



Archbishop shows how we can make a difference in our neighbourhoods

Rowan Williams visits the diocese: pages 8-9

Mothers' Union links up with branch in Iraq

OUR NEW FRIENDS IN BAGHDAD

ONE meets in leafy villages in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The other operates in the most dangerous city in the world.

But our diocese's branch of the Mothers' Union has created a new link with the Mothers' Union in Baghdad to offer them prayer, support and practical help.

Members have to run the gauntlet of sniper fire to attend meetings in St George's Church, which is surrounded by bomb barricades and razor wire and protected 24 hours a day by armed guards. The church's entire lay leadership is presumed dead after the five Iraqi-born Christians went missing on the way to a conference in Jordan.

Yet the Mothers' Union group in the Baghdad church has grown from 100 members last Easter to more than 400 now.

They meet every week, and hope to run parenting courses, visit orphanages and make cots for disabled children.

Although the setting is very different, their projects are not so far removed from those that Mothers' Union members in our diocese are involved with – organising holidays for deprived families, working with a women's refuge and making 'wraps' for stillborn babies at St Mary's Hospital. It confirms both the international perspective and the family emphasis of the modern Mothers' Union.

It was Canon Andrew White, the rector of St George's, Baghdad, who made the link possible. He spoke about the situation in Iraq at a Mothers' Union event in Denmead over the summer. Having just launched the Mothers' Union branch in Baghdad, he suggested a link with our diocese. That link was confirmed last month.

St George's Church itself – the only Anglican church in Iraq – has more than 800 members, making it one of the largest and most active churches in the country.

Its members come from a variety of Christian backgrounds, including

Chaldean, Assyrian, Catholic, Evangelical and Syrian Orthodox. The church was founded in 1936, forcibly closed by Saddam Hussein, then looted and badly damaged by rocket fire in 2003. It lacks plumbing, pews and many other basic necessities, but worshippers still meet for Sunday services and midweek Alpha courses.

Pauline Wale, president of our diocese's branch of the Mothers' Union, said: "Andrew White now lives and worships in Liphook, so when he was looking for a diocese to create a link with the Baghdad branch, we were the obvious people to ask.

"We've let them know that we are praying for them, and sent them some information about us. We're also hoping to send them Mothers' Union lapel badges, each of which will have a member's prayer attached to it. Ultimately, when the situation is better, it would be great to organise an exchange with the Baghdad branch."

Our diocese's branch of the Mothers' Union already has seven other global links – five with branches in Nigeria, as well as one in Australia, one in the Sudan and St Albans in the UK.



Canon Andrew White

MOTHERS' UNION: BAGHDAD



Founded: Easter 2006

Membership: 400 +

Main activities: meeting for mutual support, studying the Bible to boost their faith, giving stationery to children. The group hopes to start parenting courses, visit orphanages and make cots for disabled children. It is also holding a bazaar with other churches in Baghdad to raise funds to support their work.

Main challenges: sniper fire on the way to meetings, possibility of kidnapping, lack of basic necessities at home and church. They would like to do more projects, but the situation is too bad.

MOTHERS' UNION: PORTSMOUTH



Founded: 1882 (Mary Sumner founded branch at All Saints, Botley)

Membership: 1,100

Main activities: training in parenting, making wraps for stillborn babies, sending Christmas cards to inmates in prison, supporting women in refuges and asylum seekers, helping separated parents spend 'contact time' with their children, and looking after children during family visits in prison.

Main challenges: promoting Christian marriage at wedding fairs, the loss of childhood because of society's pressure on children to grow up quickly, conservation of the environment, recruiting new members.