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From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells ☩ October 2025

Talking growth

What do you think of when someone mentions slavery? For many of us, it will be an image related to slavery from times gone by, but slavery still takes place today, and it could be happening near you. That is the message that campaigners want us to share on Anti-Slavery Day, which this year takes place on Saturday, 18 October, ahead of Anti-Slavery Week.

It is a message that an event held at St Mary's Church, Bridgwater will be sharing loud and clear. Hidden Voices is holding an art exhibition on the theme of 'the hidden market' from Friday, 17 to Sunday, 19 October.



This year's Modern Slavery art exhibition incorporates art pieces, performance and information sharing.

The group has partnered with two art groups, the Minehead-based Sparrows Project, and Chard-based Vera ArtSCM. They're contributing various forms of artwork, and there are also plans for live performance piece on the opening day, Friday the 17 October.

Organiser Julia Holder-Shephard says, "We hope people will come along and see how we're all part of one society, responsible for each other. Anything that raises awareness and helps care for people - whether next door or further afield - is worth supporting. "It's not a light topic, but it's one that needs to be discussed."

With the Clewer Initiative charity reporting that over 120,000 men, women and children are trapped in modern slavery in the UK today, it's hard to disagree.

Find out more about St Mary's art exhibition: bathandwells.org.uk/modern-slavery-art-2025

News in brief

Memory Lane

At Milborne Port, a monthly dementia friendly service called Memory Lane offers calm, consistency and connection for those living with dementia and their carers.

The service follows a simple structure with familiar payers and hymns. Priest in Charge, Revd Rona Stuart-Bourne says the service is about being together and supporting one another. She says, "It's not about running big programmes or launching initiatives. It's about asking, 'What's needed here?' and listening."



Summer support for families

St Mary's Church, Chard stepped up to support families who normally rely on free school breakfasts, with a simple food bags initiative. Revd John Rollings, Associate Vicar at St Mary's says, "Many have told us how tough it is to cover the cost of meals when children are at home.

"Rising food prices makes finding enough to pay for all meals a real challenge and breakfast is often one meal families skip to make ends meet. We are just grateful to be able to do a little something to help."



Green grants for churches

Churches across Bath and Wells are being encouraged to follow the example set by St John's in Keynsham and take advantage of Green Business Grants. St John's received £15,000 towards the cost of replacing their old gas boiler with sustainable radiant heat panels.

Dan Wills Net Zero Enabler for Bath and Wells says, "We're absolutely delighted that St John's has been awarded this grant. It's a real boost for their net zero journey and a great example of how a church can take steps towards a more sustainable heating."

Find out more on these and other news stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

For or against: slavery & salvation

By Alistair Redfern, Honorary Assistant Bishop for Bath and Wells

Much of our world operates around the challenge to be 'for' or 'against'. And generally, it is easier to be against things than for them! Look at the tendencies of the media, politics and religious disputes.

On Anti-Slavery Day, people across the UK will recommit themselves to the fight against modern slavery and human trafficking, one of the great evils of our time. Like William Wilberforce and what we now call historic slavery, we need to fight against the oppression and exploitation of our sisters and brothers today. Abolition is the proper aim of being anti or against. And the challenge is growing with:

- More vulnerable people susceptible to false promises
- Police and prevention resources being ever overstretched

- Increasingly flexible working arrangements which gives space for criminal agencies to provide goods and services based on exploitation and slave labour
- And our own insatiable appetite for cheap products

There is much we need to learn to oppose and abolish.

But, in facing these almost overwhelming challenges we must not neglect what is primary for our Christian witness, the call to notice, reach out, rescue and restore. The call to love, to be for those who are hidden, neglected, hurting and ignored.

In Anti-Slavery Week, give time to thinking how you or your church or home group could better learn how to contribute to the fight against modern slavery. Consider how you could go the extra mile in the way

of the Good Samaritan. Going beyond the indifference of the priest and the Levite, too busy to stop, notice, reach out, rescue; rather how can we better contribute to establishing systems like the partnership between the Good Samaritan and the innkeeper— systems to provide care and the basis of restoring proper health and opportunities to those whose cries represent the voice of Jesus for those willing to listen.

Be against modern slavery this October, but more, be for those who need our friendship and our partnership.

Bishop Alistair
Hon Assistant Bishop and Chair of the Clewer Initiative

[Visit \[clewer.org.uk\]\(http://visit.clewer.org.uk\)](http://visit.clewer.org.uk) for Modern Slavery resources.

If it looks wrong...

John Dickinson is a trustee at the Sparrows Project which raises awareness of modern day slavery locally and provides support to survivors.

Many people think slavery doesn't happen around here. Is that right?

That isn't the case at all. Somerset and the south west may look peaceful, but slavery happens here just as it does in cities. The countryside looks soft and safe, so it's hard for people to imagine. But it does take place.

Who are the people being exploited?

It's often the most vulnerable. Many assume it's mainly people from overseas, but the largest group on the government's support scheme are UK nationals. Vulnerabilities such as homelessness, drug abuse, and family breakdowns, are exploited.



If it looks wrong, report it! Visit the Sparrows Project website at rhsw.org.uk to find out more.

How can we spot it?

There are no definitive signs, but there are indicators. Our view is: if it looks wrong, it probably is wrong.

Where is it happening?

We see abuse in nail bars, car washes, and the construction industry. Pop-up brothels are another issue, particularly around the Hinkley area. And increasingly, we're seeing exploitation in the care sector.

Why is the care sector a concern?

There are over 130,000 vacancies in the care sector, and traffickers know this. People are being brought in, particularly from abroad, to fill the gap. Many of them end up trapped and exploited. It's a hidden crisis.

What can people or communities do?

Churches and communities can play a big role. Many parishioners either live in care homes or work in them, so they're in a position to notice the signs. The key is not to close your eyes, think "if it looks wrong, it probably is wrong."

If you suspect slavery:

- Call Unseen, the Modern Slavery Helpline on 08000 121 700
- Report online at modernslaveryhelpline.co.uk
- Call the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) on 0800 432 0804