

## **ST JOHN'S MOTHERS' UNION February / March 2017**

John's Mothers' Union Branch was formed in 1998. After a year of informal meetings, six new members, including Father Andrew, were enrolled and eight parishioners who were already members were welcomed with Ann Webb as the Branch Leader.

One of our first events was a teddy bears party for the Sunday school children, and the babies and toddlers who had been baptised during the year. This was a great success and we were asked by some of the mothers to start a mother and toddler group which we called Cygnets. We received a grant of £50 from the Diocesan Mother's Union to buy toys, most of which were still in use when we closed the group seventeen years later. We could only hold the sessions on three weeks of the month so on the other week we held a pram service - Tots Time for toddlers and their mums in church.

We held children's parties every other year, a Noah's Ark party with Kim and Peter as Mr and Mrs Noah and a Captain Nemo party. After this the parish took over organising these gatherings leaving us to arrange the annual party for Cygnets attended by Father Christmas.

Our main focus in the parish has always been Children and Families, and many of our members helped with Eagles Sunday School, with baptisms, children's and holiday clubs. When a few children outgrew Sunday school Kim and I formed a small house group held in Kim's home so that they could keep in touch with their friends from church as there was no youth club at the time. The children brought other friends and they chose to call themselves Survivors, which Ros runs today though in much more exciting format.

For a number of years we have run a family craft morning during the February half term which has attracted many children and their parents giving them something to look forward to in the dark days of winter. An idea from a church in Sutton Coldfield encouraged us to hold an afternoon session in late November for children to make their own advent calendars. They also made Christmas decorations, had a chocolate coin hunt in church, and listened to the Advent story told with puppets. This afternoon proved very popular with parents and whole families came along, saying it was an enjoyable start to the Christmas festivities.

St John's MU was very involved with the District family fun-day at Field Place with many fun activities for children and families. Over the years our membership doubled and we were able to undertake fundraising for Mothers' Union Worldwide.

Over the years we have held many events to raise money for the Mothers' Union including Austerity lunches, brunches, afternoon teas, Lent lunches, a Cheese and wine lunch and coffee mornings. We held a Midsummer Madness evening meal, followed by an entertainment with a choir, readings and an amusing sketch. All these raised funds for the various Mothers' Union projects, our holidays for families under stress, our work in Lewes and Ford prisons, parenting courses, family contact centres, Gatwick detainees, and Overseas work including literacy and relief work. We have also been involved in more local initiatives such as supplying emergency bags for the maternity unit at Worthing hospital and supporting parish projects concerning children and families.

Our members have been involved in many aspects of church life including church fairs, flower festival and Christmas tree festival. At one time at least half the PCC were M.U. members.

When our old banner, which had belonged to the previous Mothers' Union in the parish, disintegrated through old age, we were delighted when Phil Etherington offered pay for a new

one in memory of his mother. Wendy Oakeshott kindly agreed to design and make this for us, and it has been proudly carried in churches and Cathedrals in this Diocese and beyond.

Over the years we have we have enjoyed some interesting outings, inviting other members of the congregation to join us. We have been to Parham House, West Dean gardens, Polesden Lacy, Leonards lea, Arundel castle gardens and the Wild Fowl Trust. We enjoyed a trip on the Bluebell Railway and on the Wey and Arun canal as well as a boat trip to Amberley. A number of members visited a Mothers' Union open day at the head quarters in Mary Sumner House and enjoyed a brief sightseeing tour of London.

Most years we enjoyed a barbeque, in all weathers, and putting at Marine Gardens, which became very competitive. Every November we have had a session making Christmas cards for cygnets and the preschool families

We have had some very interesting discussion papers on subjects for which the government is seeking grass roots opinions. These included such things as, holding nonreligious marriage ceremonies for same sex couples in church, work life balance, paternity leave for fathers, and sex education and relationship lessons in school. The results were sent to Mary Sumner House who collate and submit to them to the relevant Government Department.

Every year we have held a Wave Of Prayer service, learning about and praying for our linked Branches Worldwide. We have had many speakers who have visited the M.U in other countries. This included Hazel Treadgold who was the wife of the Dean of Chichester and a former Central President of the Mothers' Union she spoke at our first A.G.M.

We have held several "Celebrating mothers" services around Mothering Sunday.

We have supported Mothers' Union in the Diocese and Brighton District, meeting several Worldwide Presidents when they visited the Diocese. We supported family fun days at Drusillas, Hollycombe and Bentley wild fowl gardens. We held a fund raising quiz and ploughman's lunch with West Tarring involving all the Branches in Brighton District.

When the Branch first started the M.U. in Diocese was still running the crèche at the South of England show looking after around 300 preschool children over three days in June and several members travelled to Ardingly to help. For some years we also had volunteers working at the Family Contact centre run in co-operation with the Salvation Army. This enabled separated and divorced parents to meet with their children in a safe and happy environment.

Following our A.G.M. last year we agreed to make a decision in the summer regarding the future of the Branch. At our meeting in June it was obvious that, as no one was willing to become Branch Leader or Secretary, the Branch would have to close. Apart from myself, Kim Upton and Teresa Chatfield have held this position in the past and Sue Coughlin was a very efficient secretary. We have also been run by committee for a short time but this is not satisfactory.

Half of us have joined the Branch at West Tarring and we are very grateful to them for making us so welcome. Others have become Diocesan Members affiliating through the Diocese so we shall be continuing our support for the Mothers' Union. Many thanks to the present committee Sallie Parsons, Ros Ashton, Janet Kay and Sue Harris who have worked so hard to keep things going over the last few years and to those who have served in the past.

Ann Webb