



WWP's Homily – London Diocese Festival Service – Rebuilding Hope and Confidence.

My dear friends,

Good Evening! It's wonderful when we can gather like this for a Festival Service.

I am absolutely delighted to be with you this evening and my sincere thanks to Sue Johnson for her kind invitation to speak. If you have not met me before, I am Sheran Harper, your Worldwide President and I bring you warm and loving greetings from the Worldwide Board of Trustees and Staff at virtual MSH on this occasion.

A recent Facebook post caught my attention. It was a picture of a bench in a garden with a poster in the middle of it. There were two members sitting on the bench looking very happy indeed.

The poster read, *“Chatty Bench – If you feel a little lonely, or happy to have a chat, park your bottom on this bench, so others know where you're at. A stranger can become a friend, a few words can mean a lot, sit right here and spend some time, so people don't feel forgot.”* I thought this was such a clever initiative!

Chatty Bench reminds me of a few things as we emerge from the pandemic:

- Firstly, the joy of **reconnecting** on the bench,
- Secondly, **rebuilding confidence** by sharing stories on the bench,
- Finally, **renewing hope**, fresh hope to serve and to be there for each other on the bench.

Let's look at the joy of reconnecting ...

Reconnecting with each other is exciting because we were created to live in relationship and in community. I think this is one reason why we all love Mothers' Union because the fellowship is awesome!

At the moment we are consumed with the gradual lifting of the pandemic restrictions; the long awaited catching up with family and friends; meeting members over a Cream Tea; and a whole host of fundraising and fellowship activities which indicate *MU is still on the move*.

Chatty Bench reminds us that in the midst of our excitement of reconnecting, there are neighbours and friends who are still feeling a little uncertain, maybe not feeling confident enough to step out as yet. There are our sisters and brothers in other countries who are still in lockdown and the end of the pandemic is still a long way off. This is the reality we live in and one of the reasons why we are called to reach out and make a difference.

I cannot thank you enough for always being on the lookout for persons like these who are brave enough to sit on the bench or for those who silently stand on the other side of the road. May you always find the time to seize the opportunity to reach out and make a difference.

Your commitment means a lot! COVID-19 couldn't stop you! And as we emerge gradually, even with the wisdom of the delays, I know you are ready to go with fresh vision to create lasting ripples that touch lives. I wish you all the best as you reconnect and get busy again!

Rebuilding our Confidence – the Lord knows we need it.

Deuteronomy 14:2 tells us that as members, *we have been set apart, chosen and treasured for God's purpose and service* – my friends, what an honour and a privilege it is that God looked at each one of us and called us by name to serve him.

Just knowing that we were chosen and equipped by God for his purpose and service, is all the confidence we need to step out because we are assured that he is with us every step of the way. He promised us, *"I will be with you always, even to the end of time."*

There were times in the lockdown when we wondered if we would ever meet in person again. I wondered if I would ever be able to fulfil my role of traveling, meeting and inspiring members - but my friends, God has a plan. The time is here, well just about here, the key is in the ignition and we are ready to take off with our activities for a Summer of Hope - with caution of course – taking it one day at a time.

So as we begin to meet again and share stories on the bench, let the power of the stories we hear speak to our hearts as we move forward, in confidence, as God's hands and feet – as St. Teresa of Avila said, *"Yours are the hands through which He blesses all the world."* My friends we have work to do!

And finally renewing our hope.

Lasting hope, the hope and refreshment that are found in the abundant waters of Jesus Christ – *Loving Lord, will you pour the refreshing water of hope over us now?*

Thinking of hope, this year we celebrate 145 years of Mothers' Union and we pay tribute to Mary Sumner on the 100th anniversary of her death - for all she achieved in life, the good seeds she planted, and for the legacy she left us.

In 1921 Canon Vaughn wrote, "Mrs. Sumner was a constant attendant at Holy Communion. Kneeling in prayer she said, *Lord, teach me what to do, and make me do it.*" I believe this prayer gave Mary Sumner the hope she needed, so we need not wonder at the incredible success of Mothers' Union. In prayer we have all the hope we need to move forward.

As we emerge from the pandemic, would you join me as we deepen our roots in prayer, prayer that gives us hope?

"Loving Lord, give us the wisdom to know what must be done and the courage to do it. Fill us with renewed hope and confidence to boldly step towards a Summer of Hope and for our Diocesan and Branch activities beyond. Amen."

May our Lord continue to bless you and keep you!

Happy Summer of Hope my friends!

Sheran Harper
Worldwide President

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