

Birmingham Link

No 143 Spring 2020

Mothers' UNION
Christian care for families
Diocese of Birmingham

From the President



Building Hope and Confidence

THEME FOR THE YEAR

Dear Friends,
How quickly we are well into another year with spring flowers now all around us. It is a lovely time of year that is full of hope and confidence about what might lie ahead. Confidence that the days will get longer and hope that the expectation of summer brings. Last summer, there was the meeting of the MU Worldwide Council in Rwanda, which brought together all the outcomes from the listening, observing and acting of the previous two years. There is much to give thanks for in celebrating all that MU is doing across the world and how many lives the MU touches. Out of that meeting came the 2020 theme of Building Hope and Confidence. What does that mean for us in Birmingham?

I want to ask you a question. What excites you about Mothers' Union? Or to put it another way what do you think is special about the Mothers Union and why you are a member? You might want to pause here for a moment while you think about that one! As I come to branches and have the pleasure of meeting more of you, I hear lots of different answers as to what is special: for some it is Away From It All holidays (AFIA) , for others the overseas relation-

ships, for some the prison work and others the craft work for premature babies and for those with dementia: for others it is Women's Aid and advocacy particularly around gender violence. In all these different ways MU touches significantly the lives of others. My hope for 2020 is that we will all have the enthusiasm to tell others about what MU does. The MU magazine Families First has lots of wonderful stories from this country and across the world inspiring us with how the projects that MU members are involved in are helping so many others. The more we know the more confident we can be in sharing these stories of hope. And our hope is that as we share, we will encourage others to connect with Mothers' Union in ways that are exciting for them and then they too will want to belong.

*With love
Deirdre, Diocesan President*

*Our loving Father has chosen his gifts to us for our delight and his purposes.
Let us eagerly embrace the plans he has for their use; not holding back or envying the gifts of others.*

Advent Quiet Day at Polesworth Abbey November 2019

Fr Philip, Vicar of Polesworth, chose the theme 'Arctic Explorers'.

During the first talk, entitled 'Where is the North Pole?' we learnt about Captain Sir John Franklin's ill-fated expedition. Franklin's lost expedition was a British venture that departed from England in 1845 aboard two ships, HMS Erebus and HMS Terror. A Royal Navy officer and experienced explorer, Franklin had served on three previous Arctic expeditions, the latter two as commanding officer. His fourth and last, undertaken when he was 59, was meant to traverse the last un navigated section of the Northwest Passage. After a few early fatalities, the two ships became icebound in Victoria Strait near King William Island in the Canadian Arctic, in what is today the territory of Nunavut. The entire expedition, comprising 129 men, including Franklin, was lost.



During a time for rest, reading and reflection we were encouraged to think about those men

and what they might have thought about their journey. Could they have imagined what it would be like? The snow and ice and freezing cold! As we considered their plight, we thought about our own journey during Advent. Do we have any idea where our journey might take us?

The second session was called 'What to take with us.' We learnt that the two ships were not very well equipped for the conditions they encountered. But what about us? Do we need to learn to travel light? We need empty hands to hold the cross of Christ. Later explorers, who did traverse the Arctic, had help from the native people who knew how to survive in harsh conditions. Who do we need to take advice from as we travel along the path to Christ?

After sharing Holy Communion we enjoyed a delicious fish and chip lunch in the refectory. The afternoon began with the third talk 'Overwintering on the ice flow'. My reflections got me to think that often the only thing to do is sit in silence and wait to see what God wants to do through us. In a marked contrast to the men in the Arctic I enjoyed sitting beside the log burner in Fr Philip's entrance hall while other people read or quietly coloured pictures. At three o'clock we joined together for Evening Prayer which brought the day to a fitting end. We were very well looked after by members of Polesworth MU and it was good to meet old and new friends but it was the beauty and peace of the Abbey that really enhanced the day.



Anne Pycock

CANCELLED
THE DIOCESAN FESTIVAL SERVICE
IN THE CATHDRAL
SATURDAY 2ND MAY AT 11AM.



The Language of Prayer

It's a fact that whenever we use the Lord's Prayer in English, and we don't have a service order in front of us, we tend to revert to *'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...'*. In my experience this practice shows no sign of dying out. In fact all the young people's groups I pray with still tend to use this older version. The reason is, of course, that the language in which we first learnt our regular prayers will often be the language of prayer for our whole lives. It is because we know them, as we say 'by heart'. How I love that turn of phrase: 'by heart'! It reminds me of that lovely passage in Deuteronomy 30.14, where Moses asks the people to imagine where the commandments of God are: *'not in heaven...nor across the sea... No, the word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.'*

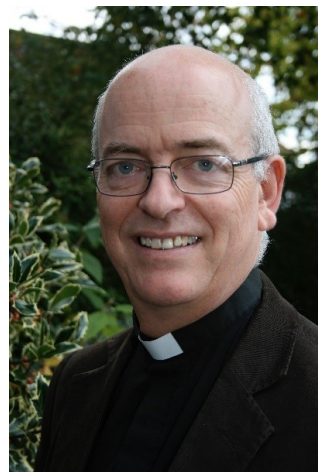
Learning by heart. Perhaps there are poems or sayings you learnt as a child and can still recite word for word. It is important, I think, that we have such resources in our memories – they can be unexpectedly useful at times. I have spoken before of those wonderful moments of praying with someone whose mind is confused and cannot remember much at all, when they simply join in with The Lord's Prayer, as if it resides in a secure and deeper vault of memory.

In the last 12 months I have been drawn back to the Book of Common Prayer after a conversation with a young man exploring his vocation to ministry. Yes, I know this all sounds a bit odd; but this form of prayer is still used daily for Morning and Evening Prayer in many churches and cathedrals. The language, at its finest in the 17th Century, really does stand the test of time. And for me, because I have been brought up in it, it is more memorable, and the order has fewer variants. So it does make it easier to memorise. For me, that is, but it won't be so for everyone.

What I want to know – and you can share your thoughts through Link – is what prayers you have memorised, and how have they been a resource to the present day? You see, here is a prayer which, I now believe, could have been written for our times – times in which on the internet we are continually assaulted by malicious software and scams. It feels like a prayer I need to pray every day.

O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; Defend us thy servants from all assaults of our enemies that we; surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Martin Stephenson, Chaplain



AFIA News

Thank you to members and branches who responded to my request in the last Link for donations to the AFIA fund. This meant that we are able to start this year with a healthy bank balance. This is the story of one of the families that we were able to help last year, because of members' generosity.

A family, which lives in Birmingham filled in their application form, and said they would like to go 'to a cottage, somewhere very green and out of the busy city'. The family have five children and wanted them to be able to experience life outside the city but were unable to afford to take them away. We arranged for them to stay in a cottage in Yorkshire and this is the email that the mother sent me on their return:

Thank you to everyone who was in the decision making of allowing us to experience such an amazing holiday. We have never been so far from home and it really excelled in all expectations. The location itself was so scenic and beautiful, the house we stayed in was more than big enough for us all, and the locals were so warming and inviting; the whole lifestyle there was slow and relaxing, something our kids had not really seen before. We spent our days outdoors on walks and in parks and everything seemed so clean and fresh. We went to the local farm which was amazing and also had a co-op at our door, so food was never an issue. The country side is so beautiful in Harrogate and the people where so amazing. I pray one day we get the opportunity to go again. The kids have made memories for life and have learnt so much skills from being outdoors. We have made it part of our routine in the weekend to always go for a family walk now. Again thank you for such a blessing x

It was really lovely to receive this email and to hear how much these holidays mean to families. Please do continue to donate when you can, knowing that the money will be well spent.

Jill Harris

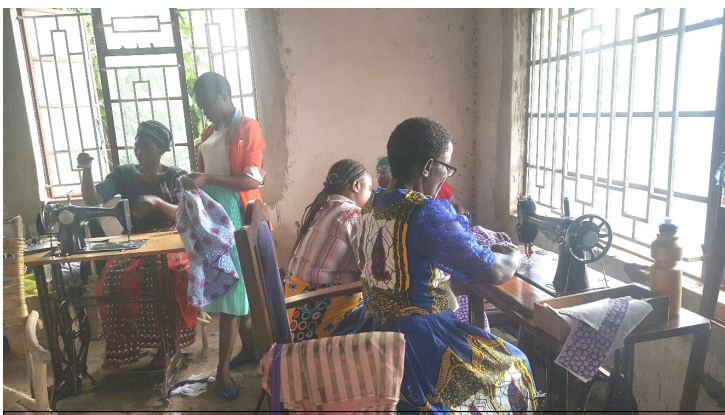
Worldwide Committee News

There were two meetings in 2019. Following reorganisation of the Birmingham MU, the Trustees had decided that the Worldwide group would continue and should now come under Faith and Policy.

Jackie Eldred sent Christmas cards, the Link and the 2019 Wave of Prayer leaflet to the Dioceses with which we are linked, and also Easter cards, but it still remains difficult to get news from them, apart from Seychelles. Elizabeth Walker also sends the eNewsletter every two months. A prayer support group for mothers whose children are victims of drug abuse had been started at one of the branches in Seychelles.

The Malawi container was loaded on 18th May and arrived safely at two destinations

Fr Albert Nampana mentioned that Mpondas had



Some of the sewing machines in use, which were sent from Birmingham to Malawi

received gifts from Polesworth. A list of suitable items to be donated could be distributed before the next container is due. Some items mentioned were spectacles, crewel needles, plastic crockery for orphanages, bamboo washable sheets and plastic backing for making sanitary towels.

Elizabeth and Ann Willis (Faith and Policy) had prepared the 2020 Wave of Prayer leaflet for distribution at the Members Meeting in October.

Agnes Mkoko, a Mothers' Union member from Malawi, paid a visit to Birmingham Diocese. She spoke about her work in Southern Malawi. Mothers' Union has been active in Malawi for a hundred years, and continues to grow as do the associated guilds, Daughters of the King, Daughters of St Agnes for young



Janis Kind and Jane Chingota, Mpondas Cathedral

mothers and St Veronica. The MU works teaching skills to women prisoners – crafts and embroidery. There are currently no co-ordinators in Malawi. The fall in the value of the pound has affected them. The quality of fish in the lake has improved following a ban on catching young fish. Another source of protein is soya bean.

Janis Kind

Last September, Agnes stayed with me while in Birmingham and attended a meeting of the Malawi Task Group and Mothers' Union Worldwide Group.

Agnes has visited several times and is known to many of the congregation in St Peter's Church, Balsall Common. The church has recently 'twinned' their toilets with four toilets in Malawi. The certificates are on show in each of the Church and Hall toilets. Agnes was very interested in this charity and spoke about how important it is for a village, school or hospital to have toilets especially for the young girls attending school. She spoke at our Café Church service and received gifts from members of the congregation to take back to children and families in Malawi. During her talk Agnes thanked everyone for the gifts they send each year on the container. These are very much valued - small or large. The children especially were keen to donate knickers for the children in Malawi. They all thought how uncomfortable they would feel if they had to go to school each day without them. They also collected pens, pencils and paper. Some of the gifts Agnes took home with her and some will go on the container in June.

Claire Laland, Past President

The Worldwide Group with Agnes Mkoko



THE NEXT CONTAINER LORRY

Will be leaving Birmingham on 6th June 2020. Children's clothing, basic first aid, books, stationery and many other items are needed in Malawi.

Out and About



Photo printed with permission

MESSY CHURCH

Members of St Barnabas Erdington Mothers' Union, Rev Joycelyn (our Children and Youth Missioner) and a young child and a mum and her daughter getting ready for Messy Valentine. We have been privileged to help with Messy Church, both beforehand and on the day, for about 2 years now. It is held several times a year on a Saturday morning. As you can see we hold it in the main body of the Church. We start off with various craft activities and there is usually a short video and some singing. The morning finishes with sandwiches, fruit and juice for the children. We have about 30 – 40 children and their parents/carers each time

and for most of them it is the only time that they come into church. We are beginning to recognise the children and chat to the parents/carers hoping one day that they will join us on a Sunday.

Elizabeth Walker

KNIT AND NATTER

St James, Hill runs a successful Knit and Natter making items for City and Heartlands Hospital. Due to a change in the group leader we invited Judy Townsley to talk to us about what she does and the needs of hospitals. She visits both hospitals about 4 times a year taking lots of knitting. She especially encouraged us to knit the larger cot blankets as babies can have up to 4 on each cot. She also advised on wool and patterns and it was a most enjoyable and informative visit. She really brought alive how important this ministry is. Members also knit dementia muffs and at Christmas have a stall to raise money for MU. We also run a Messy Trail at Advent and have made sheep, donkeys and shepherds.

Jackie Brocklebank

PANCAKE PARTY AT ST ALPHEGE

Our annual Pancake Party took place on the Saturday before Shrove Tuesday in the Oliver Bird Hall. The party is a great family evening and our main fundraising event. We started with races for tiny tots, then we had team races, with a trophy for the winning team. The Mothers' Union team won two years ago but were defeated in the second round this time. The winners were The Flying Pancakes – a team of year 6 children. There was a children's tombola; with toys donated by members and an adult's raffle. Members made pancakes for supper and cakes for the cake stall. We had lots of help on the night – stewarding the races, serving pancakes, manning the tombola, selling drinks and cakes. It was a very successful evening, with a great community atmosphere, and we raised £460 for Mothers' Union funds.

Susan Leach (secretary)

A Message from Pat Marshall:-

Heartlands hospital need knitters to make angel pockets and grieving gowns.



A Day in the Life of an Area Co-ordinator

I can hear the low hum of pleasant conversation before I see the conversationalists. As I enter the Parish Room at Polesworth Abbey there are 25 or so ladies sitting round a table similar to a banqueting table and the banquet spread before them is knitting wools in every colour and hue with garments and blankets made from these wools. It's Monday morning and I have come to meet ladies of the Polesworth Knitting Circle who meet every Monday from 10am till 12. The circle was set up by Mothers' Union and is attended by lots of other ladies in the parish including a few who live in sheltered accommodation and care homes. There is lively chatter going on and a happy atmosphere - I marvel at how all the knitting can go on without disturbing the conversation. It is especially exciting this morning as I'm not the only visitor; the High Sheriff of Warwickshire has also come to see the Knitting Circle in action as part of his charity travels around Warwickshire raising funds to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. He is wearing his chain of office and causing quite a stir. Like me he can't quite believe the amazing output of this group. In 2019 they produced 2052 items (including 1356 baby hats) which were donated to many charities including local hospitals, care homes, dementia units, Birmingham Children's Hospital, and a local homeless charity. In addition Polesworth Branch filled and donated 24 shoe boxes of toiletries to Birmingham Women's Aid.

I've come today at the invitation of Kit MacLachlan because I am a Trustee of Birmingham Mothers' Union and also Area Coordinator for the Polesworth Group. After my meeting with the good folk of Polesworth Abbey and the singing of Happy Birthday to Sally (*pictured right*) we leave so that we can catch the Knitting Group at Kingsbury which also meets every Monday.

Kit drives me through the sodden countryside (this is February and the height of the floods) to the picturesque church at Kings-



bury and through a side gate to the room that the Mothers' Union members themselves have renovated and equipped for their use. There are less people here than at Polesworth but still a lively group producing wonderful garments for donating to those who need them. I am welcomed warmly and we chat about the knitting and about what's going on in the Diocese and I get a feel of how cut off from the city centre these ladies are. Branch Leader Marjorie comes regularly to the Members' Meetings but this can only be done by car - there is no direct bus service now from Kingsbury to Birmingham (a distance of 14 miles) and the only alternative is a bus to Tamworth (even further away from Birmingham at 21 miles) and then a bus or train from there (the station is now a long walk from the bus stop) - basically it would take all day to get there and back.

It struck me how absolutely vital it is that we in Birmingham visit all our branches throughout the Diocese and continue the essential links between all the members. Due to changes in the last Triennium in Birmingham we don't currently have Vice Presidents (who did a grand job at keeping in touch with members in their designated areas) nor does the Deanery Group system seem to flourish anymore with the difficulty in finding people to lead these groups. Thankfully some Deaneries still persist with Festival Services and it was at Polesworth's Deanery Festival service last year, which was held at All Saints', Grendon, that I first met Judith Taylor of All Saints (currently in interregnum and thus making life particularly difficult for the Branch) and Marjorie and Kit and her husband, Michael, who took the service. It was lovely to establish contact with them all and I was delighted to be invited back by Kit for my day meeting the Knitting Circle ladies and a splendid lunch.

Please do feel free to invite your Area Co-ordinator to see what you and branches near to you are doing - it is so important that we support one another.

Valerie Warner

The Area Co-ordinators

Aston and City Group - Sandra Golding

Coleshill and Yardley Group - Linda Nugent

Moseley and Shirley Group - Rowena Nicholls

Solihull Group - Susan Haigh

Sutton Coldfield - Ann Willis/Valerie Warner

Polesworth Group - Valerie Warner

West Birmingham - Rowena Nicholls

Modern Day Slavery

Nikki Sweatman, World-wide Provincial Trustee, introduced the theme of combating modern-day slavery at our November Members' Meeting. She explained that



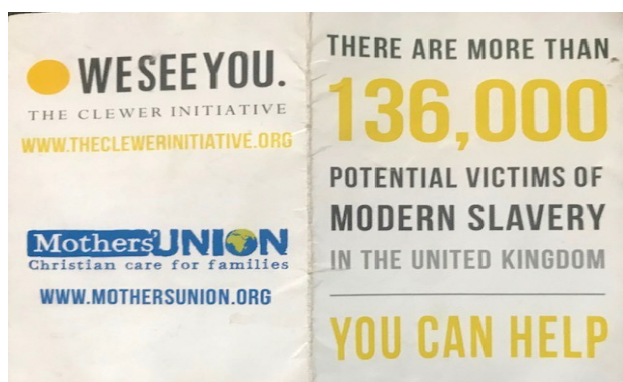
MU is working in partnership with the Clewer Initiative to oppose Modern-Day Slavery which although very common remains largely invisible.

Homeless people are very vulnerable; 50% in the UK are British citizens. 40.3 million people worldwide. Sex workers and domestic servants are common slave victims trapped by violence and coercion but also there are many other forms of slavery; such as nail/beauty bars, car washes, restaurants, textile sweatshops, forced begging, benefit and other fraud, forced criminality, organ harvesting, and forced marriage.

Nikki urged us to raise awareness of Modern-Day Slavery in the church by displaying posters to inform victims of a welcome and opportunity to talk; using wallet cards which highlight the signs of MDS to give to as many people as possible.

Members should not confront any suspected traffickers directly but phone the Diocesan Office. The Police should only be called in an emergency involving children. You can also advise people of their human rights to freedom and to a minimum wage.

To summarise:- We can be involved through prayer, poster and information, carrying info cards and noticing vulnerabilities.



For more information

<https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/> .

VE and VJ Days

I moved to Balsall Common in Birmingham Diocese just over 50 years ago but I was born and brought up in London. I well remember the street parties we



Winners of Fancy Dress competition

had for VE Day and VJ Day and the excitement they generated. I even remember the entertainment, as a radio comedian, Sandy Powell, came and delighted us all with his chatter and his catch phrase, 'Can you hear me Mother?'

I have no idea why this was funny but it generally made all the audience laugh. Entertainment was simpler then. There was a Fancy Dress Competition for children and I won 1st prize dressed as Peace. My Mother had managed to get hold of a piece of parachute silk to make the dress. The 2nd and 3rd were Old Mother Riley and a Nurse.

My Father had volunteered for the army just before war broke out so had been away most of the five years with only very occasional short leaves. I expected him to come home when the war ended but as he was in Egypt at the time and it was a long time until he was demobbed. He was like a stranger when he did come home.

In the same way we expected sweets and chocolate to come off ration and to miraculously appear in the shops. However it was not until 1953 that this happened, some 10 years after they were rationed.

We had very small front gardens with iron railings and these were all cut down to help the war effort in the 1940s. We expected they would be returned but we never saw them again but were proud to have helped in a small way.

I am sure many readers will have similar memories – not to mention the nightly bombing during the blitz . And getting undressed for bed only to put coat, hat and scarf on top of our pyjamas before going next door to the Anderson shelter.

I hope when people celebrate the 75th Anniversary this year they will remember the sacrifices that were made. Not just those of sweets and railings but the break up of families, the loss of homes and often of loved ones and the struggle of everyday life. We are fortunate to be here today and owe a lot to that generation.

Claire Laland, St Peter's Balsall Common

FAMILY MATTERS

Birthdays

Sheila Bates- Jones aged 90 13th February 1929
St James Hill
Margaret Lane aged 90 11th November 1929
St James, Shirley
Olwen Davies aged 90 7th February 1930
St Alphege, Solihull
Diana Mitchell aged 90 14th February 1930
St Alphege, Solihull

In Memoriam

Hilda Bardell St James Hill
Kit Young St Mary and St Margaret,
Castle Bromwich
Irene Potter St Michael's. South Yardley
Rosemary Stevens St James, Shirley
Doreen (Dorrie) Mary Cave St James, Shirley
Ann Potter St James, Shirley
Dorothy Horne St James Hill
Mary Shuttleworth, St Peter's Balsall Common

Wedding Anniversary

Susan and Philip Leach 50years
4th October 1969 St Alphege, Solihull

Members Enrolled

Contance Dangare – St Barnabas, Erdington
Judy Nestor - Polesworth Abbey

New Indoor Member

Margaret Allsopp - Polesworth Abbey

Corrections

Link 141 Mrs Sheila Bates-Jones was incorrectly named in the celebration of her 90th Birthday.
Link 142 Mrs Moyna Howkins first name was incorrectly spelt due to a typing error.
We apologise for any offence that these mistakes may have caused and wish both members a happy 91st birthday in the coming year.

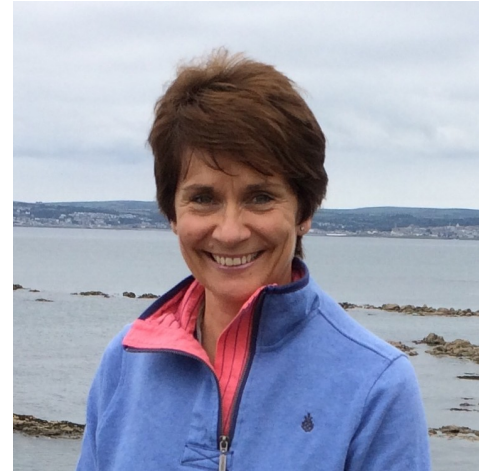
ALL FUTURE DATES ARE CURRENTLY ON HOLD.

Please note, that we shall hope to be together for the Autumn meeting, which will be at St Peter's, Hall Green October 24th at 10am with soup lunch after.

NEW TRUSTEES

Elaine Diskin

I joined St Alphege Mothers' Union in 2003 and soon became a member of our very active branch committee. I worship at St Alphege church and work part-time as a learning support assistant at the Junior and Infant school enjoying the challenges and rewards it offers. I'm married to Mike with a son of 24 and a daughter of 21 and I'm always keen to keep myself fit by running, occasionally in half marathons.



Kit MacLachlan

Michael, my husband, and I moved to Polesworth when we retired 7 years ago. I was delighted to find a thriving Mothers' Union

there, since several of our previous churches had not had a branch and I had been a diocesan member for several years prior to this. I am currently branch leader at Polesworth, where we have a lively Knitting Circle. I enjoy digital communications and my new interest in retirement is playing the cello.



EXPENSES

Peter Johnson, the Diocesan Treasurer, reminds Officers and members that they are entitled to reclaim (against receipts where possible) any reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred whilst undertaking work or activities on behalf of the MU. Depending on the nature of the activity the expenses will be reimbursed either by the Diocese or the branch. Please contact Peter if you have any queries or concerns
(petersusanj@btinternet.com)

Some thoughts for a difficult time.

This is a good time to take up knitting again if you are not already crafting. There will still be a need out there after this is all over! I have patterns I can post here if anyone wants to branch out into something new.

Also, when making a grocery order get an extra couple of things for food bank or women's shelter. We can still reach out to those in need.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 New International Version (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Click on this link to see Archbishops' Call for Day of Prayer

<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/latest-news/coronavirus-archbishops-call-national-day-prayer-and-action>





Mothers' Union

Friday at 15:19 • 🌐

The love and prayers of our Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, our Worldwide Board Members and our staff go out to all who are combatting, or preparing to combat, the COVID-19 virus across the globe. Please join us in a moment of prayer, wherever you are and whenever you can.



Loving Lord,

We pray for your love and compassion to abound as we walk through this challenging season.

We ask for wisdom for those who bear the load of making decisions with widespread consequences.

We pray for those who are suffering with sickness and for all who are caring for them.

We ask for protection for the elderly and vulnerable to not succumb to the risks of virus.

We pray for misinformation to be curbed that fear may take no hold in hearts and minds.

As we exercise the good sense that you in your mercy provide may we also approach each day in faith and peace, trusting in the truth of your goodness towards us.

PRAYER FOR A PANDEMIC

by Cameron Wiggins Bellm

May we who are merely inconvenienced remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close remember those that have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country, let us choose love during this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbor. *Amen.*

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

John 20 v 26