

MIA *mia*

AUTUMN 2022

ANGLICAN
MOTHERS UNION
AUSTRALIA





President:

Reverend Anne Kennedy
Email: ppmuaustralia@telstra.com

Secretary:

Mrs Lyn Middleton
Email: muaustsecretary@telstra.com

Treasurer:

Mrs. Marilyn Robey
Email: muausttreasurer@telstra.com

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

A quarterly magazine of
Anglican Mothers Union Australia.
Mia Mia is an Aboriginal word for 'home'.

Editor:

Christine Brain
Email: miamia@muaustralia.org.au

Printed by:

Snap Printing
18 Neil St, Toowoomba Qld 4350

Graphic Design by:

Cuccovia Design
Email: cuccoviadesign@westnet.com.au

Websites:

www.muaustralia.org.au
UK: www.themothersunion.org

Cover Photo:

Aaron Burden on Unsplash

Mia Mia Vol 106 No 3 ISSN 1326-7701



Member of the Australasian Religious Press Association

© Copyright: No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission

Have your say in Mia Mia

Suggestions, comments, contributions
and insights are welcome.

Please send all correspondence
to the editor.

Publication in *Mia Mia*
is at the editor's discretion.

Theme for next issue:
Lord, transform our group

Deadline for next issue:
15 April 2022

Meet Our Contributors



The Rev'd Dawn Colsey was ordained deacon 12 years ago and priest a year later, after a long career as a teacher, mostly of French and English.

Dawn has served in an honorary capacity in the Parish of St Edward's Kensington Gardens, where she had worshipped for about 30 years; she loved the preaching, teaching, sacramental and pastoral work involved. Currently Dawn attends and assists at St Aidan's Payneham. Recently she completed an ecumenical course in Spiritual Direction in the Ignatian tradition. Now in her sixth year as Chaplain to Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Adelaide, Dawn especially enjoys rising to the challenge of writing reflections for Executive and Council meetings.

Dawn has been married, and has a daughter and a son, 5 granddaughters and a grandson. Her hobbies are writing and performing poetry, reading and gardening. She loves the natural world, and has come to appreciate the truth that 'Everything that is, is holy.'



Sharon Kirk first heard the gospel at 14 years of age and has been following Jesus ever since. She is married to Brian, a semi-retired Anglican minister, and they have been serving in different ministry positions within the Armidale Diocese for over 30 years. Having completed a Master of Divinity degree through Ridley College (Melbourne) in 2020, Sharon is currently working at the Anglican Cathedral in Armidale, training, discipling and equipping women to grow in their Christian faith and service. For the past 10 years Sharon has been a keen supporter of MU and has been actively involved in leadership at a Diocesan level and as the NSW State President (2017 to 2019). Sharon loves being mum to her 5 sons, (aged from 19 to 35) and she delights in being 'Nana' to 2 grandsons and 3 granddaughters. Whenever she finds a spare moment, Sharon enjoys reading historical novels, sewing, watching a good movie, and just spending time with family and friends.

Sharon loves being mum to her 5 sons, (aged from 19 to 35) and she delights in being 'Nana' to 2 grandsons and 3 granddaughters. Whenever she finds a spare moment, Sharon enjoys reading historical novels, sewing, watching a good movie, and just spending time with family and friends.



Kerry Parry Whilst a Community Chaplain based in a coffee shop in Atherton, Far North Queensland (2015 to 2019), Kerry enjoyed occasionally attending the Anglican Mothers Union meetings, where members were diligent

in providing her with a copy of the *Mia Mia* magazine, which she enjoyed reading. Kerry and her husband, Paul, returned to Bendigo, Victoria, in late 2019 and in mid-2021 started attending St Peter's, Eaglehawk, where they quickly felt like God had called them 'home' in this wonderful church family. Kerry is currently working as the Parish Secretary. Kerry and Paul have 3 adult children and 5 grandchildren – 4 boys and a girl (!), 'who thankfully all live in Victoria.'

Contents

From the Editor's desk	
Christine Brain	4
From the Publication Department	4
A word from our President	
Rev'd Anne Kennedy	5
Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me...	
Christine Jensen, OAM, Vice President	6
An ABC of Christian discipleship	
Betty Coumbe.....	7
Lord, transform me	
Denise Lay, Promotion and Development Coordinator.....	8
Transform now!	
Dr. Robin Ray, Overseas and Northern Outreach Coordinator	9
Lord, make me a channel of disturbance!	
Susan Skowronski, Social Issues and Action Coordinator	10
Conformed to the image of his Son...	
John Cronshaw	11
Bev Perry's faith journey	12
Discipleship in the context of ageing and dementia	
Rev'd Ben Boland	13
Just as I am	
Kerry Parry	15
The transformational power of thankfulness	
Rt. Rev'd Dr. Peter Brain	16
Transformation out of tragedy	
Rev'd Dawn Colsey	17
Lord, help me to pray	18
Lifelong transformation	
Jill Phillips	19
MU in Sydney – then and now	
Glenda McSorley	21
The change that matters most	
Sharon Kirk.....	22
Spiritual wellness	
Rev'd Peter Dyke	24
Over the Fence	
Virginia Grice	25
10 tips for healthy game play	
ACCM	27
Around the dioceses	28



From the Editor's desk

Welcome to the first issue of *Mia Mia* for 2022, in which we turn our attention to the new theme, 'Transformation...now!' Expressed like this, there is a sense of urgency – we want change, and quickly! In truth, though, most transformation happens over time – the changes from bud to flower, tadpole to frog, chrysalis to butterfly, flour, butter and eggs to cake all take time. The grumpy old woman takes even longer to be transformed into a smiling, happy one! But whether slowly or quickly, all transformation begins with God. In this issue several contributors share some of the ways in which God has transformed them, while others point to changes we can make to cooperate with God in our transformation. I trust that you enjoy meeting our new contributors and that the insights and challenges from familiar friends all bring you encouragement and hope that transformation is possible. May we all look to God to answer the prayer expressed in the words of the hymn written by Albert Orsborn, 'Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me...'

Happy reading!

Christine

MIA MIA is available on CD

When your eyesight starts to diminish all is not lost!

All articles in the *Mia Mia* magazine are faithfully recorded for your entertainment and enjoyment. All you need is a small CD player and MU news from around Australia will be at your fingertips.

For further information contact your Branch Treasurer.

From the Publication Department

In addition to AMUA cards, certificates and badges, the following titles which relate to the theme of 'Transformation-Now!' are available from the Publication Manager.

The Gift of Years – Joan Chittister

Henri Nouwen & Spiritual Polarities – A Life of Tension by Wil Hernandez

Choose Love – Stormie Omartian

The Art of Waiting – Reflections for the Advent Season

A Faith to Live by – Roland Ashby

We also have small booklets from Pilgrim Press *Looking Up* series

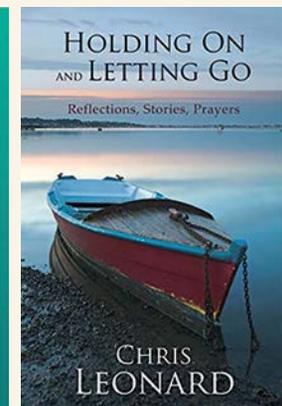
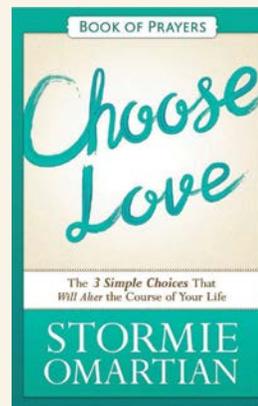
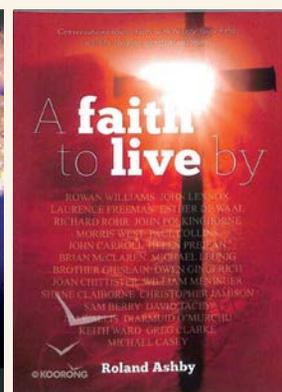
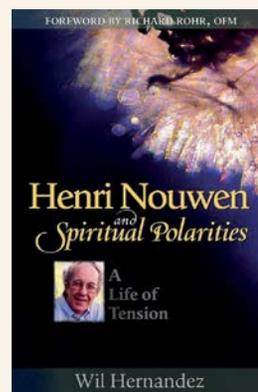
My Loved One Is Dying

Holding On...While Letting Go

When Death Has Touched Your Life

Looking Up While Lying Down

Rob Kennedy,
Publication Manager





A word from our President

Welcome to a new year! A year where we focus on a fresh theme: *'Transformation – Now!'*

Over Christmas, Rob and I baby-sat four chooks. As the chooks had to be let out every morning and put away every night, it was easier for us to stay in our daughter's home in the hills, alongside some tropical fish and a Border Collie. Surrounded by trees, visited by cockatoos, parrots and kookaburras, we had a very pleasant holiday.

Some of the days were really hot and one afternoon I noticed a chook sitting on hot concrete looking very unwell – one wing outstretched, one foot in the air, beak open, not moving. 'Oh, no!' I thought. 'I can't let a chook die on our watch!!' I talked to it, prodded it (gently) with an umbrella hanging nearby – still it didn't move. I dashed inside and grabbed two oven mitts (well, I'd never picked up a chook before!). As I gently put my gloved hands around the bird and tried to lift it, it fluttered a bit and then walked calmly away! Evidently it was sunbaking...

The apparent transformation from a dying chook to a healthy hen began with a gentle embrace.

MU members all over the world are working towards *'Transformation – Now!'* as the worldwide theme for 2022. Projects, gatherings and worship will focus on how we can be transformed – personally, as churches, as communities, and as MU groups.

In so many places devastated by drought, floods, fires and the consequences of the pandemic, transformation is prayed for daily and fervently. Spirits have been broken, confidence has been dashed, and relationships have been torn apart due to isolation and fear. How can we help transform the lives of people in great need? Our prayers can be prayed, our projects can be supported and our MULO principles can come into play again – MU: Listening, Observing and Acting – as we move around our towns and cities.

In our local communities, it's probably relationships that have taken the greatest hit. Are you feeling isolated or discouraged? Many of us wait at home expecting a knock at our door, or the phone to ring, or the postie to bring a card or note, and when that doesn't happen, we feel even worse.

Transformation can only begin when we wake up to the reality of our situation. Sometimes it's up to us to begin that transformation process by praying 'God, what do you want me to do?' The answer may be that **you** are the one who is to visit, to make the phone calls, and to write the notes to encourage hope and lift the spirits of others!

Remember the life-cycle of the butterfly – the caterpillar was a perfectly formed creature who built a cocoon around itself. While in that cocoon it was a squishy mess with no form or structure, until God began to build a new creation. When that new creation evolved, a totally different and awesome creature emerged. What stage of the cycle do you think you might be at right now?

It's amazing what God can come up with when you take time to pray, listen to your heart, and be open to transformation. I pray that God will bless you with beautiful wings!

Anne Kennedy





Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me...

Some experiences transform us, don't they?

I am sure you have a list of your own, but I think about falling in love, getting married and becoming a mother for a start! We are never the same afterwards.

Of course, we have negative experiences which leave us hurt and scarred as well – the death of a parent or a child; being criticised and losing a job; going through cancer. These would be things which would change anyone and leave us scarred. It is interesting that most of our deeply transformative experiences arise from relationships. One mother (who had been through both) once told me that losing her child was more terrible than having cancer.

Likewise, our best transformations come from wonderful and fruitful relationships. The most wonderful of these is our relationship with Jesus. When he enters our lives as Saviour and Lord, things can never be the same again. We are what the Bible calls 'new creatures', changed forever.

Here are two verses which are very precious to me, and as you read them, I am sure you will see why:

'I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.' (Rom 12:1-2).

'Do not be conformed to this world...' That's a striking concept to start with. We are social creatures, connected to the habits and morals of our time, wanting to please others. This is increasingly becoming a problem as the world we live in adopts ideas and commitments and customs which are at odds with our faith in Jesus.

How do we cope? By thinking: 'be transformed by the renewal of your mind'.

Of course, this does not mean that we do such a thing merely on our own.

First of all, we do it out of the love and mercy which God has for us, a mercy which means that we give ourselves entirely to him. Our worship is not merely what we do on Sundays – it is a whole-of-life activity. His love for us kindles our love for him and love transforms.

Secondly, we seek to find and do the will of God. Obviously, we do not do this to secure his love – for he loves us already as we put our trust in him. Rather, his love inspires us, so that we make it our aim to please him every day by doing what is 'good and acceptable and perfect', as he tells us in his word. He has transformed us and made us new creatures through Jesus. Now we live the transformed life, not doing what the world tells us, but what God tells us.

Recently, the oldest member of our church died. Her name was Frances and she was 100 years old. As we talked about her and listened to the stories of her family, we discovered more and more what it was to live a transformed life. For example, even as an elderly widow she would visit prisoners in gaol and then, on their release, she would welcome them to her home and accommodate them until they found a place to live. She was also a great woman of prayer. She prayed constantly



Used by permission

An ABC of Christian discipleship

Availability, Assurance

Boldness to speak of the Lord; Biblical

Compassion; Confidence in God

Diligence; Devotion; Dependability

Eloquence in quoting God's promises

Fixedness of heart; Fearless

Generosity

Holiness; Honesty

Intelligence

Joyfulness

Kindness

Loyalty

Meekness; Motivation; Musically praise the Lord

Nakedness; Needful of Christ's robe of righteousness

Overcoming of bad habits

Perseverance; Patience

Quietness to listen to the Lord

Reliability

Sensibility

Trustworthiness; Trust in the Lord's promises

Understanding

Victory over sin

Willingness

eXuberance

Yieldedness

Zealous

Betty Coumbe



for all around her, including her church family, interceding for us that the hand of God's blessing may rest upon us.

But the thing which I was especially struck by was her habit of singing an old hymn as she started each day. I wonder if you know it?

'Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,

All his wonderful passion and purity;

Oh, thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine,

'Til the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.'

Frances was not famous. She had to battle to bring up her family after her husband died. But she knew that God loved her through Jesus and she trusted him; she committed her whole life to him as her spiritual worship; she refused to follow the ways of the world. She was transformed by daily following Jesus.

That is the only transformation worth having.

Christine Jensen

Prayer

You are the potter, Lord,
and in your skilful hands
even the unlikeliest of clay
becomes a thing of beauty
and useful, bringing glory
not to the pot, but its creator.
So take these lives, this clay,
and in your loving hands
transform and make us
into what we long to be;
made useful, Lord, for you.

© John Birch



Lord, transform me

2 Corinthians 3:18 *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

At the time of writing this, we have just clocked in the new year. Tony and I spent a quiet evening wondering what lay ahead for 2022, with the hope it could be much better than the previous few, especially in relation to the pandemic which has been sweeping across the world. During this period, transformation came quickly; our daily routines as we knew them changed rapidly, with lives and livelihoods impacted in so many ways. I hope there will be better times ahead, as we look forward with excitement to reconnecting with our families and friends in face-to-face visits.

Many people make new year resolutions, which, although starting off in all good faith, often fade as time passes. Could this be because expectations be too high or not practical? Perhaps it's wishing for something which may never happen. What seemed like a good idea, wasn't. As a teenager, my resolutions were always to grow taller and have bigger feet, so I could buy the fashionable shoes I wanted. Neither ever happened!

On the other hand, it may be a question of change and trying harder to transform our mind and thinking to achieve the goals or the resolutions we make. The first step on our personal transformation journey plays a vital role. We may doubt our own abilities, therefore we need to pay more attention to improving and building self-confidence, enabling us to be better equipped with the tools and abilities to cope with challenging and changing times. Taking a small and achievable action is often the key to success.

As others have said before me, being a Christian and a follower of Jesus means more than just going to church or trying to live a good life; it is also letting the power of the Holy Spirit change us individually, by doing our best for God and by taking the words of Jesus seriously in how we

live our lives. The work of transformation was also accomplished by Christ on the cross. What remains is for us to grow in our knowledge of what he has done.

I believe the process of transformation of our discipleship happens because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and accepting the importance of the role of God in our lives. We must willingly engage in this process of change as he performs the work of shaping and changing us as his followers, transforming us more into his image and likeness. God cleanses us by taking our sins away to make us a new person in Christ, every day helping me and you to become better for him in our life.

In early September last year, I decided to post a number of "Cross in the Pocket" pouches, which had been made by members of the Mothers Union branch at my parish church of St. Paul's Bakery Hill, to some of my family and friends about whom I was worried. They were working very long hours in hospitals, not only here in Australia but also in London, and I wanted to say I was thinking and praying for them, as I knew they were nursing Covid patients as well as dealing with death. Although not all attend church, the response from them was quite surprising, with many telling me how much they appreciated my thoughtfulness and that when things become overwhelming my gift would be a reminder that someone cared enough to have them in their prayers. Maybe something as small as that little verse transformed them!

Galatians 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

Denise Lay





Lord, make me a channel of disturbance!

As my husband and I returned home from Australia Council in 2019, in the interests of safety we regularly checked the internet to monitor the bushfire situation. Which route to take to avoid the fires? Where would it be safe to stay? We arrived home safely under a cloud of smoke to be greeted by many dead plants. All irrigation systems had had to be turned off, even the most efficient drip systems.

Australia had faced crippling drought and devastating bush fires. Surely now climate change would be taken seriously?

Over 116,000 people were homeless. Nearly 60% of those people were under the age of 35. Surely now the need for affordable housing would be addressed?

Counting Dead Women in Australia recorded 63 deaths related to domestic violence during 2019. Surely now there would be action taken to end this bloodshed and provide support for victims?

I could go on but I'm sure you get the picture.

Have things changed? Are we in a better position 2 years later? Has our advocacy for changes had any effect?

Still 1 in 6 Australian children live in poverty. More women and children lost their lives in domestic situations. The need for action on climate change has not been given priority.

According to Foodbank's annual Hunger Report, released in October 2021 as part of Anti-Poverty Week, an estimated 1.2 million children in Australia went hungry in the past year, while 1 in 6 adults also faced severe food insecurity. Australian food banks have reported a huge surge in demand during the pandemic.



Photo credit: Thought Catalog on Unsplash

Brianna Casey, the chief executive of Foodbank Australia, said income levels and the cost of living were a big part of the problem. The report suggests that the number of people going hungry in Australia has increased since the coronavirus welfare supplement and Jobkeeper payments were withdrawn.

The underlying problems existed before the pandemic. Support for the unemployed or underemployed was insufficient to meet their needs, and 1 in 3 people struggling to meet their food needs were 'new to this situation'. Among parents experiencing food insecurity, 43% said their children went a whole day without eating at least once a week.

I pray that we can become channels of disturbance. We cannot remain silent. It is more important to speak up than to keep the peace. We cannot ignore situations around us. As we advocate for the rights of families, strive to build supportive, loving relationships and provide help to the disadvantaged we need to speak up to ask our leaders for action on climate-change, gender violence, social justice and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable.

Susan Skowronski

The 'Reverse St Francis Prayer'

Lord, make me a channel of disturbance
Where there is apathy, let me provoke;
Where there is compliance, let me bring
questioning;
Where there is silence, may I be a voice;
Where there is too much comfort and too little
action, grant disruption;
Where there are doors closed and hearts locked,
Grant the willingness to listen;
Where laws dictate and pain is overlooked...
When tradition speaks louder than need...
Grant that I may seek rather to do justice than talk
about it;
Disturb us, O Lord.
To be with, as well as for, the alienated;
To love the unlovable as well as the lovely;
Lord make me a channel of disturbance

Author Unknown

Conformed to the image of his Son...

Some 500 years before Jesus came to earth the prophet Malachi, living in Jerusalem after the period of exile in Babylon, in speaking of God's messenger to come, Jesus, wrote,

'But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.' (Malachi 3:2-3, NIV)

To the hearers, having some knowledge of the silversmith's work would mean they grasped what Malachi was saying. The ore containing silver had to be dug out of the ground, then a 2-step process of refinement was used to win pure silver. The ore was heated, initially using long straws to blow onto heated charcoal, which melted the silver at a temperature of 961°C. The second stage was when the silversmith heated the molten silver in a crucible to 'burn off' the slag. He knew that the silver was refined when he could see his face reflected on the surface of the molten silver.

This leads us to think of Jesus, who, acting as the silversmith, watches the dross of our sinful lives burn off until He can see His face reflected in our lives. This is God's desire for us, but it has to be our desire also. Romans 8:28-29 remind us that *'... we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.'* A dictionary search for the word 'conform' gives us words such as abide by, obey, observe, follow, hold to, adhere to, be in accordance with.

What is God's purpose for us? That we might be like Jesus!

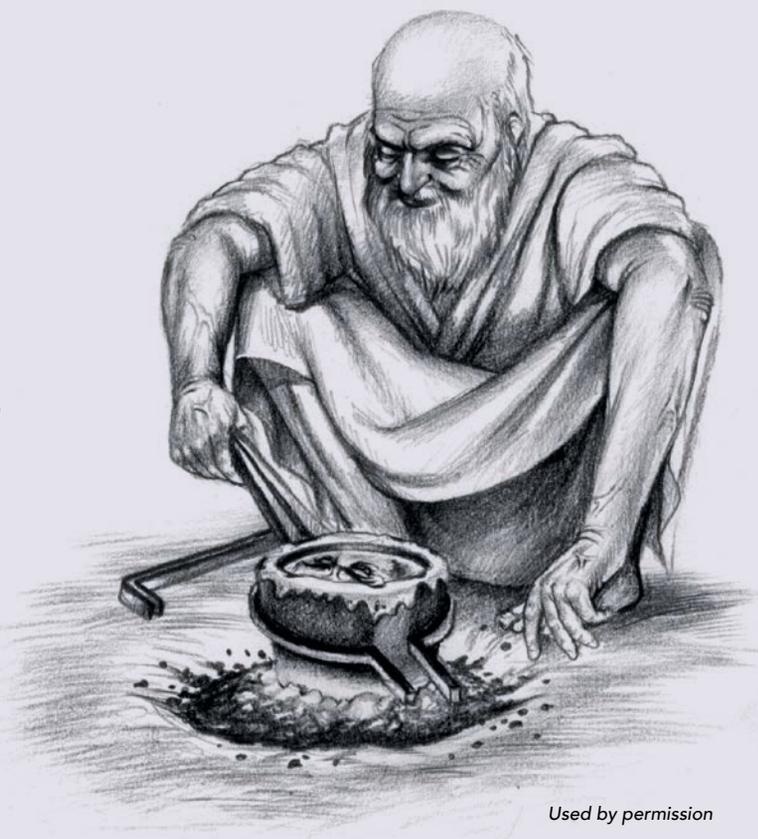
I suggest that this process of what is called sanctification is life-long and could be described as a struggle. We need to make the decision that we want to be holy and we want to conform. There is a thin line drawn between our decision to become like Jesus and to allow Him Lordship

to transform our lives. Make the choice to submit to His Lordship, and like the branches of the vine, abide in him and allow the process to work its miracle, but also cooperate with the Lord by the way we choose to live. It is then through the work of the Holy Spirit that God can produce the 'fruit of the Spirit'. (Galatians 5:22-26)

In relating to trials and temptations we face in our daily life, 1 Peter 1:7 reminds us *'so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'* (ESV)

You are precious to a loving God. Your faith is precious to this same God. And His heart's desire is that you will be conformed to the image of His Son, but it is an active and positive choice, linked to a willing submission to the power of the Holy Spirit.

John Cronshaw



Used by permission

Bev Perry's faith journey

Bev Perry is the President of Anglican Mothers Union Australia in the Diocese of Brisbane. She is a cradle Anglican, the wife of a retired clergyman, a loving grandmother and a St Margaret's Anglican Girls School old girl. Since Robert retired from full-time ministry in 2011, they have lived in Bundaberg and worship at Christ Church, Bundaberg. In an interview for *Anglican Focus* (June, 2021) Bev spoke of her faith and her roles as a clergy wife and in MU. In this excerpt Bev speaks about her personal faith journey:

How long have you been involved in the Anglican Church and in what roles?

I grew up in a farming community in the Monto district with my family attending the Anglican church in the small community of Abercorn, and from this background I caught a simple faith and a desire to go to church...My spiritual life began in my childhood and grew in my high school years at St Margaret's Anglican Girls School. But it was not until I was 27 years of age that I came to a personal life changing faith.

Two years after I met my husband in church, we were married and both ready to serve God in the parish where we made our home. In the following years through Bible study and various avenues of spiritual teaching, we grew in our personal faith until in 1980 Robert felt God calling him into the ordained ministry. In 1983 Robert was ordained in Christ Church Cathedral.



What is your favourite scripture and why?

Philippians 4.13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This verse has always motivated me to put my faith into action by stepping out to serve God in many and varied ministries during my 50 years as a committed Christian.

What person of faith inspires you the most and why?

One of the many people who has inspired me with her faith and courage is Mary Sumner, a clergy wife who was passionate about transforming the home-lives of parish families by helping women support one another in raising their children. In 1876, as a young grandmother, she founded The Mother's Union which, by 1892, spread to Australia and other parts of the Commonwealth.

What are the primary strengths of the Church and what is the best way to make the most of these for the benefit of our communities?

The primary strength of the Church is the Good News of Jesus Christ and the faithful witness of his present-day disciples, who through their faith and loving care witness God to our communities. The best way to grow and strengthen these disciples is by gathering together in small groups to learn from God's Word to pray, share and encourage one another to serve our church and community in Jesus' name.

What are the primary challenges currently encountered by the Church and what is the best



way to overcome these for the benefit of our communities?

The primary challenge is that we have ageing congregations and many half-empty churches with the younger generations sadly missing. The Church needs the Holy Spirit's power to equip and empower faithful men and women to show to the missing generations a Church that is alive, welcoming and supportive, one that reaches out into the communities showing Christ's love in all we do.

What is the kindest gesture you have ever received or witnessed?

All the country parishes we have served in have been extremely hard to leave, so it was like saying goodbye to family. Gilgandra in Western NSW is the parish that we will always remember for its many kind gestures with love and support, and the many times we were included in their special family gatherings.

What do you do in your free time to recharge and relax?

Listening to the birds during my early morning walks, reading Christian books, gardening and visiting family and spending time with the grandchildren

If you could have a billboard with any text on it, what would it say and why?

"Wise people still seek Jesus."

Reprinted by permission



Discipleship in the context of ageing and dementia

In earlier articles we have examined the philosophical and theological basis of caring for older people and unpacked the basics of caring for older people or people living with dementia (3P's: Prayer, Presence and Pastoral care) and the specifics of sharing Jesus's love with someone who does not know Him. We can now explore how to support older people and those living with dementia so they grow in their faith.

Some may ask, 'Do older people need to grow in their faith? After all, if someone is already saved, can't we simply trust them to God?' Others may question the wisdom of expending resources to make discipleship of older people and people living with dementia a priority.

Scripture is clear – **all** Christians need to grow in their faith! However, different seasons of life have different challenges. Generally speaking, there are two interlocking challenges for older people: loneliness and frailty.

As a person ages they lose relationships to death and frailty. It becomes harder to make new friends because the pool of people one meets shrinks and because frailty impacts communication. Thus, loneliness is a huge issue amongst older people. For Christians this challenge is exacerbated by the inability to be involved in church, whether that be because of the loss of one's driving licence, lack of ramps, appropriate toilets and seating or continence and cognition issues. Compounding these 'practical' issues is the common focus on ministry to the young. As if this were not enough, changeover of clergy makes it very easy for an older person to be forgotten. Yet 'religion that God accepts, is to care for the widows' (James 1).

Discipleship starts with the P's but it also includes helping older people and people living with dementia grow in their relationship with God. The challenge here is that no 2 older people are identical Let me introduce you to 'Mary' and 'Martha', 2 clergy widows who were dying. Mary spent hours each day using commentaries to compare the different Gospels. Martha struggled

with the fear of dying (not death) and used hymns to grow her faith. Both godly Christians, both clergy widows, both dying, but their discipleship needs were vastly different. The good news is, if you have been practicing the '3 Ps' you already have a good idea about the personality and faith journey of the older people in your world.

Having examined the challenge of loneliness we can now focus on the challenge of frailty. Yes, some centenarians run marathons, but most older people are living with significant frailty. Most older people, and specifically most people living in aged-care facilities, do not self-identify as frail – so we need to be careful with our language! For example, when I am praying with someone I try to ask, 'Can I pray with you?', which gives them control, something which is rare in the face of frailty. I also ask what they want to pray about. Often, I expect them to ask for healing, mobility or pain management. Instead, typically, they ask for prayers for a child, grandchild or great-grandchild who may be facing exams, has just lost their boy-or-girlfriend or is looking for work. It's a good reminder of the danger of assumption and the value of asking for help.

Another challenge of frailty is communication. Listening skills such as silence, self-deprecating humour and meeting a person where they are (not where we want them to be) remain critical. However, we also need to be aware that frailty impacts non-personal interactions too. Christians tend to be people of 'the Book' and books. Although many people can access Scripture, sermons and other devotional content through devices, not all older people are 'tech savvy' and many are post-literate, that is, no longer able to access (or easily access) text:

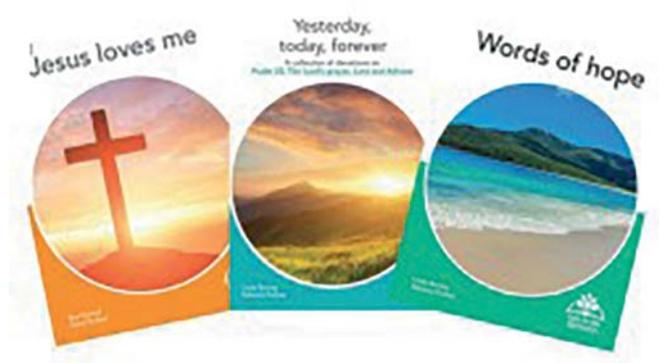
- Arthritic fingers struggle to turn pages, particularly smooth, thin pages (as found in Bibles).
- A person with macular degeneration typically cannot clearly see the middle of a page or projector screen.
- Vision impairment may mean that people need large print, yet large print means heavier books, which require greater strength to hold.

Early on in my time as a chaplain I rejoiced when I was able to give 'Lazarus' a Bible, as he had lost his own. A week later, in tears, I filled out an incident

report. The Bible I had given Lazarus was about the size and style of a traditional 'pew' one. While reading it in his wheelchair, he fell asleep and on its way to the floor the corner of the Bible's cover gave him a significant skin tear on his thigh.

The good news is that there are some tips and tricks to help people overcome the problems of post literacy:

- Not all older people are tech-phobic. Many, including people living with dementia, can and do learn how to use electronic devices such as magnifying machines and easy-to-use phones and music players.
- A cheap upgrade to a CD player is to place Velcro dots on the buttons.
- While we desperately need more large-print resources, there are some large print, light-weight, reliable resources available, for example the Faith for Life suite, available from HammondCare (<https://www.hammond.com.au/shop/faith-for-life>) and those produced by the Touching Grace store, (<https://www.alzheimersministry.org/ministryaids>).



- One of my residents had a friend take a scalpel to a Bible to cut it into sections which he then rebound in more manageable portions.
- Just as it is a blessing to read to kids, consider reading with older people, whether face-to-face, over the phone or as part of Bible reading group at a respite or residential care facility.

Dare I say religion that God accepts both generally and discipleship specifically starts with our three P's Prayer, Presence and Pastoral care. We need to be praying for and with older people, we need to be present with older people and we need to provide pastoral care to older people.

Ben Boland

Just as I am

I remember from a very young age standing in church on many Sunday nights singing,

'Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am – though toss'd about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come!'

The world I grew up in the 1960s and 70s was a very different world to the one we live in today. As I write this, (in December 2021) another strain of the Covid virus has popped up around the world and, yet again, uncertainty and fear seem to be rising as border closures are enforced and delays in re-opening are announced. It is all too easy to be overwhelmed by the happenings in our world and, yet I am comforted by the knowledge that nothing is a surprise to God. The reassurance that no matter what I am experiencing or feeling, God invites me to come, just as I am.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV) *'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'*

Many years ago these same verses were shared with me from The Message Bible: *'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned-out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me*



Photo credit: Jess Zoerb on Unsplash

and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

The phrase, 'Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. **Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.**' resonated in my spirit. By walking and working with Jesus, modelling my life on His life, I could learn the unforced rhythms of grace. A picture came to mind of waltzing or dancing with Jesus. Anyone who has attempted to learn old-time dancing may have experienced 'accidentally' trying to take the lead when your partner is meant to be leading. Usually this ends up in treading on each other's toes!



There are times in my life, I admit, when I attempt to take the lead rather than follow Jesus' lead. These are the times when I need to pause, seek God's forgiveness and say, **Lord, transform me.**

Kerry Parry

Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of our lives. Help us to glorify you in all the thoughts of our minds, in all the desires of our hearts, in all the words of our lips, in all the works of our hands, in all the ways of our feet; as becomes those who are trying to follow you, for your name's sake. Amen

(A Worship and Prayer Book for MU Australia)

The transformational power of thankfulness

Thankfulness to God is the well-proven way of warding off bitterness and feeling sorry for ourselves, just as gratitude expressed to others wards off envy, unhappiness, pride and despondency. This has always been true and is especially so with the disappointments, delays and deprivations caused by Covid-19.

Robert Louis Stevenson said, 'the person who has stopped being thankful has fallen asleep in life.' Failure to be thankful usually happens when we forget that God is a gracious giver, the one upon whom we depend for every day's breath¹ and for our daily needs². Thankfulness to God is like paying the rent!³

I have found Henri Nouwen's observation, 'gratitude is the most fruitful way of deepening your consciousness that you are not an accident', to be a helpful reminder, especially if I have felt down or unappreciated. To practise thanking God, not just for the things I enjoy but for His kindness in granting me many creational and redemptive gifts, keeps me focussed on what does not change, rather than on things which have.⁴

The contemplation of the gracious Godhead, whether together or as separate Persons, will always lead to adoration, confession and thankfulness. To adore God for his majesty in creation and for His holiness will lead us to thankfulness for Jesus's dealing with our sin which opens the door into his presence and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Without a Saviour from outside ourselves, who is fully Divine and fully man (yet sinless), there could be no



Photo credit: Sixteen Miles Out on Unsplash

grace, no pardon, no drawing near to God with confidence. Not troublesome setbacks, tragic sets of circumstances, nor even a pandemic, need rob believers of these abiding blessings. Thankfulness keeps these sure promises alive in our minds and hearts, thus enabling us not only to persevere through, but to grow because of them, and to thank God for the growth in character and grace He works in and through us.⁵

Temporal blessings can always be found if we are in the habit of looking for them. Habits are not neutral. Grumpiness is not a good one, whereas thankfulness certainly is. But it must be cultivated. It is a must since thankfulness is not just one of God's good ideas for us but is commanded by Him⁶, commended throughout the Bible⁷ and will keep us from being condemned as thankless idolaters.⁸ If you find it difficult to give God thanks or to be grateful to others let me encourage you to begin today (not today, but now!) by getting out a sheet of paper and writing down 5 things for which you can be thankful to God and begin thanking Him (after seeking His forgiveness for failing to). As you make it your pattern each and every day this could prove to be the adventure of a lifetime that will change your life by keeping you from anxiety and from facing life alone. God's commands are good for our mental health. Thanking others will also transform our relationships. I am not advocating flattery, but genuine gratitude to others for even the smallest kindnesses. Do you remember the Sunday School chorus?

'Count your blessings, name them one by one... And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.'

Practised thankfulness, even during a pandemic, is transformative. It will prepare us for whatever lies ahead and keep bitterness, envy, fretting, grumbling, greed, bad memories and the like from consuming us and those we live with, all the while contributing to our joy, contentment, patience, generosity and trust.



Peter Brain

1 1 Samuel 20:3

2 Psalm 104:27-30

3 Psalm 107

4 1 Thess 5:16-18; Col 3:15-17

5 Romans 5:1-5; 8:28-39; Hebrews 12:1-12; 1 Peter 1:3-9

6 1 Thess 5:16-18

7 Psalm 100; Luke 17:11-19

8 Romans 1:21-23

Transformation out of tragedy

'See, I am making all things new... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer (overcome? persevere?) will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.' Revelation 21:5-7.

Have you ever noticed? Even after terrible drought, horrific fires, or flooding rains, eucalypts put out new shoots. Wild flowers bloom even in ash and burnt earth. People are resilient in spite of loss, and generous with whatever they have. Following the fires on Kangaroo Island 2 years ago, about 20 young Army Reservists were photographed nursing and feeding injured koalas tenderly and patiently. Perhaps they should be members of Mothers' Union! Two friends of mine, one a poet and artist and her husband, an art photographer, lost their house, studio and 30 years' work in the Cudlee Creek fire, but within just a couple of weeks they were at a gathering to advertise her new art exhibition – "in charcoal – there's plenty of that about!" she laughed at the time. Wonderfully, this couple have had a new home built to replace the one they lost – another transformation.

God is with us in all of this. 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation' 2 Corinthians 5:17-18



Photo credit: Christian Bass on Unsplash

Consider these thoughts from a contemplative monk:

Eight things to remember when going through tough times.

1. Everything can, and will, change.
2. You've overcome challenges before.
3. It's a learning experience.
4. Not getting what you want can be a blessing.
5. Allow yourself to have some fun.
6. Being kind to yourself is the best medicine.
7. Other people's negativity isn't worth worrying about.
8. And there is always, always, always, something to be thankful for.

'How shining and festive to us is your gift of the morning, if we only look and see.' Mary Oliver

Dawn Colsey

Camellia

Camellias after rain
blanketing paths and lawns
exquisite in their spent life
their death a gift of beauty
a soft fragrant carpet
to delight passing feet

Lingering raindrops reflect the morning sun
glisten, give brief new life
to fallen flowers
a thanksgiving for their sacrifice

© Susan Skowronski 2014



Lord, help me to pray



Vanessa Lui works full-time as a Project Manager delivering infrastructure projects for North Metropolitan Health Service, WA Department of Health. She and her husband, Paul, have two children, aged 6 and 10. Vanessa also leads the children's ministry at Christ the King Anglican church, Willetton.

As a full-time working mum with 2 kids, I find it extremely difficult to juggle work, home, kids, and personal life. There is hardly any downtime, let alone quiet time for God. I am a perpetually exhausted pigeon, racing from one thing to the other – meetings, school pick-ups, music practice, school events; then rushing to help with homework, housework, dinner, laundry, and often there is not enough time, not enough milk, not enough toilet paper. Something always needs to be done, and something else always gets put off, and very often it is time dedicated for prayer and reading the Bible. I admit I am not the perfect Christian and have not always put God at the centre of my life, but I have noticed that there are small pockets of time that can be quietly dedicated to God in between the hustle and bustle. One way I have found is to spend about 5 to 10 minutes after pulling into the car park at work to sit in the car to pray or read a Bible verse. Perhaps it is the procrastinator in me not wanting to face the work day or the desperate voice seeking comfort and strength. I open my Bible app on the phone and read the verse of the day. I have a prayer journal which I started keeping after attending my church's course on prayer. I pick about three things from the list to pray for and three things I am thankful for. This gives me a good structure to start with, and I sometimes include things from the news or missionaries. It does not take more than 10 minutes to feel refreshed with the presence of God, and before I become aware of the awkward stares from other people in the car park seeing a woman just sitting in her car. This small routine has helped me feel ready for the day ahead and setting my mind on Jesus as the Saviour. Some days I miss this time because I am running late, and that is ok because I know I will be able to find other small pockets of time later. This has encouraged me to continue walking in the light of God despite being so time poor.



Joan Rickers is a retired teacher who lives independently in Perth. In recent years she has experienced the loss of vision associated with macular degeneration.

Christine: Joan, I have known you now for about 10 years, and I know you to be a woman of prayer. However, during that time your eyesight has progressively diminished. How have you adapted your Bible reading and prayer habits to this momentous change?

Joan: I use one of the Morning Prayer services once a week, including 1 or 2 of the readings from the lectionary. I have a desk-top magnifier to help, but even so I have to virtually read one word at a time. It's not easy, and if I have any length of reading to do it's really stressful, but I make sure that I do it because I enjoy reading. I also do other reading. When I first began to lose my sight, I began writing out favourite Bible passages, large enough for me to read. I also pray for several missions every day, using prayer notes, which are shorter and easier for me to manage with the magnifier.

Christine: You spend quite a lot of time reading and praying. Do you find that doing that is helpful to you in any particular ways?

Joan: I think it is. I sometimes struggle with feeling self-righteous. I don't want to feel that way, so I just get on with it, content in the knowledge that God is in the forefront of my thoughts and just dive in. I feel like I can't do much – I'm too old and too decrepit to do much. I do visit some people in the nursing home if I can but I need somebody to take me there. I feel so sad that people are forgotten when they move into a nursing home. Losing my sight has been very humbling. I have always been a fluent reader and a very independent person, so reading slowly and accepting help from others hasn't been easy, but it has been a good growing experience. One of the benefits of keeping up my pattern of prayer for missions and reading or listening to the Bible is that it keeps my mind enlarged and aware of others.

Christine: You've mentioned that you knew that severe vision loss was inevitable and you started to prepare yourself. What advice would you give to others in this situation?

Joan: Build up a library of material early on. You don't always realise what might help, but I have

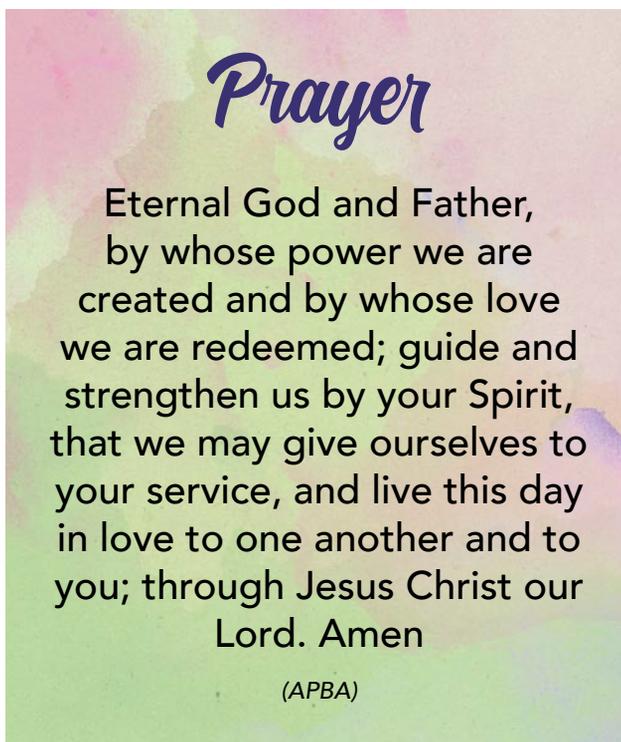
found that the effort I put in to make or obtain large-print material while I still had some vision has been well worth it. I also obtained the Bible on disc which I am able to listen to.

Christine: Are there ways that others can be helpful to you?

Joan: I can get about on my mobility scooter for many things I want to do, but I really appreciate the help others give me in driving me to church on Sundays and Wednesdays (if the weather is bad) and for night-time events, like the parish prayer meeting. It might also be helpful if people wrote out some passages of the Bible – well known passages and things like the psalms.



Joan's prayer aids



Lifelong transformation

Rosemary Waters, from Scarborough, WA, shares her testimony of God's ongoing work of transformation in her life.

I grew up in a loving family, was sent off to Sunday School and went to church. I was baptised and confirmed when I was 13. At MLC in Melbourne in my teenage years, the motto 'For God and For Home' was the constant theme. I played the piano for kindly on Sundays, and with a friend started up GFS for teenagers and then moved up the ranks teaching Sunday School. Then came the visit of Billy Graham!!! I attended with a friend who had recently begun to take God seriously. I was interested to hear what all the 'hype' was about!

It is honestly the only time I have ever heard God speak to me. 'I am talking to you!!!' was what I heard. How could I not respond? And then my faith exploded in technicolour! I readily absorbed the scriptures, learned lots of Bible verses, sang in that magnificent choir at the meetings, and took others to hear the good news.

Over the years as I have studied the scriptures I sometimes just 'know' what God wants me to do. I am writing this in Advent and I have just read my bible and commentary, prayed with our beautiful MU Prayer Diary, used the Wave of Prayer portion and read my portion from 'Watch for The Light', a collection of pieces by many different theologians. Today's devotion was written by William Willimon, about us finding it so difficult to accept a gift. To accept a gift, or a compliment makes us feel humble and we don't like that!! And then, God gave us the gift of Jesus as a BABY! How humble does that make us feel! I also read 'The Art of Advent' by Jane Williams, a gift from my MU Prayer Partner. Jane said, 'Testimony – telling the story of what Jesus has done – is a vital part of Christian Faith!' Two questions at the end of the chapter struck me:

1. What is your testimony of what God has done in your life?
2. Why do we find it difficult to share our testimonies?



She then followed with a prayer:

Lord, give us thankful hearts and renew in us the gift of the Holy Spirit, to make us ready to tell the good news of what you have done in our lives, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN



Jill Phillips spent many years serving the people of Holy Trinity church in the heart of Adelaide. Jill shares her testimony of God's work of transformation, especially as she approached retirement.

I grew up in a loving Christian family and church, which set the stage for my life as a Christian. Over the years there have been many times when the Lord has changed my circumstances – from office worker, to nurse, to Bible College student and to pastoral worker at Holy Trinity church. As I moved towards retirement, I knew it didn't mean retirement from being a Christian. However, I had many decisions to make as I moved towards this new stage of my life. Should I go to another church? I needed to ask our Lord for His ongoing wisdom and humility so I could be His ongoing servant. I decided, with God's help, that I would like to continue to worship with the people I knew and loved and to help the older folk in the congregation, many of whom I had known for a long time, to stand firm in the Lord all of their days, and for me to do the same.

Now, where to live? I had lived in the same home all of my life! But the Lord, as always, was my helper, and saw me through the change to down-sizing. So, here I am at 75, and for the last 8 years I have been getting to know a new community of people.

And now, into the mix comes Covid. A fearful time, but a great reminder for all of us who know the Lord that we are safe and secure in His hands Verses I find helpful in this unsettling time

include 'Underneath are the everlasting arms' (Deuteronomy 33:27), 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.' (Hebrews 13:8) and '...do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.' (Isaiah 41:10)

The Lord has helped me to see that continuing to meet with His people, learning from His Word, and supporting each other need to be ongoing priorities. But I also have a new opportunity – to be salt and light in my new community. All of this certainly keeps me at my prayers, knowing I am weak in my own strength, and with growing aches and pains!

Jill Phillips

I am blessed

Am I blessed?

I have breath, I have life, I have salvation.

Surely, I am blessed.

I have Christ who lives in me,
Who walks with me each and every day,
Who carries my load and gives me rest.

I am greatly blessed.

I have God's promises,
He will not forsake me.

I have His love, His faithfulness;
I have His mercy and His forgiveness.
Am I not truly, wonderfully blessed?!

With trust and obedience and with
patience in God's perfect will and timing
I CAN...AND I WILL wait
For I AM a child of His
A child of the one true, 'Almighty Father'

AND...I AM ALREADY
FOREVER BLESSED

Gwen Wright

MU in Sydney – then and now

In 1876 when Mary Sumner began Mothers Union, she couldn't have known how the union of mothers and carers would move across the globe in the next 145 years.

On October 28, 1896, 12 women were invited by the Governor's wife, the formidable and very well-connected Susan Henrietta Cavendish Brand, Lady Hampden, to meet at St Andrew's Cathedral Chapter House for what is considered to be the first gathering of Mothers Union in Sydney. Lady Hampden, herself the mother of 9, had joined Mothers Union in London. She was an active admirer of the organisation well before her husband's posting to Sydney and believed that Mothers Union could benefit mothers and families.

The organisation was to cut across the accepted social mores of the times; there was to be no distinction of education, class or district. Branches were formed at St Andrew's Cathedral, St Mark's Darling Point, St John's Parramatta, St Michael's Surrey Hills, St Phillip's Church Hill and St Paul's Burwood. St John's Camden and Holy Trinity Enfield formed shortly after the initial meeting – these 2 branches still exist.

Mothers Union Sydney, from the very beginning, sought to develop the spiritual side of parenting and family life and to encourage and equip women as mothers and carers, bound by the Bible and prayer. Membership was offered, at 1 shilling a year, to all mothers, and Associate Membership



was open to anyone who had 'care of or influence over children'. A number of single women were associate members, welcomed and supported as they cared for children as teachers, nurses, nannies and Aunties.

The early annual reports state that the members and associates of Mothers Union Sydney gave themselves unstintingly to attendance at meetings, to prayer and to the reading and understanding of the Bible. It was a grass-roots organisation; and by December 1900 there were 28 branches and 740 members. Through the years, godly and faithful women led the organisation, increasing member numbers, supporting mothers and families at their point of need and moving the organisation to be seen as a diocesan missionary partner.

Mothers Union Sydney has, over the years, exercised a Court and hospital visiting ministry and spoken out for fair pay and for a 5-day working week. They advocated for financial and rental support for widows, supported Christian teaching in public schools, began the Children's Television Council, joined with GFS to share the gospel to girls and started playgroups. But mostly they prayed. It wasn't all smooth sailing; their stand against divorce caused unhappiness until it was reversed, and sometimes relationships within parishes were tricky, but the organisation has stood firm in the object and aim 'to win the nation for Christ'.

2020-2021 have proved challenging; but we haven't let a pandemic, financial shortfall or the closure of our shop and ministries for extended periods stop us.



We have worked within the limits of Covid and continued on. Covid motivated us to begin to make the changes we had already planned. The logo and brand were refreshed and the new website and online shop set up. Training was undertaken so that online opportunities were not lost. The Seminars and Parenting Courses were made available in face-to-face and online formats. We recorded Jan with her bible chats and Jackie with her overview of her beautifully written 'Anchor for my soul' bible studies, which were enthusiastically received by members.

AGMs, Council and Executive meetings were on-line. Branches and volunteer ministries took to creative ways of keeping connected and encouraged. Personal engagement was paramount. We have broadened our connection with families through our continuing Parish Partnership workers and through reconnecting and informing parishes of what Mothers Union Sydney is about, and we continued to pray.

But what will we look like in the future?

Things will change but we believe Mothers Union Sydney has a future under God and that is what we are working towards, not just sustaining the organisation. Of course, we want to see Mothers Union Sydney move forward, but we long for the homes of the nation to be won for Christ. We need to continue to pray, to meet, to tell, to volunteer, to give and to love those who God has placed around us. During lockdown and the dreadful separation from family, friends and community, God's word has been a constant. Philippians 4 :6-7 comes to mind: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

We thank God for the amazing way He has used the women who have gone before us to extend his Kingdom. With thankfulness and expectation, we dedicate the future and we look to Him. Come Lord Jesus, come!



Glenda McSorley
President, MU Sydney

The change that matters most

Who would have thought 2 years ago that our lives were about to undergo such a radical transformation? The Covid-19 pandemic has left few areas of life untouched. Relationships have been impacted by distance and isolation. Work practices have changed to accommodate lockdown situations. Church gatherings are now regulated by Covid-safe practices. Freedom to travel has been greatly curtailed. Life has changed dramatically.

As I look back on 2021, I can certainly say that it has been a year of change, quite apart from navigating the Covid crisis Relocating to a new town and finding my way in different surroundings. Buying a house, renovating it, and then making it our home. Starting a new ministry position with the responsibility of training and discipling a significant number of women. Learning to work with a new staff team. Having the joy of family visiting for short and long stays, with the added bonus of



Photo credit: Rachel Strong on Unsplash

another grandchild being born during that time. Many changes indeed!

Navigating so many changes has had repercussions. I've been busy and distracted. It takes time and effort to establish new routines, and in the process, I've found it much more difficult to be consistent with the things that really matter; in particular, my relationship with Jesus. I've still been reading my Bible, but not really digesting it well. I've still been praying, but not really communing with God as much. I've often been going through the motions of relationship with God, but my heart and mind have been off somewhere else, distracted by all that's been happening.

Lately, I've been pondering the story of Mary of Bethany in Luke 10:38-42. It's a well-known story that I've heard numerous times. I've listened to countless sermons on this passage and every time, I've been able to identify with Martha. Fretting, fussing, and distracted — that's me! I've never really thought much about Mary, though, and I've certainly not comprehended just how significant Mary's actions were... until recently.

You might remember that Jesus has come to the home of the siblings, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Martha is busily fretting and fussing over her hospitality duties. Mary, on the other hand, is sitting at the feet of Jesus. We may suspect that Mary is not where she should be (helping in the kitchen!), but when we understand this story through its ancient cultural context, we realise just *how much* out of place Mary is.

Women, in Mary's time, belonged in the kitchen and private areas of the home; men met in the public spaces. According to the cultural standards of her world, Mary was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Not only so, but Mary was also in the wrong role for her time. A woman's role in the ancient world was to wait on men and offer hospitality. Instead, Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening and learning. Such a position was reserved for disciples of a teacher, and never for a woman!

Mary, however, was so eager to learn from Jesus that she was prepared to fly in the face of social expectation and responsibility and act in a way that was radical, potentially even scandalous. She crossed the social divide and assumed the 'male'

role of a disciple so that she could immerse herself in Jesus's teaching.

In response, Jesus commends her for her actions: 'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her' (Luke 10:42). Mary had a window of opportunity to learn directly from Jesus. Rather than busy herself in the tasks of hospitality — good tasks, which had a time and a place — the best choice she could make at this time was to sit at the feet of Jesus and feast on his words — words that would remain with her forever and shape her life. Mary prioritised what mattered most at the time: relationship with Jesus.

Mary's example challenges me. Or rather, I should say, God has used Mary's example to challenge me. Bowing at Jesus's feet, Mary wanted to learn from her master. She allowed his words to change her and shape her. Despite the cost, she chose Jesus, and spending time with him, above the many distractions around her.

I want to do the same. As I begin 2022, with all the changes and activities that may lie ahead, there is one change that matters most. Despite the distractions around me, I plan to prioritise my relationship with Jesus. I've established some new routines and I'm excited about how God will grow and shape me through his word and through prayer in this year ahead. I'll keep pondering Mary's example and continue, like Mary, to choose what is better, which can never be taken from me.

For further reflection:

Read Luke 10:38-42 and consider the following questions:

1. What do you think Jesus means when he says in verse 42, 'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her'?
2. Take some time to reflect on your life. Are there things which are keeping you from 'sitting at Jesus' feet'?
3. What would it mean (practically) for you to make a similar choice to Mary?

Sharon Kirk



Spiritual wellness

My red socks sporting the words 'Ho Ho Ho' lie languishing in the sock drawer. On Christmas Day, when I first opened my wife's gift, I burst into giggles of laughter. Later, I wore them at a party and recently used them as visual aid to a sermon. And now? What is to become of them? Do I leave my gift in the drawer? Do I only wear them on special occasions? Dare I wear them to work and cause my colleagues to wonder at me?

I have other gifts. I have the gift of physical health, the gift of emotional health and the gift of spiritual health. What shall I do with these gifts? Unlike my red socks, these gifts are important to my overall wellbeing. I feed and nurture my body, but do I feed and nurture the emotions and the spirit that lies within me too?

Spiritual wellbeing is important. The social restrictions have reminded us very loudly that we have a need for meaning, purpose and connection to something greater than ourselves. We are spiritual beings and are very fortunate to be able to believe in and connect to a loving and active God. This relationship, and the fellowship we enjoy with other believers when we meet for worship, helps to sustain our beliefs, values and ethics.



Maintaining our spiritual wellbeing is vital. Just ask anyone who has had a stay in hospital and received spiritual and sacramental care from a chaplain. The stronger our spiritual wellbeing; the better we will be able to handle unwelcome feelings and emotions during difficult times. Those with sustained spiritual health will be: more optimistic, with a strong sense of who they are, less likely to suffer psychological distress, enjoy a better quality of life, especially if facing chronic illness, and able to deal with life's stresses.

So how can we improve our spiritual wellbeing?

Firstly, we need to focus on God the Father and creator of all things beautiful around us; God the Son, and so we thank Jesus for his work of saving us and example to us and God the Holy Spirit who constantly empowers us and comforts us. Then, make time each day to reconnect to God in quiet reflection. Breathe in slowly the cleansing of the Holy Spirit and breathe out all that does not honour Jesus. Be receptive to emotions, especially loss and grief, and tell Jesus or a friend or counsellor. Practise acceptance of others and yourself. Practise forgiving others and yourself and let go. Practise compassion for others and for yourself. Find a qualified individual to accompany you on your spiritual journey.

These healthy practices will not only sustain our spiritual wellbeing but also flow through to our emotional wellbeing too. To sustain our emotional wellbeing, we can take a number of steps: First of all, the well-known saying 'if you don't look after yourself, you won't be able to help others' is still true. As the airline host reminds us, 'Please put on your own oxygen mask first'. Emotional self-care refers to activities and practices that we deliberately choose on a regular basis to enhance our wellbeing. Such self-care prevents stress and anxiety and reduces their symptoms.

Here are some ideas: deep breathing, listening to music, exercising, meditation, including prayer, reading, including the Bible and devotional writing, connecting with others by phone and engaging in something absorbing like a hobby or creative activity.

In addition to your self-care planning, it is important to find an approach that **SETTLES** the mind. The advice from Black Dog Institute is:

Stay focused on the here-and-now. Avoid thinking too far into the future and take each day one step at a time.

Engage and stay connected to friends, family and support networks. Working together with communities, united as a country we can move through this.

Thoughts are thoughts, not necessarily facts. Be alert to negative thoughts and don't give them power.

Treat people with kindness, support others through this time of uncertainty.

Limit information and time on unhelpful media. Constant exposure to anxiety-fuelling stories drives panic and uncertainty.

Exercise is key. Research shows that good physical health is critical for a healthy mind. Focus on good sleep, eating well and working out.

Seek help. If you are concerned about yourself or others talk to your GP. The Black Dog online clinic is a good place to start with a self-assessment.

When these ideas and tips are practised in your life, then you might be ready and thirsty for something deeper. Consider spiritual direction or spiritual accompaniment. The website of the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction is a really useful tool. The network describes spiritual direction like this: Spiritual direction attunes us to the stirring of the Divine deep in our soul... Spiritual direction takes place when one person accompanies another in their unique life journey, attentive to the presence and movement of the Divine... Through deep listening and quiet still awareness in conversation and in silence, spiritual direction offers a sacred space where our heart's deepest desire for communion with God, each other and all things is heard, awakened and nurtured. It is a three-way relationship between the Divine, which who is acknowledged as the *true director*, the *human director* and the *directee*.'



As for me and my red socks? I'll be wearing them more often. When someone laughs, then they'll be laughing with me at them.

Peter Dyke



Transformation isn't always dramatic. Sometimes transformation can just be a case of turning up.

I sat where I always did, left side of the church, 2 rows from the front. The morning light streamed through the tall stained-glass windows, a kaleidoscope of Brutalist architectural vision. The church family had gathered; without even looking I knew who was sitting where, and why - and I felt safe and comfortable. The brilliant green carpet (of a shade reminiscent of a well-tended mid-summer MCG wicket) had been bought at great price - and showed every sign of outliving three generations of parishioners. Our family had been happily attending this church every week for the past 6 years, in this town where desert and coral reef met starkly at ocean's edge.

We had reached that period in the service when, as a regular church musician, I often experienced slight mental shut-down. We had safely navigated through the pre-service practice and introductory songs, and the first congregational set. Having confirmed that communion was next week, that the keyboard was correctly transposed and that the Powerpoint bore an exact representation of what I was expecting to play next, I relaxed, and placed myself in the capable hands of the service leader and readers. I was half aware that the Old Testament reading had commenced. No rush, my inner voice said calmly, the preaching passage was rarely based on this - plenty of time to slowly switch on a few lights upstairs before hitting full engagement with the sermon. I had all the time in the world.

The reading flowed, fragments of familiar Scripture came wafting over me, speaking of patriarchal promises, of Jacob, of relocation and uncertainty, of a dream, of future blessing and providence - and of using a rock as a pillow. Suddenly, as if a sound controller had flicked my entire neuronal switchboard on to 'full volume' I heard the resounding words, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.' I looked around at my fellow parishioners. Had they, also, experienced a sudden amplification event? Observing their uniform efforts at quiet and



Photo credit: Sincerely Media on Unsplash

peaceful concentration, I wrote the verse down in the sermon-notes book a friend had given me. Closing my book, I traced my finger over the dugongs' snouts on its well-loved cover and wondered why this verse had been so intentionally and specifically shouted at me.

I did not have to wait long. Within a few short months, this verse would become my anchor. In response to God's clear call, our family would leave this much-loved church family and move 5000 kms away in the middle of a pandemic. The pandemic would deprive us of gentle farewells to our 3 adult children, and lead to the agony of making sudden flight decisions in a stifling motel room the night before our departure. Despite a warm and loving welcome from our new church family, the newness and challenges of our situation often threatened to overwhelm against a backdrop of dislocation and the heartache of being unable to see our family. We would join the throng whose parents had aged incalculably during the pandemic and were unable to see them. We would eventually farewell a much-loved parent, via You Tube, with our family in 3 different states.

This verse, shouted at me one ordinary Sunday when all I did was turn up, has spoken into the darkest times. When I have struggled with strong feelings of abandonment, grief and futility, it has asked me to re-consider a greater thing. The old question of 'Where is God in this place?' has been transformed into a new question, 'What is preventing me from seeing God in this place?' This shift in mentality has led to a welcome shedding of some old, tenacious, unwanted

and burdensome black holes of despair that threatened to consume when grief was high, and the cost of following God felt unbearable. I have not cried any less, but I have cried with a renewed sense of hope and certainty in God's providence and ever-present comfort. As I reflect on the past twelve months, I can genuinely see that God has been ever-present, unmistakably working out His good and perfect purposes, both directly in our own children's faith journeys, as well as the lives of our past and present congregations.

I am so thankful that I went to church that sunny, windswept Sunday, because sometimes, transformation is just a case of turning up.

Virginia Grice

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25



News from ACCM

Are you concerned about the influence of media on children?

Would you welcome tips and advice from experts in the field? The Australian Council on Children and Media (of which AMUA is a member) is the place to go.

A regular newsletter, research findings and movie and game reviews can all be found on the website

childrenandmedia.org.au

10 TIPS FOR HEALTHY GAME PLAY

Prof Leon Straker &
Dr Wayne Warburton



1. Aim for your children to have a healthy media diet in the 3 key areas:

- Moderate amount (1-2 hours per day recreational screen use);
- Content (less of the violent/anti-social/discriminatory media; more pro-social and educational media; more active games);
- Remember, you know more about content even if your child knows more about playing the games.
- Age-appropriateness, especially for children under 8.

2. Keep video games (on any device) out of the bedroom

- This will usually help to lessen the amount of use and moderate the type of use.

3. Aim for more physical activity time than sitting screen time

- This isn't easy, but in an ideal world parents would be creating lots of fun opportunities each day for activity, this can include replacing sedentary e-games with active e-games but should also include more real-world activity than e-based activity.

4. When playing video games, have an active break after 30 minutes

- This minimises prolonged sitting and sustained close-vision effects and helps to switch to other activity.

5. Encourage a good safe playing technique. That is a technique that:

- Avoids poor postures;
- Avoids repetitive movements;
- Ensures sufficient space for active e-games.

6. Know what games your children are playing and monitor their game use.

- In a recent study increased parental monitoring of screen use was associated with reductions in screen time, violent media exposure, aggressive behaviour and BMI, and increases in hours of sleep, pro-social behaviour and school performance.

7. Set and enforce rules around use.

- This may include time quotas (e.g., maximum 2 hours per day of entertainment media, averaged across the week) and content restrictions.

8. Model appropriate screen use and participation in real world activities

- Children copy their parents, so modelling healthy screen use is crucial;
- Children are more likely to be active if their parents are. In Canada, programs that replaced screen time with family time were met with initial resistance by kids, but after 6 months or so family members came to prefer family time.

9. Have a screen-free time before bedtime.

- Sleep professionals recommend 2 hours because the effect of screens with blue light interferes with sleep hormones.
- The closer the screen the greater the interruption to sleep.

10. Be actively involved in your child's game play

- This is especially important if games frighten kids, depict violent or anti-social behaviour or upset kids in other ways. It is ideal to have a parent nearby to put video game content into context and/or to help calm kids/teens if needed
- Co-playing games can be helpful, but to be beneficial the parent should be actively communicating with the child during play.

Around the Dioceses

DIOCESE OF BALLARAT

BALLARAT

St. Peter's Ballarat joined other branches in the Ballarat Deanery to put together hospital packs for patients, some of whom come from some distance away, who come into the Base Hospital under emergency circumstances. Each pack has a comb, toothbrush, toothpaste and other simple things to ensure emergency patients feel cared for before their relatives come with their other essentials.

Julie Werner



DIOCESE OF BENDIGO

COHUNA

Almost at the end of our most recent Covid lockdown, President Raylene suggested we each knit squares, and upon completion, join them all together to make a rug to cover the couch in the meeting room of our local church. Even members who have not knitted for a very long time enjoyed getting the needles busy again!

Hundreds of squares resulted in just 3 weeks – more than enough for a rug to cover the couch in the meeting room. The 'meeting room rug' proudly includes the AMUA logo and the year, 2021, knitted into a couple of the squares – we have some very clever members! We are sure this rug is going to be a conversation starter for people attending our church and will give us an opportunity to tell of the great work of AMUA and help to promote our group. We look forward to



another rug being assembled from the remaining squares and being donated where it is needed. We thank God for those crafty and creative fingers!

Shirley Bruns

DIOCESE OF BRISBANE

HERVEY BAY



'Happy are those who can give and come together in prayer.' Rebuilding Hope and Confidence was so necessary after the past years. It has been such a challenge to keep enthusiasm and activities going through prayer and opening our doors to the wider community. Following our AGM in October, we happily admitted 7 ladies to St. John's MU. We are truly blessed, as all have already contributed and participated in our activities. New enthusiasm is such a boost to our wonderful organisation. Recently we gathered around the Lord's table after our observance of the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence. Fr. Vic led our worship, and we lit a candle for each prayer during the intercessions in an extremely moving service. Care Bags, filled with toiletries and a comfort bear were blessed and then handed to our guest speakers from Centacare in Hervey Bay.

Helen Jarvis

REDCLIFFE

Mothers' Union Branch Members at Redcliffe have been inspired by The Red Rose Foundation to raise awareness of gender-based violence. A Red Bench has been placed in a prominent position in the grounds of St Anne's Anglican Church at Scarborough, with a plaque attached reading 'Change the ending – let us stop

Domestic Violence'. The Red Bench was dedicated by Father Graheme Baldock on Sunday November 28. Mothers' Union members acknowledged the period of 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence from November 25 to December 10 by reflecting on a series of 16 Bible verses and prayers.



Robyn Francis

ROMA



Saturday October 2, 2021 saw the dedication of a stained-glass window in memory of Canon Arthur and Mrs Beverley Fellows, at St Paul's Anglican Church, Roma. Arthur was rector at St Paul's from 1962 to 1968. He and Beverley raised their young family there and Beverley was a huge support

to Arthur in her role as a clergy wife, church organist, and Sunday school teacher, as well as assisting with pastoral care in the parish, and in the making of many cups of tea for visiting Bush Brothers. Beverley was a member of the Mothers' Union for over 50 years and it is most appropriate that the window commissioned by their children and Arthur's brother features the Mothers' Union logo. Many locals, some of whom knew Arthur and Beverley from that time, came to the service conducted by Bishop Cam Venables.

Margaret Jolly (née Fellows)

WARWICK

St Mark's Anglican Church in Warwick held a special service on Sunday, November 21 to mark 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence. Mrs Bette Bonney from Warwick Safe Haven gave an excellent talk about services available in our local community to help people

who are experiencing domestic violence. Each member of the congregation was handed the printed sheet of 16 Days of Prayers as they entered the church. This pamphlet also gave information about where to obtain help and gave some statistics about domestic violence in Australia.



People had been asked to wear something purple to the service as a silent protest against gender-based violence. After the service the church bell rang once for each of the victims of domestic violence in 2021. The Venerable Lizzie Gaitskell, Rector of Warwick, unveiled and blessed a Red Rose Foundation 'Red Bench' (garden seat) in the church grounds, which aims to raise public awareness and provide an opportunity for this critical issue to remain visible in Warwick.

On the following Saturday, November 27, a Parish High Tea was held for the ladies in Allora/Clifton and Warwick parishes to acknowledge World Global Day. Revd. Gaitskell led us in prayers for the victims of domestic violence at the beginning of the afternoon.

Elaine Stewart

DIocese of MELBOURNE

SUNBURY



Like a lot of groups our members are now ageing and we cannot do the things we used to be able to do for fund raising, but this year we did run a most successful 'No-Cake Cake Stall', raising over \$800. When we became aware of the Share the Dignity project it was agreed this was something we could do, so we set about collecting handbags and toiletries and finished with 18 bags full of things a lady could use.

Susanne Baxter-Smith

DIOCESE OF PERTH



In January, members of the Perth MU Executive gathered for an overnight retreat by the peaceful Murray River, near Mandurah. Time was spent in prayer and Bible study, fellowship and planning as we

prepared for the year ahead. Everyone agreed that this was a great way to get to know each other better and to focus our thinking on the best ways to encourage branches as they plan activities for the year.

Kaye Healy

DIOCESE OF SYDNEY

On a cold and wet November morning members of Mothers' Union Sydney gathered at St Andrew's Cathedral, in person and online, to celebrate the annual Advent Service and to mark 125 years of MU in Sydney. The service was conducted by the Chaplain, the Revd., Jan Donohoo, and the Archbishop of Sydney, The Most Revd. Kanishka Raffel, was the preacher. Cailey Raffel our Patron, also shared our time together.

The Archbishop opened the scriptures to us from Hebrews 12:28-13:16, explaining clearly the implications of worship that



pleases God – not formal ritual; rather the harder stuff of life – sacrificially loving brothers and sisters in Christ. That is, wanting and doing the best for them; showing hospitality even when inconvenient, providing and praying for those imprisoned, especially in countries where to identify as a Christian can lead to incarceration.

Upholding the ideals of marriage as taught by the Lord Jesus, between a husband and wife, are core objects of AMUA and although often not popular in Australian society, are still worthy and central to God's purposes to bless humanity. We were reminded that kindness and compassion are evidence of lives attuned to bring benefit to others and so, honour to the Lord Jesus. We were encouraged to remember the Jesus who suffered to make His people holy; not self-righteous, but set apart to serve, including being women who pray, often.

We were blessed to realise our Archbishop is a bit of a fan of MU, because we don't just talk – we are women who 'do' and we thank God for that privilege.

Jan Donohoo

KEIRAVILLE



Mary Sumner roses were blooming and blue skies broke through the clouds as Keiraville MU gathered at President Roslyn Lawer's home on December 7, 2021 for a very special end-of-year gathering. Acting Rector, Revd. John Thew, inducted Marian Hilleard as our newest member and then led us in a communion service in the intimate surroundings of Roslyn's loungeroom. Eased Covid restrictions finally allowed us to gather together for face-to-face fellowship and the opportunity to formally welcome Marian. We look forward to more fellowship and special celebrations in 2022.

Megan Ryman

DIOCESE OF THE MURRAY

The Zonta Club of the Adelaide Hills invited the

Mt Barker Mothers' Union to judge the message in the posters in this year's art competition at the local library. Their 'Expect Respect' campaign has entries from children from local schools where members of the police force and teachers combine to present workshops which develop awareness of all forms of violence, including bullying.



Some of the captions on the artwork were:

'Pulling someone down will never help you reach the top'

'A relationship should be a safe haven. Not a battlefield'

'Being kind is free, so make the most of it'

'Treat everyone like gold'

'She had not known the cage until she felt the freedom'

The program really struck a chord with our group because 2 of the 5 AMUA Objects are -

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.

These fit perfectly with the Expect Respect program so we look forward to continuing to support Zonta in this area.

Liz Hempel



DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

We had a lovely beginning to Christmas at **St John's, Taree**, with a Festival of Trees. We had 24 organisations and parishioners who entered trees of all shapes and sizes. The church was open daily

for a week, with people able to view the trees and vote for their favourite. Our MU branch entered 'Mother Mary'. She was covered in prayers and items that represented what we do, including Joy Boxes, Baptism Bears and Baby Bundles. It was lovely to be able to promote Mothers' Union in this way.

Kim Bussey

DIOCESE OF WANGARATTA

Through rain, hail and shine members from the Diocese of Wangaratta Mothers' Union branches and lone members travelled long distances to attend their 2021 annual meeting on November 15 at Purbrick Hall.

Bishop Clarence Bester spoke on changes that would be fruitful to inspire new folk to come along and join the ranks of our worthwhile organisation and be able to support marriage and family life – changes to decades-old habits that would bond people together to serve Christ through MU but not cause pain, confusion or frustrations to anyone. He emphasised that in 2022 every MU branch should choose a faithful and reliable leader who can lead them into the future.

Bishop Bester also gave an example of the Ministry Action Plan (MAP) based on the '5 Rs' Redefining, Re-establishing, Redesigning, Redeveloping and Restructuring. Through this Plan growth can occur with God's power to bring the Christian faith into people's lives and believing in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

The members enjoyed some lunch and fellowship before braving the elements to go home after a very satisfying and encouraging get-together.

Diane Grant





*We are being
transformed into
his likeness with
ever-increasing glory,
which comes from
the Lord, who is
the Spirit.*

2 Corinthians 3:18



*If anyone is in
Christ, the new
creation has come:
The old has gone,
the new is here!*

2 Corinthians 5:17

