

## Message from Bishop Rachel 3 December 2024



Last Tuesday Bishop Robert wrote of White Ribbon Day linked to the International 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which for over thirty years has run from 25 November (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) until 10 December, Human Rights Day.

As the Mothers' Union highlight '*Gender-based violence is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can affect anyone at any time, and it takes many forms. It can be part of a damaging cultural norm or hidden behind closed doors. But we believe that we must bring this out into the light*'.

[16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence: Global | Mothers' Union](#)

Bringing things into the light links powerfully with Advent and on Sunday evening it was good to be at the cathedral for the Advent procession. As tiny candles were lit in the darkness of the vast building, the organ led us into that beautiful Advent hymn 'O come, O come, Emmanuel'. My heart was yearning as we sang the words 'O come thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight.'

In recent days, the gloomy clouds and dark shadows have felt quite strong, not least in the context of the Makin report, the situation in the Middle East, people's stories as they have engaged with the Assisted Suicide Bill, and local situations of conflict and broken relationship. Yet I could confidently sing out the words of the refrain 'rejoice rejoice,' because in the watching and waiting of Advent we know that Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, has come and will come again. The light of Christ will not go out, and the darkness will never overcome it. In recent days I have named that in a prison chapel with despairing men; in pastoral conversations amid disappointment, confusion and pain; at the bedside of my father in his final hours on earth; and standing with a wonderful array of confirmation candidates proclaiming their faith in Jesus Christ and giving them lit candles with the words, 'You have received the light of Christ. Walk in this light all the days of your life'.

I do confess that on Sunday afternoon we put our Christmas (Advent) tree up much earlier than usual. We untangled the lights and got them on the tree and then put our Swedish advent lights in the front windows. I felt so peaceful when we'd achieved that before I set off for the cathedral. On reflection, that peace wasn't simply about getting the task accomplished, it was far greater than that. It was about an intentional and proactive proclamation of the light at the end of a difficult week.

It was a glorious privilege to later stand on the altar steps on Sunday evening to give the final blessing: 'Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, scatter the darkness from before your path, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory.'

As we walk into Advent, may Christ scatter the darkness from our path and may we be courageous scatterers of that same light.

With my thanks and prayers as ever,

+ Rachel