The following article was written by someone who was only enrolled into M.U. in October 2019. The Service in Leeds Minster was her first experience of a M.U. event and I felt that her input would be especially valuable.

Sylvia Hickey V.P.

Mothers’ Union in the Province of York, Thursday 7th November 2019 Leeds Minster

Address by Sheran Harper the Worldwide President of Mothers’ Union:-

Sheran is a physiotherapist. She is a Guyanan and has opened Physiotherapy units in hospitals across Guyana as well as lecturing on Rehabilitation Therapists Training Programme for the Government. She is now in her late 50s, a wife and mother and has been a vital member of the Mothers Union for 17 years and visited 16 countries during this time (primarily as the Worldwide Parenting Programme Trainer).

Sheran, a quietly spoken lady, addressed Mothers’ Union members in the Minster in Leeds in November and I was lucky enough to be in the congregation. She thanked us all for being there and then advised us that she had been told that Mothers’ Union in the whole of the United Kingdom is a declining organisation! Haven’t we all heard that? She however refuted that! For her the “impact” of Mothers’ Union is still there and very vital. She reassured us that she saw God’s hands and feet around her, that by people giving so selflessly in all the large and small ways that Mothers’ Union members do we do make a difference - the result is life and hope! She thanked everyone and then illustrated what our help had provided in Guyana.

Sheran described how she had prayed for the ability to help people in her country and the wonder of her prayer being answered. She told us that the money we raise and send abroad is what makes so much of this possible. She compared this to the parable we had heard of the shepherd searching and carrying his lost sheep safely home upon his shoulders and the old woman who searched for the lost gold coin. With God’s strength we can move as one heart and one community to make a difference! Sheran then told us a story to illustrate this. While attending synod she met Canon Alfred from a parish in an undeveloped area of Guyana called the Potaru. He beseeched her to come and visit the parishes there. She asked her Bishop if she could do just that but was refused. The area was not easily accessible, was malaria infested, etc. etc. and as at that time she was a young married woman with a young family - the Bishop felt it was much too dangerous. The following year at synod canon Alfred again approached her to come and visit. This time she went to see her Bishop’s wife! She explained to her all the reasons she wanted to go and the Bishop’s wife completely understood. “Go” she said, “but say nothing and I will cover you when the bishop finds out”! Next, she discussed it with her vicar’s wife and the decision was made to go together. They got the funding they needed from the trustee board and they set off. The vicar’s wife prayed consistently all the way there as it was so terrifying but they got there ultimately. They travelled in a huge truck during the night when it was cooler and were accompanied by two of her vicar’s sons. Lena, the vicar’s wife, was heard to pray “God why do I travel with this crazy woman?”

Once they arrived they spent 2 weeks in the 4 villages talking to the 40 plus women there. They took mosquito nets, medical supplies, food, etc. etc. and the women joined the Mothers’ Union and got their admission cards during their visit. In the villages, at that time, there was incest, injustice, violence, persecution for example of Down’s syndrome individuals etc. Now there are schools, health centres; some of the money we raise and send overseas with our coffee mornings, cake sales, craft fairs etc. helped to make this possible. What an achievement!

Sheran was inspiring! She was forgiven by the Bishop for going without his permission and she was thanked. For me, I would like to thank her too for giving me an insight into how our small steps become huge when included in God’s plan. Thank you very much Sheran for giving all present that insight and your encouragement to continue with our ‘declining’ organisation. May it long continue and once more grow.

Dorothy Russell