

Welcome to our Service. We gather to celebrate the life and vision of the founder of Mothers' Union, Mary Sumner, which continues to inspire us as we serve God as a movement in the 21st Century. Mary Sumner was a woman of deep faith, with a heart for prayer and a determination to make a difference in the lives of others. She listened to God and acted upon his call. We too, in our day, want to follow her example as people of faith, by listening and acting upon the call of God.

The plans of the Lord stand firm, the purposes of his heart through all generations. Psalm 33: 11

God of history and eternity, Lord of every generation, we come to worship with glad and thankful hearts.

Let us praise his name together. Amen.

Opening hymn:

Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things hath done, in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mother's arms hath blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
with ever-joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
the Son, and Holy Ghost, supreme in highest heaven,
the one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore;
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart 1636 [translated by Catherine Winkworth 1858]

Opening Prayers:

**God of the past, the present, and the future, we have gathered to celebrate and to rejoice:
to give thanks for the life and vision of our founder, Mary Sumner.**

**As we look to the past with thanksgiving so we affirm our resolve to build upon this heritage
as we seek to serve God in our generation, and establish a stable future for those yet to come. Amen.**

Collect for Mary Sumner Day:

Faithful and loving God,
who called Mary Sumner to strive for the renewal of family life:
give us the gift of your Holy Spirit, that through word, prayer and deed
your family may be strengthened and your people served;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

New Testament Reading:

³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,
⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a
good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love
may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that on the
day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through
Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1: 3-6; 9-11

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Reading:

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

¹⁸As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake — for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people’. ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Matthew 4: 18–22

This is the Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Hymn:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
as Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed Thy hand hath provided –
great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed Thy hand hath provided –
great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed Thy hand hath provided –
great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

Lyrics: Thomas Chisholm [1866–1960] Music: William M Runyan [1870–1957]

Homily:

The notes about Mary Sumner’s life could be helpful as basis for this – ‘The story of Mary Sumner’



It all started when Mary, married to George, Rector of the Parish of Old Alresford, was passionate about transforming the home–lives of Parish families, by helping the women to support one another in raising their children.

Her husband was very supportive: ‘*just share your heart – God will do the rest*’.

She was so nervous at the first meeting of the parish women, that she refused to speak, and asked George to take her place. In those days, it was very unusual for a woman to be a public speaker. However, George encouraged her to speak from the heart and it went so well that she found the courage to speak at future meetings. Her talks were inspired by her faith – it was practical and down to earth – ‘*Remember, Ladies, to be yourselves what you would have your children be*’.

After groups with women became well established, she was asked to speak to the men of the Parish. Again, she was apprehensive, but agreed, and helped them to be more aware of what their wives did for them, to show more respect and love.

The meetings grew, and included women – old and young, rich and poor. Others heard about her work, and started groups in their own areas.

In 1876, she founded ‘the Union of Mothers’ – with a membership card and promise: ‘to be given up, body and soul, to Jesus Christ in Holy Baptism, and that your duty is to train your children for his service’.

In 1885, at a time when it was still unheard of for women to speak to large audiences, Mary Sumner was invited by the Presiding Bishop to speak to a packed church congress session for women in Portsmouth. He anointed her with the authority to speak – he felt that he had no authority to speak to a group of women whose prime concern was to get enough food on the table so that the children would not starve. She overcame her nerves again. ‘Together, by the Grace of God we can calm each other when we are afraid; strengthen one another when we are weak; and work together to raise our children to the glory of God. Unity is strength’.

The movement grew further, increasingly with the support of bishops, internationally as well as in England. Some key principles were developed, including:

- ✚ that the prosperity of a nation springs from the family life in its homes
- ✚ that family life is the greatest institution in the world for the formation of the character of children
- ✚ that faith is the foundation of family life

That the tone of family life depends upon the married life of the parents – and ultimately, that example is stronger than precept.

As the movement continued to grow, Mary Sumner asked herself what its purpose really was, and what it should strive for. She reflected: ‘A true home should be a light-house, shedding its quiet beams far and wide’ – her dream was for every home to be filled with the light and love of Jesus, and for the movement to unite many hearts in many lands, nurturing healthy environments for little children.

And she was a living example of what she preached. From 1900 onwards, she and the members started to advocate on issues of key importance to families and children – she campaigned to stop children collecting alcohol from public houses for their families, and for the age of marriage for girls to be raised from 12 to 16. She was not afraid to speak up on difficult issues, despite resistance from members of the establishment.

She was also not afraid to act outside the social norms, to do what she believed to be right. At a time when unmarried girls with children were condemned and cast out, she cared for and protected her niece and her illegitimate son.

When she died in August 1921, 4,000 women attended her funeral, which was a service of Thanksgiving. The last memory was one of her, on her feet in the sunlight, praising God.

She could not have conceived how the seeds which she planted would grow into a movement 4 million strong today, of members in 83 countries putting their faith into action to nurture healthy relationships in families and communities and to fight for social justice.



Mary Sumner’s Personal Prayer

Written by her in 1876 and then prayed by her every day for the rest of her life.

The reading of the prayer may be accompanied by the presenting of symbols portraying the heritage and current work of Mothers’ Union. If there is the technology available, you may like to do this as a PowerPoint presentation. The prayer with the additional text could be read by two people, pausing for the offerings to be made / images to be shown. At the end, the congregation may be invited to join in with the collective reading of the prayer.

All this day, O Lord, let me touch as many lives as possible for thee

*Lord, we thank you for the lives touched throughout the years
and throughout the world by the members of Mothers’ Union
and every life I touch do thou by thy spirit quicken*

We pray that those whom we serve will experience the reality of your love through our prayers, words and actions.

Whether through the word I speak, the prayer I breathe or the life I live. Amen.

**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.**

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

**Loving Lord, we give thanks for the far-reaching vision of our founder, Mary Sumner.
We look back with gratitude for her witness,
and for all that has been achieved thus far in the name of Mothers' Union worldwide.**

We give thanks for our development and project work.
We pray for all initiatives, large and small, to transform families and communities.

We give thanks for our influence with governments.
We pray that our campaigns for social justice will bring lasting change throughout the world.

We give thanks for our members across the globe.
We pray that our membership will flourish and grow as stories of our work and achievements are heard.

**As we look forward with faith for all that is to come help us to build a future together
which will enable our work to flourish; through far-reaching vision and commitment to your will. Amen.**

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.**

Closing Hymn:

Hope of our calling: hope through courage won; by those who dared to share all Christ had done.
Saints of today, Christ's banner now unfurled, we bring his gospel to a waiting world.

Hope of our calling: hope with strength empowered, inspired by all that we have seen and heard;
this call is ours, for we are chosen too, to live for God in all we say and do.

Hope of our calling: hope with grace outpoured, from death's despair the gift of life restored;
our call to serve, to wash each others' feet, to bring Christ's healing touch to all we meet.

Hope of our calling: hope by faith made bold; to sow God's righteousness throughout the world;
bring peace from conflict, fruitfulness from weeds, the kingdom's harvest from the kingdom's seeds.

Hope of our calling: Spirit-filled, unbound, old joys remembered and new purpose found,
our call refreshed by sacrament and word, we go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Lyrics: A Barrett © 2005 Tune: 'Woodlands' W Greatorex [1877-1949]

Final Blessing:

All praise be to God, by whose power one woman's vision became reality through the founding of Mothers' Union.
All praise be to God who has led us thus far and whose Spirit inspires for what lies ahead.
The blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

United in love across the world, go in peace to serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Amen.