



December 2023

My Dear Friends,

It has been 5 years, and my heart still overflows with joy each time I write to you. It means so much to me that you would welcome me into your homes or wherever you are, as you open and read my letter during this season of Advent.

Thank you for the blessing you are and continue to be, and for your prayers which continue to be a source of strength and hope for members around the world, the Worldwide Trustees and Staff at MSH. This Advent we are praying for you as you prepare your hearts and homes to receive the Christ-Child afresh. What a privilege it is that our Prince of Peace left his heavenly throne and came into this world to save us. He didn't have to do it, but he did it anyway, out of love, pure unconditional love for you and for me. Hallelujah!

2023 has been a busy yet remarkable year for me. I thank God for his guidance, good health, and travel mercies as I visited the most amazing members in six MU Zones: the Provinces of Canterbury, Wales, and York in Britain & Ireland; the Provinces of Uganda and Kenya in East Africa; Madagascar in the Indian Ocean; and Southern and Central Africa. I could not have done this alone and extend my sincere thanks to those who accompanied me on these visits, supported me in my role, co-ordinated the activities, and gave of their time and expertise to make these WWP visits a huge success.

It was truly a memorable experience getting together with our hardworking members who turned out in their numbers, filling the cathedrals and tents to capacity. Walking into one cathedral to the splendour of 1,200 members in MU uniforms and worshipping God with them moved me deeply. The many opportunities I was given to engage with Bishops and Government officials, deliver the sermon at church services, address many gatherings, and hold retreats, all served to inspire, encourage, and energise leaders and members to look at our priorities differently, re-create new ways of working together and growing the membership, increase awareness, and make MU the best it can be. I am assured that although we are from different continents, we are all united and connected through our passion for Mothers' Union, our strong faith, and our commitment to making the love of Jesus Christ known and felt.

I listened to stories of transformation and the challenges that hinder progress in a variety of cultures, as members uphold the 5 Objects and take the global and provincial priorities forward. The many transformational projects and programmes are a huge testimony to their commitment of keeping the vision of Mary Sumner alive and visible at the heart of every community, giving individuals and families a chance to flourish. I am thrilled that Mothers' Union is valued and appreciated by our bishops and clergy. Mothers' Union is involved in and has a place in the mission

and ministry of the Church, and the Church through Mothers' Union is recognised by governments and community leaders as a "reliable and responsible" partner with a vast network on the ground.

On August 9<sup>th</sup> I felt very honoured and privileged to say prayers and lay flowers on Mary Sumner's grave, with members from the Diocese of Winchester. In a quiet moment, I whispered to her, "Your personal prayer is also my own as I serve as WWP, and it is also the prayer of 4 million members worldwide as they serve in their communities."

Some of the MU programmes and projects include: GBV awareness programmes which engage children, adults and communities; farming plots and rearing livestock for food, a variety of income-generating projects to sustain MU projects; visits to prisons, refuges, hospitals, and homes to minister in various ways to those in need; assistance with scholarships to further education for women and children; resilience and disaster preparedness in areas where natural disasters are prevalent; feeding programmes and hampers for those in need; the AFIA holidays which give families a well-deserved break; nurturing children living on the street; supporting parents in their role; specialised projects like the Albinism project; and so much more.

Everywhere I went members spoke of the negative effects of climate change, conflict, and the high cost of living which continues to increase, resulting in extreme challenges among the poor, homeless, vulnerable, displaced persons, and refugees. One member said those who used to give to the food banks are now coming to receive from the foodbanks.

I count it a real blessing when I was invited to visit several faithful Indoor members on my travels, including Jessie from Wales in the UK, Annie from Mombasa in Kenya, Cecile and Florine from Tomasina in Madagascar, Mother Queen Mavis from Zululand, and Letticia, Nomhle and Dorothy from Highveld in South Africa. Over the years you may remember me writing about Mother Blanche in my indoor member letters; last week she celebrated her 99<sup>th</sup> birthday and surprised me with a visit. These distinguished ladies and all indoor members worldwide are Mothers' Union Legends who continue to serve with distinction and humility, and even now their on-going prayers continue to move Mothers' Union to the next level.

As I listened to them speak from their beds, armchairs, or just a bench under a tree, I couldn't help thinking how passionately they speak of Mothers' Union with that special twinkle in their eyes. Mothers' Union is alive in their whole being. If it is God's will that I continue life's journey as an Indoor member, I pray that I will be just as content whatever state I am, just as they are, with the Mothers' Union flame burning brightly, never to be extinguished.

I was so captivated by their many stories of MU over 50 years ago, and in some ways are very similar to our experiences. They spoke of their commitment to serving the church and community; how much they looked forward to branch meetings and fellowship; the responsibility they felt in supporting young mothers in their role; the importance of promoting marriage and keeping families together; and the way they stood united in the face of injustice.

Here are some of their comments that resonated with me -

"We did a lot of work with families, but it is so different today with mums working and all that."

"Some of our menfolk did get out of hand and it was a bit of shouting here and there, but it remained in the closet. We did not call it abuse, but then it was not the same sort of thing, like today where women lose their lives..."



“50 years ago, we did things differently because it was different then, we loved it because it was exciting helping others. Now there are so many challenges. I say that we must be open to change, Mothers’ Union must change,” said Jessie at 100 years old, pictured here with Sheran.

Members brought Letticia, Nomhle, and Dorothy to meet me in one of the townships and they prayerfully laid hands on me saying, “This one touch will bless all MU members around the world.”

I couldn’t understand the native language of Queen Mother Mavis, but I saw that even at the age of 86, she was so cheerful and content. She continues to be a source of strength and support for her daughter-in-law in bereavement by her presence and caring.

Florine at 81 said, “I am alone. My husband died. My children are far away. I am blind but I am blessed because even though I am blind and cannot see, MU members are my eyes through which I see the world. They care for me.”

Can I ask that you join me in praying God’s blessings on our wonderful members who are involved in the Indoor member ministry? I cannot thank them enough for sharing God’s love through a visit, touch, or smile that continues to lift the hearts of Indoor members in the most incredible way. These visits are so important and worthwhile. Shortly after my little group visited Annie’s home in Mombasa, although we felt sad when she went home to be with our Lord, we also felt very comforted that we took the time to visit, hold her hands and sing her favourite hymns around her bedside. May her beautiful soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Thank you once again for your generous acts of love and compassion during 2023. Walking this journey of Transformation with you has expanded my heart and strengthened my determination to move Transformation to action beyond borders, where encounters with God are experienced by all.

And this brings me to Christmas 2023, where we praise God for the birth of his only Son, Jesus Christ. As we receive this most precious gift given to us and worship him in humble adoration, may we also offer Him the gift of our lives afresh, for the work of Mothers’ Union and for the furtherance of his Kingdom.

This Christmas as we light the candles and break bread together, let us think of all those who are having a very different Christmas to ours this year, for whatever reason it might be. In the quiet, we pray for God’s peace and loving embrace to enfold them, giving them comfort and blessed assurance. In faith we believe everything is for a reason and for a season. In all things we rejoice in the hope that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ gives, from everlasting to everlasting.



“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6 NIV

We pray,

*Ever-present God with us,  
Transform us with the glory of the Nativity.  
Illumine our lives as we behold  
the new-born Christ.  
Transform us into a people of his light,  
that we may reflect your glory  
in the shadows of life.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Amen.*

May the peace and love of the Christ-Child fill your hearts and homes this Christmas and always.

In love and prayer,

*Sheran*

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