



FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES
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Mothers Union, Young Wives and CARITAS

Welcome to the twenty-second edition of "From the Parish Archives". We hope that you will enjoy reading about the history of the Parish. This is especially so with us in our 150th year.

The "From the Parish Archives" aims to be factual. However, any opinions expressed are personal and may not be necessarily shared by other parishioners.

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Introduction

Many of our present women parishioners were once members of Mothers Union (MU) at Saint Margaret's or Saint Faith's or some other parish. They may have been principally associated with MU or the MU group that was referred to as A Fellowship of Marriage or The Young members Department of the Mothers Union or Young Wives or CARITAS. Its name changed over the years.

Of course the Mothers Union exists to the present day. This issue is devoted to the Mothers Union, and, Young Wives and CARITAS.

This historical account is exploratory and has many gaps. The foundation date of MU at Saint Margaret's and the list of leaders are incomplete for instance.

The Mothers Union

The Mothers Union (MU) is a worldwide society within the Anglican Communion. Mary Sumner, the vicar's wife of the parish church of Old Alresford, England, is regarded as the founder of MU. In 1876 she met with a group of mothers to discuss her ideas of them helping one another and for them to realise better their responsibilities as a wife and mother.

The first diocesan MU was within the Diocese of Winchester. MU spread quickly throughout England and by 1892 reached Australia. The first branch was founded by Ismay L'Ote who was the wife of the Rector of the parish of Cullenswood in Tasmania.

The present day objectives of the Australian Mothers Union are to:

- uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding

- encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church;
- maintain a world-wide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship, and service
- promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
- help those whose family life has met with adversity.

The Mothers' Union has always emphasised the importance of prayer underpinning its work. The Mothers' Union has organised a *Wave of Prayer* since 1920. Each diocese is given a set day to pray for other dioceses, and within each diocese each branch is given a specific time to pray. This gives to members a sense of unity in prayer for one another as the wave of prayer moves from branch to branch and from diocese to diocese. All MU meetings must open with prayer and all leaders must be able and ready to take the opening and closing prayers.

The "Calendar Prayer" of the MU is as follows:

O God, our heavenly Father, we ask you to bless the work of Mothers' Union throughout the world, and especially in each diocese for which we pray today... Bless our members in their lives and in their homes, that they, being strengthened in love to you and to each other, may serve you faithfully to your glory; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Traditionally, membership of the Mother's Union was open to all "mothers" *who have been baptised, affirm their belief in the principle of infant baptism and undertake to bring their children (if any) to Holy Baptism.* However, in the past this was denied to mothers, even if baptised, who were divorced, was married to a divorced man and those who were "unmarried". This did not mean these mothers were not helped and befriended by MU. However, it did reflect the widespread negative view found within both the church and wider society towards women who were divorced or unmarred. Obviously the issue of "same sex" marriage never arose and was never mentioned in MU Handbooks.

Mothers Union celebrated its Australian centenary in 1992. It held a conference at Monash University with the theme "New Century, New Vision". The guest speaker was Pat Harris from England. who was the Central President of MU. Bible Studies were led by Margaret Rodgers, there was a centenary pageant, workshops, worship and a thanksgiving eucharist at Saint Pauls Cathedral. Members had an opportunity at the end of the conference to make a pilgrimage to Cullenswood in Tasmania.

Young Wives

The Young Members Department (YMD) of the Mothers Union began in the Diocese of Melbourne in early 1937 under the leadership of Mrs CW Wood. This resulted from a meeting at Lowther Hall Girls School in Essendon. The first group was at Christ Church Essendon. It was originally called the Fellowship of Marriage and later was referred to as "Young Wives". During the 1960s through to the 1980s there was an active group at Saint Margaret's.

The stated aims of YMD were to:

- reach out to all young wives and mothers and bring them into the life and fellowship of the Christian Church, and later if so desired to membership of

the Mothers' Union. Through fellowship, friendship and well-balanced programmes, to build Christian homes and families

- help young wives cope through the years of marriage (often difficult and lonely) and wives, mothers and citizens in their homes and in modern society.

In 1958 Young Wives had 40 groups that represented 1200 members. In that year a Marriage Thanksgiving Service was held at Saint Pauls Cathedral. The preacher was Archbishop Booth.

In 1960 Mrs F Woods, wife of the then Archbishop and president of the Mothers Union. *reminded members of the cost of our vocation - our family, remembers we need a lot of time to give our family -ourselves, we must have time to spend in prayer.*

Dorothy Hall an early member of Young Wives recalls *in those early days of struggle and sorting out - for we had to find just where we fitted into Mothers Union. We had to set at rest the very real fears of some of the older members that this new infant would grow to a stage where it would draw away from its mother...*

She also recalled *we organised Oxford Debates. "That more children make for happiness" was riotous. "That the modern woman is too dominant in the home" was thought provoking.*

In the 30th anniversary year of Young Wives, Bette Francis described how the group true to its calling saw *the hand of friendship given to the very young wife, often very lonely living in a small flat or bungalow. Neighbours who were newcomers to this land, in need of sympathetic and understanding friendship, and those, who are pioneering the way in the new housing estates in the outer areas of our Diocese.* Such was the case for Eltham in the 1960 and 1970s.

At Saint Margaret's in 1976 the Young Wives programme included "Looking Around the Church", "Spinning, Weaving and Floral Art", "Anti-Cancer Talk", "Safety in the Home", "Some Books Worth Reading" and "What were you before you married". In 1978 the programme included a BBQ, a visit to Montsalvat and Matcham Skipper, a cake stall, Mrs Reynolds's speaking on "Olde Eltham", a dinner, a fun night and a "Planter Party"

An annual report of Saint Margaret's Young Wives in the late 1980s states that the group meets regularly at 8:15pm on the first Monday of the month. It indicates that six new members had been recruited. It also indicates that the usual practice of having speakers at 3 of the meetings was followed Two other meetings were devoted to bible study and 3 meetings were concerned with discussions on "Child Care". On a lighter side members also learnt the art of Bonsai trees.

CARITAS

CARITAS means "Christian Love for Others" and its by-line of "Friendship in Action" explains its work. Its purpose is to:

- be especially concerned with all that strengthens, preserves and creates Christian homes and family life
- provide in the Parish an entry or contact point to those who are outside the influence of the Church.
- be an open, flexible and welcoming group within the Parish.

As more women entered the workforce and single parent families increased, together with a more sympathetic attitude to divorced women and single mothers, CARITAS was founded in 1983. It replaced the Young Members Department or Young Wives group of the Mothers' Union. Membership was now open to any one baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity and could declare support for the aims and objectives of the society

In 1982 Eltham CARITAS asked Sister Josephine of the Community of the Holy Name to meet with them to discuss her work with the women prisoners at Fairlea Prison. Sister Josephine responded that things are "up in the air" as many prisoners are to be transferred to Pentridge. Nevertheless they were to have a concert at Fairlea in June and invited members the Eltham CARITAS group to attend.

The membership of CARITAS from Saint Margaret's in 1982 was 28, in 1984 27 and in 1988 22 women. In 1984 the programme included speakers from the Road Traffic Authority, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Christian Education in Schools and Odyssey House. The CARITAS News of July 1984 reminded members that *The only reward of virtue is virtue* and that *The only way to have a friend is to be one*.

In 1987 from Saint Margaret's Eltham the Chairwomen of CARITAS was Vicki Abery, the Diocesan President was Beth Hookey and the Diocesan Vice Presidents Heather Boatman and Shirley Burns. From Saint Faiths Montmorency, the Chairwoman was Lillian Henshaw.

In 1988, at the March meeting that year Sue Legge spoke on Pasta making, in May Janet Young of "Do Care" was guest speaker., and in April Concise Jenkins presented on talking to children about "Death and Dying", in June Charles ' Field Education student spoke on "Faith and Music. During the Wave of Prayer Diocesan Service in July 1988, Robin Spriggs of Saint Margaret's was commissioned as Diocesan Caritas leader.

In April 1990, Saint Margaret's CARITAS welcomed to their May 3 meeting the Reverend J Farmilo from Judge Book Village. He spoke on this prominent facility in Eltham. At an April 1990 meeting Senior Constable Munro from the Eltham Police Station spoke on the topic of "Home Security".

Postscript

Whilst the Mothers Union survives to this day it has suffered a decline in membership. This is similar to many of Anglican Church societies. This includes the Girls Friendly Society (GFS), the Church of England Boys Society (CEBS) and the Young Anglican Fellowship (YAF). This reflects in part the general decline in church attendance and the ageing of church congregations.