

Let's end violence against women



Andrew and Miriam Hargreaves, from Harbour Church, urge men to help combat violence that mars the image of God

ONE of the most life-giving verses in the Bible is Genesis 1: 27: "So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

The fullness of the image of God is found in both male and female. This is beautifully and wonderfully seen when men and women honour each other, work together and cheer one another on wholeheartedly.

As parents to three wonderful young women, and friends to many more, we have seen the wonder of God expressed in their womanhood.

Sadly, this wonderful image of God is marred when we see emotional, verbal, physical and sexual violence against women and girls. Starting with men, and then working together, we must address the attitudes and behaviours that contribute to a fear of violence for women in their day-to-day lives.

I, Miriam, work with Harbour Church, Portsmouth in a ministry called Vista, which supports women affected by the sex industry. We share God's love with some amazing women, most of whom have experienced violence and abuse.

We offer a chance to talk in confidence, practical support and advocacy as well as regular safe

spaces to gather and support one another. Each week we meet with women with hard stories to tell, and know that in our churches and communities, there are many more who are affected by abuse from the men they know or encounter.

One in four women experiences domestic abuse, and one woman is killed by a man every three days in the UK. This is an issue across the whole of society, not just in the sex industry.

'The image of God is marred when we see violence against women and girls'

I, Miriam, often wonder whether the little we are doing to support some women can make a difference. Perhaps you also see the magnitude of the problem of violence against women and girls and feel powerless to bring change.

But perhaps by raising our voices as men and women together, little by little we can see men and women living in greater harmony and mutual respect.

November 25 is White Ribbon Day. It coincides with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. White Ribbon is

a movement started by men, to raise a voice and make a difference in workplaces and social settings, across society.

One small step to starting a conversation is for men to wear the White Ribbon on 25th November and beyond. It can spark important conversations about men's violence against women and girls and to show – as a man – your own journey as an ally.

I, Andrew, am determined to be held accountable to women, and to other men, so we can change behaviour and transform harmful cultures.

I will honour, promote and celebrate women, standing up to, and steering the course away from harmful conversations, banter, and actions that harm women and girls, us all ultimately, and denigrate the image of God. Can I ask if those men who are reading this will join me?

● To read more about the work of Vista, see: www.harbourchurchuk.org/vista, www.havenchurch.uk/vista, or www.rydechchurch/vista.

For more details about White Ribbon Day and resources to help you promote the campaign in your parish, see: www.whiteribbon.org.uk and www.portsmouth.anglican.org/whiteribbon