Southwark News

150th Anniversary Year

Autumn 2026



Afternoon tea with Bishop Christopher

LETTER FROM THE DIOCESAN PRESIDENT

Dear friends

“God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” I Cor 1:9

God is indeed faithful as he blesses and guides our work for him in and through Mothers’ Union as we celebrate our 150th Anniversary. This edition of the Southwark News gives a flavour of all that has been going on. Thank you to those who contribute faithfully.

The heatwave this year was a challenge to us all however many of us have participated in the joyous service at St Paul’s either in person or online and the celebration the next day of MU past, present, and future. Bishop Christopher also kindly welcomed us to his garden for an afternoon tea.

We were extremely fortunate in having been granted a HOPE Day at Lambeth Palace which offered us the opportunity to highlight the work of Mothers’ Union in London and Southwark as we shared the venture with our friends in London Diocese. This was not an exclusive MU event, but for everyone, family, friends, and our congregations enjoyed this rare chance to visit the State Rooms of Lambeth Palace. We were thrilled that our Kathleen Snow along with June Butler and Maria van Staden, Zonal Trustees of All Ireland and Central Africa, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Southern Africa respectively were delighted to be able to join us along with staff members.



I continue to enjoy meeting members in their parishes and continue to find my way around the Diocese. I do not need to speak but I am keen to support and encourage you as you support and encourage me. Likewise, I am happy to meet, at a midweek or Sunday service, Diocesan members.

In the meantime I encourage you to be faithful to the legacy of Mary Sumner as we celebrate together, that we continue to flourish as Mothers’ Union in Southwark, as we work together to serve the Lord in our communities, remembering to invite others to Join Us, Join In.

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." Hebrews 10:23

Yours in faith

Penny

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF ST MILDRED'S MOTHERS' UNION. – 6th June



Saturday June 6th, 2026, was an important day for our Mothers' Union as we celebrated 100 years, with a Service of Thanksgiving for the Centenary of St Mildreds Mothers' Union Branch followed by an afternoon tea.

With Fr Neil leading the Service of Thanksgiving, he spoke in the reflection of the inspirational light of Mary Summer in its foundation, and the message that is still strong as ever today. After the reflection, a person from each table read a prayer, followed by the lighting of a candle on their table as a sign of the light of Christ, which has shone through the life and witness of the Mothers' Union in our parish for the past 100 yrs, and for that light to continue to shine in our church and community in the years to come.



Following the service, in true Mothers Union fashion, the tea was poured, the sandwiches and cakes eaten from a delicious spread, concluding with a choice of two celebration cakes marking our 100th birthday. This was a time to celebrate and peruse the display of past photos taken over the years along with a written history. As a special memento of the occasion, each person present received a bookmark made by Jacky Bartley from a cross stitch sewn by Pat Nicholls commemorating 100yrs of St Mildreds Branch and 150yrs of the Worldwide Organisation.

Joy Morrall

CELEBRATORY PICNIC AND TEDDY BEARS' PICNIC – 13th June

On Saturday 13th June, from 12 Noon to 2.00pm, the Reigate Area held a celebratory Picnic and Teddy Bears Picnic in Manor Park, Sutton. 35 people attended, including eight children and their mothers from St Barnabas Church Bible Stories for Children which is run by St Barnabas Mothers' Union. The afternoon began with prayer and a reading about Jesus and the little children, read by Loyce Muhindo, and the song "One More Step Along the Road I go." Then everyone sat down and had their picnics and did a Teddy Bear Quiz.

Then it was time for fun and games with a tin can alley, singing and actions to Helen Oxenbury's, "We are going on a Bear Hunt", egg and spoon races, races with a bean bag on your head and a ball going over your head and under your legs in which both young and old joined.

Sue Davis, St Barnabas, Sutton MU member, had made a special birthday cake for the occasion which was cut up and divided between everyone after “Happy Birthday, Mothers' Union” had been sung, plus biscuits made by Margaret Fitch from Tadworth Branch. After that the children went and played in the play park. A lovely event and the weather was perfect.







TAKE OVER SUNDAY – 9th August

On Sunday 9th August, Mary Sumner Day, when Mothers' Union branch took over the main Sunday service in their churches to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Mothers' Union, at St Barnabas, Sutton we used the 150th Commemorative Service held in St Paul's Cathedral taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury as the basis for our service.

The service was led by Janice Clarke, branch leader with Revd Kayode Oyebode doing the priestly parts. Peter Brown, Mothers' Union member paraded the Mothers' Union banner round the church. The Scriptures were read by Mothers' Union members Sheila Collis, Pam Green and Sue Davis who also took the role as server. The history of the Life of Mary Sumner was read by Rosemary Walsh MU Diocesan secretary, and the Reflection on Mary Sumner and the Mothers' Union collect was read by Janice. The intercessions were led by Cathy Brown, MU Reigate Trustee, Ronke Oyebode and Shirley Tillman who read list of passed members who had died. During the service we heard a recording of the Ladies Choir at St Mildred's, Addiscombe singing Mary Sumner’s Personal Prayer and, of course, the icing on the cake, was Mothers' Union member Marilyn Curtis playing the organ for the service. Afterwards, there was a light lunch of sandwiches and cake, a craft table selling jams, vegetables and crafts and a raffle which included a 150th Anniversary bag, a 150th Anniversary badge and a 150th Anniversary Prayer Book amongst other items. There was also a PowerPoint presentation of Mothers' Union branch activities since 1952. £211 was raised for Mothers' Union '150th Fund.

Janice Clarke

THE WAY OF SAINT JAMES – PART 1

In September 2024, my husband and I walked the final 116 km (80 miles) of the Portuguese Camino de Santiago (Way of Saint James) in Northern Spain. It was an amazing experience which gave us a great sense of achievement. Every year thousands of pilgrims walk one of the several routes, arriving in Santiago de Compostela. But why and how did this small Spanish city become a place of pilgrimage?

Santiago de Compostela is in Galicia, one of the 17 autonomous communities of Spain. Galicia lies directly to the north of Portugal and has its own regional language, which is spoken at home and taught in school, alongside Castilian Spanish. Galicia is an important area for agriculture, fishing and shipbuilding.

St James - History & legend



St James the Great was originally a fisherman from Galilee (in the north of modern-day Israel), the son of Zebedee and brother of John. In the New Testament, James and John are called by Jesus to become his disciples and known as 'Boanerges', meaning 'Sons of Thunder'. Saint James – 'Sant-Iago' - is the Patron Saint of Spain. He is believed to have left Jerusalem to preach in the Iberian Peninsula, which at the time was the Roman province of Hispania. Sometime later, James returned to the Holy Land, where he was martyred by King Herod Agrippa in 44 AD.

Legend tells that, following the custom of the time, James' disciples brought his body back to the place where he had last preached. They sailed to Spain and landed at Iria Flavia in Galicia (now modern-day Padrón, on Portuguese Camino, famous for its peppers)! Padrón is on the River Sar and Iria Flavia was then a port. Under the altar in the church of Santiago de Padrón is a stone reputed to have had the saint's boat moored to it. The name Padrón comes from the word 'pedron', meaning 'stone' in the Galician dialect.

From Iria Flavia, James' body was transported by ox and cart and buried in a field near the forest of Mount Libredón. The tomb lay forgotten and undiscovered for many years.

The legend recounts that in the 9th Century (sometime between 813-820AD), a hermit named Pelayo had a dream, in which he saw stars shining down on a field. 'Compostela' means 'Field of the star' in Galician. Upon waking, he found the field and discovered a marble sarcophagus hidden in the undergrowth. When Teodomiro, Bishop of Iria Flavia, heard about the discovery, he went to the site and being aware of how becoming a place of pilgrimage could transform the fortunes of an area, decided that the tomb must contain the remains of Saint James the Great! Some accounts say he was told this by the Virgin Mary, in a dream.

Teodomiro informed King Alfonso II of the neighbouring kingdom of Asturias. Alfonso travelled to the Field of Stars and had a church built over the tomb. The church became place of pilgrimage dedicated to Santiago de Compostela – 'Saint James of the Field of the Star'. His successor Alfonso III replaced the original church with a grander structure, consecrated in 899 AD.

Disaster struck in 997 AD when the Moorish Caliph Almanzor attacked the church, stole the bells and forced Christian slaves to transport them to the mosque in Córdoba, Andalucia, southern Spain. Much of the country was then under Moorish rule, until the reconquest by the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel, in 1492. The church was rebuilt and in 1075, during the reign of King Alfonso VI, work began on the cathedral we see today. It was consecrated in 1211 and the bells returned in the 13th century.

Santiago de Compostela became a place of holy pilgrimage on a par with Jerusalem and Rome. Catholic pilgrims who undertook the journey believed that their time in Purgatory would be halved and those making the pilgrimage in a year of Jubilee (such as 2025) were promised full remission for their sins.

To be continued ....

Sue Keeler, Christ Church Purley

DOMESTIC ABUSE FORUM -12th October

The forum was organised by the Mothers' Union at St Mildreds as part of its RISE UP campaign against domestic abuse. Around fifty people attended, many from St Mildred's but also local councillors and members of the local community. The Forum was chaired by Rona Robins, our Reader and MU member.

There were witness statements from three victims of domestic abuse, as well as presentations from Sue Foley of Hestia, a charity that runs refuges for women in Croydon, and Alison Kennedy of Croydon Council. This was followed by a question-and-answer session between the audience and a panel of experts – Cllr Ola Kolada, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Justice; Rebecca O'Neill, Southwark Diocesan Safeguarding Lead; Rachael Phillips, Fundraising Officer for Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid; Sue Foley, Team Leader of Hestia; and Alison Kennedy, Strategic Lead for Domestic Abuse at Croydon Council.

The Forum was informative but also very moving, particularly the testimony of the survivors of domestic abuse, and there was also, we feel, a message of hope. The three very brave survivors, whose talks were heartfelt and poignant, commented that being given the opportunity to speak out had been very cathartic. Sue Foley said that the women referred to Hestia are strong women and the Hestia team firmly believe that they can achieve incredible things. Alison Kennedy said that support for victims of domestic abuse is one of the strengths of Croydon. The Council has set up the Family Justice Service, offering independent, confidential and non-judgemental support to

individuals of all genders. There is also an Experts by Experience Panel and over 120 community ambassadors.

St Mildred's Branch is the first branch in Southwark Diocese to complete the areas of action to achieve the Gold Award. The Branch will work hard to continue to reach out and support those who have been affected.



Meg Simmons

FAITHFUL THROUGH EVERY SEASON

Last year I had the privilege of leading the Mothers' Union retreat at Wychcroft, where we reflected together on Seasons of the Soul. Whatever season we find ourselves in, God is present and at work — inviting us to notice where we are, to receive what each season has to offer, and to trust him with what comes next.

During the retreat we reflected that, whether in a season of new beginnings, battle and growth, harvest and transition, or a quiet winter of waiting, each stage has purpose—and God is with you through them all. The retreat was designed to help each participant

🌸 Discover their own spiritual season

🌼 Stay rooted through testing and spiritual warfare

🍁 Steward blessings with wisdom and prepare for change

❄️ Find meaning and hope in seasons of rest, pruning, or silence

The theme of the retreat was: You were made to grow in every season. Let's walk through them together. Reflecting on seasons felt especially fitting as we prepared to celebrate 150 years of Mothers' Union. And what a year of celebration it has been! Our anniversary celebrations have been bigger and better than we could have hoped, and, in true Mothers' Union style, they have been creative, joyful and full of fun. Yet alongside the celebration has been a deeper recognition that, after 150 years of faith, fellowship and service, God is calling Mothers' Union into a new season.

We now welcome our new CEO, Alison Marshall, who brings more than 30 years' experience to the worldwide Christian movement. We pray for Alison as she prepares to begin this new chapter, asking God to bless her, guide her and give her wisdom as she helps lead Mothers' Union into its next season.

Here in the Diocese of Southwark, we are also living through a season of change. Bishop Christopher retired in August, and we are currently in a period of discernment as we seek our next Bishop of Southwark. We pray for all those involved in this process and look forward, in due course, to welcoming our new bishop and sharing with them

the breadth of Mothers' Union's work across the diocese the energy, compassion and practical love being lived out in churches and communities every day.

And then there is the season in which our wider world finds itself. As we look towards 2027, we cannot ignore the uncertainty and challenge around us. We hear daily of wars and rumours of wars, causing many families and communities anxiety, hardship and an uncertainty.

This is precisely where Mothers' Union has a vital part to play. We are a movement of faith in action: strengthened through prayer and worship and called to stand alongside our communities with practical love, compassion and hope.

As members of the Community of the Cross of Nails, we are part of a worldwide network committed to working and praying for peace, justice and reconciliation. We know that prayer matters. So, in these troubled times, let us pray boldly and faithfully for peace, in our homes, our communities and our world.

Whatever season lies ahead, we do not enter it alone. We can celebrate all that God has done through Mothers' Union, prepare prayerfully for what is to come, and step forward with courage and hope. For our confidence rests not in circumstances, structures or even in ourselves, but in Christ, who remains our constant companion and foundation: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." — Hebrews 13:8. So let us enter this new season with faith for today, hope for tomorrow, and a willingness to put our faith into action wherever God calls us.

Ish Lennox

Former Faith and Church Relations Manager, Diocese of Southwark Member

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DATES FOR CATHEDRAL PRAYERS 2027

27th January - Kingston	24th February – Reigate
24th March - Croydon	28th April- Woolwich
26th May - Kingston	23rd June - Reigate
28th July - Croydon	25th August - Woolwich
22nd September - Kingston	27th October - Reigate
24th November - Croydon	22nd December – No Service

Further articles to be circulated next month. Any additions to be sent to Rosemary.Walsh@southwark.anglican.org by the end of the month.