**Report on the Leadership Conference, May 2016**

It was a delight that this year, in place of Worldwide Council, attended only by Diocesan Presidents, Mothers’ Union had introduced a Leadership Conference, ‘Equipped to Serve’ attended by a number of officers from each Diocese. I went to the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire with the two Archdeaconry Vice-Presidents, Sheila and Sylvia, enabling us to cement our working relationship, and attend more workshops between us. The whole conference was led by our Worldwide President Lynne Tembey and our new Chief Executive Bev Julien (who wrote an article for our last Journal), with many other staff from Mary Sumner House leading sessions.

The Worldwide Conference (for Presidents only) was embedded within this. We discussed plans for a worldwide consultation on changing the way in which the Mothers’ Union works by moving to a simpler Constitution which will be flexible enough to adapt to our very differing situations. Every Province in the World is to be consulted about this, so it will be a lengthy process! We were also encouraged to streamline the way we work, so that we do not waste our members’ time in administration.

The opening session, where delegates from all over the World shared their success stories, was inspirational, as was the worship throughout the conference.

I attended a Task group on ‘Inspiring the clergy to work with us’, where we were encouraged to believe that their first aim is to work for the Kingdom of God, and to find ways of supporting them in this aim. Our current work towards supporting Baptism families is an example of this, as is our offer of Awaydays for Churches’ holiday clubs.

Meanwhile Sheila and Sylvia went to Task groups on ‘Valuing our Members’ where improving and sharpening our communication was the main message; and ‘Sharing the best kept secret’, where they felt that the name ‘Mothers’ Union’ is quite familiar, but people have a vague or false idea of what we are about. There were a host of other workshops and events, which we tried to share out between us. The Workshop on Communication urged us to use all possible ways to communicate, as we are trying to do by having a digitally produced Newsletter alongside our glossy Journal, and by trying to put articles in The Link, our Diocesan newspaper.

Throughout the conference, sharing ideas with other Dioceses was key. This we did partly by having the opportunity to display a colourful poster about two of our activities: ours were Activity Aprons and Muffs, and Benwell’s inner-city ‘School gate’ group. This raised a lot of comments and enquiries from other Dioceses.

Before our conference, there was a conference for Diocesan Secretaries and Treasurers, attended by Sandra and Dorothy. There they met Jennifer Snowdon, who is now a member of the Communications Department at Mary Sumner House. Sandra was surprised to find that all the other Secretaries in her group were paid for their role, but, on reflection, felt happy to give her services free. Each attended Workshops appropriate to their role, and valued the opportunity to compare notes with others.

We were all grateful, as the new Triennial began, to have the opportunity to learn new skills, test our ideas and gain a broader picture of what the Mothers’ Union is about.

Barbara Packer