

## Sunday Takeover – Talk Outline

During our [150th year](#), Mothers' Union members are encouraged to talk to their clergy (or clergy in a church where there is currently no MU presence, as part of a diocese's wider engagement promoting MU generally and/or Church-Based Membership specifically) about focusing a Sunday service on Mary Sumner and the work of Mothers' Union. You may wish, for example, to takeover, Mary Sumner Day (9 August) which falls on a Sunday in 2026. You can access the **Sunday Takeover – Service of the Word Outline** on our website.

This National 'Sunday Takeover' is an ideal opportunity for members to talk during the service and inspire others to 'Join Us, Join In' and to become Mothers' Union members. Do remember to have membership forms readily available.

It may be that if you are unable to secure a service and talk, but you are able to just speak about Mothers' Union to the congregation after a service.

This is an outline for a talk that you can use, as part of the service or separately, so please do amend to suit your setting and your congregation. This could be in addition to or combined with a short homily based on the bible readings used.

Let us pray:

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

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

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

Although not a naturally confident woman, Mary was a woman of great faith. It was through her faith that she overcame her nervousness to speak out to inspire others. She was also firm in her belief that through faith and sharing what was in her heart, God would do the

rest. The principles on which her work focused included the recognition that faith is the foundation of family life.

Faith and prayer continue to be at the heart of everything that Mothers' Union members do, whether they live in Britain and Ireland, or in one of our many global countries. Did you know that every day at 12 noon, Mothers' Union members pray, either together or alone, creating a wave of prayer around the world across all the time zones? For anyone with access to Facebook, we also pray together each day (except Saturdays) at 12 noon (UK time) on the MU Facebook page led by a team of MU members – it's amazing to join across time zones!

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

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

From its earlier origins, Mothers' Union has been an advocate for change. Examples of campaigning over the years includes: [\[select just one or two to mention\]](#)

- Stopping children collecting alcohol from public houses for their families
- Raising the minimum age of marriage for girls from 12 year to 16 years
- Together with lobbying efforts from others, the Family Allowances Act was passed in 1945 with payments made directly to mothers as opposed to men
- Increasing the widow's allowance earnings limit
- Gained consultative status at the United Nations on poverty, gender equality, and HIV/Aids
- Advising on the age appropriateness of video games – remains today
- Joined the Make Poverty History campaign and the Jubilee debt campaign advocating for debt relief in the world's poorest countries
- Led a long-standing campaign for the right to request flexible working arrangements for all parents – this led to the Work and Families Act 2006
- Launch of Bye Buy Childhood, calling on government and marketers to value and protect children from exploitative marketing – this led to the Children and Families Act 2014

The fundamental focus of Mothers' Union has remained steady over the last 150 years – demonstrating faith in action by the transformation of communities worldwide through the

nurture of the family in its many forms, working with people of all faiths and none. What has changed is how inclusive Mothers' Union has become – originally open to married mothers only, now anyone who is baptised can become a member – women and men, regardless of whether they are parents.

[What do you know about the Mothers' Union programmes in Britain and Ireland and around the world?](#)

In Britain & Ireland, we work supporting the vulnerable in our local communities through projects and national programmes. From hospitals and foodbanks, to raising awareness on domestic abuse and modern slavery.

Our four flagship national programmes in Britain & Ireland include:

Domestic Abuse – this programme builds on our RISE UP campaign and accreditation scheme for members. The letters of RISE UP stand for Respond, Inform, Support, Empower, Unite and Pray. Members work closely with local domestic violence refuges, providing essentials such as toiletries, food and clothing for women and children who have been forced to flee their home due to violence. Some churches have also joined this programme.

Away From It All (AFIA) – running for 60 years, this scheme supports families through the provision of holidays and trips, offering much needed respite to people unable to afford or access a break due to difficult circumstances. Some families may be facing adversity, health problems, economic hardship, bereavement, health issues or other life-changing circumstances.

Prisons Work - Research also shows that maintaining contact between people in prison and their families and friends is essential not just for the well-being of prisoners, their resettlement and reduced rates of reoffending following the sentence, but also for the development, wellbeing and social inclusion of children. So much of our work centres on supporting the continued connection between people in prison and their families.

Our members assist in prison visitors' centres, run support groups, family days and prison creches to help families with a loved one in prison in supporting and communicating with children and preparing for prison visits. In some prisons, courses and parenting groups are also available, with members supporting the prison chaplaincy and upholding all the prisons in prayer. HM Prison Low Newton is proud to have its own MU branch.

Modern Slavery – working in partnership with the Clewer Initiative, this new programme will raise awareness about Modern Slavery in our local communities and provide access to relevant agencies that help. Modern Slavery is more widespread than anyone imagines,

and where we see it, we aim to help. Mothers' Union works within local communities, to support people who are vulnerable; reflecting the needs of today's society and targeting help where it is most needed.

Our global programmes include:

**Savings Groups and Financial Education** - This specifically focuses on building knowledge and skills in business development through a community savings group formation for members. As a result, women are now gaining financial independence, having more autonomy to manage their lives, and are participating in household decision-making, as well as community politics and leadership. The skills learnt and businesses formed stay within the communities and are passed on to family and other community members. Savings groups meet on a regular basis and save small amounts of money per person into a larger account which can be borrowed as a loan with interest to establish businesses or to develop the community further, such as building a tap to access clean water more easily.

**Literacy Education** - The programme uses participatory methods to enable communities to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills whilst discussing and planning action on their daily issues and challenges. Our literacy circles are open to everyone, crossing the boundaries of religion, age, gender, or tribe, enabling community unity. The programme has been especially effective in reaching the most marginalised in society, including groups previously discriminated against and displaced communities.

“...In Burundi & South Sudan, MU members have brought literacy learning to over 250,000 women and men in just over a decade.”

**Parenting Programme** – The programme originated in Britain and sees local facilitators deliver an 8–12-week course with community groups to discuss different topics and share parenting experiences. Locally relevant resources guide groups through sessions that cover the highs and lows of parenting, the parent-child relationship and sensitive issues such as sex education. The programme empowers individuals and brings together communities from varying ethnicities and backgrounds to overcome common parenting challenges collectively.

“...I learned how to speak to my children instead of beating them.”

**Gender Based Violence Prevention and Awareness Globally** - Mothers' Union practically meets the needs of those affected by gender-based violence in many ways across the world: [\[select just one or two to mention\]](#)

- In the DRC, MU members work closely with survivors, particularly women and girls affected by sexual violence as a result on conflict, by providing emotional support,

meeting basic needs such as housing, and equipping women to become economically empowered.

- The funding of counselling for survivors of domestic violence and rape in war-torn countries such as Sudan.
- The running of Bible study sessions, looking at what the Bible says about physical and sexual violence, encouraging women to understand that they are made in the image of God, rebuilding self-esteem, worth and confidence, and breaking stigma and shame.
- Advocating with key leaders, decision-makers and governments to bring about necessary change, including changes to local and national law and policies.
- Campaigning for legislation which prevents gender-based violence by tackling root causes including gender inequality and harmful norms and attitudes about gender, as well as calling for all forms of violence against women and girls to be outlawed everywhere.

As you can see, there is so much that Mothers' Union members are doing in their communities around the world, demonstrating their faith in action. We are a unique member-based organisation celebrating 150 years and looking forward to the future.

Jesus says, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14)

This is a call to let our witness be visible, not just for our own benefit, but to draw others into the light. Our Mothers' Union theme is 'Join Us, Join In!' and is an invitation to people to step into that light and become part of a community that is actively living out Christ's call to justice, peace, and love. It is an acknowledgment that the work of Mothers' Union is not just about individual transformation or isolated acts of charity, it is about creating a movement of people, united in faith and mission, working together to bring about tangible change.

If you aren't currently a Mothers' Union member and are interested in what you have heard, come and join our global movement! There are different kinds of membership: you could become a local member of a branch or diocese, or you could become a global member. Come and talk to me afterwards and I can help you to join.

[\[If you are speaking at a church without a Mothers' Union branch, please talk to the clergy there about a church-based membership subscription \(a new membership recently introduced for churches without MU presence\). This membership supports the Church's ministry with MU support through resources, worship and training materials and provides](#)

access to community work; showcases MU work, volunteering, campaigning and global fundraising opportunities; links Churches to MU local dioceses for additional support whilst enabling members of the congregation to be involved in local MU community projects; and lays the foundation for new MU groups to be formed.]

As we reflect on Mary Sumner's vision and all that has been achieved over the last 150 years by members here and around the world, and reflect on all that is to come, let's finish with Mary Sumner's prayer that continues to speak to so many today:

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.