

Mary Sumner 1828-1921

Mary Elizabeth Sumner was born on 9th August 1828 and died on 9th August 1921.

Mary had three children of her own but it was when she had her first child that she became aware of how much she needed help in the character training of a child. She said “ It is one of the most important professions in the world yet there is no profession that has so poor a training”

Mary gathered together young women from her husband’s parish and held weekly meetings in the Rectory. Many of these young women from all backgrounds were unaware of the significance of baptism and were experiencing difficulties in teaching their children the Christian religion.

Even today mothers can feel isolated and inadequate in the task before them of bringing up a child. In 1876 mothers stayed at home so the isolation may have seemed greater.

Mary Sumner recognised that good parenting was more than dealing with the physical needs of a child; she believed the primary responsibility was to raise children in the love of God. These support groups grew in the next ten years and spread locally in the Winchester Diocese where Mary lived. A great congress was convened by the Bishop of Portsmouth in 1885 at which Mary was invited to speak. Women throughout the country were eager to join and so a central group was formed with Mary as the President and objectives were decided – marriage, parenting and prayer were the key to the future of families

Mothers Union spread throughout the kingdom and throughout the world; there are now 4 million members in 83 countries. There are still projects to bring good parenting and literacy to people all over the world as well as advice on HIV and aids.

The Mothers Union funds workers especially in the third world through our overseas donations; at St. Mary’s some members have collecting boxes that they fill during the year. All Branches have links to other Branches abroad and in July we think especially of these links at our Wave of Prayer service.