**PRESIDENT’S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2016**

This year has been the start of the new Triennium, with several changes in the leadership team, at Diocesan, Deanery and Branch levels. All Trustees were commissioned by our new Diocesan Bishop, Christine, at a moving service in the Cathedral in February. We have been fortunate to have filled all Trustee posts and nearly all other roles. It has been an exciting process of learning and growing together, and I am grateful for the sharing in leadership, and for the contribution of each.

2016 was also the 140th Anniversary of the Mothers’ Union, as well as the 90th birthday of our Patron, Her Majesty the Queen. We have had many joyful celebrations in Branches and Deaneries. 40 members from our Diocese travelled to Winchester Diocese to celebrate at the Annual General Meeting and Service, which was made more memorable by the presentation of the story of Mary Sumner by the Saltmine Theatre Company, the contribution of a Zambian Mothers’ Union choir, and the affirmation of Archbishop Justin.

Meanwhile the regular outreach work of our members has continued and flourished. Our AFIA residential holidays have been at a number of different places and types, to accommodate individual needs: 15 holidays for a total of 32 adults and 44 children (mainly 4-day caravan holidays). Awaydays have become increasingly popular, with 7 visits to the seaside or a farm, for a total of 95 adults and 108 children – for some children it was their only day out during the Summer holiday. We are grateful for a £5000 grant from the Moulton Trust for the holidays for inner-city families, and for all the faithful work by members to raise the rest of the money needed, as well as to make picnics and provide support for the Awaydays. A new venture has been to provide ‘Pamper days’ for single mothers under stress – involving hair care, manicures and sometimes a meal out to boost their self-worth. We were supported in this by a generous gift of £600 from an individual donor.

Many of our projects are carried out in cooperation with other organisation: Women’s Refuges, the West End Refugee Service (WERS) and other refugee organisations, the People’s Kitchen. This year we have added the charity ‘Changing Lives’ who have hostels and Day Centres for people with a wide variety of problems such as domestic abuse and addiction. We have been able to provide Christmas gifts, parties and cinema visits for them, as well as days out. It is always a delight when we are able to work with groups from a Parish or Branch. Our Shoe Box collection for those who are homeless or in extreme poverty raised a magnificent 590 boxes full of gifts, and 2000 emergency toiletry bags for local hospitals were provided throughout the year. We have continued to make Activity Aprons and Muffs for dementia patients in our local Homes. On one joyful day in the Summer we supported the Diocesan Children’s and Youth Team in running a glorious day for hundreds of children in the Cathedral, entitled ‘Fruitful and Gigantic’.

We have moved to two Journals rather than three (circulated quite widely to members and others), but with two emailed Newsletters in between to allow news of future events to reach members in time. We have also started to create a new website www.munewcastle.org.uk, and continue to use Facebook and Twitter accounts. Better communication is a priority.

During the year we held three Trustee meetings and two meetings of Council. I have focussed on giving our members a flavour of the lives of members in our 5 new linked Dioceses (4 in Africa and one in North India): we have been hampered in this by the difficulty of getting responses from some of them. We have also held two meetings for our Diocesan Members, and two meetings of the Friends, all well-attended. Our annual residential retreat at Shepherd’s Dene was attended by 22 people, and led by our new Chaplain, the Revd. Jane Scott, using pictures and activities to illustrate the theme ‘Celebrating our Journey of Faith Together’.

The bedrock of all our work is in the prayer and commitment of members, as we meet month by month in our Branches. We worship and celebrate the Church’s year in Branch, Deanery and Diocesan services. Our 1100 members, in 48 Branches form a strong network, as we consider how we can best provide help - in supporting one another, in Parish life and in meeting the needs of others.

Thanks to all who have worked so hard to make all this outreach possible. As Archbishop Justin said: ‘Thus far has God led us’. We thank God for all that has been, and look forward to the future.

Barbara Packer