Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0737

M U Australia

(1892 -)

Born	18920101, Australia
Occupation	Social support organisation

Summary

M U Australia (known for most of its history as the Mothers' Union) is part of the worldwide Mothers' Union which is an organisation within the Anglican Church. First established in England in 1876, its early objectives were:
1. To awaken in all mothers a sense of their great responsibility in the training of their boys and girls-the fathers and mothers of the future.
2. To organise in every place a band of mothers who will unite and prayer and seek by their example to lead their families in purity and holiness in life.
The first Australian Mothers' Union was formed in Cullenswood, Tasmania, in 1892. The movement spread quickly across the country, becoming a major organisation both for Anglican women and within the broader women's movement in the years up to 1960. Apart from Christian outreach, the Union has been involved in wide range of social and political reform activities, mostly relating to the welfare of women and children, as well as charitable work.

Details

The first Mothers' Union was formed in 1876 by Mary Sumner in Old Aylesford, in the south England. By 1885 it was a diocesan organisation in Winchester and quickly spread across England and then internationally as women migrated. In 1896 a Central Council was formed and in 1925 central headquarters were established in London. The Union received a Royal Charter in 1926 – the first granted to a religious and a women's organisation. Until the 1970s, divorced women were excluded from membership.

The first Australian Mothers' Union was formed in Cullenswood, Tasmania, in 1892, closely followed in South Australian 1895 when introduced by Lady Victoria Buxton and Dorothy Harmer – the wives of the Governor and the Anglican Bishop. Within five years there were 49 branches with 1,350 members across the state. By 1904, Unions had been established in all Australian states. In the early 1900s, the Union frequently co-operated with other Christian women's organisations, and sometimes the National Councils of Women, in campaigns for political and social reforms. Early activities included, for example, campaigns for the provision of sex education for children, censorship of films and the Bush Nursing Service. Its national journal, Mothers in Australia (from 1945 Mianza and from 1960 Mia, Mia) was established in 1917. The Union's literature includes reams of advice about child rearing. While promoting Christian women's influence in the wider society, the Union did not support the idea of working women.

In 1974 Australia became the first overseas province to be granted autonomy. The Union changed its name to MU Australia in ??
In 2004, its objective were:
1. To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its understanding
2. To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church;
3. To maintain a world wide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship, and service;
4. To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children;
5. To help those whose family life has met with adversity.

In 2004 it claimed some 10,000 members and maintained 7 Departments: Education; Overseas and Northern Outreach; Promotion and Development; Prayer and Spirituality; Publication; Social Responsibility; Mia Mia (the newsletter of MU Australia). It also continues to work with Caritas groups (a previously semi-autonomous organisation within the church, organised at a parish level, and not to be confused with the Catholic aid organisation of the same name) to provide support for 'lonely people.' In 2004 the Worldwide Union had more than three million members in 71 countries-making it the largest voluntary worldwide women's organisation.

Archival note:
While several archival collections relating to Mothers' Union groups in Australia have been identified, many more undoubtedly exist in various local parish and Diocesan records which are currently unlisted. For a list of Anglican archives (incomplete) see:
http://www.anglican.org.au/community.cfm?SID=16&SSID=96&PID=154

Published resources

Journal Article
Sex education debates and the modest mother in Australia, 1890s to the 1930s, Warne, Ellen, 1999

Prowlers in the darkened cinema: Australian church women's associations and the arrival of the motion picture in Australia., Warne, Ellen, 2000

Militant Mothers: Faith, Power and Identity: The Mother's Union in Sydney, 1896-1950, O'Brien, Anne, 2000

Woman, save the world: an Anglican response to late nineteenth century domestic violence, Gray, John, 1994

In Pursuit of True Anglican Womanhood in Victoria, 1880-1914, Grimshaw, Patricia, 1993

Book Section
Homes are divine workshops, Willis, Sabine, 1980

Anglicanism and Gender Issues, O'Brien, Anne, 2002

Book
Education for life : the 2nd Mary Sumner lecture / [Helen Granowski], Granowski, Helen Barbara, 1985

The on-going story of the Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Sydney since 1896, Oates, Lorna and Jackson, Sally, 1996

A history of the Mothers' Union in Australia, Matheson, Avis, 1992

The history of the Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, 1895-1995, Taber, Stella, 1995

Mary Sumner and the Mothers' Union: A brief account of the story, Lee, Erna, 1995

Yesterday's tomorrow: where goes the family, Murray, Kemeri, 1979

Helpmeets and heroines : women and the history of Australian evangelicalism, Piggin, Stuart, 1988

Hearts, hands and voices: Celebrating the Mothers' Union, Diocese of Perth, Western Australia centenary, 1898-1998: The history, Howard-Wright, Miriam, 1999

The inaugural meeting of the Australian Central Council of the Mothers' Union, Mothers' Union, Australian Central Council, 1926

The Mothers' Union in Australia [a brief record, 1892-1964., Powell, Gladys Muriel, 1964

The Mothers' Union jubilee book, 1898-1948, 1948

The Mothers' Union jubilee book : Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia, 1895-1945, 1945

The Mothers' Union jubilee book: Diocese of Melbourne, Victoria, 1896-1946, 1946

Report
Annual report / The Mothers' Union, Diocese of Sydney, The Mothers' Union, Diocese of Sydney, 1895

[Conference report] / Australian Commonwealth Council, Mothers' Union, Mothers' Union. Australian Commonwealth Council., 1940

Newsletter
Mia-mia, 1960-

Resource Section
Members of the Robe Mothers' Union, 2006,
http://www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?c=465

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Archives Office of Tasmania
St Peters Anglican Church Geeveston minutes of meetings of Mothers Union

St. Paul's Mothers' Union, Dover minutes. May 1926-May 1943

Administrative Records and Baptism, Marriage and Burial Registers

Baptism, Marriage, Burial and Administrative Records

Church Registers and Minutes of Meetings

Church Records of the Anglican Parish of Cooee

Records of the Anglican Parish of Scottsdale

St Pauls Anglican Church Dover minutes of meeting of Mothers Union

Records of the Mothers Union, Geeveston and Dover

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection
Mothers' Union [Saint Augustine's Church (Stanmore, N.S.W)]

Anglican Records and Archives Centre
Mothers' Union, Diocese of Brisbane

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne
Mothers' Union, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Archives Rare Books and Special Collections Unit, Auchmuty Library
Mothers' Union, Raymond Terrace Parish

Mothers' Union, St James' Parish Wickham

Anglican Church Diocese of Grafton
Mothers' Union, Parish of Casino, Anglican Church of Australia

Cathedral Mothers Union, Grafton Cathedral Parish, Anglican Church of Australia

South Lismore Mothers Union, Parish of Lismore, Anglican Church of Australia

Charles Sturt University Regional Archives
Coolamon (St. Andrew's) Parish - Coolamon Mothers' Union

Author Details
Jane Carey

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