

**Introductory prayers**

Lord

At the beginning of this New Year I offer you my life.

Come take my voice, may the words I speak be filled with encouragement and goodness.

Come take my hands, may the work they create be generous and giving.

Come take my feet, may the journeys I walk be led by your Spirit within.

Come take my life Lord, for I love your goodness, your kindness and your leading.

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: Looking forward with Hope and Confidence**

**Heavenly Father, we bow down before you and we recognise your power, your reign over everything that has existed and all that will be in the future. We glorify you today because you are the essence of life, you are our understanding, our strength, love and our salvation. We ask that you will pour upon us your richest blessings, and do not let us fall into temptation. Teach us to walk in your way. In the name of our Lord and Saviour, we ask this. Amen.**

**Reading: Psalm 100:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup> Worship the LORD with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.

<sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his<sup>[a]</sup>;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

<sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.

<sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

## Reflection

When Helen asked me in late summer if I would do Thursday Prayer in January I was delighted to say yes. Not only because Thursday Prayer, concentrating on prayers and reflections about the work of the Mothers' Union, is always an enjoyable time of fellowship but because I always learn something new from someone who is closer to some particular aspect of our work. Being the first Thursday prayer in the year also gives the opportunity to look forward to all the new things that are planned for the year to come.

Little did I or anyone else know that January 2021 would not quite be the new start we were all hoping for.

2020 was a tough year for everyone. Even those companies who were doing very well economically because of the pandemic still had to work very hard to keep up with the demands of stocking their shops and reaching those in need, not to mention those working in care and the NHS. But you learn something all the time. Who knew that making gin was not far removed from making hand sanitiser?

But many Mothers' Union members and their friends rose to the challenge. Although many members knit constantly I doubt that they thought they would be making face masks as well as scrubs for those on the front line of care. The autumn edition of Families First showed two of our trustees with Catherina at her sewing machine making at least three sets of scrubs every week and Jo doing a 700 mile cycle ride in her conservatory and back garden!

It was also a great change for all of us from our 'normal' life. Staying in the house most of the time, not meeting friends and family and no church or meetings, including MU branch meetings, made for a very different pattern to our days. As always our organisation rose to the challenge in using the telephone (and then Zoom) to keep in touch with church and MU members and support those who needed it.

Although the Diocesan Office at Bishop Woodford House and our MU office has been closed much has continued as normal. We have continued to organise the AFIA holidays (although re-organised until October half-term), the refuges and hostels have received household equipment, bedding and clothing for those in need of it and knitted goods have been distributed to local hospitals and care homes as well as world-wide. Prayer and reflections have continued regularly in the monthly MU newsletter and through phone calls, and Zoom meetings started to help replace the lack of contact that regular branch meetings gave. Communication has also changed using Facebook, u-Tube and a much improved MU website instead of only face to face meetings. I attended a Praying with Purpose Zoom call, run by MSH with 73 members taking part. That would not have happened in a normal year. Midday Prayer is now listened to by hundreds more people across the world now that it is on line and telephone and feels truly worldwide.

So where are we in January 2021? In the UK, as far as the transmission of the disease is concerned, in a worse place than we were last Spring. More people catching Covid, more people in hospital, more people dying. More, it seems, not being so careful and the disease spreading. More people worried about the health of their loved ones or themselves.

Hope is with us though because hundreds of people have worked so hard, across the world, to produce a vaccine to protect us from this illness. To have developed something so life changing within a year is magnificent. To know that everyone over 50 years old will have had it by the summer (and I am sure some reading this will have already had it) and that transmission can be controlled is an outstanding achievement.

**Rebuilding Hope and Confidence** is the theme this year for the Mothers' Union and how appropriate. Many people will need the help of others to give them confidence and isn't this where prayer, practical help, communication and fellowship are so important. All the things that the Mothers' Union are good at. We must not underestimate the job to be done in the MU this coming year. Some will not join our organisation again as they think of their branch only as monthly meetings and of course there have been none. Some will find it difficult to leave their home after being alone and frightened for so long. Some will just find it all too much to even think about. Our hand of friendship and support, I am sure, will continue to be extended to care for all in need.

Let us pray together

**Loving Lord, we pray for your love and compassion to abound as we walk through this challenging season.**

**We ask for wisdom for all those who bear the load of making tough decisions.**

**We pray for all those who are suffering with sickness, and all those who are caring for them.**

**We ask for protection for the elderly and the vulnerable.**

**We pray for misinformation to be curbed so that fear may take no hold in hearts and minds.**

**We pray that those in self-isolation may find strength in you while physically alone and that those of us who remain well continue to reach out and support all those in need.**

**Amen**

## **Intercessions**

In our intercession today, we pray:

For the world-wide work of the MU, particularly at this difficult time.

For Sheran Harper, our world-wide president based in Guyana

For our Chief Executive, Beverly Julienne.

For all who work for the MU normally based in Mary Sumner House, including those who have moved on because of redundancy and those new staff who have joined recently.

For all Provincial presidents and Kathryn Anderson in the province of Canterbury.

Let us pray for all members of our Diocese that in these difficult and upsetting times they are able to cope and have found new ways of working and keeping in touch.

*An opportunity to offer personal concerns to God, either aloud or in silence;*

May God bless all those for whom we pray. Amen.

Our theme for this week in our Prayer Diary is Christian Fellowship and today it says,

‘Lord we ask you to bring us together as one in prayer and praise and to daily lift each other to your throne of grace. May we feel your love helping our fellowship to be a witness to you as we serve you even in difficult times and challenges.

In our Wave of Prayer we pray for –

St Mark the Evangelist in South Africa, Butare in Rwanda, and Okigwe-South in Nigeria, Gambia, British Columbia in Canada and Rajesthan in India.

Let us 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 as your hands across the world.**

**In Jesus' name. Amen**

# 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.

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

Daily doth the 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 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.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,  
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Romans 15:13*

The Grace

Hazel Williams