**Questions and Answers with WWP, Sheran Harper, on 2nd July, 2020**

1. **What are the "projects that are of strategic importance to MU" which are being delayed.**

* One project which is being delayed is the MSH Renovation project. This is an enormous project and very sensibly has been put on hold after discussion at Board level. You will agree with me that MSH is the crown jewel of MU – members overseas see it as a Shrine - but she is old now and in dire need renovating. She also has the potential to generate net significant revenue for the Movement, but further work is on hold until the economic climate becomes clearer, and hence the ability of the building to generate sustainable net revenue long-term
* Another project is the new customer relationship management programme to replace the database with something much more user-friendly and flexible; this would greatly improve the ability of the database and website to work for us, but is dependent on our ability to fund upfront
* The current finance system is very old and clunky and requires a high level of manual input, which means that it is slow, requires checking to eliminate errors, and has limited ability to allow for quality analysis of performance. It is expected that a new system would pay for itself within 2 years through the reduction of direct staff numbers and releasing of the time of others, but this is on hold until we can fund the upfront expenditure for both these IT projects, and indeed our IT support overall, the Board has established a new committee under Board member Paul Hindle which will include external experts, and will seek to identify a practical and affordable way to address MU long-term needs.

1. **What is the purpose of the planned webinar training? Is this good timing with everything else going on**

I can just imagine how inundated you and others feel with all sorts of online programmes, paper work, diocesan duties and the list goes on. My understanding is that the proposal for webinars came following discussions with Diocesan presidents about how to help to support leaders in their roles whilst it is not possible to meet. These are not compulsory, but the topics were drawn up in the light of feedback on what was needed, for example social media training.

The aim is for these to be offered to whoever the relevant leads are in the Dioceses – so in many cases this is likely not to be the DP. The aim also is to create opportunities for members beyond the Diocesan Presidents to engage with one another and MSH on topics of common interest.

1. **What is the WWP vision for MU over the next few years in a) B&I and b) Globally**

When I think of my vision for MU I think of what God’s vision for MU is because it’s not about me or you… it’s all about him. It is his ministry that he ordained for such a time as this and the perfect reason why we have survived as a charity for nearly a century and a half. God called each and every one of us … I think it was last week in Wales that I shared - when I received my call, I tried to escape the Worldwide Presidency because I felt I had done my bit and I was just so ready to potter around

my garden, and play with my dogs … but God had other plans, the same as he does for you … you are to be his hands and feet wherever you are placed, his eyes and his ears, and above all his heart to express love in a way that we cannot understand – unconditional love. It is through the little things that we serve the needs of others like knitting the hearts that keep loved ones united through the pandemic, or writing an eBook of Comfort with beautiful poems and prayers, or entertaining others with adventures of Perky and Mr Ron. Or offering a warm bed and a hot meal to the homeless, or a much needed holiday to a family… all ties in with the scripture according to St Matthew Chapter 25:34-40.

At WWC 2019, under a new constitution, members positioned themselves to hear from God following his direction of extensive consultation with over 200,000 members worldwide and at the end of it all our vision as MU was clear with a definite direction of where we need to be going … hence the birth of the global strategic plan.

Globally, my vision, and also our collective focus whether we are in B&I or outside - is on transforming lives – so much to be done in this area in response to all the challenges we are facing globally; nurturing membership; building firm foundations and accessing resources. All so very important. And flowing from those are the important issues … gender justice, peace and safety, and self-reliance. Gender based-violence is now emerging as the 2nd pandemic and safeguarding is a huge priority especially in countries worldwide, in countries that have little or no social services or legislation to protect and provide for the vulnerable. We must support our women and girls as much as possible. At our recent trustees meeting two trustees shared how close GBV is to the altar, and we recognised that MU had a duty to help to combat it from within in the Church.

In Britain and Ireland … my vision is for you is to grow from strength to strength, strengthening all that you are doing in the church and stepping out of the church and into the wider community – out of your comfort zone and into the deep where your faith will be made stronger. This of course will require the willingness to do so, the confidence and believing that when God takes you to it, he will take you through it.

B&I have been doing a marvellous job in the short term with the response to COVID – you have done and are still doing so much from home…it’s amazing. I think coming out of this there will be great need for rebuilding family relationships and looking at vulnerable children and families.

Membership development is also important – growing the membership, developing new leaders with new energy and vision while remaining faithful to all MU is…. Then empowering these new leaders with the confidence to go out there and inspire others to join them and make a difference.

How we keep existing members is another issue. I remember saying last week what brought our current membership to MU in the first place will keep them there and they will be back even after COVID-19… it might take a bit longer but they will be back …. And bringing a friend too … so you will have to buy more teacups and saucers … I think what we have to work on is attracting new members … new and engaged members, passionate about making a difference, faithful to their calling as members. I think my vision would be to see all these areas fulfilled, transforming live and communities, spreading God’s love in a new way that meets the needs of today’s communities … in a way that has never been done before.

1. **How can we channel the energy from Black Lives Matter to look constructively at combating major issues such as Modern Day Slavery, where we are partnering with the Clewer Initiative?**

I cannot agree with you more in saying that this is a golden opportunity and our energies could be channelled in a better more constructive, helpful and progressive direction rather than in anger. Systems must be put in place to educate and help healing from the past to avoid it being perpetuated and escalating over and over again. There must be a call for all humanity to accept and respect each other, we must treat each other just as we would like to be treated. There is a great need to promote reconciliation and peace everywhere ….rather than conflict and hate. Modern Day Slavery – this slavery in the 21st century is an injustice and must be condemned and removed from society … completely removed from God’s world.

I think it is great idea for MU to show leadership in this area and I believe God is calling and has called us to move in this direction, to take action and end it. The challenge is how we do this effectively in such a complex field… especially as there are issues relating to criminality. I believe partnership with the Clewer initiative is God’s gift to the Church … and the partnership between Clewer and MU is an excellent initiative that enables the church and wider church networks to raise the awareness of modern day slavery, identify victims and help signpost victims towards support and care.

I was privileged to join one PP and her team to visit one initiative where young men were rescued and given the necessary opportunities for support, care, healing and reintegration into society – all a long process but so worthwhile. This programme is headed by an MU member, supported by the Church and others from the community.

A huge thank you to all members who are already in partnership with Clewer, as they continue to create awareness in their communities and signpost / report to those with expertise.

1. **The donations received from the membership to set against this year's £1M deficit have demonstrated an extraordinary outpouring of generosity and loyalty. However, I suggest that reliance upon the generosity of the membership cannot and should not be considered when planning against future deficits. What is the financial plan for the next 3 years?**

First of all I’d like to say a huge thank you to each and every member, all Branches, Dioceses and Provinces … for your generosity toward the Covid-19 appeal – it is beyond all we ever imagined….and certainly it is a harvest that that is filling the bucket and I am praying that it will continue to overflow and be a blessing to others.

I cannot agree with you more that we need to be on a more robust footing. I can assure you that more information will be shared during the next ZOOM meeting on July 16. But for information now – can I share that in 2019, the Charity ended the year with a surplus in line with budget; in 2020, we will have taken out about GBP 1million in costs relative to budget; and for 2021 onwards, the Board has asked for scenarios, on the assumption that income will be below 2019 levels, and that the Board is seeking to rebuild reserves. The staff reduction announcement is one example of action being taken to ensure that the charity can live within its means.

The generous donations this year have given us the gift of time to restructure and reorientate our activities. The Board is meeting twice more over the Summer to review scenarios from Management, and I would like to reassure you that in all cases we will be taking a conservative view of what is possible from an income perspective, so that we do not have to put out such an emergency call for support again

1. **Has the response to the COVID appeal shown a shift in support, i.e financial support shared by some of the richer countries?**

Financially, all countries that are able to support, like USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are supporting MU centrally. A fine example is of Australia who reviewed their financial position, and are selling some of their assets to make a significant contribution. Some smaller countries are also giving what they can. Those countries that still receive grants for CDCs… are all taking a share of the costs themselves …. a fine example is with the Province of Myanmar … who have absorbed the full costs for their CDCs for 2020 – a huge step for them. We will continue to work with Provinces, to help all countries to become self-sufficient.

1. **As we are an international organisation will the Board be continuing to use increased social media to connect and broadcast the charitable work of MU?**

Yes we will continue more social media activity including midday prayers and special services … COVID-19 in addition to being the dreaded pandemic, has also brought with it new opportunities and ways of working. Members are even more connected than they were before. I recently heard the story of a 94 year old member in Wales who is very eager to receive her internet training before winter comes … amazing ! So our members are valuing social media more and more, and yes we will continue social media activity.

We have been more active generally in the media since the start of the crisis, with coverage in the Christian media, and on mainstream Radio 4. We are also increasingly using the new technology to engage more frequently with members around the world, with a weekly call with provincial presidents and provincial CDCs, which is how we are now able to put together well grounded proposals to fund further programme work, for example in the area of countering GBV.

1. **Younger women state that they find it hard to understand what MU actually DOES**

MU does so much and sometimes it can be quite a task navigating! But MULOA has been a gift that worked well for us, hearing from our members at the grassroots about what we do and where we want to go as a Charity. Our website is available and improving communications is something we can look further into. We recognise we have to get better at capturing our stories and improving how we share them. Our members are still very humble in sharing what they do,

because they see it as an expression of their faith … I think for most of us this is true …. so we have to find ways capturing more stories and this is high on the agenda. However it’s good to note that we were featured on BBC radio recently speaking on Covid-19. Another point to note is that we have not done a lot with technology in the past … but the good news is that we are at the dawn on a new era, readying ourselves for a new wave of online members.

We are working harder to reimagine how MU can operate in the policy and advocacy space … we have representation and a voice at UNCSW … you will remember June Butler here with us today was a part of the delegation that attended last year and her daily blogs on Facebook were very informative and gave great insight … we would like individuals that want to join MU to know that we are doing these things. I personally am looking forward to having your daughters join us – what a day of rejoicing that would be for us all!

1. **Given that well over 50% of our membership in our Branches are over 70 years of age, how does the WWP visualise Mothers’ Union operating at ground level and/or as an organisation in 5-10 years time?**

I can see your concern having over 50% of your membership over 70 years old … and visualising MU in 5-10 years’ time might be difficult. If there is any fear among us that as an aging membership we will find it hard to exist … I can assure you that this is far from true… I agree there may be some challenges but we will continue. I am confident about this because it is God’s work that we are doing and he was the one that called us and if we truly have faith and believe this … he who began the good work in you will see it through to completion, even to the day of Christ Jesus. It is God who called us to be his hands and feet here on earth to work his purpose out … I can already see you flourishing in a different way in 5-10 years time. I can already see the younger women answering the call to rise up and the older wiser women imparting knowledge.

You say B&I are an older generation but you have been doing a fantastic job at managing yourselves for a long time now – and you still continue to do so despite the age. It’s not about the age, it’s about the heart and the belief that it will work … maybe in new and different ways … But you can still be passionate about your work, seeking it out and making a difference, and the good thing about it is that you can do it from where you are. You are great B&I!

I think a huge part of my success as DP for 2006-2012 came from learning from you – and taking your ideas, activities and passion back to Guyana and the West Indies and adapting them for use in a different culture …. I learnt a lot from Blackburn Diocese and Exeter Diocese when I lived there, the ladies were older than I was but the knowledge they imparted was invaluable. A fine example of the older wiser women empowering and sharing with the younger women – just as scripture says.

MU has been on a journey for the past 3-5 years re-imagining things – you have been asking yourselves the questions, including … do the structures we have encourage people to join? I believe your Leadership Conference was going to address some of these things. You need to be

looking at structures and approaches, I would love to be involved but I believe the first steps of the re-imagination must come from you B&I because you know what is needed on the ground better than I do.

I can also share that this age range for B&I is not reflected around the world … and it might also be an excellent idea to connect with your link Dioceses overseas on this. I have every confidence that B&I will be flourishing on the ground as a movement in 5-10 years time … a respected charity and the voice on all that concerns family …

1. **We appreciate that MSH is being radically reimagined, but are there plans afoot to radically reimagine how MU operates within the Anglican Communion at ground level?**

The Anglican Communion has its own way of working and also its own unique challenges … it is also difficult to navigate at times … but from a MU/Anglican Communion point of view … we have been engaging with the Clergy at grassroots and growing this relationship …. Clergy/MU relationships are mutually beneficial … I remember last year at Synod in York, I encouraged the Clergy and MU to work together and more closely in the mission and the ministry of the Church … we have so much to offer. And low and behold when I got to Wales there were 4 members of Clergy standing in front of me in an admission service. They said we cannot do what we do in our parishes without MU.

Earlier on this year the Archbishop of Canterbury recommended that I attend the interfaith dialogue in Rome…. You will read more about this in your current Families First …. But MU was there as the only representative for the Anglican Communion. We are positioning ourselves and offering to the Communion… working on how MU can better support the Anglican Communion and strengthen relationships. It is not something that can happen overnight…. I think overseas the role of MU is sometimes more obvious, because we are regarded as the ‘women’s arm” of the Church.

I think, for example, if at the level of Theological College in B&I a session or short course could be run when Clergy are in training, then they would understand better about MU. We are also actively influencing the Communion at a number of levels around the world, for example through the CEO being on the Board of the Anglican Alliance, and the CEO and Head of Development playing active roles in supporting the delivery of the Lambeth Conference, and activities to bridge the delay until it is held

1. **What key differences, if any, have you noticed from “being “an MU member in B&I to “ being” an MU member in the other Worldwide Zones?**

I would say that a Mothers’ Union member is recognisable wherever you are geographically – despite our diversity we experience the same kinds joys and challenges, and our hearts are the same …full of love and compassion, we are all driven by our faith to reach out as God’s hands and feet wherever we are placed and all eager to make a difference … every member knows that despite the escalating levels of all that is happening around us – if we make a difference in the life of one person, we will have done our part.

Perhaps one difference elsewhere is that members like to show their sense of identity and purpose through wearing their uniforms with pride