



How the Mothers' Union is still supporting women and families 130 years on

On the eve of [International Women's Day](#), we spoke to two current leaders of the [Mothers' Union](#) in Adelaide about the work of the organisation and how it has supported and served women and families in the city for more than 130 years.

## International Women's Day

When Martha Achieu Solomon, pictured above, arrived in Adelaide in 2001 from her hometown of Bor in South Sudan, after time in a Kenyan refugee camp, she faced a new but no less daunting challenge.

Not only was she adjusting to life in a new country, but she spoke no English – although her husband spoke a little – had two young boys, her son and a nephew both aged 11, in tow, and had to build a life for herself and her family from scratch.

‘We arrived in December, just before Christmas and asked where we could find the nearest church,’ Martha recalls. ‘It was a little scary but the church and the Mothers' Union were very welcoming. They helped me and my family get settled and connected with the community.’

By 2008 Martha was starting to feel at home and began working with the Mothers' Union herself, as part of a group of just 24 at St Peter's Cathedral before moving to St. Martin's in Campbelltown.

She is now Chairwoman of her local Mothers Union at St Barbara's Parafield Gardens, near her home in the northern suburb of Munno Para.

Through the Mothers' Union, Martha has helped newer arrivals navigate the challenges of daily life in Australia, from finding housing and jobs to enrolling children in school, while organising prayer

groups, Bible studies, and skills-building workshops to support Sudanese women and their families.

“The biggest challenge is when the children grow up, they start to have their own thoughts and don’t always listen to their parents,” Martha explained. “But we try to guide them and teach them the word of God. We put it in God’s hands.”



***Mothersâ?? Union Adelaide Secretary Betty Edwards believes it is the best mission organisation in the Anglican Church***

Mothersâ?? Union veteran Betty Edwards also arrived to build a new life in Australia, from Manchester. She came to Australia in 1967, going straight to [St. Catherineâ??s, Elizabeth Downs](#), where she

remains to this day and joining the Mothers' Union two years later.

Betty, an energetic 86-year-old, is on the Mothers Union Adelaide Diocese executive, serving as Secretary.

Despite their different backgrounds, both Betty and Martha, see similar strengths in the Mothers Union.

"I think we are the best mission organisation in the Anglican Church," says Betty. "We raise funds and have a good network of people who work on local projects that last two years. At the moment we're with St. John's Youth Services who help young homeless people find accommodation."

The local organisation also works with the national Mothers Union on national and international mission projects in the Pacific region.

"The Mothers' Union is all about family values," says Betty. "Through the national organisation, we help Aboriginal women in the Northern Territory.

"We're about family life, supporting family life, and that has met with adversity as well as supporting each other."

Local projects supported by the Adelaide Mothers' Union include St John's Youth Services for young mothers and their dependent children, the Seeds of Affinity project, helping women entering and post prison sentence by supplying feminine hygiene products and toiletries, the Quickest Warmth project, supplying personal and household goods for distribution through Anglicare, the Indigenous Women's Training Fund, the Parenting Programme in PNG, and Helping at the Helen Mayo House – babysitting whilst mothers have treatment or "time-out".

The organisation's biggest strength, though, Betty says is its prayerfulness together.

Both Martha and Betty are concerned that not enough people in the Church truly understand the work of the Mothers' Union and that, because of that, there are fewer younger women coming on board. Membership in the Adelaide Diocese sits at around 200, down from peaks of more than 300.

Martha is confident the Rev'd Dr Gethzi Devasagayam, the new President of the Adelaide Mothers' Union will help reinvigorate the organisation.





***The Revd Dr Gethzi Devasagayam***

“She has great ambitions of getting us together with other mother’s union groups from the African community, which will invigorate us and help us to get things going,” says Betty.

“We’ve got great hopes, we pray for all of this.”

Despite the challenges, Martha, too, remains deeply committed to her work with the Mothers Union. She hopes to continue attracting younger women to get involved and carry on the mission of supporting families in the Sudanese community.

“We’re not a large group, but we do what we can,” Martha said. “If someone new arrives, we help them find their way and connect with others. That’s what the Mothers Union is all about – coming together to care for one another.”

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