

Closing keynote address for the Mothers' Union Worldwide Gathering, Durban South Africa, 3 October 2026, by Kathleen Snow, MU Worldwide President

The Future Belongs to the Faithful: Hope, Courage & the Mothers' Union's Next 150 Years

Her Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury Dame Sarah Mullally and His Grace, the Archbishop of Southern Africa, Dr. Thabo Makgoba, Bishops and clergy, Mothers' Union Worldwide Board of Trustees, incoming CEO Alison Marshall, Provincial and Diocesan Presidents, Provincial Community Development Coordinators, Mothers' Union members, Mary Sumner House staff and invited guests. I bring warm greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many of my sisters and brothers know that I have this practice of lighting a candle before I commence any Mothers' Union work to remind me that the Holy Spirit is with me. I always pray that He will guide me and give me His words. When I am at home, I have cards which have scripture verses on each card, and I open a new scripture each day which guides me for the day along with my Bible reading.

As I was praying and preparing for this talk, I pulled out a prayer from My Little Prayer Jar which is a jar of prayers which our Zonal Trustee Deb Lee gave to me to take with me when I travel. The prayer which has guided me I share with you now: Dear God, help me to see the quality of everything I do when I seek to bring you glory. Let us remember that we are always to seek to bring Him glory.

I share with you in this spirit-filled Gathering a simple prayer. We pray for one another in our dioceses every day to support each other in our Mothers' Union work, in our faith and in our communities, walking alongside one another. Let us pray.

Arise, shine; for our light has come
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon us.
Get up; shake off complacency, apathy and despair,
And all the things that bring us low.
Glow; reflect God's glory, the light of Christ,
So that others may see in us the glory of God.

I mentioned this to you in the opening address, which seems like such a long time ago. We have walked alongside each other in these last three days. It is day 4, and to God be the glory!

We are now at a significant moment. This has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It will likely not happen for some time, if ever. Our world is changing. We are not simply ending this celebration; I pray that we all return home renewed, equipped and

committed.

I would like to recap a bit about what we have heard and experienced over these last few days. There has been excitement in this room. An energy in this room. There has been joy in this room. There has been love and warmth in this room. There has been celebration in our dance and song in this room. The Holy Spirit is in this place.

We have had themes for each of the days during this Worldwide Gathering:

Day 1 on Wednesday was about Gathering - Remembering God's Faithfulness

Day 2 on Thursday was about Growing - Families, Faith and the Next Generation.

Yesterday on Day 3 we learned about Serving - Justice, Courage and Transformation, and today we are Going – Going out in Hope in the Next 150 Years.

So, we have Gathered, Grown, Served and are now being charged to Go out together! We have journeyed walking alongside each other. We have celebrated the Glory of God and His nudging of Mary Sumner who started with a little group of women 150 years ago. We have been growing His Kingdom here on earth for the last 150 years. Viva Mothers' Union. Viva!

I share this tree slide, which our Safeguarding Trustee Liz Gailer originally shared with us last week, as this seems to have been a theme for those of us who attended the Worldwide Council last week, and it has followed us into this Gathering's theme as well. We are about gathering and growing.

I quote from Genesis 2:9, 'He made all kinds of beautiful trees grow there and produce good fruit. In the middle of the garden stood the tree that gives life and the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad.'

Look closely at the tree, and the leaves on the tree. We have gathered in prayer and praise and dance and celebration, from different provinces, different countries, and indeed different continents. When I view this tree, not only do I appreciate the different continents in the tree, but I also note the ray of light coming from behind it, to nurture it and to allow it to grow and to thrive.

We remember that without the sun or Son, we would not thrive. We need the light of our Lord Jesus Christ to guide us and keep us on the right path. We need His love to grow and to thrive.

This is what our movement has done through our love, and our faith in action. We are blessed with the light of the Holy Spirit to guide us into the way of life. Mothers' Union is a way of life. We are witnesses to each other, to our families and to our communities. We learn from one another as we model Christ's love.

I also examine those strong roots on the tree, rooted in the depths of the earth, soaking up the goodness of the earth, much like we soak up the richness and truth of the word in our Bible which guides us in our daily life and gives us strength.

I would like to share several other images of trees with you at this time. Our Worldwide Council met last week for a Triennial Meeting where we engaged in the business of our movement and set the strategic plan for the next 5-6 years.

The Worldwide Council is made up of the Worldwide Board of Trustees who govern the movement, the Provincial Presidents of the 34 provinces of Mothers' Union, and a representative of the Past Central and Worldwide Presidents. We also were joined by several of our Provincial Community Development Coordinators (PCDC's).

Our previous strategic plan developed in 2019 upheld three pillars of ending poverty, ending injustice and ending violence. We met as a Council last week and unanimously approved a refreshed strategic plan for the next 5 years. It was not a new plan, but rather we refreshed the previous plan, as there was much that we decided was still relevant and appropriate.

This previous plan was based on our MULOA workshops (Mothers' Union Listens, Observes, Acts) where 200,000 of our members participated in the generation of this strategic plan. Council members participated in the development of this new refresh. I wish to thank Sarah Newnham and her team, and our Senior Leadership Team for their development of this new strategic plan.

We now have three goals for our movement, and the three diagrams depict these goals.

Empowered women

Thriving safe families and communities

Communities free from gender violence and injustice.

We have developed several outcomes for each of the three goals.

What do Empowered Women look like? They have (outcomes of the goal) skills and resources to build self-reliance, and confidence and leadership to build positive change.

What do thriving safe families and communities look like? They have (outcomes of the goal) healthy and stable family relationships, families moving out of crisis towards resilience, and people experience belonging and support through love in action.

We have spoken of the importance of belonging and support in our discussions this week, especially in relation to our young people and in the marginalized. Belonging is our strength. The worldwide fellowship is one of our greatest gifts, especially in a world where people, mainly youth, feel isolated and disconnected.

What do communities free from gender violence and injustice look like? They are

communities that support inclusion and gender equality, and the policies and institutions uphold gender justice.

We now have a roadmap for the next 5 years with expected outcomes and our activities to support it. So, what will our future be based on?

I close with three points which I pray will guide us as we leave this place.

Our future is built on God's faithfulness.

Our future requires courage and openness.

Our future belongs to all of us.

I propose that our future is built on God's faithfulness. We have survived the last 150 years through the faithfulness of the generations of our members. In Psalm 119:90 we read, 'Your faithfulness extends to every generation, and enduring as the earth you created.'

Mothers' Union has been passed on from generation to generation. We have heard many times how grandmothers and mothers have passed Mothers' Union membership on to their daughters and to their sons. I had the privilege of enrolling Valerie West's son Paul as a member of Mothers' Union two days ago in the Southern Sun Hotel. Valerie is the Provincial President of the West Indies, and we were joined by members from Wales, Ireland and Canada in the enrollment. It was a joyous occasion.

When I asked Paul why he wanted to be a member, he stated that he had seen the work that his mother and father (Revd Stephen West) have been living out, in particular with a children's home in Trinidad and Tobago, that he became involved in the same work and felt called to be a member.

In some provinces we have heard that we now have Fathers' Union, which is a wonderful thing. In Wales, when I visited, I could not get over the number of men who were Mothers' Union members, some for more than 20 years. These men were supporting their wives in the work of Mothers' Union, and indeed several have been here with us attending this Gathering. I have had a member in my own home Branch for the last 37 years who is valued and loved.

We know that the power of prayer is the foundation of the movement. We know how important the power of prayer is and that it is the foundation of prayer in our movement. Mothers' Union began through prayer and continues through prayer.

I would like to invite the members of AMARE from South America to join me on stage to demonstrate the power of prayer, and how they reach out to others to grow God's Kingdom here on earth. AMARE is Spanish for 'to love' and these women are affiliated with the Mothers' Union. They are members from Buenos Aires, Salta and in the Northern Argentina area we have Wichi and Toba Indigenous women.

Thank you to these members. This is the first time they have travelled to Mothers' Union to participate in such a gathering, and we have been blessed to have them with us. Please let us show our appreciation.

God continues to work through each of us in the ordinary. We heard this week that it is the small things we do in our daily lives that make the difference. I have shared about the Prison ministry by a member in England that have changed the lives of women in a maximum-security prison - 40 Mothers' Union members enrolled while serving sentences in a maximum-security prison.

I could share many stories of changed lives, whether through sharing a cup of tea, sitting and listening, supporting one another in prayer, teaching women how to read and become leaders in their communities. God is in the small and the big things.

I visited members in Bahrain this year two weeks before the war in the Middle East broke out. These are members of St. Christopher's Cathedral in Manama. They are a blend of Tamal as well as other women who live in Manama and surrounding area. Many are diaspora but they created a branch three years ago and now have over 30 members. Young women with older women. Learning about Mothers' Union, learning how to belong in the challenging world of today, learning and growing together in God's love with Him walking beside them. This is how we start. A small seed is planted. He is a faithful God. He is a faithful God.

This anniversary is not simply a celebration of longevity; it is a testimony to God's continuing presence. We have heard much about listening, and walking alongside each other and in our communities, and that is what has made a difference to our communities. We know that He walks with us, He promised He would.

Our future requires courage and openness. Mothers' Union has survived and flourished because we have responded faithfully to changing circumstances. We are a movement and we transition as needed, by God's grace.

We heard this yesterday about families under pressure and the diverse types of families, child-headed families, single mothers, and the distances within relationships. Families are our calling. Supporting family life remains central to our mission, and we meet people where they are in family life. It is not for us to judge the structure or make-up of it. We must care for them where they are and support them with Christ's love and compassion.

We need to listen to new generations and different contexts, as we heard from Hannah and from our youth panel on Thursday. We need to trust our youth and listen to them. They need to be seen by us and valued.

We need to remain united while honouring diversity. Our cultures are different, our languages are different, our memberships are different. But we all believe in the same

Lord Jesus Christ, we believe in the same Aim, Purpose and Objects of the Mothers' Union, we do the same work, and we advocate for the vulnerable with love and compassion.

As we heard yesterday, we need to create a Holy disturbance. Advocating for others is our witness. Our Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ calls us to speak and act for people who need justice. Bishop Vicentia quoted Micah yesterday from 6:8, 'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

We want to keep people safe. We want to offer safe spaces. Our Mothers' Union has been rolling out training on Safeguarding. We are developing a Safeguarding Charter with the support of Steph Nunn and our Safeguarding Lead Deena Patel at Mary Sumner House. This tree depicts our draft Safeguarding Charter which will drive all our work in keeping people safe.

The roots of dignity, love, justice, compassion, safety and service undergird all that we do. Jesus has commanded us to love one another. If we base our work on this command and these values, the limbs, branches and leaves on the tree will allow our members, branches, diocese, provinces, central charity and partners to flourish and thrive.

As we look to the future, we must remember that the future belongs to all of us. We heard yesterday that it is not the leaders who make a difference. It is each one of us. A few leaders will not write the next chapter of Mothers' Union. It will be shaped by each one of you in every parish, community and Province.

I close in encouraging you to consider:

What is God asking of me?

How can my Branch serve its community?

How can we make space for new voices?

How can we continue to be people of prayer, compassion and action?

In closing, hope is our posture. The challenges ahead are real, but God's faithfulness is greater. We honour what has been entrusted to us, and we step forward with confidence into what God is calling us to become. The God who has guided us as Mothers' Union sisters and brothers in Christ for the first 150 years is the same God who will lead us into the next chapter. He is a faithful God!

My prayer is that we continue to walk together, learning from one another, strengthening one another, and trusting that God will use even the smallest acts of faithfulness to bring transformation.

I close with the following prayer:

Loving and faithful God,

We give You thanks for Mothers' Union - for 150 years of faithfulness, for the women and

families whose lives have been touched, and for all who have served with love and dedication.

Thank You for carrying us through every season and for the strength You have given us to continue putting our faith into action.

As we look to the future, fill us with hope and courage.

Give us wisdom to discern Your way, faith to trust Your leading, and hearts ready to embrace all that lies ahead.

May we remain united in Your love, faithful to our calling, and confident that You are with us every step of the way. In Jesus' name. Amen.