



# Arundel & Brighton Justice and Peace Assembly 2024

Safe at home, safe in our communities?  
Addressing violence and abuse in our homes,  
families and wider community.

On Saturday, January 27th, the memorial of St. Angela Merici, the annual Diocese of Arundel & Brighton Justice and Peace Assembly took place at the St. Philip Howard Centre in Crawley, West Sussex. The event was hosted by the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton, the Rt. Rev. Richard Moth and Aisling Griffin who opened the assembly with a prayer for peace written by Pax Christi.

The following speakers addressed the issue of abuse from various perspectives: Canon Rob Esdaile on the biblical understanding of peace in our relationships and communities; Emma Scott from the charity Restored which helps to provide support and awareness for women who have experienced domestic abuse; Kathryn Slater from Crawley's Life Centre, raising awareness and providing support for the survivors of sexual abuse and Aisling Griffin from Pax Christi.

Canon Esdaile focussed on the biblical vision of human loving as taught in Genesis chapters one and two, with male and female created in God's image and likeness. The consequences of the Fall disrupted the union between man and woman, with mutual accusations, shame and an imbalance in power in the relationship. Such an imbalance in power in relationships needs to be addressed by the Church and in the Church which has previously tolerated slavery and war. Canon Esdaile noted a shift from the idea of marriage as contract to that of covenant, with mutual nurturing an integral part, being modelled on the love of God.

Noting the Church as a field-hospital for the wounded and vulnerable, he reminded the assembly of the challenge involved in moving from "thou shalt not kill" to "love your enemies". He also highlighted the risk involved in the alliance of throne and altar whereby the Church can be seen to be compliant with the wishes of the ruling classes.

Emma Scott defined domestic abuse as "an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner but also by a family member or carer. It is widespread. In most cases, it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men." The effects are manifold: emotional; financial-economic; physical; psychological, sexual and spiritual. Controlling and coercive behaviours were defined and differentiated; the former involving subordination and dependency, the latter used to frighten the victim.

According to UN statistics, globally 137 women are murdered daily. In the UK, 97% of women aged 18-24 will suffer sexual harassment in some form, whilst 25 % of British women will be subjected to domestic abuse.

The challenge for Christian denominations is to recognise and challenge the abusive relationships that can take place in the Church, with effective airing of the issue of abuse leading to a more effective response.

The speaker suggested that the Church can be a safe talking space by teaching about healthy relationships for all ages, providing safe spaces and referring to and partnering with competent agencies. The following biblical message was seen as a rallying cry:

"Everyone who saw it was saying to one another 'Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Just imagine! We must do something! So speak up!' Judges 19:30.

Kathryn Slater from Life Centre spoke about the challenges faced by many victims / survivors of abuse, such as guilt, fear of revenge, fear of not being believed, fear of social ostracism, shame and the potential impact on one's career.

Aisling Griffin concluded by explaining some of the ways in which Pax Christi is trying to bring Israeli and Palestinians together. One way is to bring together families who have lost loved ones due to violence.

The day ended with a blessing by the Rt. Rev. Richard Moth.