

## **MOTHERS UNION OF KENYA**

### **Report #K23**

#### **HISTORY**

The Anglican Church, within which Mother's Union was born began in Kenya in 1844. The Mother's Union in Kenya was founded in 1918 by European women. This was a context of colonial settlement and heightened missionary activity particularly by the Anglican Church. There are also claims that Mother's Union was founded in Kenya in 1960 by a British woman lady by the name Mary Sumner. Mary Sumner, however, founded the Mother's Union in 1876 after her first daughter Margaret gave birth and Mary took the initiative to establish a society whose thrust would be to support mothers. By 1900, the Mother's Union had spread from England and within the Anglican Communion as far as India, Canada and Madagascar in Africa. Now Mother's Union does not only belong to Kenya. Mother's Union belongs to, is found practically in all the provinces within the Communion of 49 Provinces.

The founder of Mother's Union in Kenya is said to have been the wife of a governor and very instrumental in the faith of the Anglican Church under the colonial leadership. So the Mothers Union has continued over the years to the present. Now that also means, therefore, when you talk about Mother's Union it is worldwide, and it is also written here in the constitution. Mother's Union is a Christian organization of the Anglican communal church spread to many parts of the world. The Mother's Union of the Anglican Church of Kenya is one of the Mother's Union worldwide and operates under the guidance of the Archbishop and the Anglican bishops. I have already put that very clear in matters of leadership. The Mother's Union has several significant milestones, and a select few will be mentioned under its aims.

#### **MISSION/VISION**

The unifying vision of the mothers is that 'marriage, parenting and prayer' are vital in upholding the families' future. The promotion of family life as well as the promotion of the spiritual lives of women as mothers, parents and leaders is a prerogative of Mothers Union.

Now the general aim of the Mother's Union, a growing movement, is "to advance Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and family life."

Its purpose is "to be especially concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life."

Mother's Union has five aims:

1-"To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding"-The Union emphasizes that marriage ordained of God is only between man and woman. The Mother's Union in Kenya holds this as the authentic teaching of Christ and is a matter that has widened the rift between some Anglicans in the West and those in Kenya regarding gay marriages. In underscoring this, my interviewee said that Mothers in Kenya "will speak out... and cannot replace Christ's teaching with anything else."

2-“To encourage parents to bring their up their children in the Christian faith and life of the church”-This is done by training children and young people through rites of passage and encouraging single parents with children out of wedlock to have their children receive a ministry of the church through blessing of those children

3-“To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service”-The women are involved in the worldwide day of prayer and fellowship with women from other denominations as they evangelize among other things.

4-“To promote conditions in the society favorable to stable family life and the protection of the children”-Women in Mother’s Union get involved in forming cooperative societies. They take care of the cleanliness of homes, garden houses, training each other and even harvesting of rain water. This is one aim in which the interviewee stated that Anglicans emphasize cleanliness.

5-“To help those whose family life has met adversity/problems.”- Mother’s Union ministers to the bereaved in families particularly widows. In Kenya, the Mothers Union planted peace trees after the Kenyan ethnic and political crisis of 2007/2008.

In addition to these five aims, each woman in Mother’s Union commits herself to three promises:

1. The confession of faith in Christ and to be Christ’s “faithful soldier and servant” to end her life.
2. Upholding and supporting the aims of Mother’s Union “by word and action.”
3. Plan their life in such a way that it includes worship at church, reading the Bible and prayer.

The Mother’s Union hymn captures some of these aims and desire in these promises:

*Lord, King of livelihood,  
You embraced humanity;  
And was born of the Holy Virgin Mary:  
May our children be holy,  
May we learn how to bring them up.*

*Ever since you were born,  
Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
By your mother Mary  
We are all honored;  
May we resemble that lady  
In accordance with our service.  
May our souls be clean,  
And may our thinking be forthright,  
Same as our words and actions  
May they be an example to the children;  
So that they may be brought up well  
From the onset of life.*

*Lastly, may we be filled with happiness  
By witnessing our children  
Being of God conduct  
And working well;  
So that we may praise you in heaven  
Together with our children*

In Kenya, the Mother's Union covers the entire country in the old seven governmental provincial areas. Kenya is now divided into 47 counties, and the researcher is yet to establish the geographical and ethnic scope of Mother's Union in this new county governance system. The Mother's Union serves all and sundry regardless of their ethnic, denominational or social background. The Union serves them in the areas mentioned under its aims and restricts its ministry to those areas.

Mother's Union has some significant milestones:

1. The Mother's Union has synergized with the growth of the Anglican in transforming communities by strengthening Christian family life.
2. Mother's Union has raised safe spaces for community transformation through schools, particularly for you children.

## **OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WITH SIMILAR FOCUS/MISSION**

The Mother's Union has similarities with Catholic women and women in the Presbyterian Church. Together with ACK and with PCEA, women in these churches have the opportunity to reach much if not all of the country in their ministry. The Pentecostal churches are trying, but the women that are transforming Kenya are the ones from the Anglican, Catholic, and Presbyterian churches. Presbyterians reach much but not all of the country.

The Methodists have a similar focus but are limited to areas such as Meru, Nairobi, Kilifi, Kisii, Nakuru, and Kisumu. Pentecostals are unlike the Mothers Union because they hardly minister to the same scope in schools, hospitals, and other places.

Anglicans will minister to all, unlike some churches that are inward focused. They do little in community transformation according to the interviewee.

## **BOARD STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION**

The Mother's Union operates under the arena of four boards: Board of Finance, Board of Missions, Board of Education and Training, and Board of Social Services. The Mothers Union is governed under the Board of Missions, although the Board of Finance cuts across all the other Boards. The Board of Missions takes cares of church membership and the Mothers Union. The Board takes care of all categories of women in the Anglican Church of Kenya.

There various patrons of the Mother's Union at different levels: The patron at the national level is the Archbishop, the Patron at diocesan level is the Bishop; Patron at Parish level is the clergy

whether male or female. The interviewee, a Canon in the Anglican Church is a patron in St. Paul's parish. Her husband is a vicar of St. Paul's church and the interviewee was the patron of the Mother's Union.

She recently spent a whole day in a retreat training the women. Talent week in the Anglican Church is a great avenue to spot talent and to nurture it. Before the beginning of the talent week, the Mother's Union seeks the blessing of their patron.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & STAFF LEADERSHIP**

Gender in the Mother's Union leadership is all female. However, the Union's accounts are run by the Board of Finance, and there is a network with men in managing the Union's finances. This is a strength which protects the women from being "inward looking only" according to my interviewee. The networking with men is also a strength that helps Mother's Union to be accountable to a wider circle in the Anglican community.

At the national level, the Mothers Union maintains a 'Kenyan look' on ethnic representation. This means that various offices are occupied through regional representation. National regions maintain the look of their regions. At the diocesan level, where there is a major city or town, a national look is maintained. In cathedrals, there are members of Mother's Union who come from other ethnic regions. However, local or rural centers often maintain a local look.

### ***Weaknesses of Mother's Union:***

1-Nationhood needs to be addressed all the time, and many women are disadvantaged in education at higher levels of leadership. They are therefore not able to have as great an impact as they would have with more education. Capacity building in Mother's Union is slow though an ongoing matter. Since leadership changes all the time, there is need to keep building capacity.

2-Many leaders stay in their position for a long time often blocking the younger generation. The Mothers Union is addressing this by limiting the term of service.

3-Sometimes a leader may leave one position and take another within the same setting. This also blocks the training of other leaders particularly the younger ones.

4-Although leadership succession is taught, it is hardly practiced. This is especially true for many gifted women leaders who are used to being appreciated and find it extremely difficult to have successors.

The education level of women in the Mothers Union varies from one person to another. At the national level, the president is appointed at the national level, and the president's education may range from secondary school to college level. A diocesan coordinator would have a first degree. In the top leadership of Mother's Union in Kenya, some of the women are university educated.

There various patrons of the Mother's Union at different levels: The patron at the national level is the Archbishop, the Patron at diocesan level is the Bishop; Patron at Parish level is the clergy whether male or female.

The women in Mother's Union elect their own leadership apart from that which is dictated by the Episcopal office. They elect their own council members from among themselves. The patron is, however, a man. This man, often a bishop or a pastor, does not need to sit in all the meetings of the Mother's Union. There are certain policy or activity related issues in which the patron does not have to be involved.

## **BOARD AND STAFF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION**

Board members are chosen from the membership of the organization. The members nominate and then elect. However, the office of the patron and president is non-negotiable. This reverts to those in office by virtue of their position of spiritual leadership. The rest of council membership follows the nomination and then election process. The election is done by secret ballot.

## **STAKEHOLDERS**

As already described, the Mother's Union operates under the arena of four boards, but it is the Board of Missions that has more direct control over the Union and is, therefore, a major stakeholder. Other stakeholders include the Union itself and families. There are also various Christian organizations that support the work of Mother's Union projects and they too are stakeholders.

## **FINANCES & OTHER RESOURCES**

Most of the money coming to the Mother's Union comes from membership. The Union has its own way of requiring an annual subscription from all the members from various membership levels. The membership is at provincial, diocesan and parish levels. The members give to the parish then the parish gives to the diocese, and the diocese gives to the province.

However, the Mothers Unions also fundraises depending on the activities planned for a given year. They have an annual plan for their activities, all the year through. Some fundraising activities are held on same days of the year for the unions; others are national or have dates that are regional or dates that are unique to a Mother's Union. A parish could have a special or unique activities sometimes even projects for it will fundraise.

The Mother's Union has a lot of partnerships. Just like an NGO, they write proposals to donors such as Act Alliance, Action Aid, and World Vision. The Union also partners quite a lot with the financial institutions such as banks and other financing bodies. Such institutions and banks include MEP, Equity Bank, and Cooperative Bank. Sometimes it's NACADA because we also want to capture the training on drugs and alcohol.

Mother's Union also raises money through sales of items, for instance, they sell the material. Such materials are used in making uniforms for members. The union also sells printed materials and baskets. Every enrolled member or inducted member has to buy that material from the national office. The Union makes a small margin of profit from such materials.

Many Mother's Unions have also built parish halls. Such halls in a given community can be hired for a fee. In such halls will be chairs, tents, plates, cups for hire by the community.

Every Department in Mother's Union is encouraged to save. A department that makes about Kshs 150,000.00 (about USD 2000.00) is not supposed to keep such an amount in an account but is expected to look for a place to save and invest it so it can be earning you some income. All money received by the Mother's Union is audited annually. Annual auditing at the national office is done with the rest of the accounts. The budgets of Mother's Union vary from diocese to another. Some have very modest budgets and others such as the extensive Mt. Kenya South diocese has a bigger budget. The movement of the Mother's Union in that diocese is so massive that it has had to hire its own accounts officer. Although Mother's Union can engage in income generating projects, it is expected to operate within its budget consistent with its income.

## **PARTNERSHIPS/LINKS**

Mother's Union in Kenya partners with banks and NGO's both local and overseas already mentioned under finance. Nevertheless, where Mother's Union knows that such partners have a policy or doctrine that is questionable, the union will not seek funding from them. Some partnerships are not money-related, but rather are activity related. Such a conference could be on the issue of finances and banks have been a key partner for Mother's Union in that regard. However, Mother's Union will not partner with the Mormons or the Free Masons.

## **SWOT: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS**

The strengths and weaknesses already mentioned under "organizational structure and leadership" apply. There is, however, an additional weakness that relates to the wearing of uniforms and activities of the Mother's Union. Many of them are disillusioned with wearing the uniform and being in seminars and workshops with their mothers and grandmothers. According to my interviewee, the young women are clamoring for "a little flexibility in the activities of the younger people."

One threat that the Mother's Union faces is the dissatisfaction of younger women in its ranks. In our rapidly globalizing context, the younger generation including the women prefer the use of technology in sight and sound particularly in teaching or communicating with them. The Union needs to enact new mechanisms of making sure that these people get involved and have value for what they appreciate.

## **IMPACT/SUCCESS/ASSESSMENT**

Mother's Union in Kenya has had an impact in encouraging and family like in the country and the region. It has particularly clung to explicit teaching regarding marriage according to biblical teaching. The Union has also built community facilities such as halls and Christian schools that are open to all children. The Mother's Union in Nairobi has bought property that will generate income for the Anglican Church and undertaken many projects that have yielded office equipment for the diocese.

The Mother's Union has also built Bishops Towers in Nairobi, a building that houses the national office and generates income by leasing office space to many companies.

The Mother's Union has also built homes such as St. Nicholas Children's Home in Nairobi. They spend time and also feed children in such homes. They have also built girl's hostels so that

young women can have a safe spiritual space as they pursue their education and other goals. Together with Kenya Anglicans Men's Fellowship, the Mother's Union has been ministering to both the boy and girl child spiritually and in our day and age worked to have appropriate rites of passage for both boys and girls at various stages of their lives.

## **TRAINING/LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Training and mentoring are considered as key for the recruitment of Mother's Union leaders such as coordinators. In recruiting coordinators, the very first leadership entry requirement given by the bishop is that a candidate must be a Mother's Union member. And to be a Mother's Union member, they have a whole booklet of training, just like basically how Anglicans have the catechism for training our people for baptism or confirmation.

The leaders are also trained in areas such as the place of the Holy Spirit, the work of the church, the work of the mother, and whatever other objective and the whole wide church, not just the Anglican denomination. They are also taught to network and to worship. Having been trained, leaders are also assigned to ministries appropriate to their gifting.

The Mother's Union also trains its members in their denominational school namely St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya. They also have other training such as Carlile College in Nairobi. These schools have undergraduate and graduate programs. There are also many leaders in Mother's Union training at institutions that have trained in non-denominational schools such as Africa International University and International Leadership University.

For church based training including TEE, assessment of the training is done within the church. Other training is assessed within the institutions where Mother's Union leaders take their training.

## **PRINT AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

At the office levels, Mother's Union uses print media, the laptops, and the computers. The Anglican Church through Uzima Press produces and distributes its own materials which are distributed by their network of bookshops. Many mothers use booklets that carry a study between mother and son.

Such materials are also translated to ensure that those who do not speak English can have the materials in their mother tongue. Many such materials have already been translated into Kiswahili.

The Mother's Union has a great need for developing relevant materials for Sunday school for example. Although Mother's Union has some Computers, the need is far greater than they can afford to have for their needs, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas.

## **FUTURE**

The Mother's Union has a strategic plan in place every year. The plan is renewable in terms, after four years. After four years, the Mother's Union takes on another one plan, and there is one currently being evaluated. Currently, the key emphasis is on more national projects for the

Mother's Union, for the purposes of financial and other aspects of sustainability. Presently, only 25% of Mother's Unions are getting funding and 75% generate their own resources.

The Union has many plans for printing. Considering that there are many youths in this country, many of them unemployed, the Mother's Union is working on a manual for ministry to the youth. They have also been outsourcing much of their Sunday school curriculum but are now working on their own for different ages: 13 to 15, 16-18, 19-21. Granted, they have had some Sunday school of their own, but they have a need to expand it and to align it with the realities of today's child.

In working to develop and review its materials, particularly booklets, the Mother's Union recognizes the challenge of a digital generation that doesn't want to read books but prefers reading material in digital form. The Union wants to develop digital materials that capture the young generation.



Mothers Union: Anglican Diocese of Mount Kenya South

## **REPORT PREPARATION INFORMATION**

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