

Sermon 18th October 2026 HC 150th Anniversary of MU

Reading: Matthew 5 v 13 - 16

Let us pray:

All this day, O Lord, let me touch as many lives as possible for thee; and every life I touch, do thou by thy spirit quicken, whether through the word I speak, the prayer I breathe, or the life I live. Amen.

I wonder if you've heard that prayer before? Mary Sumner, the founder of Mothers' Union, wrote it in 1876, the year that she started what has become a women-led, international Christian movement with over 4 million members in 84 countries. Her prayer, her vision, her faith and her call for action are still so relevant today.

Mary's vision was a practical approach to support the women in her parish, many of whom were primarily concerned about getting enough food on the table so their children would not starve. She believed that women could all support one another in motherhood regardless of class, age and status. She also recognised that the work of many women in the home was not fully acknowledged and so she also reached out to men - helping them to be aware of what women did and to recognise the need to show respect and love.

Although not a naturally confident woman, Mary was a woman of great faith. It was through her faith that she overcame her nervousness to speak out to inspire others. She was also firm in her belief that through faith and sharing what was in her heart, God would do the rest. The principles on which her work focused included the recognition that faith is the foundation of family life.

Faith and prayer continue to be at the heart of everything that Mothers' Union members do, whether they live in Britain and Ireland, or in one of our many global countries. Did you know that every day at 12 noon, Mothers' Union members pray, either together or alone, creating a wave of prayer around the world across all the time zones?

This year we celebrate 150 years of Mothers' Union. And what inspired Mary Sumner to create Mothers' Union? Her role as a mother helped to shape her views on the importance of parenting and the challenges that parents faced. But it was as a grandmother that she was first inspired to create a union of mothers in her own parish and then beyond.

Above all else, Mary Sumner wanted to create an organisation for women that brought together women from all backgrounds to build a network that would support all mothers as they brought up their children in the Christian faith.

From its earlier origins, Mothers' Union has been an advocate for change. Just a few examples of campaigning over the years includes:

- In 1945 lobbied over the Family Allowance Act which when passed payments were made directly to mothers as opposed men.
- Advises on the age appropriateness of video games - remains today.
- Joined the Make Poverty History campaign and the Jubilee debt campaign advocating for debt relief in the world's poorest countries
- Led a long-standing campaign for the right to request flexible working arrangements for all parents - this led to the Work and Families Act 2006

The fundamental focus of Mothers' Union has remained steady over the last 150 years - demonstrating faith in action by the transformation of communities worldwide through the nurture of the family in its many forms, working with people of all faiths and none. What has changed is how inclusive Mothers' Union has become - originally open to married mothers only, now anyone who is baptised can become a member - women and men, regardless of whether they are parents.

So, what are the main national programmes of the MU in Britain today?

- Domestic abuse. The campaign is RISE UP - respond, inform, support, empower, unite and pray. Members work closely with local domestic violence refuges, providing essentials such as toiletries, food and clothing for women and children who have been forced to flee their home due to violence.
- Away From it All (AFIA) - running for 60 years, this scheme supports families through the provision of holidays and trips, offering much needed respite to people unable to afford or access a break due to difficult circumstances.
- Prisons work. Research also shows that maintaining contact between people in prison and their families and friends is essential not just for the well-being of prisoners, their resettlement and reduced rates of reoffending following the sentence, but also for the development, wellbeing and social inclusion of children. So much of our work centres on supporting the continued connection between people in prison and their families.

One of our members, Heather, has worked for years as a volunteer at Honily prison visitors centre, helping run a crèche there where fathers who are imprisoned can get the opportunity to meet and play with their children.

- Modern Slavery - working in partnership with the Clewer Initiative, this new programme will raise awareness about Modern Slavery in our local communities and provide access to relevant agencies that help.

Mothers Union is a global organisation. As I said at the beginning there are branches in 84 countries. The work in these countries is wide ranging from Literacy Education, Parenting programmes, teaching financial and business skills. Teaching skills to support families such as farming, sewing, how to use tools. MU practically meets the needs of those affected by gender-based violence and domestic violence. They run Bible Studies and provide spiritual resources such as reflections, prayers and liturgy. They work to progress needed changes with local leaders by acting as advisors. They give so much hope to many individuals and groups. MU work across the globe is vibrant and exciting.

So, what was your image of the Mothers Union before my talk? If you thought we were a group of ladies who mainly sported grey hair, could make a good pot of tea and bake cakes, then I hope I have in some way changed your opinions.

Our group here at Holy Trinity meets every third Wednesday of the month at 2pm in the Conservatory. We support a variety of initiatives including knitting warm blankets for the Saints centre to distribute to those in need, emergency toiletries for those admitted to GEH unexpectedly, comfort packs for those receiving cancer treatment, providing Mothering Sunday posies, hosting coffee mornings, learning about a variety of charities by inviting visiting speakers

And we have fun! Games afternoons, Christmas and Summer parties, craft afternoons....

You are welcome to join us. You don't have to be married, have children or even be a woman!

Mothers Union celebrates 150years of Faith in Action. May we all work together as Christians to be, as our Bible reading says, salt and light to make a tangible difference in our local communities, country and worldwide. So let us finish by saying Mary Sumners prayer that continues to speak to so many today.

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