

Ponderings from Greenbanks

Lady Day – May 2016

On Monday 4 April, the western church celebrated Lady Day. Lady Day, in the church's liturgical year, is not a celebration of female clergy, bishops or otherwise, nor is it a day of praise for females in general. What it is, is a very special day when the church recognises the visit of the angel Gabrielle to Mary to tell her that she is going to have a baby and be the mother of God's Son - Jesus, and it celebrates Mary's response - 'I am the Lord's servant', Mary answered - 'May it be to me as you have said'

What a brave response from a young girl engaged to be married to Joseph! The Mothers' Union celebrates Lady Day with a special service but this year it was also celebrating 140 years since it was founded by Mary Sumner. Mary, the wife of a vicar, was very concerned that mothers should always be a good example to her children and that prayer life should be central to the life of the family. The organisation and its aims spread across the world and today it works to support families and married life and to help families in need. Its 'Celebration of Faith' this year, recognises all its members who through the ages have been lights in the world as they have shared the love of God through their witness and service. And what times they have served through and what changes have happened in the world in those 140 years.

The make up of our country and society today is very different from how it was in 1876. The MU was formed after industrialism had taken hold – in the towns and cities, people lived in overcrowded conditions and diseases such as TB, Diphtheria and Polio were common. Family life was under pressure. Two world wars came and went and family life suffered; women took on men's roles, and children grew up without the role model of a father. Many fathers never came home; those that did had experienced such horrific scenes and treatments that many found it hard to forget. In the sixties we saw new sexual freedoms, new contraceptives and women, for the first time, being able to choose whether and when they became mother's. Women had families and it became the norm that they went out to work; medical advances and the age of technology changed the complexion of society again and so it goes on. But through all those times of change the Mothers' Union has remained a stalwart and impregnable force for good in our society, underpinned by Christian values,

but non-judgemental of individuals and always reaching out in love to help families and communities in need.

And who knows where the next 140 years will lead. God's love never changes but society will continue to change; as an organisation the MU will be there, continuing to respond to the needs of families and speaking out for family values and defending those who can't defend themselves. When I grew up, one of the hardest things I had to learn to accept was that life doesn't stand still and that things and places I held dear, wouldn't always be there or if they were, they would have likely changed. The MU will be there, of that I have no doubt although God may call it to serve and reach out to people in ways that at the moment are not clear to us but are clear to God. A verse I am always encouraged by is Jeremiah 29: 11 – 'For I know the plans I have for you' declares the Lord, 'Plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'. God cares for all and knows the plans he has for the Mother's Union and how He will use it to support family life in 2016, 2026, 2036, 2046 and so on – the Mother's Union is the vehicle that God uses to help others – to prosper and not harm them, to give them hope for the future; to show them love.

So as the Mothers' Union takes on the challenges of the 21st century to continue to serve people in their communities, and strengthen and nurture faith based family life they will underpin it all with prayer. When we ask God to lead us and show us the way, life can be unexpected and amazing as Mary Jesus' mother was. So as the MU ask God to guide them for the future who knows how God will call them to serve in this 21st century that is so different to those that have gone before - but what we do know is that God loves us all and he will call them and us to serve others in ways that reflect His Love.

With every blessing, Sue

- See more at: <http://www.7churches.org.uk/blog#sthash.qlsdyun.dpuf>