

A group of Church of England bishops have issued a call to the public to “open their eyes” to slavery in their midst.

In a letter to The Times, the 15 bishops, remark that slavery is on the rise in the UK in a way “not seen since the days of William Wilberforce”.

The letter describes Easter as a time to celebrate “life in all its fullness” but warns: “There are thousands in our midst who cannot do the same, who are suffering a life of slavery: exploited, threatened and abused.”

They call upon the public to play an active part in observing and reporting possible signs of slavery in communities.

It comes ahead of a campaign planned later this year by the Clewer Initiative, the Church of England’s anti-slavery initiative, to uncover exploitation in the car wash industry.

The full text of the letter, which is published [here](#), reads:

*Sir,*

*Easter is a time to celebrate new life — and life in all its fullness. But there are thousands in our midst who cannot do the same, who are suffering a life of slavery: exploited, threatened and abused.*

*Slavery is on the rise in Britain in a way we have not seen since the days of William Wilberforce. Last year 5,145 victims were found in the UK. It is a big increase on 2016’s figure, but it still does not come close to the tens of thousands that the National Crime Agency believes are hidden.*

*It might seem that we should leave this problem to the police. But this Easter we are asking everyone to open their eyes to the signs of potential exploitation around them. The Clewer Initiative, our national anti-slavery project, educates people on what to look out for. New life for those entombed in darkness.*

*As Wilberforce said more than 200 years ago, “You may choose to look the other way but you can never say you did not know.”*

*The Right Rev Alastair Redfern, Bishop of Derby; the Right Rev Julian Henderson, Bishop of Blackburn; the Right Rev Stephen Conway, Bishop of Ely; the Right Rev Michael Ipgrave, Bishop of Lichfield; the Right Rev Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark; the Right Rev Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford; the Right Rev Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester; the Right Rev Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham; the Right Rev James Langstaff, Bishop of Rochester; the Right Rev Christopher Foster, Bishop of Portsmouth; the Right Rev Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans; the Right Rev Nicholas Baines, Bishop of Leeds; the Right Rev Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool; the Right Rev Christine Hardman, Bishop of Newcastle; the Right Rev David Walker, Bishop of Manchester*

