



MOTHERS UNION NEWCASTLE

# March Newsletter 2026

"Serving others - Nurturing ourselves"

Luke 10.41-42

from the desert to resurrection joy

Sharing Christ's love by encouraging, strengthening  
and supporting marriage and family life

## **Mothers Union**

### **Diocesan Executive 2026**

Elizabeth Bissaker-President  
Barbara Warland-Vice President  
Gail Iles-Vice President  
Laurel Brooks-Secretary  
Jan Garrard-Treasurer  
Reverend Nicole Baldwin-Chaplain

### **Departmental Coordinators**

Promotion/Publicity-Vacant  
Noelene Lentfer-Overseas & Northern  
Outreach/Links  
Rhonda Morse-Prayer & Spirituality  
Denise Brown-Publications/Assistant  
Secretary  
Noeline Darcy-Social Issues & Actions

### **Committee Members**

Jane Conway-Birthday Cards  
Leonie Benson-Lone Members  
Diane Kenchington-Magazines  
Gayleen Bayliss-Publicity/Newsletter  
Editor  
Lyn Wickham-Coffee & Care  
Denise Hird-New Born Ministry

### **Life Members**

Noelle Freeman  
Robyn Southerden  
Laurel Brook

### **Our Vision:**

Our vision is of a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful, and flourishing relationships.

### **Our Objectives:**

- To promote and support marriage and family life.
- To encourage parents in their role to develop the faith of their children.
- To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service.
- To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
- To help those whose family life has met with adversity.

### **The Mothers' Union**

#### **Prayer**

Loving Lord, we thank you for your love so freely given to us all. We pray for families around the world. Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share your love through the encouragement, strengthening and support of marriage and family life. Empowered by your Spirit, may we be united in prayer and worship and in love and service reach out as your hands across the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## President's Ponderings



Welcome to 2026 even though we will be into our third month of the year by the time you read this. I'm sure all your Branches and Parishes are reinvigorated after the Christmas break. Some of you have spent precious time with your families and some were lucky enough to go on holidays.

Jim and I enjoyed a short cruise to Melbourne to attend the Australian Open tennis and witnessed the incredible fitness of all the players taking part. We were also amazed watching the ball kids, umpires and media people who spent many hours in the heat of the day making our visit so enjoyable.

This started me thinking about my spiritual fitness. Engaging regular prayer is essential for spiritual fitness. It allows us to connect with God, seek guidance, and cultivate a deeper relationship with Him. As stated in 1 Timothy 4:7-8, while physical training has some value, godliness holds promise for both this life and the next. Therefore, developing a routine of prayer and meditation can strengthen one's spiritual muscles.

Being part of a Christian community is vital part of spiritual growth. Fellowship with other believers encourages mutual support and accountability. Participating in group activities, Mothers Union, Bible studies and worship services can enhance one's spiritual journey and provide encouragement. May this year be blessing to you all.

In October Rev'd Nicole and I attended Australian Council meeting at Baulkham Hills. This was a time of fellowship, discussion, reporting, sharing and encouragement for the Diocesan Presidents, Australian Executive and visiting Provincial Members. We also had ZOOM sessions with the Worldwide President, Kathleen Snow, and Mary Sumner House CEO. Rev'd Nicole was there as our spiritual adviser.

Thank you to those who attended the AGM in November where Bishop Peter joined us to announce our theme for 2026 and carried out our election of the new Executive. There are a few new faces on Executive – welcome to Gayleen Bayliss as Newsletter Editor and Jane Conway as Birthday Card Coordinator. We farewelled Lynn Mulley and Beth Weeks and thanked them

for their service to MU Newcastle. We are still looking for a Publications Coordinator. Please speak to Denise Brown or me if you would like to find out more about this position. A big thank you to those continuing on in their current positions.

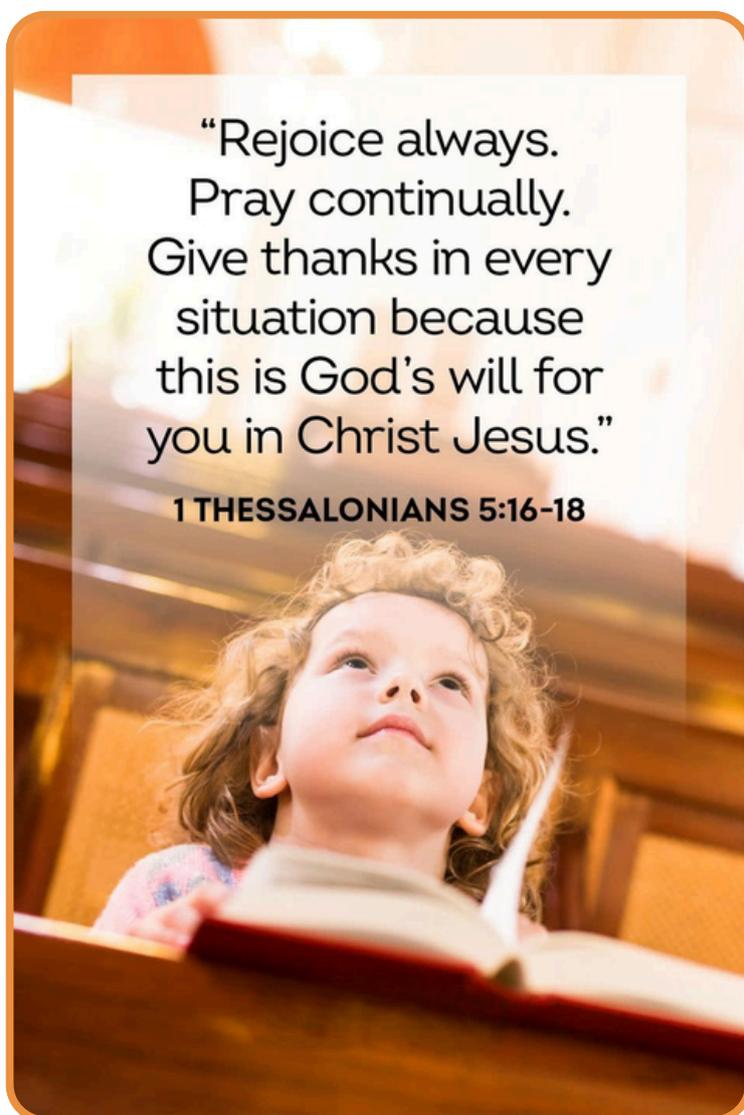
I encourage you all to regularly look at our MU Newcastle Diocesan Website – [munewcastle.org.au](http://munewcastle.org.au) Any information from MU Australia is included on this site, including Mia Mia. Even though you received the printed copy of Mia Mia please look at the current issue as there were pages missing from the printed copy. These missing pages will be included in the next printed copy of Mia Mia.

This year we are celebrating 150 Years of Mothers Union. There is a worldwide gathering being held in Durban, South Africa at the end of September. We are also being encouraged to hold celebrations around our Diocese and beyond. Please look out for any information that comes to you through your Branches. I have recently been advised that the Mothers Union Branch at Toronto will be closing. Most of their members will become members of the Lone Members Branch. We hope that we can acknowledge this closure at one of our Diocesan gatherings.

The Executive has made the decision to hold this year's Lady Day Service at St Marys Maitland. They felt that with the renovations being carried out at the Cathedral and our dwindling numbers attending that it would be the right time to try out holding Lady Day Service at a church where parking and access is a bit easier. Thank you to Maitland Parish for making us feel welcome at their church. Bishop Sonia is our officiating Bishop.

May you all be richly blessed during 2026.

Elizabeth Bissaker  
MU Diocesan President



**“Rejoice always.  
Pray continually.  
Give thanks in every  
situation because  
this is God’s will for  
you in Christ Jesus.”**

**1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18**

## Reflections for the Journey ~ In the presence of God ~



Dear friends in Christ,

Our Lenten journey takes us again into the desert, inviting us to pause and listen for God's voice. I encourage you not to rush through Lent to Easter morning and resurrection joy. Instead, take some time to sit at the feet

of Jesus, with Mary, and listen to him. Give Martha some well-earned rest; the tasks you have to do will still be there for you. Lent is a time to pause and pay attention to what truly matters.

The story of Mary and Martha is a familiar one in the Gospels, and many of us recognise ourselves in Martha. There are meals to prepare, responsibilities to carry, people to care for, and countless small tasks that fill our days. Much of this work is good and necessary. In our families, our churches, and in our communities, these acts of service are often expressions of love. Yet in the middle of all this activity, Jesus gently reminds us that there is also a need to be still and attentive to his presence.

Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen. She placed herself in the posture of a disciple, open and attentive to the words of the one who brings life and hope. Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen "the better part." This is not because service is unimportant, but because our service flows from our relationship with Christ. When we take time to sit with him, to listen, and to pray, we are renewed and strengthened for the work that lies before us.

Just Pray by Shawna Edwards reminds us to:

Bring your doubts, your worries and your faith.

Share your hopes and dreams. He is listening.

There's no time or distance in the way.

The moment you begin, it's just you and him.

He is there when you're searching for the answers.

He is there when you need a little grace.

You're his child and his love will never fail you.

He is with you. He will hear you. He will stay. Just pray.

These words are a beautiful reminder that prayer is not about having the right words or perfect thoughts. Prayer is simply coming before God as we are. We bring our joys and our sorrows, our hopes and our fears, trusting that God listens with compassion and love.

Prayer does not need to be complicated or lengthy. Sometimes it is simply a quiet moment in the middle of a busy day, a whispered prayer while driving, or a moment of stillness. In those times we are reminded that God is always near, ready to listen and to meet us where we are.

Lent gives us the opportunity to renew these habits of prayer and reflection. It invites us to slow our pace and to make space for God in the midst of our ordinary lives. Whether it is through reading Scripture, spending a few moments in silence, or offering a simple prayer, these small acts help us to remain rooted in Christ.

As members of Mothers' Union, prayer has always been the foundation of our life together. Our prayers for families, for our communities, and for those in need are powerful acts of faith and love. Through prayer we support one another and uphold the work of strengthening family life throughout our parishes and communities. Yet prayer also sustains and renews us, reminding us that we do not serve in our own strength but in God's grace.

Across our Diocese and around the world, Mothers' Union members gather faithfully in prayer. Some pray in groups and meetings, others quietly in their homes, but together these prayers form a strong and faithful witness of trust in God. Each prayer offered, no matter how small it may seem, is a reminder that God is present and at work in our lives.

During Lent, may you find moments of stillness. May you hear again the gentle voice of Christ calling you to rest in his presence. And may that time at his feet strengthen and guide you as you continue to serve with compassion, faith, and hope.

Prayerful love and blessings

Reverend Nicole

*Any time, anywhere you have a chance to.  
Seek the one who knows the way.  
Just pray.*

## A Life Around MU

I was first taken to a MU Meeting in my pram in 1938. My mother was a member, and my grandmother was a president of Shepperton-on-Thames UK MU, for many years, between 1930-1950.



Anne in her pram 1938

As a small child my grandmother would take me by train to London, to Mary Sumner House to buy special books. In my school years my mother, a retired teacher, became an official MU Speaker, and travelled around branches speaking. MU had a great influence on our family life, always focused on the Christian life, community, giving and love.

Now I am proud to say I have been a member in Merewether for almost 25 years, and privileged to have served on the Newcastle Executive. I am now proud to say I am able to hand over my secretaryship to a much younger member.

How has MU changed over these 85 years, and what would Mary Sumner think today, 150 years from when she started the movement to support families. Much of the growth in the past 80 years has been in Africa the Pacific Islands and Asian countries, and what tremendous growth there has been. My mother often commented in England how wonderfully attractive the African delegates were at important meetings. MU has been able to influence Improved Health, Education, Child Development, as well as to promote Christian Family living throughout the world. The Organisation now has over 4 million members world wide. Members travel the world to support each other. I was even able to visit Uganda and Kenya in 2007 and stay with a MU member



Anne with Joy, her Ugandan host, 2007

in each country, and also attend their meetings. Today Mary Sumner's families remain the focus of all MU work throughout the world.

Here in the Hunter have we grown and developed? I think not so fast. But we are ever faithful to our Five Objects and our great mission statement to marriage and the family. By our interactions with Sunday Schools, Jenny's Place,

NICU, Disadvantaged Mothers, Mission to Seafarers, Hospital packs, Joy Boxes, supporting our churches, caring for Lone Members; we are ever present in the Community spreading Christian love.

We are searching for new ways to attract new members, and to developing new ideas. We look ahead, after 150 years, trusting that the same love will guide our steps and keep unfolding our story. As I advance to my final years, how will we use our gifts in AMUA in 2026?

Anne Clarke  
Merewether MU



Anne at the Equator 2007

A digital illustration of the Virgin Mary. She is depicted from the chest up, wearing a white robe and a light blue headscarf. Her hands are clasped in prayer, and she has a serene expression, looking upwards and to the left. A soft, golden halo surrounds her head. The background is a light, muted blue.

*Lady Day*

The Annunciation of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary

**St Mary's**  
68 Church Street, Maitland

25 March 2026 | 10am

Followed by  
a catered morning tea

RSVP by 18 March  
to Elizabeth  
[munewcastle@gmail.com](mailto:munewcastle@gmail.com)

## Belmont MU Small Group

On 18th November 2025 Belmont Mothers Union Small Group held their AGM. Mothers Union Diocesan President Elizabeth, was invited to attend to present several awards and admit a new member. Our afternoon began with a Eucharist led by Fr Peter Tinney. After the Eucharist President Elizabeth admitted Helen Carter to our group and Certificates of 42 years of membership were presented by President Elizabeth to Ruth McFarlane, Lesley Byrne, and Hilary Owen.

Nancy Lott was also awarded her 25 years badge. As Chris Penniford was absent on this day, she was later admitted to Belmont M U by Fr Peter and Val Weiss is to receive her certificate of 42 years membership when she returns from New Zealand.

Following this, Nancy read a short report detailing our first successful year of being a small group and the Treasurer Ruth read her annual report. We then moved to the church hall for an enjoyable afternoon tea and a chance for members to chat with our Diocesan President Elizabeth.

Our sincere thanks to President Elizabeth for taking the time in her busy schedule to visit us and present the awards and membership.

Nancy Lott

Belmont MU Small Group

## Starting the New Year

Cardiff MU started their year with a beautiful service prepared and delivered by Rev'd Elizabeth Falckh. The service commenced with "candle lighting" -the central candle signifying "Light of Christ" and the surrounding smaller candles representing the global connection of Mothers Union members around the world. The gospel reading was the Newcastle MU theme for 2026, Luke 10:38-42 and intercessory prayers included prayers for all MU members in 84 countries, the 150th anniversary of MU and for a clear vision for the year ahead. We celebrated Eucharist and joyfully sang as we worshipped.

Lyn Wickham

President

Cardiff MU



## Coffee and Care Volunteer Morning Tea

Coffee and Care at Worimi Children's Court, Broadmeadow is an outreach program of Mothers Union in the Newcastle Diocese. The program commenced in 1975, instigated by Rev'd Wilf Redden, who was Director of Social Work for the Diocese of Newcastle, with part of that responsibility being Chaplain to the Newcastle Children's Court. Currently, Coffee and Care operates on Monday mornings at Worimi, with volunteers from various Mothers Union branches serving on a roster system. Coffee and Care volunteers offer tea, coffee, hot chocolate and biscuits to young people and their support person/s while they are in the waiting area before being called into Court.

A morning tea was held at St Thomas Anglican Church, Cardiff late November, 2025 to thank the dedicated group of Coffee and Care volunteers for their commitment to the program. Being on a roster system, volunteers do not have an opportunity to catch up with one another and the morning tea was a time to meet other Coffee and Care volunteers and to discuss and ask questions about the current running of the program. Two volunteers, Diana Taaffe and Adele Allen, who were retiring from their volunteering role, were thanked for their many years of service by Elizabeth Bissaker, Newcastle MU Diocesan President.

Jennifer Bailey, Identified Aboriginal Caseworker from Newcastle Youth Justice (NYJ) was our special guest. Jen is a familiar face for our volunteers at Worimi. Jen expressed the gratitude of NYJ for the work of the Coffee and Care volunteers.

Coffee and Care volunteers appreciated the opportunity to come together over a relaxing morning tea and being acknowledged for their important role.

Lyn Wickham  
Coffee and Care Coordinator  
MU Diocese Newcastle

From left to right are  
Adele Allen, Diana Taaffe,  
Elizabeth Bissaker, and Lyn Wickham



## Celebrating membership and service in Cessnock

During December we had the joy of welcoming two new members into the Cessnock branch of Mothers Union: Ashlee Dodds and Lyne Rigby. It is always a delight to welcome new members into our Mothers Union family, and this occasion was made even more special by a beautiful connection across generations.



Ashlee's grandmother, Evaline Murray, had been a faithful and much-loved member of the Cessnock Mothers Union for many years. Following her passing, her Mothers Union Service Books were entrusted to Reverend Nicole for safekeeping.



As Ashlee now follows in her grandmother's footsteps by joining Mothers Union, it was a particularly meaningful moment for Reverend Nicole to present Ashlee with her grandmother's service books. It was a simple yet deeply symbolic gesture, one that spoke of faith, service, and the continuing legacy of love within families and within the Mothers Union community.

Ashlee shared, "I am looking forward to continuing her service and honouring her memory."

At our first meeting of this year, we also had the privilege of celebrating a significant milestone in the life of our branch. Billie Mills marked 25 years of faithful membership and service within Mothers Union. We gave thanks for her dedication, commitment, and the quiet faithfulness that has enriched the life of our branch over many years.



Together, these moments remind us that Mothers Union is not only about welcoming new members, but also about honouring the faith, service, and legacy that continue to shape and strengthen our community across generations.

Rhonda Morse  
Cessnock Mothers Union

# Stitching Together a Legacy

It started with stitching a few crosses and grew into a tribute to Newcastle's community.

Brenda Dryden's legacy has been at the centre of Christ Church Cathedral for more than 30 years.

With over 204 hand-stitched kneelers, Brenda has captured both her life and the history of Newcastle through her art.

Each kneeler is made from high density foam with a wooden backing, measured and cut by Brenda's husband, Fred, while she painted and stitched each design.

Every kneeler tells a story, from the series showcasing the development of the Cathedral, to tributes to the armed services in the Warrior's chapel.

"I decided to go to the RSL in Newcastle to see if they would sponsor these kneelers [in the Warrior's chapel]. And that started a whole new chapter because after that, most of these kneelers have been sponsored," Brenda says.

These kneelers act as a highlight reel for our community and include tributes to loved ones and key moments of history.

Brenda was a guide at the Cathedral for many years and says her tours would provide great inspiration.

"I decided to do this series of kneelers to help guide me so I could talk about each church and show them a picture. It tells us a story," she says.

"It means everything to me - I love the Cathedral; I'm very upset about not being able to guide anymore and tell them all the stories I've learnt over the years. I loved it."

Although Brenda is no longer a guide at Christ Church Cathedral, her kneelers will continue to tell our stories for generations to come.

With a kneeler taking roughly two weeks to complete, Brenda has dedicated nearly 70,000 hours to weaving stories into the fabric of the Cathedral.

"I am one of those people that can't leave things alone once I've started them, I have to keep doing them," she says.

"I sometimes sit and look at them myself and think I don't know how I ever did them.



Brenda Dryden's  
204  
needlepoint kneelers  
sit proudly in  
Christ Church  
Cathedral Newcastle



“It’s amazing because you start with a blank canvas; I did all my own drawings and everything. “But it’s been a labour of love really.”

Brenda Dryden



## Encouraging families through faith in action

Dear members of MU Australia

I pray you were able to celebrate Christ’s birth with hope, peace, joy and love and are now ready to begin a new triennium of possibilities for God through MU. At a recent planning meeting for my local branch, I was encouraged by the opportunities that are before us this year.

MU’s participation in the United Nations 16 Days of Activism is an important part of our program each year. I thank Christine and Susan for the reflections and prayers that guide us through the 16 days. I also thank you for all the prayer, acts of worship, events, protests, advocacy and awareness raising that you participated in towards decreasing gender and family violence in our communities.

In February, our new Executive met together in person to evaluate the last triennium, reflect, pray and listen to God’s voice as we plan ways to support you during the next three years.

150 years of Mothers Union - 2026 is a momentous year for MU worldwide as we celebrate across the world. Praise God that Mary Sumner answered God’s call to found Mothers Union in 1876. Prompted by reliving the difficulties of motherhood as she witnessed her daughter’s struggles, Mary Sumner used her networks to begin an organisation to support mothers across all social

classes (an important distinction at that time). When thinking about attracting new members, we could learn from Mary's use of her networks by sharing the great work of MU with our friends and others, inviting them to come to MU events.

Since Mary Sumner's time MU has grown exponentially as the importance of "winning homes for Christ" through care for women, girls and families has been recognised throughout the Anglican Church worldwide. As MU members here in Australia, I commend you for all you do in continuing to carry out that work in our parishes and local communities.

Our MU Framework with God at the centre of our lives and Jesus as our example guiding MU actions, our five objectives give us focus and direction. Listening to your diocesan Presidents as they reported on the MU work being undertaken in each diocese at Australia Council last October, I rejoiced in all that you had done and are doing for God's Kingdom.

My prayer is that you all can participate in some way in a celebration of MU's 150 anniversary, giving thanks to God for the blessings you have received through MU and looking forward to our future with hope. As the prophet Jeremiah (29:11) proclaims, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Let these words inspire your MU branch and diocese in this exciting anniversary year.

May your preparations for and participation in Lady Day in March enable you to reflect on Mary's consideration of the angel's request and her obedience to God's call. May it strengthen you as you live out your faith through your MU work.

I hope you can use the Australian Prayer diary on a regular basis. Please be assured of my prayers for you all.

I look forward to meeting with you and hearing your MU stories when I have occasion to visit your diocese over this next three years.

Yours in Christ

Robin

President MU Australia

# DIARY DATES 2026

## MARCH

6 <sup>th</sup> Friday	1 <sup>st</sup> Council Meeting	9.30am for 10am	New Lambton
25 <sup>th</sup> Wednesday	Lady Day Speaker Rev'd Sarah Dulle	10am service followed by brunch	Maitland

## APRIL

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter Day

## MAY

18<sup>th</sup> Friday Executive Meeting 9.30am for 10am Boolaroo

## JUNE

11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> Diocesan  
Wave of Prayer

19<sup>th</sup> Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> Council Meeting 9.30am for 10am Cardiff

## AUGUST

3<sup>rd</sup> Monday ONO Luncheon 9.30am for 10am New Lambton

4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday ONO Luncheon 9.30am for 10am Wyong

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday Mary Sumner Day

17<sup>th</sup> Monday Executive Meeting 9.30am for 10am Southlakes

## SEPTEMBER

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday Anglican Women 10am for  
Spring Festival morning tea East Maitland

30<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> October 150 years  
World Gathering  
in Durban  
South Africa

## OCTOBER

13<sup>th</sup> Tuesday Quiet Day 9.30am to 1pm Kurri Kurri

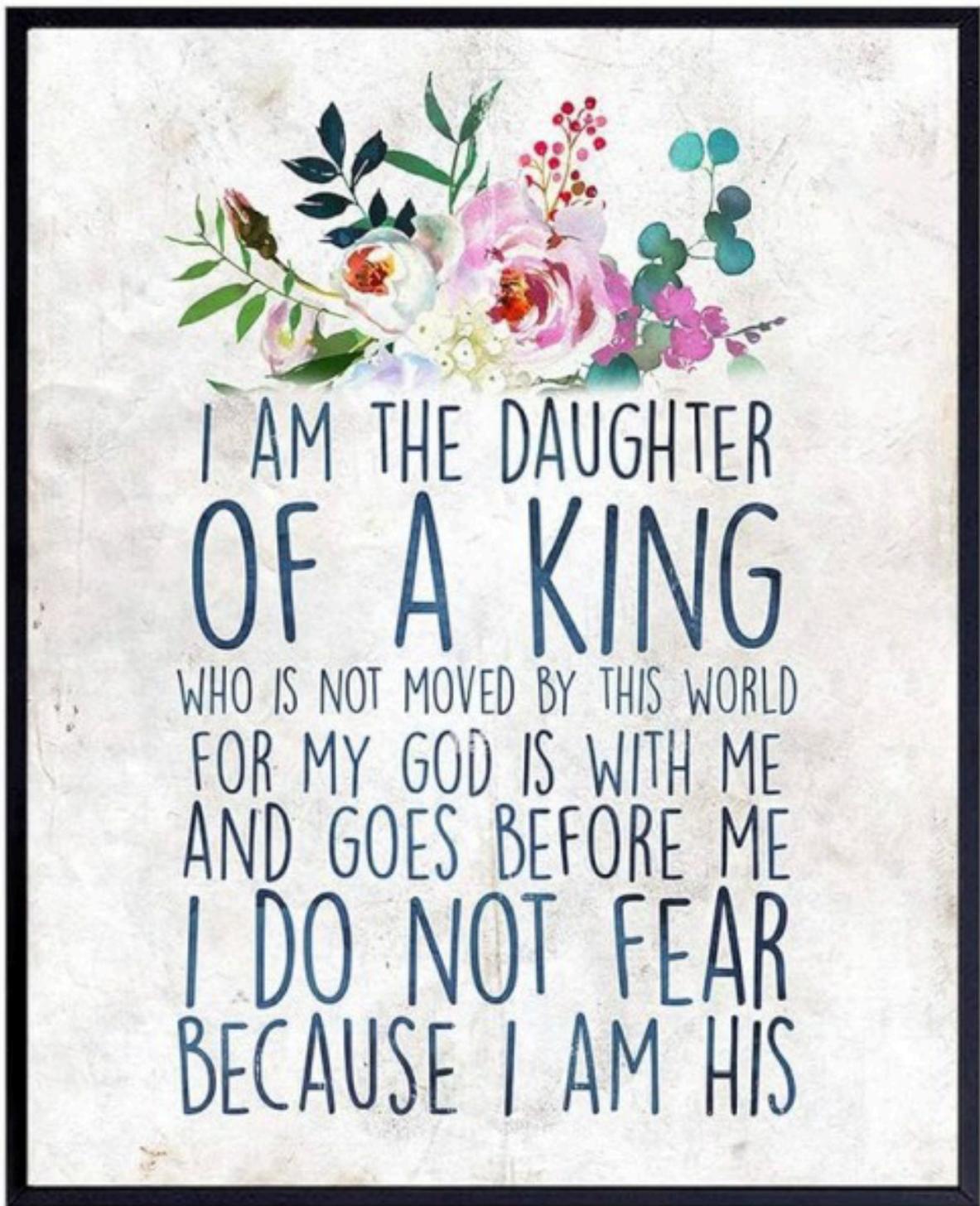
15<sup>th</sup> Thursday Quiet Day 9.30am to 1pm Kotara South

19<sup>th</sup> Monday Executive Meeting 9.30am for 10am Raymond Terrace

## NOVEMBER

20<sup>th</sup> Friday Annual General Meeting 9.30am for 10am Merewether

25<sup>th</sup> November to  
10<sup>th</sup> December 16 Days of  
Activism



**DEADLINE FOR NEXT NEWSLETTER  
19th May 2026**

Please send your Mothers Union news, photos, stories, poems, recipes, etc  
**Email: [stjohnscottage@bigpond.com](mailto:stjohnscottage@bigpond.com)**

Websites:  
[munewcastle.org.au](http://munewcastle.org.au)  
[muaustralia.org.au](http://muaustralia.org.au)