**Chief Executive Address – General Meeting 2019**

I would also like to say a huge THANK YOU. In visiting some six Dioceses since we last met, I have once again been so impressed by all of the work which you continue to do, selflessly in your own communities – making a difference to over a hundred thousand people here in Britain and Ireland each year and it has been such a privilege to witness work such as lovingly provided knitted items for the Mission for Seafarers in Truro, or the help being given in Durham to young single mums coming out of care to make a good start in life for themselves and their babies, these often seemingly small acts making a big difference to individuals’ lives!

Back in 2016, in Winchester, we looked towards a revitalized MU in our 150th anniversary year in 2026. We also started to look at how to get there (and decided that the charabanc was not fit for purpose!). It is great to see the journey already travelled - MU now has a new worldwide constitution, a new Board, a new website – and we are making great progress in establishing the Directory so that we can all stay in touch better in the future – and the voices of over 200,000 members around the world have also contributed to setting the future direction for the movement.

We also made a commitment that as the Unit Committees finished, we would engage with members in other ways, through Communities of Interest, working groups or task groups.

The new Communities of Interest are now starting to come to life! The aim is to have a range of groups covering a range of areas of interest, so that each Diocese has the opportunity to engage where relevant to them and individual members also able to express interest and participate.

Each community will work in ways which are right for them. For example, in Faith, members are already contributing prayers for Families Worldwide, and there is a group specifically for Diocesan Chaplains, who, as in the last Triennium, will come together for a day in April next year, to explore how we can best support them in their MU ministry.

Each Community will have a special area on the website which can be accessed by the “my account” section and every member can choose to be kept informed about what is happening in any area of interest to them

Let me give you an example:

There is already a collection of templates for writing a press release and other topics, as well as presentations on Social Media and Communications – to help you to ensure that, in your parishes and Dioceses, the light of MU can shine and no longer be concealed under a bushel!.

In addition, for key strategic topics, members are integral to shaping the future direction. As well as the General Meeting Committee, for example, another group is leading the parenting review, and there is a core Metamorphosis group made up of the participating dioceses. We are also, as you know, keen to find practical, manageable ways of capturing stories and numbers on the amazing work which is ongoing in Britain and Ireland, so members are working with staff on this – watch this space and you will hear more about MU Live!

So I hope you can see that there are many ways developing in which you can both find out more about the movement – and help to shape it, too!

As Sheran said, there was a joyful, uplifting and highly productive meeting of the seventy two members of Worldwide Council, observers and staff in June, during which they together reviewed all of the outcomes of the MULOA conversations across the world. What was astonishing was just how much all members of Mothers’ Union have in common! While there is a kaleidoscope of diversity in what we do to meet local community need – there is far more that unites than divides!

Together, these leaders described Mothers’ Union as “a global, women-led, volunteer movement. United in our diversity, and living out our faith, we support individuals and families to transform their lives. Embedded in the Church and Community, we have unprecedented reach which gives a voice to the stigmatized and vulnerable around the world” WOW!

Focusing particularly on women and vulnerable children, we aim to help strong relationships to develop and be sustained between individuals, in families and in communities. We work with the Church and others in partnership to help members to help as many people as possible.

First and foremost, we aim to build hope in the future, and confidence to make change, in ourselves and in those whom we seek to support. Energized by this hope and confidence, members across the world seek to make a difference to people’s lives by improving gender justice, helping to create and sustain a peaceful and safe environment for all, and giving individuals and communities a “hand up rather than a hand out”, building self-reliance by equipping them with the skills to identify and use their own and other resources.

The values which inspire and guide us all are just as important: working non-judgmentally, with people of all faiths or none, members aim to be bold and open to change, persevering, and above all, loving and compassionate, creating safe spaces and really listening to needs, being there over the long-term - living in the communities we serve, and NOT going away when times get tough!

What is wonderful is the work which is currently happening, working across all three areas of change. A group went to the United Nations again this year to fight for Gender Justice, and here in the UK, we were able, thanks to your input, to provide, for example, input to legislation on domestic violence in Westminster, create awareness amongst Parliamentarians of the need to prevent gender based violence between those under the age of 16, and respond to the Welsh Government’s consultation on Relationships and Sex Education.

As you know, the funds and resources which enable most of the almost one million people to be helped each year by our members worldwide, are provided by the members themselves - who give selflessly of their time and money to support their neighbours. However, without your generosity, the transformational programme work which makes a difference to some 100,000 a year would just not be possible

For example, last year, in Tanzania we were able to start a three year savings and credit project co-supported by the Anglican Communion fund, in conjunction with the Church. The results so far are amazing! Over 4000 members have joined Mothers’ Union Savings Groups, and collectively they have saved more than $300,000 enabling the development of new enterprises, such as the Chimole Parish tomato field. Over 75% of groups are using or planning to use some of their funds to support the vulnerable in their own communities, and over 90% are giving to MU, enabling MU to build capacity and move towards independence. Excitingly, in what is a very male-led church, over 1000 lay leadership roles are now being held by female members – and over 90% use their savings group time for joint bible study. As one member said, “ this feels like a form of evangelism”

And, in a war-torn country, South Sudan, your generous support has been helping our sisters in South Sudan over a number of years to create a safer environment, and resilience against future conflict. This was historically particularly through the literacy and financial education programme – which members sustained after the formal programme had ended by going on to train new groups of their own volition.

Sadly, it continues to be one of the most fragile and poor countries in the world, with an ongoing need to help the vulnerable to build resilience, both in terms of reconciliation post conflict and the ability to rebuild their livelihoods.

Thanks to you, and in partnership with the Flowers Foundation, in February MU enabled 170 leaders to come together for two weeks in Northern Uganda, to help a personal and collective healing process, and to equip the women present to go back and provide practical help in their own communities. The effect was truly transformational. Women arrived from tribes who had been at war with one another, and initially they would not mix. Yet by the end of the 2 weeks, through shared activities including prayer, worship and bible study together, they realized that all had suffered, and that they could help one another to move on. At the end, they were singing and dancing together – as well as sharing mobile numbers.

As one said, “now we can lay down our burdens and be healed”.

What is particularly impressive is that since they met, those women have indeed gone back and helped their communities to make plans to improve their own lives – whether through experiencing some of the healing tools themselves, or beginning to implement practical initiatives, such as further literacy training.

We are very much hoping that it will prove possible to continue to support them as, step by step, they start to build a hope and a future for their communities and country, so that Mary can walk more than two miles outside her compound without fear of being killed, and Anna can grow sufficient crops to feed her extended family

In Kigali, our leaders also reflected on how they wanted this movement to work and be sustained. Their vision is for a movement where all Provinces are interconnected, supporting one another as well as being supported by a core professional team – and they recognized that, at present, an unreasonable proportion of the burden for funding the movement lies on the shoulders of you, the members here in Britain and Ireland. All Provinces have committed to making a contribution towards the funding of the movement according to their own means and already this year, we have received more contributions than ever. Programmes such as the one in Tanzania are also enabling other Provinces to develop their own resources so that they can contribute themselves to the Movement. Whilst it will take time for the contributions to develop fully, it is very clear that all are committed, which is great!

You will see from the finances for 2018 – which are given in the Annual Review [wave in air] and also in full in the Accounts which are available online - that a small surplus was generated from operations, which was excellent given the level of ongoing transformational work with MULOA, the Constitution and the Directory and Website. This is very much due to your continuing generosity – thank you! It is important to say, however, that finances remain tight, and that the amount of work we can deliver is constrained by our available funds.

So whilst the vision by 2026 is that Provinces around the world are making a substantial contribution to the overall costs of the Movement, and that collectively we have built the capability to attract major external funds to support transformational work, it is likely that we will be asking the membership, and wider donors within Britain and Ireland, to continue to support our work in countries elsewhere as they build their capabiliites. We cannot thank you enough for this!

Another source of long term income which the Board has asked us to explore is Mary Sumner House. MUe already runs a successful meetings room and conferences business within the House, which generates net income to cover the basic ongoing running costs of the building and a number of core costs. However, our home is now one hundred years old, and the house is feeling her age! She is coming to a time when she needs a significant overhaul, which cannot be funded from the ongoing income of the Charity. So last year the Board asked us to look at options, which included selling the building. External advice, however, was that it would be in the better interests of the Charity to retain the building as a long term asset. The Board was acutely aware of the value placed on the building by members here and across the world as the home of the movement. So we were asked instead, under a small committee of the Board including Nikki Sweatman and June Butler, and an external with significant property experience, Jan Lloyd, to evaluate “how the building could work for us” – to be renovated to both generate increased revenue streams for members’ work and enable the home of Mothers’ Union to be viable for another 100 years.

The Board will take a decision on whether or not to go to planning permission at the end of this year – and if that decision is taken the plans will be shared with you and your opinions sought.

What is absolutely clear is that the renovation would fully respect the values of the movement, the Chapel would be retained for members’ use – and no work would be undertaken before 2021, so there will be time for proper consultation

As mentioned at the start, our Patron, the Archbishop of Canterbury has set MU the challenge to cease to be “the best kept secret in the Anglican Communion” – I believe that excellent progress is being made here… and that this is set to continue. For example, this year Mothers’ Union participated for the third year in the Thy Kingdom Come wave of prayer – and there were over 600 present in Coventry Cathedral for the service, as well as members from across the world watching by tuning in via our Facebook live stream! The Synod speech of your Worldwide president ( which covered work in the UK as much as worldwide) received a standing ovation – and Mothers’ Union will be playing a significant role in the Lambeth Conference next year… through hospitality, supporting the spouses’ programme and also a key note speech by our worldwide president in the main meeting in the session on Peace and Reconciliation.