

For some reason women have been seen as hard to understand when I reckon we are quite straight forward individuals really! It has been the topic of many a joke as far back as anyone can remember and it emphasises that men and women are different. Many a comedian has used differences to get a laugh – from Les Dennis to Billy Connolly.

A comment made by a marriage guidance counsellor I know and which I have always remembered emphasises this point. She said that often 'men think to talk while women talk to think'. So often confusion and misunderstanding set in when we don't take time to understand each other.

But it is also very easy to be misunderstood when it comes to faith. For anyone - male or female – a faith lived in action will run the risk of others misunderstanding. One Saturday evening back in Ireland I came home at teatime to find a stranger washing our cars. Puzzled I said hello and went in to ask Ted why there was a man washing the car. We had a house full of family and Ted explained that one member of the family thought he was mad while another thought he had done the right thing. It turned out that the man from Poland had been in Ireland working but was now unable to get further work and with the government cutting benefits he now had no money and wanted to get back to Poland to his wife and children. €80 would get him his bus ticket home. Deciding from his papers that he was genuine Ted agreed to give him the money - the man then insisted that he work for the next 4 or 5 hours. He washed several cars in the drive plus the parish mini bus. We eventually convinced him he could go and sent him off with a food parcel.

The jury was out in the house – one son saying you've been had and the other son saying how could you not help.

Faith in action will lead to misunderstanding and yet it is a risk that Christians must take. It is something that has happened for the past 2000 years since the early Christians.

Today the Mothers' Union remember the 100th anniversary of the death of Mary Sumner.

The Mothers' Union was started by Mary Sumner – though it was through the influence of her own mother's faith and her women's meetings that may have inspired her to begin the Mothers' Union.

She married George Sumner, an Anglican cleric, in 1876, and they had three children. When her eldest daughter Margaret gave birth, Mary was reminded how difficult she had found the burden of motherhood. She was inspired to call a meeting of mothers in the parish to offer mutual support. Her plan was radical in its day, as it involved calling women of all social classes to support one another, and to see motherhood as an important profession.

A number of parishes began to have Mothers' Union meetings on Sumner's pattern, and the then Bishop of Winchester, made the Mothers' Union a diocesan organisation.

Rapidly, the Mothers' Union spread. By 1892, there were 60,000 members, which grew to 169,000 by the turn of the century.

Mothers' Union now has more than 4 million members in 84 countries and as our branch of Mothers' Union shows it now has members who are men and those who are not mothers – it is open to all.

Mary Sumner acted on faith – she saw a need and ignored the class boundaries of her day – she would have been very misunderstood and expected to know her place as an upper class educated woman.

The Mothers' Union as an organisation can also be misunderstood and the vital work that they do throughout the world is not always heard of or appreciated.

Mothers' Union workers provide vital leadership for community projects. They enable people to gain essential skills, develop and encourage sustainable self-help projects, and run training seminars for local Mothers' Union members and the wider community.

Workers also run Literacy and Development Programmes in many parts of Africa. These programmes enable learners to become literate and numerate as well as gaining skills in health, hygiene, HIV/AIDS and poverty alleviation.

Mothers' Union is also involved in campaigning and lobbying on a number of worldwide issues such as parental rights, international debt relief and child poverty. They work in partnership with various organisations, including the United Nations.

One theologian (Teilhard de Chardin) has described this putting faith into action like this:- 'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience'.

Over and over again we are challenged in the words of scripture to live our Christian faith. There is a faith that consists only of words. The faith that we are challenged to have flows from words to deeds.

To pray for people is a good thing and shouldn't be underestimated. It can bring people comfort of knowing that they are not alone. But prayer should never be an excuse to do nothing else. We pray for our project in Uganda, but also go as a team to work there as well.

It is in the doing of our faith in a loving, caring God that our lives walk in the footsteps of Jesus, and we become truly Christian.

Another marriage counsellor has written, “It is a universally accepted truth that men and women have different wavelengths”.

And sometimes when we follow the Christian way and choose actions that mirror the teaching of Christ we will be misunderstood, just as Jesus himself was, just as the MU often is. Christians can be seen to be on different wavelengths but that’s the challenge – not only to say what is right but to do what is right and be the body of Christ here on earth, putting love into action, whoever we are and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves and however we might be misunderstood.