Longford

¹ Australian Institute of Criminology [AIC] 2017, 2017 National Homicide Monitoring Program report; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019, Family domestic and sexual violence in Australia continuing the national story; and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, Family, domestic and family violence in Australia 2018



Armour

From a distance I watched him prepare. Methodically, he put his armour on. Inch-thick, impact-absorbing, leg and thigh guards were strapped on securely, followed by a titanium helmet and heavily padded gloves. Appropriately clad, he extracted a bat from his kit and swung it around several times, re-familiarising himself with the weight of the English willow. So armoured, he strode purposefully away from us and out towards his combatant. A brief conversation was shared with an identically-clad compatriot before he took his place, then he squarely faced his opponent, who stood, menacingly, some 30 yards away, casually and repeatedly tossing his own personal weaponry into the air. This sanctioned assailant wore no protective armour, and his only weapon was a 156g red leather ball. He was, however, enormous. A veritable man-child. Even from the boundary it was obvious that items marked 'Gillette' had made it into his kit-bag. At the umpire's signal, he commenced his run up, and, at full and magnificent flight, with a perfectly straight arm, he hurled the ball full force at over 110 km/hr at my son. My son sensed the ball rather than saw it, and with head perfectly still, executed a classic defensive block. The ball, neutralised of all momentum, stopped harmlessly at the toe of the bat. I made a small marking at the relevant points on the score book. "Dot ball to Grice," I said to my fellow scorer, who grunted his assent.

All mums and dads whose children enjoy competitive sport will have experienced the terror of watching their child face up to a veritable Goliath. The nausea and tachycardia that arise when players of vastly disparate body mass are matched up is known simply as 'parent gut'. It is by no means restricted to our particular brand of sporting madness (cricket); other parents have shared that they have felt physically ill to the point of passing out when watching rugby in any form, and I can only imagine equestrian events!

After decades of happily being a cricket mum, an opportunity came for me to actually play. In

a proper team. With an organised competition, uniform, training and everything. This may seem uninteresting, but, for me, at age 50, it was a very welcome turn of events. Our club was totally supportive, our team was blessed with bi-weekly coaching by skilled members of all three senior male divisions. Given this sure foundation, there were grounds for confidence despite our newness to the game. Nevertheless, as I would soon discover, there is a primal response when facing somebody who is about to hurl a solid object at you that no amount of preparation will completely dispel.

I clearly recall experiencing this mid-season, during a night game played under lights. It was our turn to bat, and I was opening the batting line-up. I had every reason to want to scurry back to the grandstand without facing a single delivery – our opponents were a team of young guns who were well-known for their decisive bowling attack. With a dry mouth and eyes wide open, I turned and faced the bowler steaming down at me. In a split second, between two rapid heart-beats, I (thankfully) recalled two critical truths: firstly, I had been given a sure foundation, and secondly, I was fully armoured. At that decisive point, fear gave way to a surge of confidence. I had everything I needed.

The result of my women's mid-season cricket game is totally unimportant. The point, however, is crucial. Life can similarly deliver significant head-on attacks that require a sure foundation and full armour. These full-frontals may come in a variety of serious forms, be it loss of health, damaging relationships, financial hardship or a faith-destroying loss of spiritual confidence. The apostle Paul recognised this reality in his letter to the Ephesians, written during a period of Roman-enforced house arrest. Paul wrote, 'Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.' We can imagine Paul dictating his letter, all the while eyeing off the fully-armoured guard, positioned just inside his very own doorway. Armour. Armour repels threats. Armour. Armour reduces fatal blows to injuries that will heal. Armour. Armour allows the wearer to resist challenges that would otherwise prove overwhelming.

At this point, the analogy between physical and spiritual armour breaks down. Physical armour can only go so far, and the worldwide cricket community grieves deeply every year on the anniversary of Phil Hughes' tragic passing. I myself have sat in ED with our cricket-playing daughter, and watched her fail the concussion test to the point that she could barely bring my name to remembrance. Yet Paul reminds us that when it comes to matters of faith, spiritual armour, carefully and properly applied, allows us to stand firm in all circumstances, regardless of the magnitude of the challenge. We who call Jesus our Lord are reminded to have an attitude of expectancy that the great deceiver, the father of lies, will throw everything at us to make us lose hope and confidence. But know this – that when those days come, the armour of faith, truth, righteousness and the protective power of God's word will give us everything we need.

And we will stand firm. *Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.*

Ephesians 6:13-18, 24.



Photo credit: Lisa Scott from Pixabay

On the front foot for Christmas

No, this article will not help you plan your Christmas menu or compete with your organised friend who always finishes her Christmas shopping by the end of October! But before the hustle and bustle starts, let's talk about another kind of Christmas preparation.

If you are a Christian celebrating Christmas, how similar are your preparations to those of your non-Christian neighbours? Is the only difference between you a matter of church attendance on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, and slightly less alcohol? What can you do to prepare spiritually for Christmas, for your own benefit as well as a witness to your family and friends?

For many years, starting when my children were young, I have been collecting Christmas books

that re-tell the story of the first Christmas. They are mostly books from secular publishers (not Christian bookshops) and they are beautiful with blue and gold and red and green. In early December I display them on the sideboard in our dining room. I also buy copies of these books each year and give them away to families at church as an Advent present.

A list of these books and a description of each one appears at the end of this article.

Some of us know the grief of adult children who have not followed on in our faith and who have not brought up our grandchildren in the faith. Perhaps we can buy attractive Christmas books for our grandchildren as an Advent present? Even if your children are hostile to Christianity, I recommend that you buy big, beautiful books that recommend themselves, not small, token books which you hope will sneak under the radar. Do not give these books instead of Christmas presents, but in addition to them. Even if you don't feel



you can buy these books for your grandchildren, make sure you have them at your house so they can see them when they come to visit and you can read the books to them. You might even be able to start a Christmas tradition by lighting Advent candles each week in December and reading part of the Christmas story aloud from the Bible.

Let me conclude with my top 11 (!) tips for being on the front foot for Christmas:

1. Pray for your preparations.
2. Read the Bible every day and thank God for sending Jesus.
3. Give Christian Christmas cards.
4. Think about some Christmas activities to do with children.
5. Pray for opportunities to talk to people about Jesus.
6. Talk about what you celebrate at Christmas with friends, family and neighbours.
7. Invite people to come to church with you at Christmas (or the Carols service).
8. Think about how to win people – can you give Christian books as gifts or children's books of the Christmas story to families?
9. Pray about the things that worry you at Christmas – money/family tensions/loneliness.
10. Find some good Christmas music to listen to.
11. Start a spiritual Christmas tradition in your family.



I pray that God will take our resolves and works of faith in preparing for Christmas and make them good ones this year (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Elizabeth Parker

Top Christmas books for children

YOUNG CHILDREN

A Christmas Story

Wildsmith, Brian. Oxford University Press, 2007.

A beautiful book with simple text and amazing pictures - look out for what the pictures tell you that the text does not. Lots of gold. Suitable for toddlers to 7-year-olds.

The Nativity

Lane, Leena & Wilson, Anne. ABC books 2006.

Possibly out of print. A beautiful picture book which re-tells in simpler language the biblical account of Jesus' birth. Large pictures and suitable for 3-7-year-olds.

The Story of Christmas

Dalton, Pamela. Chronicle Books, 2011.

The pictures are traditional folk-art style and the text is King James Bible.

The Nativity Play

Butterworth, Nick & Inkpen, Mick. Hodder & Stoughton, 2005.

A humorous look at children's preparations for a school nativity play which faithfully retells the story of the first Christmas. Suitable for 4-8-year-olds.

The Nativity – Six Glorious 3D Tableaux

Crespi, Francesca. Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 1994.



A beautiful interactive book with tabs to pull etc telling the story of Jesus' birth for toddlers to 6-year-olds. The author has also produced *Ding Dong Merrily on High – a Pop-Up Book of Christmas Carols*.

PRIMARY AGED CHILDREN

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey

Wojciechowski, Susan. Walker Books.

A moving story about a woodcarver who is embittered by past losses but is transformed while carving a nativity scene for a little boy and his mother. Lovely pictures. Suitable for 5-12 years.

The First Noel

Pienkowski, Jan. Candlewick Press, 2004.

Amazing paper cut-out book which folds out into a five-point star book for display. Simple King James text. Very striking.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever

Robinson, Barbara. Harper Collins, 1972.

Hilarious!! An account of a small-town church nativity play which is thrown into chaos when a particular family of children decides to participate. This is a story of redemption for the children who join and illumination for those inured by familiarity against the impact of the first Christmas. A chapter book suitable for primary school aged children – great fun to read them a chapter a night.

The Tale of Three Trees – A Traditional Folktale

Hunt, Angela. Lion Hudson, 1989.

A Christian folktale weaving the stories of Jesus' birth, ministry and death. Simple but powerful with lovely pictures. Suitable for 4-10-year-olds.

(From a list compiled by Christine Jensen and adapted by Elizabeth Parker)

All these books can be purchased online through Booktopia or Amazon, or through your local secular bookshop. If you use your local bookshop, take this list and ask if they can order the books in for you – most bookshops are very happy to do this. They are mostly \$20-\$30 in price.

Elizabeth Parker

From My Bookshelf



Bringing Forth Life, published in February 2023, encourages new mothers and mothers-to-be with an uplifting perspective on pregnancy and motherhood while providing important information in the relevant medical, psychological and spiritual spheres. Jodie McIver, the author, is a practicing



midwife living on the outskirts of Sydney. Jodie and her husband, an Anglican minister, are parents to three primary-school-aged children. She wrote the book after perceiving that there was a

lack of Christian resources on the huge transition women experience in becoming mothers – there were many books on parenting, but not on the transforming process of becoming a mother.

Jodie's aims in writing the book were to:-

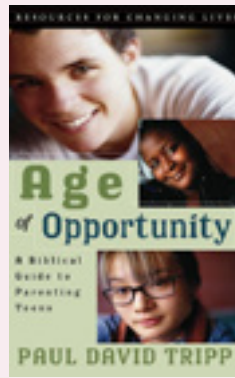
- ❖ provide good preparation for first-time mothers for the experience to come;
- ❖ explore what new mothers are about to go through from a spiritual perspective;
- ❖ make women feel valuable in this life-bearing role;
- ❖ help with the tricky decision-making that can arise during pregnancy;
- ❖ give women a sense of God's purposes in pregnancy and motherhood, even in the hard and unexpected challenges that arise.

Many personal stories of a variety of women in pregnancy and new motherhood are sprinkled throughout the book. The book helpfully acknowledges that motherhood is a mix of pain and joy, which also reflects the pain and joy experienced by God in nurturing his people. In an age where women's roles in paid work and other contributions to life have greater prominence in public discussion than their domestic and sacrificial caring roles, this is a helpful and inspiring book for a new generation of mothers.

Bringing Forth Life can be bought through the publisher, Youthworks, online at <https://youthworksmedia.net/products/bringing-forth-life>

or by phoning (02) 8268 3309, or through your local or online Christian bookstore.

Elizabeth Parker



Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens by Paul David Tripp

I thoroughly recommend this book! I wanted a book to help me parent my teenage daughters because I was finding it so hard. This book was just what I needed. Paul David Tripp shows us what

our families are and could be, by God's grace. He outlines how our teens are being coerced into following the world and how we as parents have our own idols and shortcomings. He gives us a biblical framework for understanding parenting and how to disciple our children. His ideals are high and sometimes daunting, because they align with a holy God who wants the best for our children. God wants our children to be wise and do good, to know God and honour him.

In the third part of the book, Tripp gives us practical, hopeful, realistic ideas to implement.

After reading this book I feel excited and hopeful that there is a way to be connected to my teenagers, to point them to Jesus for salvation and to humbly ask for my Father's help to sanctify them and to help me in the work he has for me to do.

Michelle Foster

Michelle is married to Paul, an Anglican minister. They have five children and live in Quirindi in regional NSW.



Hymn Workout – Obedience

Reading: Luke 14:25-33

*Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild, restless sea;
Day by day his sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow me."*

Mark 1:17

*As, of old, apostles heard it
By the Galilean lake,
Turned from home and toil and kindred,
Leaving all for his dear sake.*

Mark 1:18

*Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."*

*In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil and hours of ease,
Still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."*

Luke 8:14

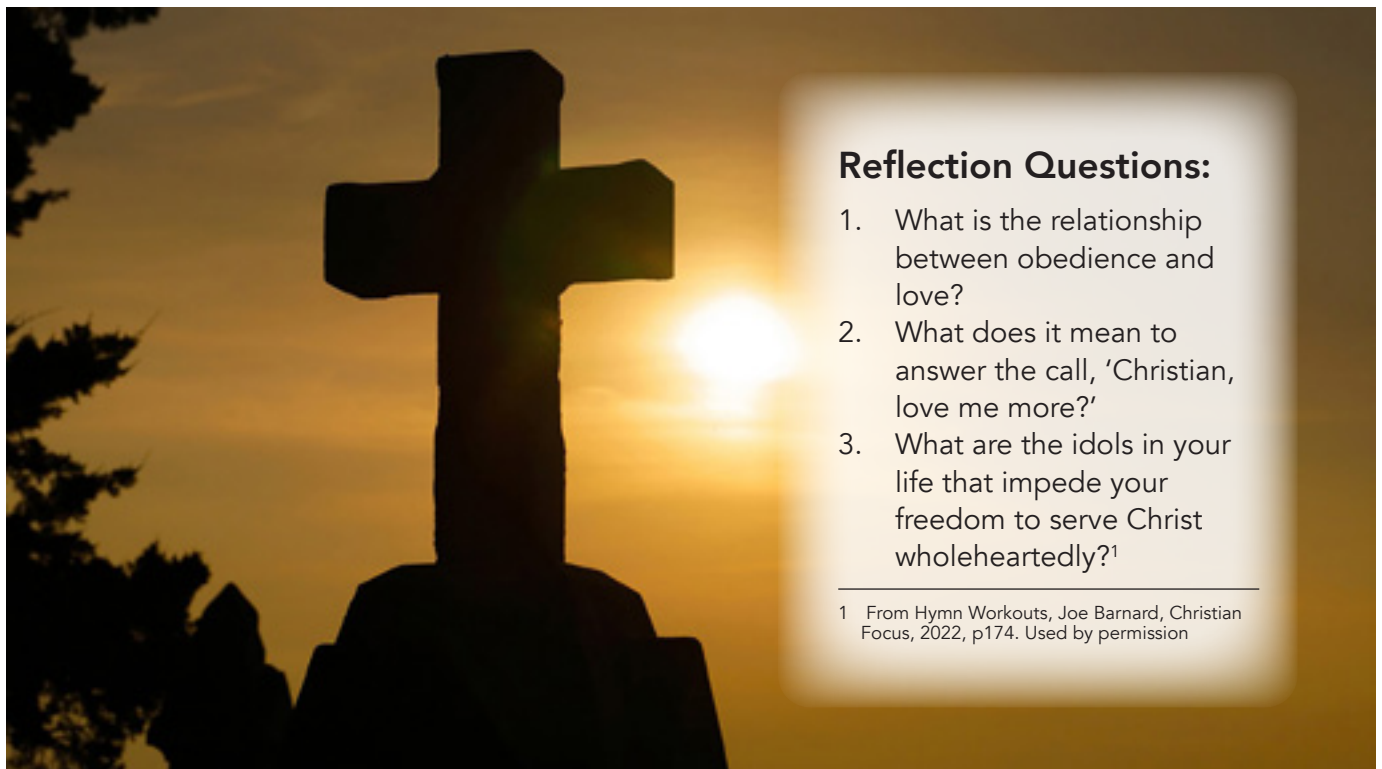
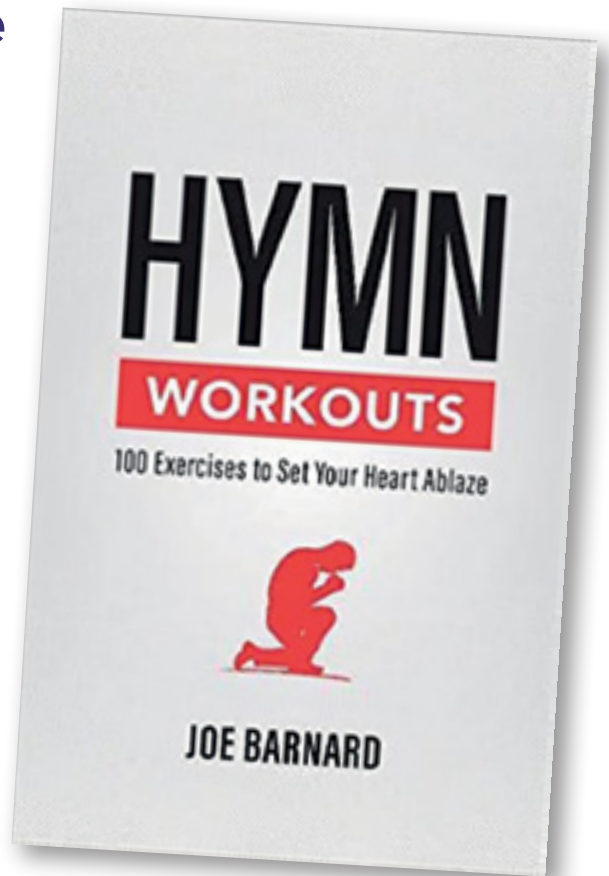
*Jesus calls us; by thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thine obedience,
Serve and love thee best of all.*

Rom. 12:1

John 14:21

Luke 14:26, 33

CECIL FRANCES ALEXANDER



Reflection Questions:

1. What is the relationship between obedience and love?
2. What does it mean to answer the call, 'Christian, love me more?'
3. What are the idols in your life that impede your freedom to serve Christ wholeheartedly?¹

¹ From Hymn Workouts, Joe Barnard, Christian Focus, 2022, p174. Used by permission

Photo credit: sspiehs3 from Pixabay

Jacob's Lunch

I was up early. It was school holidays and Mum and Dad were letting me stay with my cousins for the two whole weeks while they went to the city for a break.

I'd packed my backpack and was all set. Auntie Jess arrived just as I was finishing breakfast and said, 'We've got a treat in store for your first day, Jacob!' But no matter how many times I begged her, she wouldn't say any more.

It took a while to get to their house, but Nathan and Esther came whooping down the path as soon as they saw me.

'Hurry! Hurry!' they yelled, 'We're going on a surprise!'

Grabbing my backpack, I followed the family as they made their way towards the hill in the distance. I could see crowds of people heading in the same direction, and away in the distance, the green grass looked like a sea of moving colour as people of all shapes and sizes collected together.

Puffing and perspiring, we finally made our way to the slope, stepping over and around the hundreds of people already seated on the grass, till we found an empty spot.

'Tell me what's going on!' I demanded, as we settled down on the rugs Uncle had brought.

'Well,' he said, 'have you heard about that chap who's been going all over the place doing stuff, like getting lame people walking, and making others who were blind, able to see absolutely everything! They reckon he even stopped a thunder storm dead still, and he was even able to walk over the water to the middle of the lake where his mates were fishing!'

'Unreal!' I gasped, 'do you mean that guy, Jesus?'

'Yes! And he's coming here today...now!'

The rest of the day was a blur of excitement as we watched the man arrive and start to talk to the crowd. Somehow his voice carried even down to where we were sitting, and he said some amazing things.

Can you imagine how nervous I was when he actually made his way through the crowds near enough to see the colour of his eyes, and I swear I could even see his laughter lines!

I heard people asking if anyone had any food, because Jesus was telling his mates that they should get us all a feed.

Everyone seemed to have forgotten to bring anything, but suddenly I remembered that Mum had packed a lunch for me, and I quickly rummaged through my backpack and pulled the crumpled package out. Without thinking twice, I ran between

the people right up to Jesus, and offered it to him. You should have seen the smile that spread over his face.

'Why, thank you, Jacob!'

How on earth did he know my name?

It wasn't long before his twelve organisers had everyone sitting down and grouping themselves, so there was room to move between the rows, and to my absolute shock, Jesus held my squashed lunch pack in his hands, closed his eyes, said grace, and began passing my bread rolls and pieces of fish to his friends to pass out to the crowd. Somehow it just kept coming and coming.

I heard later, that more than five thousand people got something each. Can you believe it!

Meg Lane

Meg Lane describes herself as being 'very ancient. (Never imagined the Sunday School teaching I began when I was 15, would still be a weekly happening at 88!)

I was married in Sydney to an amazing man who took our three young children and me to Canada for five years, when they were very young, and then, as short term missionaries with the Wycliffe Bible Translators, to Papua New Guinea for three more years of huge adventures.

This wonderful man died suddenly when we had only been back in Australia for a split second, so I was forced back into my teaching career, where I actually thrived despite my grief.

Best of all, my family grew to 11 grandchildren, to which have been added 12 great-grandchildren, to delight my every moment. Occasional babysitting is still a joy.

I volunteer once a week as a mentor in an Aboriginal school, teach Sunday School every week at our Cathedral in Bunbury, and coordinate the youth group. Letter-writing to shut-ins, being on the church prayer chain, and pastoral care are important to me. I also keep all the local coffee shops afloat, doing my social networking!

And I belong to a weekly writing group where I often write a lot of nonsense. At home, I love writing reflective poetry and reimagined Bible stories. And read heaps and heaps!



Around the dioceses

BUNBURY

On the last day of June members from around the diocese gathered in Collie for our 2023 Friendship Day. First held in 2021, these days are an opportunity for members to come together in an informal setting for a day of fellowship and sharing. The days are held in small towns in the diocese, not necessarily where there is a Mothers' Union branch. The day commences with a prayer service from our MU service book, and is followed by an activity, lunch and then members have the opportunity to share what has been happening in their branches. The diocesan executive meets the day before and provides a report on its activities and decisions, seeking input from members.

This year the day started with a visit to All Saints Anglican Church in Collie, where members learnt about the unique history of the church and of its life-sized mural in the sanctuary, which was painted 100 years ago. Following a service in the church, members travelled to the CWA rooms where they undertook an activity which challenged them to explore the women of the Bible and our Christian tradition. This was followed by a presentation on the work of Mothers' Union in other countries around the world. Having learnt about the many different activities that other branches and other dioceses undertake in these countries, members were asked to consider their own branch activities – what they do and how these relate to the objectives of Mothers' Union. The final activity was an opportunity to dream about what we might do in the future in the name of Mothers' Union.

Wendy Mabey



CANBERRA GOULBURN



With gratitude and thanks Canberra and Goulburn MU acknowledges Helen Lloyd's 57 years of service to Anglican Mothers' Union Australia and the Canberra & Goulburn Diocese.

Helen was born on 23 June 1933 in Geelong. Helen and her husband, Gordon, were married in 1964 and had five children. After moving to the ACT Helen joined Caritas (Young Members' Department) in 1967. Helen's accountancy background led to her being asked to accept the position of Australian Commonwealth Treasurer, which she held from 1981-1986. She was treasurer of the Canberra & Goulburn Diocesan Council from 1987-1993. Her experience and knowledge have been of great assistance to the members of MU in this diocese, whom she has served as Diocesan Treasurer for many years until her retirement in 2022.

Over the years Helen attended many MU and ACW conferences, but remembers the Launceston gathering to celebrate MU's 125th Anniversary as the most significant in her memory. We give thanks for Helen's service to Mothers' Union and wish her a very happy and blessed 90th Birthday celebration with her family and friends.

Joan Eberlé

NEWCASTLE



Twice a year Boolaroo MU make up toiletry packs for those living in their cars. We make packs for ladies, men and families. The need is very great, and as you can see by the photo, there is quite a bundle of toiletries in each pack. Our parish is also very generous in helping us fill these packs, which is tremendous. After being blessed, the packs are passed to our Samaritan Foundation, and they give them out to those in need.



MEREWETHER

I recently had the pleasure of visiting our MU Link Branch in Mawnam Parish, Cornwall in England, where I met with Mary Cockerman, the branch president of Mawnam MU. Mary invited me to join her and her husband at a Sung Eucharist at Truro Cathedral on Trinity Sunday. Mary then showed me around the Cathedral, including the permanent MU display in the side aisle. We enjoyed a long chat over a coffee, when I also met several other MU members.

The Link ministry is a great way to maintain our MU outreach. It encourages branches to share prayerful thoughts and community activities and to foster new ideas. I pray many branches will continue to maintain links throughout the world, both in the spirit of friendship and to keep the MU flag flying.



Anne Clarke

PERTH

Lesmurdie member, Liz, joined Mothers' Union because she saw it as a way to use her creative gifts. 'I am a keen quilter, knitter and love to crochet. A friend told me about the M.U. meetings and the work that they do in caring for families in a practical way. I thought that I could use my talents for M.U. so I went to my first meeting three years ago and have been a member ever since.'

Liz, together with other members of our M.U. support a number of social welfare agencies with hand-made quilts, knitted rugs and warm clothes. Upon receipt of these gifts the question is often asked, 'What is M.U.?' and we have the opportunity to explain that as a group, we show God's love by sharing our talents with all people

and especially those families and children who are struggling with adversity.

Our quilts, rugs and warm clothes have been sent to the neo natal ward at King Edward Memorial Hospital, The Perth Children's Hospital, Ronald McDonald House, the Ukraine refugees, St Bartholomew's House, Valencia Nursing Home and to accompany Wheelchairs for Kids. Our next project will be support for the people who are rebuilding their lives under the umbrella of Shalom House.

A gift is something given as a present or a special ability. We have chosen one aspect of this as using a talent and sharing it loving with those in need.

Nancy Rhodes

Mothers' Union members at **Carine/Duncraig** got into the spirit of the coronation of King Charles with a High Tea on the afternoon of May 6. Members travelled from across Perth to enjoy a delicious afternoon tea of home-made treats, both savoury and sweet, served on fine bone china. Jenny McCormack entertained the crowd with her beautiful flute playing and it was followed with a good 'old fashioned singalong' of some of our favourite British songs. People dressed for the occasion and there was more than one crown seen amongst the crowd, as well as hats galore. Both King Charles and Queen Camilla were prayed for during the afternoon and everyone took home a commemorative copy of the prayers as well as a specially made and wrapped shortbread biscuit in the shape of a crown.

Wendy Mabey, Overseas and Northern Outreach Co-ordinator for AMUA, was our special guest and gave all in attendance a very informative insight into the current projects AMUA is supporting through Overseas and Northern Outreach

funds. All monies raised from the High Tea are earmarked for O & NO. Everyone in attendance agreed that it was a fabulous afternoon.

Helen Krynen



QUEENSLAND AND NORTHERN TERRITORY CONFERENCE, MACKAY MAY 16 – 19

Finally, after two postponements, we were able to hold the Conference. It was a joy to see so many people come together, intent on enjoying all that was presented. The theme was *Unity in Diversity* and the sessions came from the banner – Worship, Service, Prayer, and Love. Each Diocese presented one of the sessions and Wendy, the Australian Overseas and Northern Outreach Coordinator, gave us a world perspective after each session. We had many cultures represented, and time was given for each cultural group to showcase something special about their culture. The first presentation was from the Torres Strait and then we heard from our Aboriginal members. Next came the South Sea Islanders, with representatives from Vanuatu, the Solomons and Tonga. Our final presentation was from the Immigrants who have made this wonderful country of Australia their home. As we came together in Unity, we could appreciate how much we gain from encompassing all our diversity. This was also emphasized by Wendy's sharing about the richness of the diversity in our worldwide organisation, and her wearing of clothes from different countries helped us appreciate it.

We were blessed to have our Provincial President, Robin, and four other members of the Australian Executive – Wendy, Susan, Kristi and Sue – adding their expertise.

Throughout our time together it was wonderful to see old friendships being renewed and new friendships made. As always, we gain so much by

just being together, worshipping together, sharing what is special about belonging and having fun!

Vivienne Feltham



WANGARATTA

Before Covid 19 struck, the three centres of our parish, St Paul's, Avenel, St John's Nagambie, and Christ Church, Seymour, met a few times a year for a service in Seymour and to enjoy a bring-and-share lunch and fellowship.

This year, some folk have instead had lunch at the restored Mangalore Railway Hotel in Seymour. However, not all the pensioners of the parish can afford this luxury, or drive far, and they say they miss this combined Seymour service and shared lunch. So, on Wednesday, June 14, some of the parish ventured, on a cold early-winter's day, to St John's Anglican Church in Mansfield for a service led by the Rev'd Melissa Clark. The lovely old church looked welcoming in the mild sunshine, and autumn leaves blanketed the grounds. A few of St John's flock attended the service and welcomed the 10 MU visitors and four parishioners from Nagambie and Seymour. Rev'd Clark then joined the visitors for a delicious lunch provided by the Delatite Hotel. It was a chance for members of the parish to enjoy some fellowship with their fellow parishioners.

Diane Grant



