

Join the fight against modern slavery

Last month, on Anti-Modern Slavery Day, churches across Somerset were lit in bright red as part of the Clewer Initiative's campaign to show their stand against modern slavery. Clewer is the national work of the Church of England to combat modern slavery. They support churches across the country to help tackle it where they are, especially with their Hidden Voices programme.

Bath Abbey, which recently hosted a Monuments, Empire and Slavery exhibition to explore the Abbey's past connections with the transatlantic slave trade, was one of the 'red churches'. Yet, 200

#ORDINARYACTIVISTS

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This year's campaign was #OrdinaryActivists

years after the abolition of the slave trade there could still be up to 136,000 men, women and children trapped in modern slavery in the UK. The first town to petition against the transatlantic trade slave was Bridgwater and today the community is still active in battling slavery and are part of Hidden Voices Somerset which has had 60+

lay people and clergy involved from five denominations. An event for to mark Anti-Slavery day was held on 18 October at St Mary's Church, Bridgwater.

The theme for this year's Anti-Modern Slavery Day was #OrdinaryActivist and Clewer shared stories of people from all walks of life doing their bit to fight modern slavery, from the bride sourcing an ethical dress for her wedding to a mum working in the evenings and during her child's nap times to raise awareness of modern slavery.

If you think you could be an #OrdinaryActivist visit: theclewerinitiative.org ■

News in brief

Planting the green canopy

Bishop Ruth took a special present to King Ina school - a broadleaf tree. The tree was given to all Bishops of the Church of England by Forestry England. These will all be planted to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee as part of the Queen's Green Canopy.

The Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher, lead Bishop for the Environment, said "They will also be symbols of our joint commitment to pray, speak out and take action to ensure that we work together in our communities for climate justice in Jesus's name."

Though it is a very small sapling now, it's hoped the tree will eventually grow to around 30 feet high. It will help the environment by storing carbon and will also act as a symbol of the church's commitment to take care of God's world ■



Bishop Ruth with pupils from King Ina school

New school celebrations

The pupils at King Ina Church of England Academy in Somerton enjoyed showing their new school to Bishop Ruth and other supporters at a special celebration assembly. The new space brings together the pre-school, Infant and Junior schools.

Bishop Ruth encouraged the children to 'recognise that there is so much in our world to be thankful for' ■

Abbey celebrations

Bath Abbey supporters, congregation, staff and volunteers have attended a special Footprint Celebration Service.

Guy Bridgewater, Rector of Bath Abbey, said: "We are overjoyed to celebrate the completion of the building work of the Abbey Footprint project. The vision of a fully restored Abbey floor, and greatly enhanced facilities for welcome, worship and ministry has been gloriously fulfilled. The Celebration Service is a chance to express our gratitude to God - and to everyone who has helped renew Bath Abbey by their generosity, patient faith and hard work." ■

'There is much to do'

By Alistair Redfern, Assistant Bishop and Chair of Clewer

Our church faces many challenges about funding, organisation, credibility and appropriate approaches to mission. Where might modern slavery fit in?

Bath and Wells is a leading light within the Church of England in terms of a positive and effective response to the growing evil of modern slavery. On behalf of the Clewer Initiative, which coordinates the Church of England's work in this area, I would like to say a huge thank you to David Maggs, Sian Owen and others. They have helped the diocese lead the way in raising awareness, offering training to establish community resilience, fight back against the phenomenon of county lines (the involvement of children and young people in drug trafficking), and pioneered the

development of partnerships which enable the church to play a key role in both care and prevention. Bath Abbey has been doing some ground-breaking work about monuments and the transatlantic slave trade with an approach that will be helpful to others. Yet, with modern slavery increasing, there is much to do.

Jesus calls us to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. The gospel makes clear that the neighbour is not just the person next door, but the person everyone easily passes by – while they are suffering without hope. In Matthew 25 Jesus makes it clear that we meet Him in the poor and oppressed – or in Clewer's words, Hidden in Plain Sight.

In the modern rush to grab cheap goods and services, we rarely

notice those who may suffer and are criminally controlled in order to provide them. As we rightly reorder our priorities as churches, our ways of working, our mission and service – modern slavery is a key indicator of whether we aim to serve the church as our own safe place, or whether we aim to be out on that road between Jerusalem and Jericho, looking to encounter and rescue and raise up those who are trapped and suffering and generally ignored.

Let us not rest on our laurels, but build upon our work so far, so that others may be brought good news, embraced into our communities, and given confidence to know the love of God through the love of their neighbours.

Every blessing
Bishop Alistair

A community approach

Volunteer, Sian Owen runs the Hidden Voices, a Modern Slavery Support group in Bridgwater and was shortlisted for one of this year's Modern Slavery Awards for her work.

How did you get involved with Hidden Voices?

I first heard about Hidden Voices about four years ago when they ran a course at my church, St Francis in Bridgwater. I went to support the church but got very interested in the subject. That intensified after the death of a family member, who we later found out had been exploited.

What does your work involve?

It is mainly getting out into the community and onto the streets to raise awareness of the issues. We started by getting in touch with the Mayor who put me in touch with the leader of the Town Council who had recently written an article about Bridgwater being the first town to petition against slavery in



Sian Owen, Hidden Voices volunteer

1785 and our network has grown from there. We attend as many community events as possible, such as the Bridgwater Together event that celebrates the diversity of our community. It was a fantastic day, then lockdown hit.

What impact has the pandemic had on your work?

I've been able to do some online

training for village agents and they still keep in touch and call if they have any concerns. We have continued to be out and about and visible as much as possible and my partner and I were even able to spot an incident of County Lines drug exploitation on our early morning walks.

How can people get involved?

Everyone can learn to spot the signs and make a call. You can call the Modern Slavery Helpline (08000 121700), the local police on 101 or the Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority (0800 432 0804). You can also do the [Hidden Voices course on the Clewer website](#) and read more about Sian at [bathandwells.org.uk](#)

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