**Mothers` Union, Annual Meeting. Winchester 23rd September 2016.**

**Hampshire Court Hotel, Basingstoke**

**“A Celebration of Faith 1876- 2016**

The morning session began with a dramatized account of the founding and development of the Mothers Union by Mary Sumner, supported by her husband George, up to Mary`s death. This drama presentation was given by the Saltmine Theatre Company, a small but very professional group who gave an excellent and inspiring account of Mothers` Union early years. It set the tone for what was a somewhat different from the norm meeting as this was primarily a celebration of faith to mark our 140th anniversary.

The opening worship was led by our Central Chaplain The Rt. Rev. Andrew Proud, Bishop of Reading. He also led the other times of worship, supported at Midday Prayers by the Mary Sumner Choir from Zambia who had also been at the Cathedral the day before. They were a joy and delight to hear, they sang with such enthusiasm and rhythm, their music was truly uplifting.

Our Worldwide President Lynne Temby gave the opening address in which she traced some of our many success stories starting with the campaign in the very early years to abolish the practice of small children being sent to the local public house to fetch a jug of beer up to, and including, our ongoing Bye Buy Childhood campaign and child internet safety issues. Lynne gave an account of her visit to Africa contrasting the joys and sorrows she encountered. Lynne also introduced the Mayor of Basingstoke who welcomed our presence in her town but admitted she knew very little about our organisation prior to our choice of venue. The Diocesan President of Winchester also spoke, again with words of welcome to her Diocese but also to what is her own home town.

During the lunch break we were able to circulate, to visit the various stalls and to meet and chat to many of our fellow members from other Diocese.

 Our afternoon session was opened by Daniel McAllister, Head of Fundraising and Communication who showed two or three short films and talked about homelessness and young people, contrasting their plight and M.U. involvement in Wales, Manchester and Uganda. He also talked about our journey though faith reminding us that people relate to people, they like to hear about their own local “heroes”, the requirement for that is to seize the opportunity and initiative and tell the story. Mothers` Union members do some wonderful and amazing work at home and abroad and this can inspire others to join us more than any other approach. We were told to build on M.U. Church and clergy relationships i.e. M.U. is now offering Mothering Sunday resources to clergy. We are many people, many issues but we speak with one voice.

Our final presentation was given by our new Chief Executive Beverley Jullien, who likes to be known as just “Bev”.

She spoke of her visits to Uganda and Kenya and of the challenges M.U. faces in these countries. Bev also highlighted our challenge here at home which is of course our declining membership. She provided us with three possible visions of what M.U. could aspire to be in 10 years’ time. The one that we would hope to attain would see M.U. as a thriving, diverse, multi-generational movement of socially aware Christians with a growing membership, a highly valued partner of the Anglican Church using up to date methods of communication to facilitate prompt response to key issues.

The 2017 Annual Meeting will be held in Edinburgh 29th&30th September and will continue to develop the different approach began here in Winchester. This was an inspiring and exciting start to what promises to be a challenging future, but with God`s help, hopefully a rewarding one.

Sylvia Hickey