



UN International Widows' Day falls on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June each year.

This week we hold in love and prayer those know to us and widows across the world who face circumstances very different to our own.

Meet Marthe Vira, now Provincial President in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Martha works tirelessly on behalf of widows in the DRC which has the largest number of war widows, including child widows, in the world.

When speaking about widows there is a natural assumption that we are talking about elderly women. Marthe highlights that widows are indeed often young; some are young mothers, and some, quite shockingly are girls as young as eight or nine years old.

Many widows are found in rural settings in the villages surrounding main cities where war and conflict have continued for many years.

When husbands die from conflict the plight of the widow does not stop at the death of a loved one - traditions, customs and discriminatory interpretations of religious codes often lead to women being stigmatised in the very communities that they have been living in.

They will also lose their home; their livelihood and their children will suffer further through the subsequent loss of education.

Amid this suffering Marthe speaks of Mothers' Union "raising the women up and helping them to be able to move on with their lives."

Loving Lord,

We pray for the widowed in the challenges they face as they adapt to a different way of life:

for those who struggle with loneliness  
even when surrounded by family or friends,

for those who struggle with faith in you  
because the partner whom they loved,  
and still love, is no longer with them

for those who see tears as a sign of weakness or self-pity.

for those who struggle in cultures  
where traditions stigmatise widows  
and deny them rights.

May each one receive grace enough to truly grieve their loss.  
May there be glimpses of hope that life can still have purpose.  
May happy memories be a source of strength.  
May your loving kindness enfold each one.

(During Covid -19, Marthe and other Mothers' Union members have been providing demonstrations on how to wash hands properly and make homemade masks for the general public. They have set up makeshift stands on streets and have even created songs to help with this teaching.)