

Sheran Harper, Worldwide President, as keynote speaker welcomed members joyfully proclaiming to the audience of almost 1000; "What a joy it is to be part of a family that transforms hearts, lives and families in step with God. Let us go forward in recognition that we are the living hope of a loving God. I thank you, I love you and may God bless you!"

Sheran shared some of her experiences of the first nine months of being the first overseas Worldwide President of Mothers' Union including a visit to a prison in Wales where members are providing a play area for children visiting their parents so they have a welcome distraction if needed during the three hour visitation period. She also talked about areas around the world where Mothers' Union has been working closely with communities to build resilience and help recovery from natural disasters. She told how in Madagascar, in the Diocese of Mahajanga, communities have decided to address the issue of environmental preservation and have cultivated a plant called Vetiver which is a fast-growing grass that preserves the soil during the rainy season. After the Vetiver is uprooted, trees that fertilise the soil and store water in their trunks are planted as they also provide great barriers when the cyclones hit.

Zonal Trustee June Butler chaired a panel discussion with members who each spoke about projects and initiatives in their areas which were positively impacting their communities. Deborah Munday from Scotland spoke about how their members responded to a request of help from clergy, providing local families with clothes and school equipment for children. Caroline Collins of Liverpool diocese spoke about how members made little "bags of love" for mums and dads dropping off their children at their first day of school to let them know that they were being thought of and prayed for. Kathleen Wilson described how they had been approached by the prison warden where Mothers' Union members in Durham volunteered to set up a branch of MU in the prison. There are more than 15 members in this branch and the project has gained recognition culminating in MU being invited to participate in a meeting in the House of Lords during Prisons Week. June also spoke of a prison project that they had set up in Ireland ([read more here](#)) where they had purchased multiple sets of books so family members can read together even though they are separated. All these projects started from small ideas and have flourished in many ways to support local communities. Zonal Trustee Nikki Sweatman and Provincial President of York June Houghton then took to the stage to tackle some common myths that they had been asked many times when visiting dioceses in their province. One member commented afterwards "it really helped dioceses to better inform their members who had been yearning for such clarifications for years!"

At lunchtime members were able to visit various stands run by staff and members in the marketplace as well as purchase products and souvenirs. The afternoon session began with the Chief Executive address from Bev Jullien in which she updated members on the progress of a number of initiatives such as the database and Communities of Interest, gave a financial update and also spoke about some of the moments of impact MU has had over the past year such as our Thy Kingdom Come service in Coventry and Sheran addressing General Synod in July.

The guest speaker for the afternoon was the Reverend Barry Hill, himself a proud Mothers' Union member! Barry spoke to delegates on evangelism, discipleship and how to work well with clergy. Sharing specific stories of the "mini-revolutions of mission" Mothers' Union are making across the country in areas like gender-based violence, education, exploitation and prison work, he encouraged the gathering "not to settle for a smaller, easier vision of the difference Mothers' Union are called to make in the Kingdom of God." He continued, "Whilst Mothers' Unions are often known for being excellent at hospitality, we know cuppas and cakes are only a tiny part of the bigger calling. Most of our country know a committed Christian, most don't know a vicar. Mothers' Union members are brilliantly placed to share faith and make a practical Kingdom-of-God-difference Monday to Saturday."

Members were then able to listen to Adam Sach, MU Head of Fundraising and Communications, encourage those present to think about "what makes them proud to be a member of Mothers' Union". He said "I would like to work with you to find even more ways to ensure Mothers' Union is more visible, to encourage even more people to get involved and to secure funds to help make the amazing difference you, in many different ways, are a part of right here in Britain and Ireland as well as across the world".

The meeting concluded with Sheran announcing the annual theme for next year as "Building hope and confidence". She enthused "I have never been more hopeful about the future of Mothers' Union as I am today...let us walk together in hope and confidence, trusting each other... and building the hope and confidence of families and communities as we reach forward as God's hands and feet".