The Church of England has been encouraged to help provide support for the victims of modern day slavery at the launch of a new network of 'champions' to combat the growing crime of human trafficking.
The Bishop of Derby, Dr Alastair Redfern, spoke of how the Church can work with statutory and non-statutory agencies at a local level to care for the victims of trafficking and human slavery through initiatives such as training and awareness days and support networks.

Last year more than 2,300 people were identified as victims of trafficking in the UK from more than 96 different countries.

Speaking at a training and awareness day at Lambeth Palace, Dr Redfern said: “The key to tackling modern day slavery is through building partnerships and creating networks.

“That is the strength of the Church - our parish system looks outwards and provides a neutral, open space for people to come together to learn and be aware of this tragic issue that affects the most vulnerable people who are often hidden but are nevertheless members of the community.

"We have to build networks of love, support and care for them that are long term and sustainable."

The day was attended by representatives from 30 CoE dioceses who were joined by representatives from Scottish Churches Anti Human Trafficking Group and members of other Christian denominations including the Roman Catholic Church and representatives from the Muslim and Jewish faiths.

Speakers included Meghan Field, from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Detective Chief Inspector Phil Brewer, head of the Metropolitan Police trafficking and kidnap unit.

The conference also heard talks on pioneering work in the Truro and Derby dioceses on building partnerships to combat human trafficking.

Dipti Pardeshi, UK head of mission for the International Organisation for Migration, (IOM) which provides awareness raising training to the Church of England on human trafficking, said: "IOM has been working with victims of trafficking for the last twenty years and in that time has developed expertise in how to support and identify victims of trafficking.

"It is particularly important that the people who are likely to come into contact with victims of trafficking, such as religious leaders, are equipped with the knowledge and tools to spot the indicators of trafficking, identify potential victims, and feel confident in the best way to respond to them".

Jane Vlach, vicar of All Saints, Witley, in Guildford Diocese, who helped draw up Freedom Sunday resources for churches, said: "It is incredibly encouraging when you have worked behind the scenes for a little while to see so many people motivated and inspired to go back and mobilise in their dioceses to address this appalling crime.

"Trafficking moves from community to community and that is why it is so important for the faith groups to be there, looking for the signs that people have been trafficked and equipped to take action."

To read Bishop Alastair’s blog on the training day see http://cofecomms.tumblr.com/post/132860841162/helping-shine-a-light-into-the-darkest-corners-of
To read a blog by the Rev Jeremy Thorold, Chaplain to the Bishop of Truro see http://cofecomms.tumblr.com/post/132861368072/at-the-heart-of-this-are-people-made-in-gods