

The Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury have given their backing to the launch today of a project aimed at mobilising the Church of England's 12,000 parishes in the battle to eradicate modern slavery.

Theresa May welcomed the Clewer Initiative, a three-year programme to help the Church of England's 42 dioceses work to support victims of modern slavery and identify the signs of exploitation in their local communities.

The project was being launched today at Lambeth Palace at an event attended by representatives from Church of England dioceses and other denominations, along with MPs and charities involved in work to combat modern slavery.

In a statement of support for the launch, Mrs May said: "Modern slavery is a barbaric crime which destroys the lives of some of the most vulnerable in our society. I value the work that the Clewer Initiative will be doing to enable the Church of England dioceses and wider church networks to develop strategies to tackle modern slavery.

"In particular, I welcome the focus on engaging with local communities to help them to spot the signs of modern slavery.

"We need to shine a light on this hidden crime and to encourage more victims to come forward so that we can provide them with the support they need.

"Tackling modern slavery is one of my priorities as Prime Minister, and as Home Secretary I was pleased to introduce the Modern Slavery Act 2015, giving law enforcement new tools to pursue criminals and increase the support available for victims.

"However, the Government cannot tackle this problem alone and this is why the efforts of organisations and groups such as the Clewer Initiative are so important."

Work is already under way in dioceses with training and information sessions on how to provide support and identify victims of labour exploitation in areas from the construction and property sector to hand car washes in British cities and shipping.

Bath and Wells, Chester, Derby, Durham, Guildford, Lichfield, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Rochester, Southwark and Southwell and Nottingham dioceses are already signed up, with a further 14 dioceses due to participate later this year.

In Derby, the diocese has become a key member of the Derby and Derbyshire Modern Slavery Partnership, uniting with police and social services working to help victims.

In a video message, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, encouraged churches to act as 'eyes and ears' in local communities to identify victims.

He said: "Jesus came saying that he proclaimed freedom for captives. Freedom is something that we take for granted, but it is the gift of God, it is the purpose of God. Those who purposefully constrain, confine and traffick and enslave people will face the judgement of God for their terrible

sins.

"Yet even more serious is when we choose not to see: when as it were we put on our own blindfolds and don't see those around us who are held in slavery, oppressed, trafficked, in other peoples' power.

"But we can change it - we can change it so easily, so quickly. We can set people free, set our society and nation free from the scourge of slavery simply by removing our blindfolds and acting on what we see."

Kevin Hyland, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, said: "Faith groups have influence, insight and rare avenues into the community; they are therefore a powerful tool in the fight against modern slavery.

"The Church of England has acted on this unique ability by launching The Clewer Initiative, which adds backbone to the church's anti-slavery approach. Clewer offers important knowledge to leaders of the Church, parish members and the public.

"By informing those who are in a position to identify and support victims of this brutal crime, I am confident that the church is living up to its potential in defending the oppressed and overcoming injustice."

The Bishop of Derby, Dr Alastair Redfern, who chairs the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's Advisory Panel, said: "Modern slavery is present in nearly every community in England and will continue to flourish if we remain indifferent to it.

"Churches can provide a space to gather of goodness and grace, with an open agenda where different groups can meet to discuss how they work together to support victims, and to improve efforts for rescue and prevention.

"We can also act as 'eyes and ears' in our communities to help identify victims. Our work in the Clewer Initiative will build on the passion of churches to be with people, to contribute to more effective structures, and to go the extra mile for the sake of those who are suffering."

Notes to editors

The Clewer Initiative is funded by the Clewer Sisters, an Anglican order now based in Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire. The order was founded in the 19th century to help vulnerable, mainly young women who found themselves homeless and drawn into the sex trade.

The Church of England is working with the Anglican Alliance to help mobilise a wider Anglican Communion response to modern slavery. It has been a regular participant in meetings of the Santa Marta Group, an alliance of international police chiefs and bishops from around the world working together with civil society in a process endorsed by Pope Francis to eradicate human trafficking and modern day slavery.

More information on the Clewer Initiative can be found [here](#)

