All-age talk

You will need:

- sweets or flowers (enough for all women in the congregation to be given a sweet or flower).
- two volunteers

Optional:

- Photographs of Ren, available from [christianaid.org.uk/lent](http://christianaid.org.uk/lent)
- large jar/container, large pebbles, smaller pebbles and a jug of water.

For some, Mothering Sunday may be a difficult day to celebrate. Please be sensitive to those in your congregation who may find it hard.

Today we celebrate the people in our lives who have looked after us and cared for us: the people who have sacrificed things in their own life to put others first. In particular, we celebrate the role of great women, mothers and carers in our lives.

Lots of people around us do nice things for us that we sometimes take for granted.

(Ask the congregation) Can anybody share something that somebody has done for them that they really appreciate?

(Ask the younger people) Can you tell us something your mum or carer has done for you that perhaps you’ve never said ‘thank you’ for? Can you think of things that your mum or carer asks you to do that is for your own good? (Suggestions might include brushing your teeth or putting your coat on during the winter.)

One thing that mums do for us, often more than we realise, is worry about us. Why do you think that is? (Hopefully elicit a response along the lines of: ‘Mothers worry about us because they want the best for us’.)

Explain that, in honour of mums and great women, you are going to hand out sweets or flowers to all the women in the congregation.

Ask two young volunteers to distribute the sweets or flowers to all the women in the congregation; allocate them half of the congregation each.

Allow one volunteer to get on with the challenge, but make things more difficult for the other volunteer – keep changing the rules and calling them back to add another element. For example, call them back and tell them they now have to do it by hopping on one leg, then call them back and give them something else to carry at the same time, and so on.

Reflect on how much easier it was for the first volunteer, who did not have to juggle other tasks and worry about other things.

Explain that you’d like to introduce them to one mum this morning who used to have lots to worry about when trying to provide for her family.

Ren (pronounced ‘Rain’) lives in the countryside in Cambodia. Eighty per cent of Cambodia’s 13.8 million population live in rural areas where most of them rely on farming and agriculture to live.

Until 2003, Ren lived in a small bamboo cottage with her mother, her son and her disabled sister. Her husband died 10 years ago.

Ren had no land other than the plot around her tiny house and she often earned only enough money to give her family dried noodles twice a day. She
would work for money in the fields or climb trees to pick palm leaves with which to make roofing panels for other people’s houses. Each panel took almost a week to make and for each one she was paid only US$1.25.

Can you imagine – a week’s work for US$1.25! (That’s about 79p.)

(Ask the congregation) Can you think of any of the things that Ren might have had to worry about?

She says: ‘My livelihood back then barely allowed us to survive. As a single mother, it was really tough. We mostly only had two meals a day back then. We had to eat basic food plus anything I could catch in the rice fields, like crabs.

‘I was always worried and I was always uncertain about the future because I didn’t have a stable job or income.’

But then Christian Aid – which is a charity working to end poverty – supported a local organisation called Life With Dignity (LWD) to help poor families like Ren’s.

For Ren, it was a turning point when LWD arrived. ‘They supported me with clothes and books for my son to go to school. Then each year they supported me in different ways. They supplied me with seeds like mangoes to plant in my garden, and they gave me tools to cultivate my plants. They also helped me with other agricultural tools and fences. But most of all they gave me knowledge and skills to start farming more effectively myself.’

By 2007, Ren had saved enough to replace her old rickety bamboo cottage. She bought a wooden stilted house from someone else and had it re-assembled on her land.

‘When I look back, the most remarkable thing that LWD helped the community with was setting up a village bank. Because of the bank I could borrow money – up to 100,000 riels [about £17]. So I bought a sow with the first loan. When the sow had piglets I sold them all and paid back the loan. With the next generations of piglets, I kept what I needed and sold the rest.’

So it was having somewhere reliable to borrow money from and buying a pig that turned Ren’s life around!

Because Ren had less to worry about, she was able to become more involved with the village development committee. Before Ren began to participate in the committee, she had always been afraid to talk to others because she didn’t have any confidence. She didn’t know how to stand up for her rights or how to ask for help from others.

But as a member of the committee, Ren has been able to take literacy classes. Before that, Ren wasn’t able to read or write, but she started learning maths and found out she was good at it! Because of all this, the village elected Ren to the village bank committee.

Ren was given lots of training and knowledge. She began to have regular meetings with the local commune and district councils, and became deputy village leader. When the village leader was promoted by the district council to be commune leader, Ren was elected in his place. She now has a steady income and is better able to support her son and, through the bank, other members of the community.

Ren’s story shows how important it is to support organisations like LWD that help to bring about change in communities. It is through such organisations that we can help people like Ren to have a better future.’
chief, Ren had done such a good job that they asked her to be the village leader!

‘I never imagined I could be on the village development committee, let alone become village leader. It’s a great achievement for me. It makes me happy, and makes me happy to be serving people,’ says Ren shyly.

As village leader, Ren has helped to campaign for a new local school and has mobilised the community to fundraise locally for a good-sized plot of land on which the school can be built.

In John 10:10, we hear that Jesus came to bring life in all its fullness. Just like mothers, Jesus wants us to live a full and happy life. When we have fewer worries, we are better able to concentrate on living our lives for Christ, and fulfil our purpose to serve each other.

Because of the support Ren received from Life With Dignity, she is now living life in all its fullness; supporting her family and the whole community.

Living life in all its fullness isn’t about having everything we’ve ever wanted, or being selfish, it’s about having what we need. But imagine what it’s like to live without clean water or enough to eat, or having no doctor when you get sick. This definitely isn’t living life to the full. The bad news is that at the moment, millions of people around the world live in this type of poverty. The good news is that God wants all of us to be a part of his plan to make the world a better place. Let us think this week about how we can help others to live their lives to the full and let us thank God for our mums and carers.

Optional activity for talk

- Using a large jar, fill it with large pebbles. Ask the congregation if it is full. As they say yes, add in a handful of tiny stones and shake the jar so that they fill in the gaps. Ask ‘What about now?’ Some may catch on and say no. Using a small jug of water, pour it in till the jar really is full.

- Explain that the big stones are the important things in our lives – our families and friends, taking time to spend with God. The pebbles are the things that take up our time that we have to do – maybe work/chores etc. The water is our worries – they fill up our brain if we let them. What would have happened if we’d poured in the water first, and then tried to put in the large stones? We’d have made a lot of mess! If we let our worries come first, we will fail to live life to the full.

Follow-up activities for children’s groups

You will need:

- per child – small plastic milk containers with a screw top, pipe cleaners, pink paint, pink card, googly eyes and other craft material

- digestive biscuits, ready-to-roll icing, pink food colouring, icing writing set, round biscuit cutter slightly smaller than the digestive biscuits, rolling pins, plastic knife to cut icing

- pre-drawn grids for ‘pen the pigs’

- sticky dots for pigs in ‘pen the pigs’

- quick quiz or wordsearch for children to complete

- seeds

- Bible verse cards

- paper

- pens, pencils, felt tips, collage materials

- sticky tape

- PVA glue

- scissors.

Activities

- Make a recycled piggy bank. Put a tablespoon of pink paint and a tablespoon of PVA glue into the empty, clean milk container. Secure the lid on tightly and shake the bottle until the inside is coated pink. Add more glue and paint if necessary to ensure it is evenly coated. Decorate the outside like a pig with googly eyes, a pipe-cleaner tail and paper ears and feet. The bottle top is the nose! When the paint inside has dried, an adult should cut a money hole in the top.

- Make piggy biscuits. Give each child a digestive biscuit and a small amount of pink icing. Roll out the icing and use a biscuit cutter to cut a circle that will fit on the biscuit. With the remaining pink icing roll a small amount into a pea shape and squash with your finger to make the pig’s snout. Make two triangles for ears and attach at the top. Use icing writing sets to add eyes and a smile. If doing this on Mothering Sunday the children could give these as presents to their mothers/carers. Remind the children about Ren and the village piggy bank: for Ren this was a great gift – like their piggy biscuits.
Pen the pigs. Take several sheets of paper. On each piece, draw a grid of dots – 10 columns and 10 rows. Divide the group into pairs, and give each pair a piece of paper with a dotted grid. Children take it in turns to join the dots one at a time following the dotted lines. If any child draws a line that completes a square they get to put a ‘pig’ (a sticky dot) in that square with their initial. When all the squares are complete the winner is the child who has managed to ‘pen’ the most ‘pigs’.

Stop worrying! Split the children into two teams. Give both teams the same activity to complete and tell them that the winners will be the team that complete it first. The activity could be a wordsearch or building a Lego tower; whatever works best for your group. During the game, distract one team by asking them lots of questions while they are trying to complete the task, and let the other team win. Ask the group why they thought one team had won over the other team. Talk to the children about how much easier it is to do something when you aren’t worrying about something else. This is like Ren’s life: when she didn’t have to worry about feeding her family she could concentrate on building up her business.

Get each child to draw a picture of some flowers. Write on each flower something that the child worries about: spelling tests, bullies, going to secondary school, etc. Explain to the children that when some flowers die they change into seeds and these seeds grow into beautiful things. If we let our worries ‘die’ then we leave room for God to plant seeds inside us that can grow into beautiful things – these are much better for us than worrying. Explain that there are seeds that grow into plants and create food and help people like Ren, and there are also seeds that we can’t see but that grow in us, help us with our lives and bring us closer to God. You could give each child some seeds to take home and plant.

Memory verse. John 10:10. Read the verse together. Talk about what you think it means. Give the children a set of cards – put one of the words from the verse on each card and ask the children to put them in the right order, to help them learn the verse.

Taking it further

Encourage the children to take their piggy banks home and collect their small change in them to help people like Ren.

Serve piggy biscuits with refreshments after church and ask for donations for Christian Aid’s work with partners like Life With Dignity.

Encourage the children to write a prayer about mothers or carers, and ask them to say the prayer every night for one week.

Make cards and gifts (such as the plant pots below) for the children to give to their mums or carers, to say thank you for all that they do.

Give the children some seeds for fast-growing flowers, and ask them to plant them in small pots (you could do this together in your Sunday groups, or give the children the seeds to take home). Ask them to look after the flowers so that when they start to bloom, they can give them to someone who might be worrying about something. Make tags for the plant pots with the children, using one of the following passages:

John 10:10 – ‘I came that they may have life, and life in all its fullness.’

Ephesians 2:10 – ‘For we are what he has made us, created in Jesus Christ for good works.’

Galatians 6:2 – ‘Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.’