**General Meeting 2018**

**Bev Jullien Address (Morning)**

Wow! This video is hot off the press, and will be on YouTube and the website by next week – it really gives me goosebumps! To me, it really embodies what Mothers’ Union is all about!

The couple on the left are arguably one of the most famous couples worldwide – the gorgeous baby, Prince Louis, perhaps less so – but 2 joyful events in the life of our Patron, the Queen, this year! We sent cards of congratulations on behalf of the whole of the membership, and these are the thank-yous to you all, now framed and on display at MSH

My thanks to you, too, for the wonderful warmth and hospitality I have experienced as I have travelled around the UK seeing work, such as the parent and toddler group in Bath, Diocesan meetings in Oxford, Liverpool, Newcastle and Southwark and enjoying wonderful Festival Services, including in Chester, Lichfield and here in Swansea and Brecon. On a slightly different note, I also had the pleasure of being the guest of the Bishop for the patronal festival of my home Diocese, St Albans, where we processed through the town behind “St Alban” and other characters, and MU members looked after the children and walked them up for a blessing at Communion

And a particular thank-you for the work which you continue to do, quietly, every day – we know you reach over 100000 people each year, but we suspect it is much more – please do continue to share special stories, such as this one, in which members in Chelmsford Diocese are not only teaching English to refugees – but also providing them with support and space to make friends, as one participant said “ so much more than just language lessons”

... and thanks for your amazing fundraising which you do for your own local projects, as well as supporting work across the Diocese and Internationally! I know the “Summer of Hope” Appeal has raised so far this year more than it had at the same time last year, which is wonderful! Fundraising should always be FUN – as this face painting certainly seemed to be – and all contributions make a real difference – whether it is a local cake sale or major personal challenges such as Lesley’s London marathon!

It matters, because the funds you raise are used to enable whole communities to take charge of their lives and lift themselves from dependency. A fantastic example is the Savings and Credits programme in Rwanda. Nearly 100,000 people benefited directly or indirectly from the programme, through the businesses which women were able to set up and the people they were able to employ. But in addition, they were so effective that they were also able to create health insurance and social care support for the community as a whole. Such support is truly priceless!

What is worth remembering, too, is that transformational programmes such as this are complementary to the work which members across the world fund and deliver themselves, just as you do. I have been fortunate this year to visit both Zimbabwe and Kenya. In Zimbabwe, the ladies in the Victoria Falls Region are working to eradicate malaria in their communities – and in Harare, the ladies in this picture are supporting young expectant Mums who have nothing, with “baby baskets” so they and their babies can go home from the clinic with the essentials to start life together. In Northern Kenya, the ladies here, whom I met at their National Conference, had come outside their homesteads for the very first time. In their tribes, girls are sold at puberty and subjected to female genital mutilation before marriage – their courage in finding ways to survive and support one another, rescue girls and gradually educate their communities to change is truly humbling

A very current example of local work is seen here, where members in Myanmar are sending supplies by homemade canoes to victims of flooding. It is your work, and work such as this across the world, which together combine to make a difference to the lives of over three-quarters of a million people each year - truly amazing! I cannot thank you enough for all that you continue to do!

Now to “switch gear” for a moment. You may recognise these slides from Edinburgh last year, when we talked about the journey towards a new Dawn?

You may perhaps remember that we reflected that, whilst a charabanc is a wonderful thing, for today’s world, an air conditioned bus is much more preferable? We recognised that the time had come for Mothers’ Union to modernise some of its ways of working

And we talked about the tools to achieve change, through the constitution, improved communication and engagement with members and non-members alike. What I would like to do now is to share with you how far we have come in transforming those intentions into reality.

So Lynne has shared that the Queen has approved the new constitution, which was prepared after much prayerful reflection by the Board, and extensive consultation with the Dioceses here in Britain and Ireland and worldwide

This means that the worldwide Governance now meets the latest standards for charities, and the constitution has been designed to give the flexibility so that the organisation can evolve as necessary to meet changing needs of the membership and the communities you serve. The current elections for Worldwide President and the Worldwide Board are being held under the new constitution, and the results will be announced, as agreed by the Board, in the week of 8th October.

It is wonderful that the current Unit Committees have shared generously their wisdom and experience to help to shape the communities of interest which will be introduced at the start of next year – and it is our hope that through these, as well as by continuing to engage members in specific projects, that, as Lynne said, there will be more, rather than less, opportunities for member development in the future

So just to give you an idea – there is a named member of staff responsible to drawing together each community (for example, separate communities for Faith and for Policy). We are inviting Dioceses to nominate individuals to join whichever communities they see as relevant for their Diocese – and subsequently, there will be space on the website for each community to share information, and any individual member with an interest in a particular area will be able to join that particular group

Communication is the hardest thing in the world to get right – sending, receiving, sharing, interpreting – and I believe it is a particular challenge for Mothers’ Union, when our channels of communication have been historically in paper form, or by word of mouth. So a huge THANK YOU to all who have chosen to have your contact details included on the new member directory – this will make sending you information appropriate to your personal needs much easier (for example, all information on resources for members, but in line with your personal preferences only for fundraising). It will ensure that you are in control of the details held about you, which will be the same for branch, diocese and Mary Sumner House.

You may have seen that the “new look” website has now been launched. Improvements are still being made – so your feedback is very welcome. There is a stand in the marketplace where you can find out more, and David Ewaku will be there to answer any questions – but I would like to give you a quick flavour now of what it has to offer

It has been designed following extensive feedback from, and in ongoing consultation with, Dioceses and members, and has been designed to be versatile and easily readable on a phone or tablet, as well as a desktop computer. The front page aims to draw people who are not familiar with Mothers’ Union in to find out more about the movement – and also includes a dedicated button for faith and prayer, a resources button and one for you to manage your account.

There is an interactive map to show where MU is present around the world, and a viewer can then click on any country, to find out more about our work there. Throughout, there are “calls to action”, inviting the visitor to get involved, for example “join a community of 4m members worldwide”

There is an invitation to “join now” – which for central members is now possible fully online

The visitor can choose whether to join centrally, or a local group – and if a local group, will be invited to fill in their details, which will be automatically sent to their nearest Diocese. So we hope that the website will start to provide a “pull” for members to join locally.

The Board has also approved introducing a “friend” category. We knew that some Dioceses were doing this already, and had had feedback about people wanting to take part in Mothers’ Union activities, but who, for example were of another faith or none, and therefore not eligible to be a member. Now, someone can join as a Friend even if they are not willing or able to meet the conditions for full membership, although they will not have voting rights. For central friends, the subscription is the same as for a member. We very much hope that this will open up new pathways for people to engage with MU and ultimately join as full members

To make it easier for someone to have an idea of whether to join locally, there is now a search facility for “Mothers’ Union near you”. They just need to put in their postcode or the name of their Diocese from a drop-down list

And there is now a page for every Diocese on the website, populated by information from that Diocese, telling the visitor more about the Diocese near to them – so here for Swansea and Brecon!. This is not a replacement for the Diocesan website, but provides a link to it and to a contact person. Again, the hope is that this will improve the “shop window” for the Diocese, and help to draw more people in. The page also has the facility to include local news stories, controlled by the Diocese itself to help visitors to find out more. Katherine Hudson will be in the marketplace and able to talk further about how we are aiming to improve our support for you in developing membership

And we received a lot of feedback that resources on the old website were really difficult to find. There will still be room for improvement, which is why ongoing feedback is really helpful – but we do hope that the way they are grouped now, as you can see here, for example, will be make it easier to find what you need. There is a stand of member resources with Marian Pope in the marketplace – please do make the time to find out more from her

And another key way of communicating is, of course, through our publications. You may remember that Families First was established some years ago to compete in the commercial magazine market. Unfortunately, this market is reducing in size and highly competitive, and FF will make a loss this year.

For this reason, and following feedback on what members really value reading, the decision has been taken to transform Families First into an overtly member-focused publication, which will contain information which can also be valuable in telling non-members about MU. This is consistent with the approach of most modern membership organisations. So next year you will see an increase in articles which can be used for discussion in meetings, and stories of the work of members here in the UK and worldwide, coming to you 4 times per year. Membership renewal will also be direct with the centre, to reduce the administrative burden on the Dioceses. I understand that the team has received a number of queries around renewal, the most common being – is it as simple as sending off the form with £10? The answer is, yes!

Families Worldwide will continue, and you may have noticed that there is a focus now on more in-depth features from selected countries, rather than information on all, as this can now be found on the website. In 2019, Families Worldwide will be delivered by post direct to the doorstep for all members whose addresses are on the directory, reducing the administration burden on Dioceses, and speeding up delivery to you.

And now a less-standard form of communication - the windows of the Mary Sumner Shop in London have been transformed into marketing space for Mothers’ Union work at home and worldwide! This window dressing can be easily refreshed and updated, and conveys some of our key messages. It has been great to see passers-by pause to read them! The physical shop was closed at the end of last year because local competition had made it loss-making – but the online and MUe rep businesses continue to thrive, and we are creating “pop-up” shops for key events and visitors. For example, when 77 visited us from South Africa last week, the “pop-up” generated over £1000 in sales!

We all know that continuing, and improving engagement with current and potential members is absolutely critical for our future – and MULOA (Mothers Union Listens (to God and others), Observes (needs in the community) and Acts (in faith, to bring about change)) is critical to this.

This time last year, we were still very much stepping out in faith, The Board and Provincial Presidents had agreed to lead the process, and the Americas had held a first workshop, which had gone really well. But we still had no idea how effective it would really be

What I would like to do now is share with you just how far we have already come! You will see that this map now looks very much like the MU Worldwide map – that is because every region in the world, meeting as Zones first, has started the process, most recently in the Pacific, and all will have completed in Spring of 2019. We estimate approaching 200,000 member voices have now been listened to worldwide! What this is helping to do is to answer those vexing questions “who are we?” “who do we serve?” “what difference do we make?” “what is our DNA”? so we can have confidence to talk about who we are and what we do, and shape the future together. And what really excites me is that, across the globe, independently of one another, and coming from a huge diversity of cultures, members voices are saying many of the same things – what unites us is far greater than what divides!

We are here at the seaside – so I would liken MU for a moment to a stick of rock – bear with me!

At the heart of every member, very clearly, is faith and prayer. Following Jesus Christ, listening to his voice, and being open to what he is calling us to do

Wrapped around this, then, is fellowship – communal worship, supporting one another and learning together – also creating safe space for fellow members and for others who are isolated or in need – that “ministry of the tea-urn”, or equivalent around the world, non-judgemental listening, unconditional love. This is Mothers’ Union embedded in the community, which does not go away in times of trouble

And on the outside, we see the diverse kaleidoscope which is where members put their faith into action in ways which are right in their particular part of the world – that myriad of small, practical actions……….. but even here, there are very clear “golden threads” which unite us. Everywhere, members are taking action to support families, whatever their form; everywhere members care for the judged and the stigmatised, the “screaming silent”, and everywhere there is a strong ministry of care for the vulnerable – and courage and persistence to speak up and speak out on sensitive and difficult issues.

The changes we bring about, at our best, are both personal and communal: personal faith is strengthened; individuals are changed, and feel empowered to follow God’s calling; relationships are restored, and the quality of life of members and others is improved….

… and as a result we can also strengthen and reinvigorate Mothers’ Union! I remember meeting the ladies from Argentina and Peru last year, and they were very wary of getting too involved in MU – now they are highly engaged and committed, and growing new groups. Our relationship with South India had grown weak and has now been refreshed, and West Malaysia have asked to become affiliated. In a number of Provinces, ladies who are not members have helped to facilitate – what is fantastic is that they are choosing to join once they have understood MU better

… and in Britain and Ireland, the journey so far is very promising. Members have talked about MULOA as a “God-given opportunity” to reflect, re-engage and refresh. Many have said that the bible-story based approach has enabled those who are usually silent in meetings to speak up, and others, very honestly, that they have been reminded of the importance of listening first to understand what the real need is, rather than “doing unto” others.

We have talked so often about the modesty of MU members, and the fact that we “ just do what’s needed”. Through MULOA, members are recognising that every little action makes a difference – to the person touched, and potentially much more widely, as individual lives are transformed and they in turn help others causing the big to ripple out from the small

And the groups we touch, or want to touch more, the outer stripes of the stick of rock, in Britain and Ireland, will vary by Diocese and community, but include the lonely, bereaved, elderly and young people as well as single parents in families; within the screaming silent, victims of violence, domestic abuse and modern day slavery; and of the vulnerable, prisoners, refugees and asylum seekers, the homeless and disabled, and the mentally ill, including those with dementia. And the circles overlap, because so do the challenges people face

So what is the B and I “flavour” to the stick of rock? When the B and I Trustees were reflecting on the MULOA outcomes so far, Jean McPherson-Richardson talked about the unique Scottish picture as a “Tartan Tint”. We have talked about the groups we touch or seek to touch – but In terms of the changes which members want to make, for ourselves and those we reach, through MULOA so far we have learnt that at the heart it is to be closer to God, for individuals to have hope and confidence in the future; for people to feel included and empowered to take control of their own lives and help those around them; to build and nurture healthy relationships and for there to be a decreased level of violence in families, communities and society at large. What an amazing and humbling vision!

And having listened to the voices of the membership, we in Mary Sumner House will align our work, within available resource, to support you in delivering your vision. So for the “core” of the rock, Catherine Kyte will continue to provide support for your faith development; for the middle layer – we help ensure continuing engagement with MULOA, to help the ongoing refreshment, and to enable those who have not yet experienced it to do so; and for the outer “flavour”, named members of staff will co-ordinate support for your work with families in crisis through AFIA, your work with prisoners, and indeed ex-offenders; and your work with refugees, asylum seekers and on modern day slavery; we will ensure that dioceses have the necessary guidance on legal compliance, for example for craft and GDPR – and we will ensure that we can advocate and campaign for change on the areas which really matter to you

And I would like to update you on this area in particular, because I know that some have been concerned about changes in MSH, and in particular the stopping of Faith and Policy Watch. Over the last year, we have continued to support the 16 Days of Activism, with a campaign which included radio and newspaper coverage; a delegation went to UNCSW and advocated for rural women, based on a policy paper which was prepared with member input – and we were invited by MU member and MP, Fiona Bruce, to take part in the Government consultation on relationships and sex education.

We now have a new Policy Adviser, Mary Santo, in place, and following the MULOA feedback, in which “healthy relationships” and “decreased violence” are 2 of the key changes members want to enable in society, we will engage with 2 major Government Consultations: firstly, relationships and sex education, building on inputs already received ( for example when Karen Morris, member from Coventry and parenting trainer, spoke to a House committee).

In addition, Mary has prepared a short survey which is on your seats – do take the opportunity to complete it and put in the box in the foyer, or go online to complete – and please do encourage others to do so online when you get back, because your voices will make a difference, in our response to the next stage of consultation at the end of October.

We were delighted that the Government has also decided to review its legislation on Domestic Abuse, following lobbying from many, including ourselves. We responded to their initial consultation, and will invite your input on key issues once the draft Bill has been published

And Mary has also prepared resources for 16 Days of Activism this year – do look at the website. Yes, Faith and Policy Watch has been discontinued, but instead, Mary will be contributing to each issue of Families First and Families worldwide and the e-Newsletter, as well as regularly updating the website

… and she is here today in the Marketplace – do go and talk to her. She will be co-ordinating communities of interest within Policy, and if you have a particular interest and would like to participate, please do let her know!

Finally, Just a reminder of the staff team at Mary Sumner House. A couple whom I have not mentioned who are here today in the marketplace to talk with you about MULOA and development work in Britain and Ireland and overseas are Catherine Kyte and Ursula Kopp– and all who cannot be with us send their love – and are dedicated to serving you

And delighted to host you, too – these are the South Africans who joined us and sang at a special midday service last week, together with Margaret and Sue from London Diocese, and a visitor from Australia!

The House generates net revenue every year to support the work of members – and I was reminded again of how much we have in common around the world when I saw this quote on a building in Kenya, which is both the home of the Mothers’ Union and a creator of revenue for their work. More importantly, however, it brings me back to the heart of that metaphorical stick of rock – across the globe, it is the deeply rooted belief and conviction of members that all things are possible through Christ, who strengthens us which is the inspiration for us all

And as we reflect on all that unites and inspires us as a family across the world, “ we are one body with many different parts, but we are all one in Christ”, it gives me great pleasure to invite the Provincial President for Wales, Reverent Tim Williams, to lead us in midday prayers