**Myth Busters – General Meeting 2019**

In this short session we want to delve into some of the common myths that we hear from our members when we are out and about visiting dioceses within our provinces.

**Myth 1**

**You have belong to a branch and attend meetings to be a member of MU**

We understand that because branch membership is such a rich part of our heritage and a wonderful part of our membership today. However this is in fact false – there is no need to belong to a branch if this does not fit in with personal lifestyle or commitments. Individuals can choose to become Diocesan members, and attend Diocesan events. Groups can also choose to meet together without becoming a formal branch. Groups are indeed increasingly common – for example in my province I know a branch who…. meet in a wine bar ~MU at 8 or another that recognised they have potential MU members in their Toddler group and share news of the MU at coffee time [possible friends of MU]. And in Canterbury I love that some of our branches meet by WhatsApp or Facebook or even at the school gate!

You can also become a central member which is great if you are particularly interested in finding out more about Mothers’ Union and supporting our work. You will become part of our global family, a community of action and prayer, and receive Families First as well as Families Worldwide. Anyone who joins as a central member can also ask for the details of their local Diocese and attend Diocesan meetings, or transfer to becoming branch or diocesan members

**Myth 2**

**You can only join MU if you wish to become a member**

There is now an option to become a friend of Mothers’ Union! Anyone who cares about the work of MU, but may not be a practicing Christian or be seeking the fellowship or commitment which comes from full membership can choose to join as a friend centrally, and increasingly so at Diocesan or Branch level. If they join as central friends they will receive Families First and the e-newsletter – and can choose to continue their journey within MU to become full members locally if and when they wish!

It’s a great way of introducing people to MU in a gentle way. Now, I know that some of the members in my province have asked if there is a special service and certificates for “Friends”. It seems that many people think that this is a great idea! A certificate to show when they join as a friend, and a service for those “friends” for whom it would be right. Anyone who joins as a central friend already receives a badge in thanks. This is something we can have further discussions on in Communities of Interest. However we need to respect that not everyone would be comfortable with a service, and ensure that it remains optional.

**Myth 3**

**You have to have permission from your clergy to open a branch**

There is no “set” answer to this. As branches often have meetings within the church building and are attached to a specific congregation then it really does help to work alongside the clergy. Ideally, Mothers’ Union should be viewed as a great partner in ministry. Perhaps the reason some clergy are negative is that they don’t understand our identity and what Mothers’ Union is about. Or, maybe they have had a negative experience with MU in the past? There may be some reconciliation work that needs to be done so that members and clergy are working together from the start. The experience of others who have been in this situation is invaluable so I recommend that you go to your Diocesan President in the first instance for some pastoral support and advice – they in turn can ask their provincial president or zonal trustee for support as well.

**Myth 4**

**Clergy can stop people joining MU if they don’t attend church**

It’s understandable that some of you agree with this and actually that some clergy may think this too. The Membership service asks if individuals will continue to nurture their personal relationship with God and be committed to His family, the Church. However we are open for those who are on their faith journey to become “friends” and in this way they can also be part of a branch. Therefore they do not necessarily have to attend church or the one attached to the branch.

Joining Mothers’ Union may be the beginning of a faith journey – and what a thing for us to encourage! Communication with clergy is key here explaining gently the circumstances of the potential member and how we want to encourage all to know Christ and … through a good experience at the MU they may well be attracted to also join the church congregation. Again, the support of your Diocesan Presidents and Provincial Presidents in circumstances like this can be very helpful to help navigate these sometimes tricky situations!

**Myth 5**

**You have to have your branch meetings in the afternoon and you need a speaker at every meeting!**

For some branches meeting in the afternoon is the most convenient time and so that is absolutely great. But for many – especially those who work or have responsibility for the care of children or grandchildren – this isn’t the best time. Ask yourselves, what are the needs of your members or the potential members in your community? Are your branch gatherings fulfilling those needs? We know this isn’t always easy to do. If you want to change things a bit then why not have a chat with your DP – they may be able to connect you with a member or a branch, even if it’s in another diocese, who are already doing things in a different way – the wonderful thing MU is that we can support each other to flourish and grow!

As for speakers, some members have said how difficult it is to find speakers for every meeting and we just want to reassure everyone that you don’t have to have a speaker every time or at all! Perhaps instead of a speaker your branch could do an activity together – there are some great ideas on the website such as the Mary Sumner game. Perhaps your group could spend the time putting together items for partner projects such as the local women’s refuge, homeless packs, small holdalls for those leaving prison etc – spending time praying as you do this important work. This will open doors to new speakers ,invite people from your partner groups to personally tell you about their organizations taking away the items prepared by you [ this saves storage & delivery problems].You could organise a meeting where you could invite friends or family, enjoy fellowship and friendship and hopefully become more aware of the value of our movement.

When we look to the future of our special organisation we have to look with our eyes fixed ahead. Branches are special, but members don’t need to feel that they have to do things a certain way as that’s how it’s always been. It’s okay to change and do what works best for your members. There’s no pressure!

Remember the leadership teams in your diocese and province are here to help you, so make sure you ask!