



Thursday Prayer 2022

"Transformation - Now!"

Thursday Prayer is held in one of the chapels at Ely Cathedral (usually St Dunstan's) monthly, on the third Thursday unless otherwise stated.

Also at Little St Mary's Church, Trumpington St, Cambridge on 4th Thursday of each month, Both from 10.30-11.00am.

They are also held at All Saint's Church, St Ives on 4th Thurs at 2.30-3pm.

See dates on inside front cover.

Friends and family members are very welcome to attend as well.

Each month we use a common theme and pray for a special concern. We also reflect upon our own membership of the Mothers' Union. If you are unable to attend, please use these prayers in your own group or home.

Thursday Prayer is now available on Zoom.

Please see monthly MU Newsletter for details.

Dates for Thursday Prayer 2022

Cathedral & Zoom Lt St Mary's & St Ives

January	20	27
February	*17 (Zoom only)	24
March	17	24
April	*7	28
May	19	26
June	*9	23
July	21	28
August	18	25
September	15	22
October	20	27
November	*24	24
December	15	15

- **Please note following changes: Feb is Zoom only as Cathedral is closed for filming all month. April is moved to 1st Thurs owing to Easter. June is moved to 2nd Thurs to avoid Corpus Christi. Nov is on 24th because of Christmas Craft Fair.**

Suggested Guide for Thursday Prayer

Introductory prayers

- *opening prayer;*
- *prayers for members and events in the Diocese;*
- *prayers for the theme and focus of the month;*

Bible reading and meditation

- *Bible reading;*
- *Meditation spoken upon the theme/focus or Bible reading either using own words or a chosen passage;*

Further prayer

- *an opportunity to offer personal concerns to God, either aloud or in silence;*
- *the Lord's Prayer;*
- *the Mothers' Union Prayer;*
- *the Thursday Prayer;*
- *the Grace;*

Hymn

- *a hymn or piece of music of the leader's choice may be used where it is considered appropriate. The Cathedral hymn book is the New English Hymnal.*

Our intercessions

In our intercessions we are asked to pray for:

- The worldwide work of the Mothers' Union;
- Sheran Harper (from Guyana) our Worldwide President;
- The Chief Executive, Beverley Jullien;
- The Task Group Leaders in Faith in Action, Praying our Faith, Finance & Administration and Communications;
- All who work in Mary Sumner House;
- Our province of Canterbury and Kathryn Anderson, our Provincial President.
- Our Worldwide Links:
Lusaka in Zambia
Shyogwe in Rwanda
Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria
Karimnager in India
Plus Diocese to Diocese with Kigali & Vellore.

The monthly prayers included in this booklet are mostly taken from the new MU books of prayers, "Dear God", "Praying in Every Season", and the Pocket Prayers series – "Faith in Action", "United in Fellowship" and "Vision and Mission".



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

The Thursday Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

January: Transformation – Now!

Reading: Psalm 19:1-4a

Prayer: Gracious God, make known to us your plans for peace and wellbeing; to be lasting Transformation. Lord, we pray that lives will be transformed into ones of self-respect and sufficiency through effective use of your resources. We pray that families will be transformed into strong and loving households as they explore your ways for relationship. We pray that communities will be transformed into ones of resilience and prosperity through trust and cooperation.

Gracious God, guide us in your plans for peace and wellbeing; to transform lives for good. Amen.

February: God's greatest gift

Reading: John 3:16-end

Prayer: Jesus Christ, Light of the world, we walk in the light of your presence that our lives may brightly reflect your love.

We walk in the light of your presence, we journey with you by our side.

We walk in the company of your people, their fellowship encourages us.

We walk towards the light of eternity, the wonders of heaven spur us on.

Jesus Christ, Light of the world, as we walk through life inspire us to shine your light in the most effective way, that it would reach to those in greatest need. Amen.

March: Jesus blesses the children

Reading: Mark 10:13-16

Prayer: Lord, we pray for the Away From It All holidays and thank you for the blessing they are to so many families who are struggling and carry heavy loads.

We pray for volunteers involved in these holidays. May your strength sustain them in all their works; where problems arise may solutions be found.

Loving Lord, who gives us rest, lift their burdens and hear our prayers. We pray for families who enjoy these holidays; may they be refreshed in body, mind and soul; may the benefits they gain be rich and healing. Loving Lord, who gives us rest, lift their burdens and hear our prayers. Amen.

April: The presence of Jesus Christ is transforming!

Reading: John 20:11-18

Prayer: Christ is risen. Alleluia!

Lord Jesus Christ, in dying you conquered death and rose again in glory. Through your great love and abiding grace, we will one day be with you in your heavenly kingdom. Lord, we pray that we may make each day of our earthly life worthy of your great sacrifice on the cross. Thank you that we can find sanctuary in your love because you have chosen to love us just as we are, with all our faults and failings and that, if we truly repent, you will forgive our sins. Amen.

May: The True Vine

Reading: John 15:1-5

Prayer: God of glory, draw us together as people of vision; may vision inspire us to worship and spur us to action.

Thank you for those who urge us on to acts of love and good works; for those who encourage us and share in making vision reality.

Unite us in our shared vision of a world where your love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships. God of glory, move us forward as people of vision; may vision inspire us to worship and spur us into action. Amen.

June: The Bread of Life

Reading: John 6:32-35

Prayer:

Dear Lord, You are the wine, you are the bread,
You are the sacrifice, the pierced head,
Filled with the Spirit, we kneel to serve,
We are the sinew, the hands, the nerve.
You are the Potter, we are the clay.
You are the living water, the light of day.
You are the pathway, the truth, the life –
We are the body. You are the Christ.
Amen.

July: God's sign to Noah

Reading: Genesis 9:12-17

Prayer:

Generous God, we affirm your power to bless all cultures and transform communities.

Abundant God, you have provided all the resources to transform communities and create a sustainable future.

Compassionate God, enable your people to see your provision that their sense of worth and quality of life may flourish.

Gracious God, transform the mindsets of the vulnerable from powerless dependency to freedom of self sufficiency.

Gracious God, we are blessed by your constant provision. Help us to use your resources well and enable others to do the same.

Amen.

August: Celebrating Mary Sumner**Reading: Matthew 6:5-15**

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, reveal who you are.
Set the world right; do what's best – as above so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
You're in charge! You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes. Amen.

September: The Gift of the Holy Spirit**Reading: Romans 5:1-5**

Prayer: Loving Lord, we give thanks that you have prepared our way and strengthen us at every stage with hope and resolve.
God of unchanging power, your Holy Spirit enables us to proclaim your love in challenging times and places.
Give to the Mothers Union steadfast and fresh understanding and a clear vision, that together, we may respond to the call to be your disciples and so rejoice in the blessings of your kingdom.
We ask this in the name of Him who gave His life that ours might flourish, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

October: Peace**Reading: John 20:19-23**

Prayer: Loving, heavenly Father, we thank you for a shared vision of a peaceful world where your love is shown through flourishing relationships.
As we are united across the world may vision for peace inspire us to worship and spur us to action.
As we are united in prayer for peace, may God encourage us in heart and unite us in love. Amen.

November: Christ's Disciples are sent out into the world.**Reading: Luke 9:1-6****Prayer:**

Lord, let us serve your world with love as we mirror the example of Christ:
Help us to love unconditionally.
To refrain from needless expectations; to be generous in acceptance; to be selfless in support, as Christ has loved and forgiven us.
Gracious Lord, show us the way to serve one another with love.
May we place the needs of our neighbours above our own as we mirror the example of Christ.
Amen.

December: Looking forward with Hope**Reading: Isaiah 11:1&2, 6-9****Prayer:**

Loving God, draw us on the journey to the places of holiness, the places of peace, the places of fellowship, the places of encounter, the places of beauty, the places where faith has been lived, your love made known, your hope held out in the past, for the present, into your future.
Amen.

We pray that through the power of Christ and in love and unity with each other we may be enabled to:

- support, promote and strengthen marriage;
- help families to explore and enjoy faith together;
- build a Christian community that is grounded in faith and love;
- support all forms of family life;
- help those facing adversity.

“How lavish is our God! We celebrate his generosity to us with thankful hearts”.

The Thursday Prayer is prepared and published by the Praying our Faith Team of Ely Diocese Mothers’ Union. Please feel free to photocopy as many booklets as you need for your branch/ group’s use.



Mothers’ UNION
 Christian care for families
 Diocese of Ely

Registered Charity No. 251394

Thursday Prayer

20th January at 10.30am at Ely Cathedral and on Zoom
Hazel Williams speaking on Transformation Now

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpacGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09>

Meeting ID: 838 4780 9128

Passcode: 338053

TRANSFORMATION NOW

As we begin this New Year and New Triennium let us start with a prayer:

ALL **Gracious God, we put our trust in you.**

Give us open hearts and minds to discern your perfect direction for our Mothers' Union:

Affirm us in your love, that we may be bold to seek your face.

Strengthen us with resolve, to embrace new ways with confidence.

Unite us in heart and mind, that we may move forward with gladness.

Inspire us in our faith that all things are possible with God.

Transform us into a people empowered by the Spirit,

Overflowing with hope, to effectively serve our communities.

Amen.

In the Mothers' Union Prayer Diary for 2022 each month of prayer has a different over-arching topic. For January it is Transformation, and as this week is the beginning of Week of Prayer for Christian Unity the week's topic is Transforming the Church. Today's prayer is:

We give thanks to God for the richness that we have in our differing Christian traditions. We pray to be open to embrace one another's expressions of faith; ready to experience God in new ways together.

Reading Psalm 19 1-4b A Psalm of David - the message from the heavens.

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

²*Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.*

³*They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.*

⁴*Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.*

When David wrote this Psalm with its first line of '*The heavens declare the glory of God*' he clearly saw the glory of God in the blue skies of day, with sun and clouds as well as the night sky with the moon, stars and galaxies. The reading links directly in this second week after Epiphany to the journey of the Wise Men who followed a star.

Christine Holt will present a reflection she has written about this time.

Looking back over the festive period, I hope many of you were able to spend time with relatives and /or friends over Christmas. For those who are blessed with small visitors, it is always a joy to see the glow in the little ones' faces at this time of year.

Now, I'd like to take you back to the first week of January, to the Epiphany and how the three wise men, sometimes referred to as Kings, or Magi, followed the star to where the Christ Child lay. We are told in *Matthew 2* that they are from the East and, later, Countries such as Persia, India and Arabia have been suggested as to where in the East each may have travelled from.

As we look further into their story, we find that they are not Jewish. They are, in fact Gentiles - and God has called them. Most of us do not have Jewish ancestry and so, we can rejoice, for in the call of these Magi is foreshadowed our call. Before this moment in the Christmas story, only Jews have made their way to Bethlehem. The introduction of the Gentiles allows us to see that the gospel is not only for Jews, but for the whole world.

When the wise men reach Jerusalem, they inquire of the reigning King, as to where the child is, but they find that Herod had not expected a royal birth and when Jewish scribes are called and religious scriptures confirm His existence there is no great excitement exhibited. If this child is not related to the Royal House and its religious significance has not roused interest, then what should they do? At this point perhaps the wise men were a little unsure and, maybe, considered turning back, having perhaps made a mistake. But, the Star they have been following remains in the sky and they decide not to give up but to go on in search of this king.

Their constancy brings them to where the star rests above where the child is and overwhelmed with joy they go in. Their conversion is immediate as it is with all who meet Jesus with an open heart and, although Herod had wanted them to return to him to give the whereabouts of the Christ Child: having been warned in a dream not to do so, they take another route.

Inside, where the Christ Child is, with great faith they prostrate themselves before Him and worship Him. They are no longer paying homage to an earthly king; they have faith and this is manifested in religious worship. But faith does not come alone *James 2: 14-17* talks of the works that real faith produces. So, do we have signs of anything more than faith? They are moved to present gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. These are expensive gifts and they also have special meaning.

In giving the gift of **Gold** the wise men understand this represents everything they possess and they promise to use their wealth only as God wishes.

Frankincense is the gift of worship and the wise men promise to pray to and worship God all the days of their lives.

Myrrh, considered to be a burial ointment, speaks of Christ's death and the wise men join in this sentiment as they are offering their own lives to be used by God for His purposes: in that He must increase, but I (they) must decrease. *John 3:30*.

So, the wise men have shown they have true faith; when God called, they remained constant, confessed him to be Lord in their worship of Him and accepted the cost of their new discipleship in their gifts. They have turned around. They have taken a different route. They now walk God's way. They have listened and obeyed. In fact through careful stages, God has transformed them. They can no longer go back to their old gods and previous pathways. They must go on a new road, the road to salvation.

As we leave them, their story goes on - out to all mankind. But, what of our transformation? As with the wise men, God, over time, brings us to a greater understanding of His ways and a knowledge of what He needs from us. He carefully transforms us so that we too, can offer the gifts of obedience, worship and that of 'stepping back' in order that He can live in us.

Let us sing together our Hymn for today's service:

THROUGH ALL THE CHANGING SCENES OF LIFE

1 Through all the changing scenes of life,
in trouble and in joy,
the praises of my God shall still
my heart and tongue employ.

2 O magnify the Lord with me,
with me exalt his name;
when in distress, to him I called
he to my rescue came.

3 The hosts of God encamp around
the dwellings of the just;
his saving help he gives to all
who in his mercy trust.

4 O taste his goodness, prove his love;
experience will decide
how blessed they are, and only they,
who in his truth confide.

5 Fear him, you saints, and you will then
have nothing else to fear;
his service shall be your delight,
your needs shall be his care.

6 To Father, Son and Spirit, praise!
To God whom we adore
be worship, glory, power and love,
both now and evermore!

Let us all pray together for our worldwide organisation.

ALL: Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our intercessions. We pray for:

- The worldwide work of the Mothers' Union;
 - Sheran Harper our Worldwide President;
 - Our Chief Executive, Bev Jullien; and all who work in Mary Sumner House;
 - Our Diocesan President Hazel Williams and Trustees;
- the Task Group Leaders in: Faith in Action, Praying our Faith,
Finance & Administration, and Communications;
- Our province of Canterbury and Kathryn Anderson, our Provincial President.
 - Our Worldwide Links: Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogwe in Rwanda; Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria; Karimnager in India; Plus Diocesan Links with Kigali & Vellore

In our wave of prayer for today we pray for

- St Mark the Evangelist in South Africa;
- Butare in Rwanda;
- Okigwe-South in Nigeria;
- Gambia;
- British Columbia in Canada and
- Rajasthan in India

We also pray for:

- Our local parishes, our families, and our friends, and give thanks for our many blessings.
- Anyone known to us who is in need or unwell.
- Relief from the effects of the coronavirus.
- The many countries around the world where there are troubles and people are suffering.

Transformation

So, what can we do? Many members have been with the Mothers' Union for a very long time. Faithful service, hard work, fellowship, prayer and supporting those in need as well as helping within our parishes should be enough surely. But we are getting older and like everything else life is changing. Sometimes the changes sadden me such as having fewer children on a Sunday morning which is when I choose to worship. This means I am not always around for Messy Church when families (adults and children) come together and enjoy time in church with activities, stories, singing and food (Covid permitting). A friend of mine, of my age, said he hated church when he was young because they went twice on a Sunday, no Sunday school and no toys and sermons he could not understand. He could tell you in detail what was carved on the church roof but nothing else about what happened except it was boring. I would prefer messy church just as today's children do.

That only happens of course if parents have an interest, and many have no church background of their own. However, many younger people and parents are interested in what is happening in our world today. They may not want to come to meetings or but they do want to know what is going on. MU is in a perfect position for that but only if we say something. We have a worldwide organisation that does so many things. The membership across the world is rising among all age groups, except in Britain. All the things that we benefited from 30 or 40 years ago are still needed very much in Africa, India, Latin America but Britain and Ireland members have been the leaders and we are still needed in this country as well as abroad. The Activism against Gender Violence is probably worse now than it was in the past, it is certainly not going away. Poverty is still a big issue and food banks are an area where some members are able to help. Support for parents with young children can make such a difference in a country where grandparents are often many miles away. Writing in your church or community magazine about what we do will raise awareness and possibly transform the way others see us.

If you are thinking that helping with these things is difficult, maybe because you are in poor health, the foundation of our movement is prayer and that is something we can all do. Spread the word about why you are a member and what we do and that is the beginning of transformation now.

Let us join together in the Mothers' Union prayer we know so well.

All **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

The Grace

Thursday Prayer 17th February at 10.30am on Zoom only

Philip Baker speaking on God's greatest gift

Zoom connecting details and link: Meeting ID: 838 4780 9128

Passcode: 338053

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpaGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09>

Introductory prayers:

Jesus Christ, light of the world, we walk in the light of your presence that our lives may brightly reflect your love.

We walk in the light of your presence, we journey with you by our side.

We walk in the company of your people, their fellowship encourages us.

We walk towards the light of eternity, the wonders of heaven spur us on.

Jesus Christ, Light of the world, as we walk through life inspire us to shine your light in the most effective way, that it would reach those in greatest need. Amen

We pray for members and events in the diocese: For Whitworth House, which has received funding for the next three years; for Fenland Refuge, whom we were able to support recently; for the Sick Children's Trust at Rosie Hospital; and for Revd. Paula Spalding, as she starts her term as Chaplain to the Ely Mothers' Union.

The theme for this service is "God's greatest gift". From the Mothers' Union Prayer Diary, the theme of the week is "Transforming Lives" and the prayers are from Burundi. For today the prayer is: Through Mothers' Union, we thank you God, because the most sustainable change starts at home. Parents in general and mothers in particular play a key role in their families. New skills and attitudes impact their family life and lay a good foundation for children, ensuring sustainable change.

Reading: John 3:16-end (NIV)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptised. Now John also was baptising at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptised. (This was before John was put in prison.) An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan – the one you testified about – well, he was baptising, and everyone is going to him.

To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given to him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, "I am not the Christ but I am sent ahead of him." The bride belongs to the bridegroom, The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Meditation:

Mark 9:23, referring to the rescue of a boy from a demon that had taken control of him by Jesus, and which no-one else could remove, reports Jesus as saying "Everything is possible for him who believes." Of course, he means belief in God. Writing in the Times after Rafael Nadal's victory at the Australian Tennis Open, correspondent Matthew Syed wrote that Scottish philosopher David Hume, famously argued that the rational man proportions his belief to the evidence. Under enlightenment philosophy we should sift, assess, and only then determine our empirical conception of the world. He propositions that Nadal coming back from 2 sets down is witness to Hume's dictum in that he believed not only that he *could* win but he *would* win. Most of us call that "confidence" (or "stubbornness") and although it frequently draws on biblical references to add authenticity, it is a complete, but commonly made, misunderstanding of the biblical passages. Mark is talking about something else altogether. Not just something difficult for humans to achieve, but actually impossible! Yet, with God, it can be done. In Matthew 9:26, comparing the difficulty for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God as like trying to pass a camel through the eye of a needle, he writes "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

And now we arrive at the point – it is not belief in ourselves that makes things possible, but belief in God. As we heard in the passage from John 3 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". So, what is God's Greatest Gift, the theme of this talk? God has given us the land we live in, the food and water we need to survive and, importantly, the wisdom to see what is going on and what matters. But none of these are his "Greatest Gift". By our own efforts alone we are still nothing; we will live out our lives and then cease to exist. But with belief in God we can look forward to eternal life – is that the Greatest Gift? Nearly, but not quite! How do we believe? We believe through God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ; as it is put in John 3 "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him". And that is God's Greatest Gift, his one and only Son, because he is our route to belief and, in turn, that is our route to the achievement of the humanly impossible – eternal life!

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

Hymn: Jesus is Lord Mission Praise 367 *Led by Mike Banyard*

**Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,
for by His power each tree and flower was planned and made.
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it;
sun, moon and stars in heaven cry: Jesus is Lord!
Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!
*Praise Him with "Hallelujahs", for Jesus is Lord!***

**Jesus is Lord! Yet from His throne eternal
in flesh He came to die in pain on Calvary's tree.
Jesus is Lord! From Him all life proceeding,
yet gave His life a ransom thus setting us free.
Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!
*Praise Him with "Hallelujahs", for Jesus is Lord!***

**Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
from death He rose and all His foes shall own His name.
Jesus is Lord! God sends His Holy Spirit
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.
Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!
*Praise Him with "Hallelujahs", for Jesus is Lord!***

Our Intercessions:

We pray for:

The worldwide work of the Mothers' Union;

Our Worldwide President, Sharon Harper;

The Chief Executive, Bev Jullien, and all who work at Mary Sumner House supporting members;

Our Diocesan President, Hazel Williams, and our Trustees and Task Group Leaders;

Our Provincial President, Kathryn Anderson and all members in the Province of Canterbury

Our Worldwide Links: Lusaka in Zambia, Shyogwe in Rwanda, Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria, Karimnager in India;

The Diocese Links: Kigali and Vellore.

In our Wave of Prayer today, we pray for: Bentiu in South Sudan; Bunyoro Kitara in Uganda; Okigwe-North & Omu-Aran in Nigeria; Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh in All Ireland and Krishna-Godavari in India.

And we also pray for:

Our own parishes in the Ely Diocese, our families, and our friends

Anyone known to us who is unwell or in need

Those suffering directly or indirectly from the pandemic

The many countries around the world experiencing conflict, oppression, natural disasters and anywhere where people live in fear or poverty.

We end with The Mothers' Union Thursday Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers, we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Ely Cathedral Prayers 17th March 2022

The zoom link is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpaeGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09>

ID. 838 4780 9128 Passcode 338053

Good morning and welcome to our prayer time today, on this, the 17th day of Lent.

Let us say together:

**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 that I live.
Amen.** (Mary Sumner Prayer)

Reading: Mark 10 v 13 - 16. (NIV)

'People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child, will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, and blessed them.'

In this passage the disciples thought Jesus should be spending more time with more important people to avoid criticism but we know Jesus has time for everyone especially these little children.

Meditation: for this I have drawn on John Pritchard's idea for a short mediation. (John Pritchard was an Archdeacon of Canterbury.)

It is called Palms up, Palms down.

We are all witnessing such atrocities in the world at the moment and with it comes the disbelief that in this day and age we are watching the destruction of peoples lives and cities and wondering when and where it will all stop. These awful problems are crowding into our own daily worries and fears.

Please make sure you are sitting comfortably, and close your eyes and put your hands, palms upwards, on your laps. So I want you to hold all those problems you are experiencing at the moment, in your hands. Your own personal worries, the worries of the pandemic still rife, and the worries of the world. Quite a lot.

You can feel the weight of your problems and those of the world. Recognise that they are part of you at this moment and that you've brought them with you. (Pause)

Now shortly, I'm going to ask you to turn your hands over so that your palms are facing down and as you do so feel the weight shifting and falling away and all those problems and issues

are falling into the outstretched arms of God, who, as we know, is always there to catch everything that needs to be caught. Feel yourself release to him all those things that you don't need to keep hold of. Feel the freedom, and the lightness, as the worries fall away.

Please turn over your hands. (Pause.....)

I would like you to turn your hands over again this time with the palms facing upwards. Now your hands are open, but empty, no longer carrying the weights and the burdens they were before; they are ready to receive all the good things that God has to give you. God is always wanting to give us far more than we can imagine. Be open to receive whatever that is today, for yourself or for others. Be open (Pause.....)

Let us stand to sing our hymn -

**Be thou my guardian and my guide,
and hear me when I call;
let not my slippery footsteps slide,
and hold me lest I fall.**

**The world, the flesh, and Satan dwell
around the path I tread;
O save me from the snares of hell,
thou quickener of the dead.**

**And if I tempted am to sin,
and outward things are strong,
do thou, O Lord, keep watch within,
and save my soul from wrong.**

**Still let me ever watch and pray,
and feel that I am frail;
that if the tempter cross my way,
yet he may not prevail.**

((Text: Isaac Williams (1802 - 1865))

Music: Melody by Isaac Smith (1734 - 1805))

Our Intercessions - We pray for:

The worldwide work of the Mothers Union and our Worldwide President Sharon Harper. The Chief Executive, Bev Jullien and for all those who work at Mary Sumner House, supporting members.

Our Provincial President, Kathryn Anderson and all members of the Canterbury Province.

Our worldwide links: Lusaka in Zambia, Shyogwe in Rwanda, Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria and Karimnager in India, our Diocesan Links of Kigali and Vellore.

We pray for our whole Diocese, for our Diocesan President, Hazel, for those on the Trustee Board and those leading branches, those working in the Task groups, our deaneries, our chaplains and our members. We pray for events being held in the parishes.

For the Away From It All Holidays, which benefit families in so many different ways. We give thanks for all the fundraising done on their behalf.

We pray for our members worldwide and especially today we are asked to remember Kajo-Keji in South Sudan; Tarime in Tanzania;

Dutse and Akoko-Edo in Nigeria and for all those members in Canterbury, here in England.

(Mothers' Union 2022 Prayer Diary for this day)

Our heavenly Father, mighty Warrior! We pray for expectant mothers. Protect the babies in their wombs, give them strength to push to the last day. We pray that they will give birth to their babies like the Hebrew women!

We pray for all mothers here and around the world.

We pray for young mothers overawed by the task, and by the depth of their feelings;

For older mothers thrilled beyond measure that at last a child has come; for all mothers who are single, scared and poor; for the mothers who have escaped from Ukraine and find themselves alone.

We pray for the world and all in conflict and especially Ukraine. We pray for the Russian people - for the mothers who have lost their sons -

We say together 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 across the world in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The Mothers' Union Thursday prayer:

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers, we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

To bring our prayers full circle please place your hands palm up. Now we will ask God to give us back all those things which we need to deal with, and, which he has kept safe, some things you may find that you don't need to take back, and some things may come back but have been subtly changed - for God has been holding them. You are now ready to take your responsibilities, but always knowing that God shares them with you, but even more that he holds you in the palm of his hands.....

God go with us on our journey of Faith -revive us when we grow weary, direct us when we go astray, inspire us when we lose heart, reprove us when we turn back.

Keep us travelling ever onwards, a pilgrim people, looking to Jesus Christ who has run the race before us, and who waits to welcome us home. **Amen.**

((Nick Fawcett, (Prayers for all Seasons; 1998)).

Thursday Prayer 7th April 2022 10.30 Ely Cathedral and Zoom

Canon Stuart Mitchell 'The presence of Jesus is transforming'

Zoom connecting details and link: Meeting ID: 838 4780 9128

Passcode: 338053

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpaGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09>

Introductory prayers:

LORD Jesus Christ, in dying you conquered death and rose again in glory. Through your great love and abiding grace, we will one day be with you in your heavenly kingdom. Lord, we pray that we may make each day of our earthly life and worthy of your great sacrifice on the cross. Thank you that we can find sanctuary in your love because you have chosen to love us just as we are, with all our faults and failings and that, if we truly repent, you will forgive our sins. Amen

We offer our prayers for all members in the diocese and the ongoing work supporting the aims of the Mothers' Union

The Mothers' Union Thursday Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers, we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Our walk through the season of Lent is ending and we may have been reminded, during that time, of our own difficulties and struggles. Sometimes the way seems dark. Sometimes we are filled with grief and pain. We ask, will our circumstances ever change? Show us the way, O Lord. *(MU prayer diary 7 April)*

As we seek God's help and guidance through these spiritual challenges, we pray for Him to help in the wider world torn apart by war particularly in Ukraine, Yemen, and Syria.

The theme for this service is 'The presence of Jesus is transforming' The reading comes from St John's gospel and records the encounter in the garden between Mary Magdalene and Jesus

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene Read by Christine Mitchell

Mary Magdalene stood crying outside the tomb. She was still weeping, when she stooped down and saw two angels inside. They were dressed in white and were sitting where Jesus' body had been. One was at the head and the other was at the foot. The angels asked Mary, "Why are you crying?" She answered, "They have taken away my Lord's body! I don't know where they have put him." As soon as Mary said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she did not know who he was. Jesus asked her, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener and said, "Sir, if you have taken his body away, please tell me, so I can go and get him." Then Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him, "Rabboni." The Aramaic word "Rabboni" means "Teacher." Jesus told her, "Don't hold on to me! I have not yet gone to the Father. But tell my disciples that I am going to the one who is my Father and my God, as well as your Father and your God." Mary Magdalene then went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord. She also told them what he had said to her.

(Contemporary English Version)

Meditation

Mary walked slowly across the green, mist from the fens unusually at this time of year hanging over the west end of the cathedral.

She paused turning and inclining her head upwards, the tops of the towers and the lantern were hidden. On the north side the remnant of the towers made safe years ago looked strangely out of place, the church looking unbalanced. She had viewed from this place before, usually with the sun high over the octagon demanding she closed her eyes, squinting to protect them from the strong sunlight.

How many years have believers and those unsure of the stories of Jesus walked this way to join with hundreds on Easter Day to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. The days of Lent had passed, the solemnity of Holy Week still offering thoughts of the cruelty of crucifixion and yet through it comes hope and salvation.

She wondered a little more, how many Marys have stood where she was standing now.

Her mind drifted to a familiar story, of how many Marys were there at that first morning when the carved-out tomb was found empty. Others were there though remaining unnamed. Only the Marys are recorded.

Mary the mother of Jesus had witnessed her son brutally put to death; beside her Mary the wife of Clopas a close friend, Mary Magdalene - probably the one who sat at Jesus feet - stood a little way off but still nearby for her presence to be felt.

St Luke writes of women who followed from Galilee among them Mary the mother of James, Joses and Salome. St Mark tells that it was she and Mary M who went to anoint the body of Jesus.

All those women called Mary and of course there was Mary sister of Martha whose story we heard recently. Now on this latest Easter Day another Mary, Our Mary, made her way to the cathedral to hear again the story of the resurrection of Jesus.

She knew the story well and quietly thought of the significance of Mary Magdalene in all the gospel accounts. Could she be the woman whose life was unconventional, who found her life changed forever by that encounter in the garden.

In that story recounted by St John, suddenly the understudy was thrust into the glare of the centre stage spotlight.

Mary Magdalene had found a new life; the man she had followed and anointed was there, right in front of her.

Don't touch me Mary, not yet anyway. She held back to listen to his instructions. Jesus tells her to go quickly, tell the others – I will be with you for all time, though I am returning to my Father. Trust me Mary everything will be fine.

Inside the cathedral, the words of the Gospel of John Chapter 20 verses 11-18 died away. The preacher climbed into the pulpit. Our Mary sat down as did the rest of the congregation.

She relaxed and prepared to hear how a Mary from two thousand years ago might change this modern day Mary's life, to bring light and hope to a world in pain born by one nation, pain inflicted by its neighbour with the world poised for wider destruction on the brink of warfare.

Hymn: My Song is love unknown

My song is love unknown,
My Saviour's love to me;
Love to the loveless shown,
That they might lovely be.
O who am I,
That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh, and die?

He came from His blest throne
Salvation to bestow;
But men made strange, and none
The longed-for Christ would know:
But oh, my Friend,
My Friend indeed,
Who at my need
His life did spend.

Here might I stay and sing,
No story so divine;
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like Thine.
This is my Friend,
In whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend. (*Samuel Crossman 1623-1683*)

Intercessions:

We pray for:

The work of the Mothers' Union;
Worldwide President, Sheran Harper;
The Chief Executive, Bev Jullien, and all who work at Mary Sumner House supporting members;
Diocesan President, Hazel Williams, and our Trustees and Task Group Leaders;
Provincial President, Kathryn Anderson and all members in the Province of Canterbury
Worldwide Links: Lusaka in Zambia, Shyogwe in Rwanda, Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria, Karimnager in India;
The Diocese Links: Kigali and Vellore.

In the Wave of Prayer today, we pray for: Cueibet in South Sudan; Gahini in Rwanda; Wusasa & Ibadan in Nigeria and Christchurch in New Zealand.

And we also pray for:

Our own parishes in the Ely Diocese, our families, and our friends
The Revd Paula Spalding our chaplain
Anyone known to us who is unwell or in need
Those suffering directly or indirectly from the pandemic
The many countries around the world experiencing conflict, oppression, natural disasters and anywhere
where people live in fear or poverty.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

We end with **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**

The Lord be with you **And also with you**

The Grace

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.**

THURSDAY PRAYER: MAY 19th 2022, Ely Cathedral.

10.30am IN PERSON/on Zoom/by phone.

Led by Deirdre Milner on the theme: "The True Vine"

To join the meeting, follow this link (same info as last time):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpaeGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09> (Meeting ID: 838 4780 9128 - passcode is needed: 338053.)

By Telephone ring: 0203 051 2874 - then follow the instructions given.

Good morning and welcome to our prayer time today.

Let us begin by saying The Mothers' Union Prayer together:

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

Reading: John 15:1-5 15

"**I am the true vine**, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3 You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me as I abide in you."

Meditation

When I read the passage chosen for today's Thursday Prayers, at first, I was unsure how to connect it to my reflection, surprisingly or unsurprisingly I awoke a couple of days later with my thoughts very clear.

In these days of rush, bustle and multitasking, we try to juggle several tasks, not to mention numerous thoughts all at once. I have found that by taking a step back even for five minutes, clearing my mind and thoughts, when I return to the same tasks, they seem much easier to deal with.

Closing one's eyes and breathing in and out slowly and listening rather than having an internal dialogue, calms the soul and helps one to hear that "still small voice of calm".

I would like us to try a short meditation. Please sit in a comfortable position, with your feet flat on the floor, your eyes closed and your hands in your lap. Breathe in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth and as you do so, relax your shoulders. I would like you to focus on calming your mind and body and reflect on "Thy love maketh me whole". If you find your mind drifting to busy thoughts, repeat it in your mind. "Thy love maketh me whole". We will just do this for about 5 minutes and then I will say St Teresa's Bookmark.

Let us begin.

Five minutes silence.

Let nothing disturb thee, Nothing affright thee;

All things are passing; God never changeth;

Patient endurance, Attaineth to all things;

Who God possesseth, In nothing is wanting;

Alone God sufficeth.

If we are to be the branches of the vine, we must try to be the best "us" that we can be. Not by rushing around, but by being focused in what we do and doing it to the best of our ability with God's help.

By being still for just a few minutes and trusting in God's love we may find that when we return to those activities that were so pressing, we do so in a calmer and more structured way. Remember that there is nothing that we cannot cope with, if God is with us.

Let us stand to sing our hymn.

**Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy one is here
Come bow before him now
In reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on Holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy one is here.**

**Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with Holy fire
With splendour He is crowned**

**How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around.**

**Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place.**

Composed by David J. Evans

Our Intercessions - We pray for:

The worldwide work of the Mothers Union and our Worldwide President Sheran Harper.
The Chief Executive, Bev Jullien and for all those who work at Mary Sumner House, supporting members.
Our Provincial President, Kathryn Anderson and all members of the Canterbury Province.
Our worldwide links: Lusaka in Zambia, Shyogwe in Rwanda, Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria and Karimnager in India, our Diocesan Links of Kigali and Vellore.

We pray for our whole Diocese, for our Diocesan President, Hazel, for those on the Trustee Board and those leading branches, those working in the Task groups, our deaneries, our chaplains and our members. We pray for events being held in the parishes.

In the Wave of Prayer today, we pray for our members worldwide and especially today we are asked to remember Grahamstown in South Africa; Masasi in Tanzania; Afiko in Nigeria; Wiawso in Ghana; Chester in England and Northern Argentina in Argentina.

We pray for all who have homes which are inadequate; those living in shanty towns and those who live in squalid conditions. May people in positions of influence take positive steps to bring improvement to such living conditions. **Amen**

(Mothers' Union Prayer Diary for 19th May)

As the world is in such turmoil, we ask for your help for those who are suffering in all the conflicts around the world. We particularly hold before you the children and young people, who have seen such atrocities. May they reach safety and find the love and support that they need. **Amen**

God of glory, draw us together as people of vision; may vision inspire us to worship and spur us to action. Thank you for those who urge us on to acts of love and good works; for those who encourage us and share in making vision reality. Unite us in our shared vision of a world where your love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships. God of glory, move us forward as people of vision; may vision inspire us to worship and spur us into action. **Amen**

Let us say together The Mothers' Union Thursday prayer:

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers, we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us say together **The Grace**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen**

Thursday Prayers for June 9th 2022

Prayer Focus: The Bread of Life

Introductory Prayer

Dear Lord, may we feed upon You and not the things of this world, so we will reap life and not death. May our souls hunger and thirst for You and You alone. You are life everlasting. **Amen**

Prayer for the month

Dear Lord, You are the wine, You are the bread,
You are the sacrifice, the pierced head,
Filled with the Spirit, we kneel to serve,
We are the sinew, the hands, the nerve.
You are the living water, the light of day.
You are the pathway, the truth, the life -
We are the body. You are the Christ.

Amen

Bible Reading: John 6: 32-35 ³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Reflection

When Jesus said that He was the 'Bread of Life', people didn't understand. Furthermore, when he told them that in order to receive salvation they must eat of His body and drink of His blood - they were somewhat horrified.

Of course they were thinking in the literal sense. Many of the elders knew Jesus' parents, as He was speaking on home ground. They must have thought, 'How could this be?' He also lost many disciples at this time, who couldn't follow this reasoning.

Today, we know that Jesus was speaking metaphorically and what He was talking about was the new covenant, whereby He would be present at communion when we eat the bread and drink the wine. The way in which this occurs has long been in dispute and whether His presence is substantive or spiritual is, at least in the Anglican community, believed to be made possible by the Holy Spirit. How this happens is shrouded in mystery.

But, however we view the specific form of that belief, whether it be a substantive change or a more spiritual one, we can all agree that as we take part in the Eucharist, Jesus feeds us His body and His blood. Through this, we enter into communion with Him and with one another, (partaking in the Divine Love that He shares with the Father). Unlike other food, which becomes part of us, Jesus in the sacred bread and wine makes us more like him. Therefore, we too, are to be bread for the world. To this end we are to share this gift. There are many examples of how this is being done by disciples, here and all over the world. With personal example, service, sacrifice, teaching, ministry and advocacy, each disciple shares the love of God by which all the world is fed.

Intercessions

We ask for God's blessing on Beverley Jullien, our chief executive; Sheran Harper our Worldwide President; Kathryn Anderson, our Provincial President; Julia Jameson, our Zonal Trustee; and, in our own diocese of Ely: Hazel Williams, Diocesan President; the Trustees, the Task Group Leaders and all who work in Mary Sumner House.

We remember in our prayers, our MU links world wide: Lusaka in Zambia, Shyogwe in Rwanda, Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria, Karinmager in India and our diocesan links with Kigali in Rwanda and Vellore in India.

In our Wave of prayer we pray for Yambio in South Sudan; Garissa in Kenya; Mbamili in Nigeria; Hereford in England; Willochra in Australia and Thailand.

Thank you Lord, for the gifts of the Spirit; help us to share them for the benefit and blessing of your people and not to keep them to ourselves. Give us grace to appreciate each other's gifts and work together to use them in Your service.

Let us have a few moments of silent prayer for those in need, remembering especially the Ukraine and to offer personal concerns to God...

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

Hymn

I am the bread of life.
He who comes to me shall not hunger;
he who believes in me shall not thirst.
No one can come to me
unless the Father draw him.

Unless you eat
of the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink of his blood,
and drink of his blood,
you shall not have life within you.

And I will raise him up,
and I will raise him up,
and I will raise him up on the last day.

And I will raise him up,
and I will raise him up,
and I will raise him up on the last day.

The bread that I will give
is my flesh for the life of the world,
and he who eats of this bread,
he shall live for ever,
he shall live for ever.

I am the resurrection,
I am the life.
He who believes in me
even if he die,
he shall live for ever.

And I will raise him up,
and I will raise him up,
and I will raise him up on the last day.

And I will raise him up,
and I will raise him up,
and I will raise him up on the last day.

The Thursday Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Grace

MOTHERS' UNION THURSDAY PRAYER: 21 JULY 2022 – “God’s Sign to Noah”.

Welcome to the Mothers’ Union July Thursday Prayer which has the theme “**God’s Sign to Noah**”. We begin with a **couple of prayers** and then we will sing our **hymn**.

JULY THURSDAY PRAYER.

Generous God, we affirm your power to bless all cultures and transform communities. Abundant God, you have provided all the resources to transform communities and create a sustainable future. Compassionate God, enable your people to see your provision that their sense of worth and quality of life may flourish. Gracious God, transform the mindsets of the vulnerable from powerless dependency to freedom of self-sufficiency. Gracious God, we are blessed by your constant provision. Help us to use your resources well and enable others to do the same. **Amen.**

Canticle of the Creatures (St Francis of Assisi)

All praise be yours, My Lord, through all that you have made.
And first my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day...
How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendour!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars;
In the heavens you have made them, bright and precious and fair.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air...
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water,
so useful, lowly, precious and pure.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you brighten up the night...
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother,
Who feeds us... and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs...
Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks,
And serve him with great humility. **AMEN.**

~~~~~

### **SONG**

*[Tune: England’s Lane (For the beauty of the earth)]*

### **SHADES OF PURPLE, SHADES OF BLUE**

1. Shades of purple, shades of blue,  
green and yellow, orange, red –  
Noah and his family, too,  
saw the rainbow overhead.  
God, Creator, high above  
you displayed your sign of love.

2. Soon new life was springing forth,  
filling land and sea and air.  
God, you chose to bless the earth  
with the promise of your care –  
And your promised love extends  
far beyond our human friends.

3. In the rainbow, you were clear:  
every living thing has worth.  
You love every creature here  
on this planet we call Earth.  
God, forgive when we destroy  
gifts from you that bring you joy.

4. May your church begin to see  
in that rainbow high above:  
We are daily called to be  
stewards of this world you love.  
Since the earth is dear to you,  
may we treat it kindly, too.

~~~~~  
After Song: We now have our Bible reading from Genesis.

Reading: Genesis 9:12-17

¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

~~~~~

**TALK**

I like seeing rainbows in the sky. Particularly if there’s a double rainbow. And I often like to take photos of them if I can. It always reminds me of this story and God’s promise to Noah. I feel thankful for creation and God’s world, and think of the need for us to look after this planet responsibly.

It is a sign of hope – the sun shining through the rain after the storm. It was no surprise that this was a symbol much used during Covid, particularly when linked to thanking the NHS.

Noah had had an extremely challenging time before the rainbow appeared. Having to build the ark, look after his family, and all those animals! – yet he showed his obedience to God, probably encountering some opposition, and facing the terrible flood and the destruction that ensued. It wasn’t plain sailing!

Another thought that springs to mind when I started thinking about rainbows was the classic Judy Garland song “Somewhere over the Rainbow”.

The first verse goes:

*“Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high,  
There’s a land that I heard of once in a lullaby;  
Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue,  
And the dreams that you dare to dream,  
Really do come true.”*

We all have our own “Hopes and Dreams”. Our Christian Hope is rooted in our faith, a firm belief, and not a vague hope.

In Acts 2, after Pentecost, Peter addressed the crowd that had gathered after hearing people speaking in tongues:

<sup>14</sup> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

<sup>15</sup> These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> ‘In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Ending with:

<sup>21</sup> And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ ”

Do our dreams really come true? What might our dreams be about? Peace, love and justice for all? Good health and happiness for ourselves, our families, and our friends? People being saved through the love of God, shown through the sacrifice of His son, Jesus?

This is the Covenant of the New Testament which is detailed in Hebrews:

“This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”

In Old Testament times, God made many covenants with His people: for example with Abraham, with Moses, and with David. So if we now have a New Covenant, what can we learn from one of the Old Covenants? God made a Covenant with Noah and all generations and all living creatures. Between Him and the Earth – never again to be destroyed by flood.

But why should it be a rainbow?

One reason is that there’s a sort of poetic relevance about it. Rainbows appear after storms as the light from the sun hits the water droplets in the air and breaks into the different colours we don’t normally see. A light rain may still be falling, but usually you know when you see the rainbow that, no matter how fierce the storm may have been, it’s over. There’s an expectancy that a cessation of the rain will happen.

However, I didn’t realise until I started looking up the details of the story that the Hebrew word for “Rainbow” has a different meaning. I consulted a few Bible Commentaries and found there was a general consensus of opinion that: There is no Hebrew word for rainbow. The word translated as rainbow in Genesis 9:13 is the same Hebrew word translated elsewhere as an “archer’s bow”. So I’ve tried to put together some thoughts based around these comments that I’ve read.

So the Hebrew word isn’t “rainbow”, it’s just “bow”, as in “bow and arrow”. It is a war bow, a deadly weapon. There has been terrible destruction on the earth, and God has done it. He has rained down floods that have exterminated every living thing apart from what’s in the ark. Are we to imagine Him taking aim at the world from heaven? But God’s war bow is turned away from all of us. It is an “inverted bow”. No matter how low we may feel and whatever sins we may be guilty of, He will not cast us aside. He will always work for our good; we always have a future.

What’s the significance and why does it matter if we interpret that Hebrew word as rainbow or bow? It’s significant because it means that God did not just randomly create a chance spectacle in nature as the beautiful multicoloured sign of His covenant promise. He didn’t just place a rainbow into the sky as a symbol of his peace and love towards humanity, He hung his bow upon the clouds as a sign of His promise that He would never again be sending flooding rains down from heaven as a judgement. Whether rainbows existed before or after The Flood, God is able to use things in the natural world for His purposes. The rainbow is a sign of God’s faithfulness in keeping His covenant that there will be no more judgement of death; today we can live under the new covenant and enjoy all His promises as God’s covenanted people.

Our Christian life and church life are centred on a covenant life; we stand not on our feelings, experiences, situations, or knowledge but on God’s word, His promises. We shouldn’t be frightened or discouraged by the clouds of our convictions, feelings, and environments; we are under God’s covenant, no longer under God’s condemnation, and we need to enjoy His blessings.

Some final thoughts, written by Peter Harris, from the website of **A Rocha**, an international Christian organization which, inspired by God's love, engages in scientific research, environmental education, community-based conservation projects and sustainable agriculture. They envision the transformation of people and places by showing God's love for all creation.

*The story of God's covenant with Noah has more relevance in our time than it has ever had before. In a world torn apart by injustice, oppression, wars and environmental degradation, perhaps we are the first generation to read this story with such a sober understanding of the destruction with which it begins (Genesis 6:5), and such a sharp awareness of the vital importance of the promise of God with which it ends (Genesis 9:8-17). The same can be said for some of the forebodings of the Old Testament prophets who understood that living selfishly and independently from God brought about not only human but also ecological catastrophe which was the direct consequence of human disobedience of God.*

*We can also find in the covenant our proper place as earth-keepers for the living God who holds all creation together. The covenant is given expression by Noah and his family, and the church, which is the body of Christ, the Creator stands in their line to live out God's care and love for all he has made.*

*Today we live under a new covenant which is the fulfilment of God's purposes of salvation that was expressed in the Old Testament covenants. It is a covenant of grace mediated by Jesus Christ through his sacrificial death and resurrection. The new covenant promises the redemption of the whole of creation, forgiveness and a renewed relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.*

*We need to rediscover, in the practice of living in the times and places God gives us, what the hope of this new covenant means. By thinking in terms of the covenant we see what folly it is to attempt to graft on environmental issues as just one issue for the church's social agenda. Rather, the task that faces us is to restore the biblical place of all life on earth in our thinking, and to translate God's concerns into our own discipleship as we follow Jesus the Lord, the Creator, who New Testament scholar Rikk Watts has called "the first earth-keeper". [Rikk is Dean of Theology at Alphacrucis College in Australia.]*

*In the terms of secular society, the church is the biggest non-government organization on earth, and so we can glimpse what could be some wonderful consequences for all life on earth if we return to our true calling to be the body of Christ, and a biblical grasp of the scope of the gospel.*

~~~ **PAUSE FOR REFLECTION** ~~~

Let us join together in the MU JULY MIDDAY PRAYERS on the theme of:
"God's Church for God's World".

Please join in the words in **BOLD**.

MU JULY MIDDAY PRAYERS: God's Church for God's World
Thursday: Living good lives

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. *1 Peter 2:12*

Christ our Lord and Saviour, may our lives reflect your goodness to the communities around us, as we seek to serve them well.

Help us to live in such a way that our words and actions may be one, and our faith seen to be real.

And so may all we say, all we do, and all we are, witness to you and the wonder of your love shown through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You are a God of love and mercy, and we praise you, in his name. Amen.

© Nick Fawcett

From the MU Prayer Diary for this month – the Theme is “Family and Relationships”.

God of relationship, we look to your example of how to value the people who are part of our lives. May all our relationships with family, friends, community and with the church, flourish and grow and glorify Christ. **Amen.**

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**WE PRAY TOGETHER:**

**THURSDAY PRAYER.**

**ALL: Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Our intercessions. We pray for:**

- The worldwide work of the Mothers’ Union;
- Sheran Harper our Worldwide President;
- Our Chief Executive, Bev Jullien; All who work in Mary Sumner House;
- Our Diocesan President Hazel Williams and Trustees;  
the Task Group Leaders in: Faith in Action, Praying our Faith,  
Finance & Administration, and Communications;
- Our province of Canterbury and Kathryn Anderson, our Provincial President.
- Our Worldwide Links:  
Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogwe in Rwanda; Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria; Karimnager in India;  
Plus Diocesan Links with Kigali & Vellore.

**WAVE OF PRAYER: 21 July**

- Gitega in Burundi; Murag’a South and Mbeere in Kenya; Enugu North in Nigeria; Polynesia in Tonga and Jaffna in Diocese of Church of South India.

**We also pray for:**

- Our local parishes, our families, and our friends, and give thanks for our many blessings.
- Anyone known to us who is in need or unwell.
- For the Queen, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, all those in government, and all MPs.
- All in Local Government, in the Health Service, Emergency Services, and Transport and Travel Industry; those in Education, especially remembering children and young people who have recently finished their school year.
- We remember the newly Ordained Priests and Deacons, especially Sue Squires-Dutton and Jill Stimpson, and pray for them and their families in their continued ministry within their parishes.
- The many countries around the world where there are troubles and people are suffering.

~~~ **PAUSE FOR REFLECTION** ~~~

WE SAY TOGETHER:

MOTHERS’ UNION PRAYER.

ALL: 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.

LORD’S PRAYER.

**ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen .**



CREATOR GOD

(please join in with the words in **BOLD**)

In bright light and dull darkness
In the energy of each day and the rest that comes with night
We remember the goodness of God.

In the heavens high above our heads
In waters that run deep around the world
We remember the goodness of God.

In solid land and flowing seas
In vivid flowers and fruit laden-trees
We remember the goodness of God.

In the rising and setting of the sun
and the cycles of the seasons
In the patterns of the shining stars
We remember the goodness of God.

In oceans teeming with fish
In skies filled with birds
We remember the goodness of God.

In a world filled with animal life
And in ourselves as human beings
We remember the goodness of God.

And God looked and saw all that he had made, and indeed it was very, very good.
In rest and reflection, in wonder and worship
We remember the goodness of God. Amen.

From “Creation Care Prayers” (Diocese of Leeds)



We say THE GRACE ALL TOGETHER.

**May The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.**

[Footnote: Song “Shades of Purple, Shades of Blue” by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. Carolyn grew up in the United Methodist Church in the USA. She has written over 400 hymns, several books, and is a Presbyterian pastor. With her husband Bruce she co-pastors a Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania. www.carolynshymns.com]

THURSDAY AUGUST 18TH 2022 - "CELEBRATING MARY SUMNER" -

Welcome everyone to our Thursday prayers.

Introductory Prayers

Lord, guide us this day in all that we say and do; Lord in all things make us true. Keep us safe from evil thoughts and deeds aware of other people's needs. May we not wander from the straight and narrow way; may we trust in you Lord, every day, Lord in all things, make us true. Amen.

Rev. Moira Jameson, Province of Scotland

ALL: Mothers' Union Prayer

Loving Lord, we thank you for your love so freely given to us all.

We pray for families round the world.

Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share our 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's name. Amen.

THE MARY SUMNER STORY

Mothers' Union started with Mary, married to George, Rector of the Parish of Old Alresford, being passionate about transforming the home-lives of parish families.

In particular, she wanted to help the women 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 practical, down to earth faith. "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 both 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 a 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 women speaking to large audiences was still unheard of, 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, feeling 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.

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, such as stopping children collecting alcohol from public houses for their families, and raising the age of marriage for girls 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, 4000 women attended her funeral, which was a service of Thanksgiving. The last memory shared was one of her, on her feet in the sunlight, praising God. She was 93 years of age.

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. Loving God, we give thanks for Mary Sumner our Founder and we pray for Mothers' Union Worldwide and the work of its members. This year Ely Cathedral MU celebrated the life of Mary Sumner on 9th August with a short, member lead service in Powcher's Hall followed by Tea and Cakes.

Let's finish our Celebration of Mary Sumner's life by saying her prayer together.

ALL: Mary Sumner Prayer
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

Thursday Prayer

Loving Lord, we give thanks for the Mothers' Union worldwide and the work of its members in seeking to bring the Kingdom of God in the here and now. We hold before you those whose lives are being changed by a vision of a world where all may flourish.

In our Wave of Prayer we pray for Kasai in the Democratic Republic of Congo; Shyira in Rwanda, Ijumu and Egba West in Nigeria, Liverpool in England and Sambalpur in India.

In our Intercessions today we pray for –

The Worldwide work of the Mothers' Union and our worldwide president Sheran Harper, our chief executive Bev Julian and all who work in Mary Sumner House. For our Diocesan President Hazel Williams and Trustees and all task group leaders and MU members within the Ely Diocese.

In our **Worldwide Links we pray for:-** Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogwe in Rwanda; Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria; Karimnager in India; plus diocesan links with Kigali and Velore.

We also Pray for:

Our local parishes, our families and our friends and give thanks for our many blessings. Anyone known to us who is ill or unwell. **Pause**

The many countries around the world where there are troubles and people are suffering and dying in wars and conflict.

Finally for the world we live in, that God may open our eyes to recognise the goodness of all creation and help us to do what we can to restore and care for the wonderful gift that we have been given.

Our reading today is taken from Matthew Ch. 6 vs 5 – 15

1. "Again, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in synagogues and at street corners for everyone to see them. Truly I tell you, they have their reward already. But when you pray go into a room by yourself,

shut the door and pray to your Father, who is in secret and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

2. In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard. Do not imitate them for your Father knows what your needs are before you ask him.

This is how you should pray:

**ALL: Our Father
who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen**

For if you forgive others the wrongs they have done, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done;"

All Stand for our Hymn

**1 All my hope on God is founded,
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth
Only good and only true.
God unknown,
He alone
Calls my heart to be his own.**

**2 Pride of man and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray his trust,
What with care and toil he buildeth
Tower and temple fall to dust,
But God's power,
Hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.**

**3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
Deep his wisdom, passing thought.**

Splendour, light and life attend him,
Beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
From his store
New-born worlds rise and adore.

4 Daily doth th'Almighty giver
Bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
Pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
At his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from man to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
For the gift of Christ his Son,
Christ doth call
One and all:
Ye who follow shall not fall

Words Robert Bridges 1844-1930 : Music Herbert Howells 1892-1983

We will now celebrate and be grateful for the life of our second Mary today, Mary the Mother of Jesus

We have given thanks for the life of Mary Sumner our Founder and now we give thanks for the life of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who we remember on the 15th August. She is another person we associate with family life, as the mother of Jesus. Mary was a constant in his early life and who saw it all from his birth to his death and resurrection. We often get the phrase, *and she pondered these things in her heart* – so we surmise Mary to be a reflective and thoughtful person.

Let us pick up a few themes within what Mary says as food for thought today.

Firstly, Mary speaks from deep thankfulness with a tinge of awe and amazement. She was a very insignificant person in the grand scheme of things, on the margins, not just loved by God but chosen by God in this very special way.

There is also a deep sense in her humility in the face of wonder. She understands her lowliness and yet articulates how generations to come will call her Blessed.

Mary has also been thinking about the implications of the coming Messiah. Like many of her day Mary was expecting the Messiah to come in power and strength to overcome all the difficulties of their present! And yet on reflection Mary's words show her heart had reached

a different conclusion. In a nutshell she prophesies it as good news for the poor and humble and bad news for the powerful, proud and wealthy. Indeed, Jesus did challenge the powerful of his day be it the Pharisees, Pilate or Herod. Those who were arrogant, abused their power or were caught out in hypocrisy, were also confronted.

Another key concept in all this for Mary was mercy and in particular the mercy of God. Mercy is about compassion, kindness and forgiveness. It is quite the opposite of what drives arrogance or hypocrisy. What Mary particularly draws our attention to is the mercy of God which goes right back to our forebears, to Abraham and is with us into our future, most importantly forever.

God's mercy is something we should look for and live for as Mary did, as we live modelling a merciful, compassionate and kind approach in our dealings with each other, each nation and our world. Ultimately the judgement and justice in all this is God's and God's mercy will always be wider and brighter than we can ask or imagine.

Finally, as we reflect on Mary's words we do see her recognising God's hand in her life, even in the face of great potential jeopardy as I observed earlier. Mary says "*the Mighty One has done great things for me*". God's work in Mary was specific, significant and special. The same is true of each of us, we may not be as centre stage in the action as she was in her day, yet we each have a unique and special role to play in God's world. We will do it better too with thankfulness, with humble hearts and seeking God's mercy.

=====

Both our Mary's today, Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Sumner made a big and lasting difference, were thoughtful and reflective and followed God's call on their heart and their lives. Let us end with a prayer to do likewise inspired by Mary's words of praise and wonder in Luke's gospel.

ALL: Lord, our hearts praise you, our souls are glad because you are our Saviour, because you have remembered us, your servants, because you have shown mercy to all who honour you. We praise you because of all the great things you have done for us. Help us to follow the calling you have for us as Blessed Mary and Mary Sumner did in their hearts and their lives.

Amen

After the style of the Rev. Alison Way

All Stand for THE GRACE

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen

Mothers' Union Thursday Prayer 15th September, 2022.

“The gift of the Holy Spirit”

Welcome to the Mothers' Union September Thursday Prayer which has the theme “the gift of the Holy Spirit”.

We begin with **prayers** and then we will sing our **hymn**.

At this time of national mourning

A prayer for her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II may she rest in peace and rise in glory.

Heavenly Father,

We give thanks for the life and work of Her majesty: for her unstinting service and devotion to the nation and the Commonwealth and her dedicated duty to the good of all her people, which never failed.

We thank you, too, for her strength, her unassuming and modest character, her support of generations of governments and all who have served in her name.

We give thanks for her heartfelt and powerful witness to Jesus Christ, her love for her family, and we pray for them and all who mourn her death.

Amen

September Thursday Prayer

Loving Lord, we give you thanks that you have prepared our way and strengthen us at every stage with hope and resolution.

God of unchanging power, your Holy Spirit enables us to proclaim your love in challenging times and places.

Give to the Mothers' Union steadfast and fresh understanding and a clear vision, that together, we may respond to the call to be your disciples and so rejoice in the blessings of your kingdom.

We ask this in the name of Him who gave His life that ours might flourish, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

HYMN – Spirit of God (sung to the tune of the Skye boat song: traditional melody)

Spirit of God, as strong as the wind,

Gentle as is the dove,

Give us your joy, and give us your peace,

Show to us Jesus' love.

You inspired men, long, long ago
They then proclaimed your word;
We see their lives, serving mankind:
Through them your voice is heard.

Spirit of God

Without your help, we fail our Lord,
We cannot live His way,
We need your power, we need your strength,
Following Christ each day .

Spirit of God

Penny is going to read from **Romans** (King James version or New English Bible)

Reading: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans 5 : 1 -5

1. Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
3. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
4. And patience, experience; and experience, hope:
5. And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us .

OR (new English bible version of this below)

1. Therefore now that we have been justified through faith, let us continue at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
2. Through whom we have been allowed to enter the sphere of God's grace, where we now stand,
3. More than this: let us exult in our present suffering, because we know that sufferings train us to endure,
4. and endurance brings proof that we have stood the test, and this is the ground of hope.
5. Such a hope is no mockery, because God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us

TALK: Suffering and the Holy Spirit.

(with thanks to [Andrea Hollingsworth](#) Theologian, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities for an excellent analysis of the roles of the Holy Spirit)

Anyone who has personally experienced suffering borne of tragedy, or has walked alongside a friend or colleague in the throes of this experience, knows that simple presence—attentive, compassionate, patient, and often wordless—is probably the most helpful and healing gift one can offer. Just the knowledge that “you are not alone,” even though answers and solutions may remain hidden, can provide enormous strength and comfort in the midst of affliction.

The Holy Spirit is the “Giver Extraordinaire” of such presence. Solace, sustenance, companionship, and an uncanny sense that, somehow, despite everything, “all will be well”—these are just a few of the types of comfort the Spirit may bring into our lives when we are suffering.

The Old Testament offers ample evidence of the Spirit’s consoling presence. The Psalmist (David) declares the Spirit’s persistent, attentive care in every place and situation imaginable: Even in the bed of death, even at the farthest reaches of the world, even when deepest darkness surrounds, the Spirit of God is still there, leading and holding fast (Psalm 139:7-12).

In the New Testament as well, we find numerous instances in which the Spirit is experienced as Comforter in situations involving suffering. The Gospel-writer John calls the Holy Spirit *parakletos* (John 14:16, 26; 15:26, 16:7), the proper meaning of which is, “one called to the side of another” or “one called to the aide of another.”¹³ *Parakletos* can be translated in different ways: Comforter, Advocate, Counsellor, and Helper are common renderings. (Hauser, Richard J. *Finding God in Troubled Times: The Holy Spirit and Suffering*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994.)

St. Paul also casts the Holy Spirit as the “groaning intercessor” who pervades and carries our prayers even though we are weak, ignorant, and/or exhausted (Romans 8:26). And, in 1 Thess. 1:6, we are assured of the Holy Spirit’s power to give joy even in the throes of severe suffering.

Numerous Christian thinkers have wrestled with important theological issues related to the Spirit’s role in walking alongside people experiencing affliction., persecution, situations of poverty and oppression, trauma. It doesn’t let them give up. It has always sent light into the hearts of those people to help them see viable options, keep struggling, and survive through the ages ([Andrea Hollingsworth](#) Theologian, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities)

So, what, ideally, does the Holy Spirit’s attentive presence in our suffering *accomplish*? Is it merely to “get us through,” or is there something more? Richard Hauser (theologian) offers a compelling answer to this query. All of us encounter suffering, he says, and the reason for the suffering often remains mysterious. However, *in* our trials, the Holy Spirit is near, providing us with the resources we need to handle our affliction with Christian maturity and charity rather than inward-focused despondency:

We Christians are challenged to love and serve God and our neighbour during all the moments of our lives. This challenge is experienced most acutely in times of suffering. Suffering tends to self-centre us. During suffering we are tempted to excuse ourselves from the Gospel mandate, withdraw from others and indulge in self-pity.

*Consequently, at no time do we need the help of the Spirit **more** to remain faithful to our calling. And responding to the Spirit during suffering can become the key moment of transformation in our Christian lives.*

Suffering, in other words, can be an opportunity to deepen our faith. The ultimate outcome of the Holy Spirit's attending during times of trial is the lasting transformation of the sufferer.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Let us join in the MU SEPTEMBER MIDDAY PRAYERS on the theme of Transformation -Now! Fruit of transformation: Transformation of creation

Please join in the words in **BOLD**

Then the One sitting on the throne said, "See! I am making all things new.

Write, for these words are true and faithful." *Revelation 21:5 (NLV)*

**ALL :We pray for our beloved planet,
scarred by conflict and natural disaster:
bring healing to its lands
and cleansing to its waters;
bring justice to its peoples
and peace to its nations;
bring life for today and hope for the future.**

God of all eternity, ignite in us, your people,
the faith to believe that you will
one day heal our broken world,
and grow in us the perseverance
to keep praying and working
towards that day when your creation
will once again be whole and free.

We ask all these things in the name of your matchless Son , Jesus Christ. Amen

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From the MU Prayer Diary for this month – the theme is “Creationtide”

God of creation, Lord of the harvest,

We bring you our first fruits of praise;

We celebrate your goodness with thankful hearts.

All that you have made is very good;

Let us steward your creation with integrity and care.. **Amen**

WE PRAY TOGETHER (the Thursday prayer)

All: Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

IN OUR INTERSESSIONS;

We pray for:

- The worldwide work of the Mothers' Union;
- Sheran Harper our Worldwide President;
- Our Chief Executive, Bev Jullien; All who work in Mary Sumner House;
- Our Diocesan President Hazel Williams and Trustees; the Task Group Leaders in: Faith in Action, Praying our Faith, Finance & Administration, and Communications;
- Our province of Canterbury and Kathryn Anderson, our Provincial President.
- Our Worldwide Links: Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogwe in Rwanda; Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria; Karimnager in India; Plus the Diocesan Links with Kigali & Vellore.

Lord, we pray for Mothers' Union worldwide, in the

WAVE OF PRAYER: 15 September remembering

- Mthatha in South Africa
- Namirembe in Uganda
- Pankshin and Sabongidda-Ora in Nigeria
- Dublin and Glendalough in All Ireland
- Central Solomans in the Solomon Islands

We also pray:

- For the King and the Royal family, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, all those in government, and all MPs.
- For the family of the Revd Dr Jenny Gage: may she rest in peace and rise in glory.

- For our local parishes, our families, and our friends, and give thanks for our many blessings.
- For anyone known to us who is in need or unwell.
- For all in Local Government, in the Health Service, Emergency Services, and Transport and Travel Industry; those in Education, especially remembering children and young people.
- For the many countries around the world where there are troubles and people are suffering.

Reflective prayer

God be in my head, and in my understanding;

God be in my eyes, and in my looking;

God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;

God be in my heart, and in my thinking;

God be at mine end, and at my departing. **Amen**

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

WE SAY TOGETHER:

MOTHERS' UNION PRAYER.

ALL: 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.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen .

WE SAY THE GRACE TOGETHER

May The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all , now and evermore. Amen.

Thursday Prayer 20th October 2022

We are unable to use the Cathedral as we normally would so this will only be on Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpacGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09>

ID. 838 4780 9128 Passcode 338053

Looking Forward with Hope

Good morning and welcome to our prayer time together today.

Introductory Prayers

Loving God, draw us on the journey to the places of holiness, the places of peace, the places of fellowship, the places of encounter, the places of beauty, the places where faith has been lived, your love made known, your hope held out in the past, for the present, into your future.

Thursday Prayer 2022

God of Peace,
give a sense of hope to your people
who live in countries where there is conflict.
May they receive the love and nourishment
they deserve, and may they strengthen each other
through circumstances we cannot begin to imagine.
Encourage those who work for
peace and reconciliation,
give them understanding and patience
and a resolve not to give up.
May they know the love of Jesus Christ. Amen

Mothers' Union – The Prayers We Breathe

Reading Isaiah 2 1&2 6-9

¹The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem

²And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

⁶Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.

⁷Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots:

⁸Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made:

⁹And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.

Meditation: Looking Forward with Hope

Looking Forward with Hope was my theme for December focusing on Advent and Christmas. However, I have changed to October as Sue Claydon was going to a conference in Croatia this month.

As I thought about using this theme in October I began to realise that it applies to all seasons and any time. Our Christian faith is full of hope and encouragement. It is a faith of love for others and love to all of us from God. I do not see it as a stern rigid way of life as perceived by some in the past and perhaps even by some sects today. Our faith looks forward with hope that love and compassion will make a better world for everyone.

For all people with faith or even without one, hope is what carries us forward and keeps us going. We all hope for a better future for ourselves and future generations, for our country and throughout the world. We hope that all the conflict in the world can be ended so that people can live in peace with one another. We hope that we can delay and even halt climate change and global warming.

Hope, coupled with faith, helps people living in countries like Ukraine, Yemen and many African countries to keep fighting for peace and justice and to survive drought and the recent devastating floods in Pakistan. Hope helps refugees and migrants to survive hazardous and arduous journeys in search of a better life, hoping that somewhere they will be given the chance to fulfill their dreams.

We all, in our own way, look forward with hope. Without hope comes despair, desperation and what today is described as mental health problems. Without hope the thoughts of people such as the homeless or unemployed can soon turn to despair. Our Christian faith and in fact all faiths, can help to support us during dark times encouraging us to look forward to better times.

It was looking forward with hope that carried us through the recent Covid pandemic joining neighbours and communities together in a way that many people had forgotten. Neighbours helped others, church communities gave support and we all came out to clap for the NHS workers who gave their all to look after their patients when it was not known how to cope with this new and deadly disease. Scientists went forward with hope to achieve, in record time, ground-breaking vaccines to help humanity to survive the disease.

We act out this message of love and hope in the Mothers' Union in the UK and All Ireland and around the world. In Ely diocese we help people to look forward with hope with our AFIA holidays and our support for Women's Aid, Refugees, Hostels, hospitals and families of prisoners. At a national level, MU acts with its involvement in legislation affecting families.

Worldwide we look forward in hope that our projects will continue to transform lives, especially in African countries focusing on literacy, gender-based violence, FGM, child marriages, parenting, credit and savings programmes.

I was encouraged by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his closing message to this year's Lambeth Conference expressing his belief that the conference was a success and that despite different attitudes to human sexuality and marriage the Anglican Communion had remained committed to listening and walking together with hope for its future.

To end our thoughts today let us remember our late Patron Queen Elizabeth II who was a good example of looking forward with hope in both good and bad times. Her message to us all during the pandemic ended in hope with "We will meet again". We now look forward with hope to a new era with King Charles III as our monarch.

Hymn

All my Hope on God is Founded

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth th' Almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Intercessions

We pray for:-

The worldwide work of Mothers' Union
Our Worldwide President, Sheran Harper,
Our Chief Executive, Beverley Jullian,
Task Group Leaders and all who work at Mary Sumner House,
The Province of Canterbury and our Provincial President, Kathryn Anderson.
Our MU Worldwide Links – Lusaka in Gambia, Shyogwe in Rwanda, Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria
and Karimnager in India
and our diocesan links with Kigali and Vellore.

In the Wave of Prayer today we pray for High Veldt in South Africa, Nambale in Kenya; Niger Delta
in Nigeria; Guinea in West Africa; Blackburn in England and Bhopal in India.

In this diocese we pray for:-

Our Diocesan President Hazel Williams, trustees, task group leaders and team members, our
chaplain Paula and all our members

We pray for our new monarch Charles III and his Queen Consort Camilla and his family. May he have a long and peaceful reign.

We end our prayers by saying together our diocesan Thursday Prayer :

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, though Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

and 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

and the Grace.

Della Fletcher

In the Cathedral and on Zoom 10.30am 24th November

Irene Porter – Christ's Disciples are sent out into the World

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpaGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09>

ID. 838 4780 9128 Passcode 338053

Welcome to our prayers today, focussing on Christ sending his Disciples out into the world.

Let us say together the Thursday prayer

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

BIBLE READING Luke 9: 1-6

REFLECTION

Jesus sent his disciples out to spread God's word and heal the sick. In verse 10 of Luke 9, we hear that the Apostles returned and told Jesus what they had done. Apostle, is from the Greek "apostolos" meaning, person sent. The term is applied to others, especially Paul. Mark 6: 30 also tells us that they returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. In Luke 10 we find that Jesus has chosen another 72 disciples, again instructing them to take nothing with them. The word is spreading. Mothers' Union has spread across the world. As our new leaflet says, members are passionate about transforming and improving community life in 84 countries around the world. With our prayer diary we pray for members in those countries.

We have special links with 4 countries, Zambia, Rwanda, Nigeria and India. All have been sent the details of the Zoom link for today, please can you all give a special hello. HELLO AND GREETINGS TO YOU FROM ELY.

In the passage Jesus sends out his disciples instructing them to take nothing. When the early Mothers' Union members travelled they wouldn't have had the clutter we take with us today. I panic if I forget to take my phone, when packing for a holiday, how many of you take more clothes than you need, just in case. So many in this world have nothing or very little, but not through choice. When women arrive at the refuges they have few possessions and are grateful for the donations of items collected by our members.

Mothers' Union members are spreading the love of God to families and communities, healing families from poverty through literacy education and helping to set up small businesses, supporting each other and the communities around them.

On August 9th, Mary Sumner day, 2012, a small group of Mothers' Union members set out from Lands End, by public bus, on route to John O'Groats, a journey of 1,066 miles, taking 7 days. On route they arrived and departed from 32 bus stations supported by groups of Mothers' Union members with banners. In order to keep the costs to a minimum all the major bus companies were approached for sponsorship, in the form of travel passes for the core team as, despite public perception, not all of the team were old enough to be eligible for a

bus pass. Rail companies also gave passes which enabled team members to reach their start and finish points along the route, even a mobile phone was provided so that they could keep in touch along the route. The journey did not always go to plan but the fantastic amount of prayer support that was given by members across the UK and worldwide ensured that despite various mishaps, the buses rolled across the countryside with their load of Mothers' Union members who talked and chatted all the way from Lands End to John O'Groats. The members found that, to their surprise, everyone on the buses were interested in the work of the Mothers' Union. Following the journey a book was published detailing their journey. I was looking through this when a photo taken at Merthyr Tydfil caught my eye. I thought I recognise that lady, a phone call confirmed that it was one of my branch members who moved to Yaxley from Wales last year.

The journey took a lot of planning, when Jesus sent out his disciples I doubt there was any planning, they couldn't take a walking stick, a bag, food, money or change of clothes, they only took God's message. As members of Mothers' Union, we are all disciples of Jesus bringing hope and change throughout the world.

PRAYER

Lord, let us serve your world with love as we mirror the example of Christ. Help us to live unconditionally. To refrain from needless expectations, to be generous in acceptance, to be selfless in support, as Christ has loved and forgiven us. Gracious Lord, show us the way to serve one another with love. May we place the needs of our neighbours above our own as we mirror the example of Christ. Amen

INTERCESSIONS

Lord we pray for the worldwide work of the Mothers' Union, spread throughout the world by your disciples.

We pray for Sheran Harper, our worldwide president and all who work at Mary Sumner house.

In Ely we thank you for Hazel's guidance as our Diocesan President, our trustees and the achievements of all our Ely members.

Lord we give special prayers for our link diocese in Lusaka Zambia, Shyogwe in Rwanda, Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria and Karimnager in India, also our links with Kigali in Rwanda and Vellore in India. Lord we pray that these links can be strengthened.

Lord we bring before you all who are troubled at this time, bring healing to those in ill health. May your comforting arms surround them. Amen

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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 our 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

HYMN

All over the world the Spirit is moving
All over the world as the prophets said it would be
All over the world there's a mighty revelation
Of the glory of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea

All over this land the spirit is moving
All over this land as the prophets said it would be
All over this land there's a mighty revelation
Of the glory of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea

All over the church the spirit is moving
All over the church as the prophets said it would be
All over the church there's a mighty revelation
Of the glory of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea

All over us all the spirit is moving
All over us all as the prophets said it would be
All over us all there's a mighty revelation
Of the glory of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea

Deep down in my heart the spirit is moving
Deep down in my heart as the prophets said it would be
Deep down in my heart there's a mighty revelation
Of the glory of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea

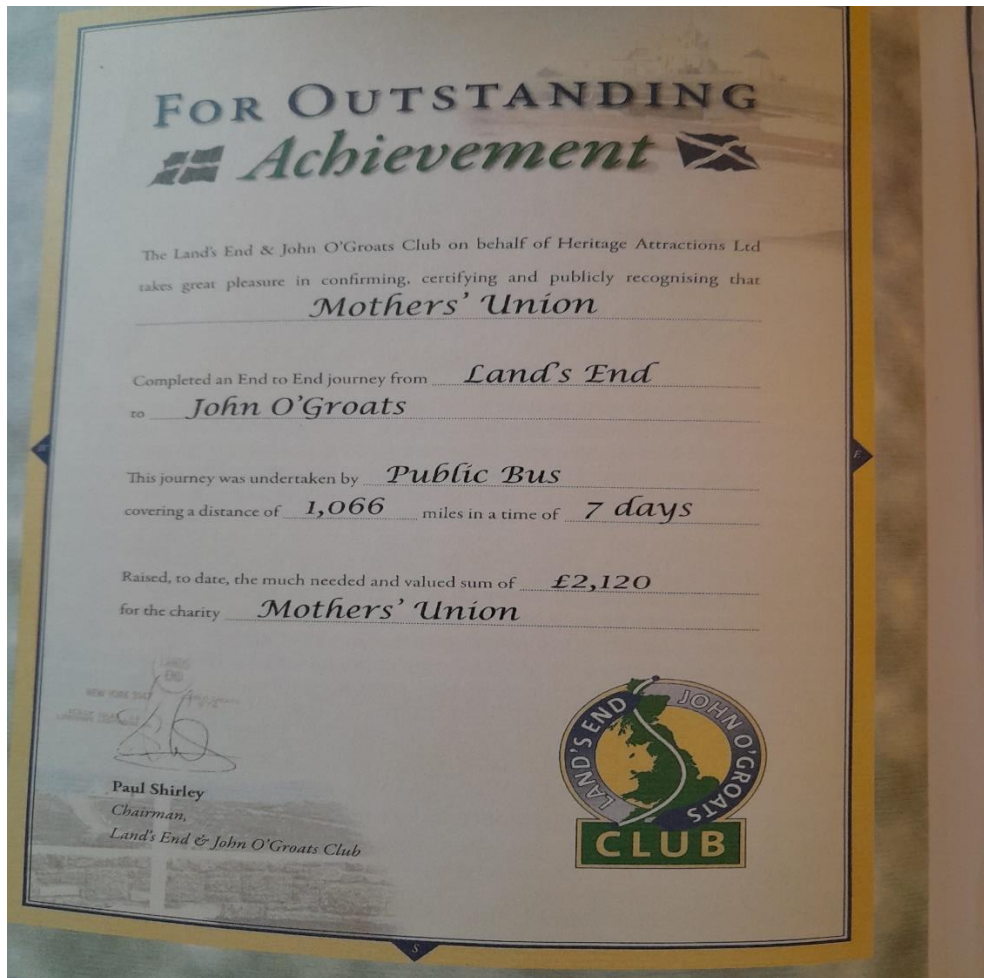
PRAYERS

Father God, we call on you to breathe the spirit of service on us. Help us to serve graciously and with a willing heart exhibiting the true mind and heart of Christ to lift someone in need who can feel God's rays of compassion reaching out in their time of stress. Make us flowing channels that will stop beside a deprived soul and stretch out to serve and uplift the fallen.

This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen

Loving Lord, we give thanks that you have prepared our way and strengthen us at every stage with hope and resolve. God of unchanging power, your Holy Spirit enables us to proclaim your love in challenging times and places. Give to the members of Mothers' Union steadfastness, fresh understanding and a clear vision, that together, we may respond to that call to be your disciples and so rejoice in the blessings of your kingdom. We ask this in the name of him who gave His life that ours might flourish, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

GRACE



<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpaGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09>

ID. 838 4780 9128 Passcode 338053

The theme of our prayers today is 'Peace'. And so we begin with a special prayer for peace in the Ukraine and all places experiencing war.

Holy God, open our eyes to a fresh vision of a peaceful world, along with the will to seek alternatives to revenge and violence. Awaken in us compassion for the victims of war: soldiers of all nations, grieving families, civilians, the wounded creation. Open wide the eyes of world leaders, especially in our own country, to see a path toward peace between Ukraine and Russia, and in all conflicts that tear apart the one human family. Grant us eyes wide open to peace. Amen

The Thursday Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The desert will sing and rejoice

And the wilderness blossom with flowers;

All will see the Lord's splendour,

See the Lord's greatness and power.

Tell everyone who is anxious:

Be strong and don't be afraid.

The blind will be able to see;

The deaf will be able to hear;

The lame will leap and dance;

Those who can't speak will shout.

They will hammer their swords into ploughs

And their spears into pruning knives;

The nations will live in peace;

They will train for war no more.

This is the promise of God;

God's promise will be fulfilled. (Isaiah 35 Micah 4)

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>It came upon a midnight clear
That glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold
Peace on the earth, good will to men
From heaven's all gracious King
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing</p> <p>Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing</p> <p>Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;</p> | <p>And warring humankind hears not
The love-song that they bring;
O hush the noise of mortal strife
And hear the angels sing.</p> <p>All ye beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow
Look now for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing
O rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing</p> <p>For lo! the days are hastening on
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When Peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.</p> |
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Reflection

As some of you know there was a change in the date for my presenting this service. As it has worked out, the timing is perfect as this coming Sunday is the fourth of Advent and the candle we will light is designated for 'peace'.

This is the time of year when cards popping through the door often include the word 'peace'. It is what the Angels sang all those centuries ago. A few years ago I counted the number of times that the word 'peace' appeared in my Parish Communion service. Between prayers, readings and hymns it was 38 times! Now I mention this as all too often the word 'peace' is used with little thought to what a complicated and complex word it is.

There are so many forms of 'peace'. While the word is in our media today mainly is the 'absence of peace' in places like Ukraine, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, and Iran, it is also something that applies to communities, families and to us as individuals.

The complexity of 'peace' in all these situations is varied, but the core element is the resolving of the issues – including those within ourselves – that lead to conflict. It is often quoted that 'peace is more than the absence of war'. But what can help that process? The recent Lambeth Conference sent out a number of 'Calls'. One of those was for Reconciliation. This is part of what 'Peace' needs for it to happen. 'Reconciliation' like 'peace' can seem a simple thing, but there are many elements to lasting reconciliation, including 'justice'.

It can feel overwhelming the absence of peace. Sometimes it is easier to shut off the information – turn a blind eye. But the Mothers Union has never been known for that approach. Checking the MU website you will see the work being done in many places looking at how our members, predominantly women, can support peace and reconciliation in these situations of conflict. Equipping women as peacemakers includes in communities where women have a low status and yet these inspirational and brave women are finding ways through MU and the church to address their daily challenges. They are sharing resources by building strong local networks and relationships that transcend community/tribal divisions, and they recognise each other as people who are equally loved by God. We also know that when women are involved in Peace Agreements at national/regional level, those agreements last years longer than when women are excluded from the negotiations. More to home helping women escape violence and so bringing a level of peace to them and their children is something we are all involved in

Advent along with being a time for waiting is also a time for hoping.

As our thoughts move to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, while it a place where peace is often denied to those living there today, it is also a time to recommit ourselves to working for peace, wherever and whenever we can so that the word 'peace' is more than a word repeated without thought in our carols.

INTERCESSIONS

Father God, we thank you for the promise of your presence always with us. We pray for your blessing as we worship together today and in the remaining time of Advent as we prepare for Christmas with all the uncertainty that we continue to face at the present time.

The Worldwide work of the Mothers' Union and our worldwide president Sheran Harper, our chief executive Bev Julian and all who work in Mary Sumner House and those supporting women in peacebuilding around the Anglican Communion.

For our Diocesan President Hazel Williams and Trustees and all task group leaders and MU members within the Ely Diocese.

In our Worldwide Links we pray for:- Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogowe in Rwanda; Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria; Karimnager in India; plus diocesan links with Kigali and Vlore.

Our local parishes, our families and our friends and give thanks for our many blessings.

Anyone known to us who is ill or unwell and for all those who care for us through the NHS and social care. *Pause*

God of Advent, of darkness, of waiting, we wait ...
for the hungry to be fed,
for freedom for all,

for the weapons of war to be abolished,
for everyone to have clean water and sanitation,
for an end to suspicion between Christian, Muslim
and Jew, for peace in our world ...
God of Advent, of darkness, of waiting, we wait ...
for your Kingdom to come. Amen

Together we say the Mothers Union Prayer

Loving Lord, we thank you for your love so freely given to us all.
We pray for families round the world.
Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share our 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's name. Amen.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>O Holy Night!
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!</p> <p>Fall on your knees
Oh hear the angel voices
Oh night divine
Oh night when Christ was born
Oh night divine</p> | <p>Truly He taught us to love one another
His law is love and His gospel is peace
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother
And in His name all oppression shall cease
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name</p> <p>Christ is the Lord, then ever! ever praise we!
His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!
His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!</p> |
|--|--|

A prayer from the International Anglican Women's Network

The Advent story is of hope and mystery, anticipation, preparation a kingdom of this world and the next, and a king appearing when we least expect.
Heaven touching earth, the footsteps of the divine walking dusty roads as once they did in Eden, and a people searching for a saviour and walking past a stable.
Open our eyes and our hearts that this might be an Advent of hope for our world. Amen

And finally -
God of Advent, of darkness, of waiting, we wait ...
for the hungry to be fed,
for freedom for all,
for the weapons of war to be abolished,
for everyone to have clean water and sanitation,
for an end to suspicion between Christian, Muslim
and Jew, for peace in our world ...
God of Advent, of darkness, of waiting, we wait ...
for your Kingdom to come. Amen

Wishing you all a Blessed Christmas and a holy New Year