Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse

St Anne's, Buxton.

The parish of St Anne's Catholic Church in Buxton, Derbyshire held a Day of Prayer for the Victims and Survivors of Abuse on 23rd April 2024. A previous parish priest, Paul Cullen, was found guilty in 2012 of abusing three young children in the 1980s; he was subsequently convicted, sent to prison, and died there in 2018.

Rt. Rev. Patrick McKinney, the Bishop of Nottingham, encouraged the parishioners of St. Anne's to hold this Day of Prayer, and came himself to an evening service to publicly apologise to the victims and the people of the parish. He said "…My prayers and thoughts are with all the victims of sexual abuse, but particularly with the survivors here in Buxton. As current Bishop of the Diocese of Nottingham, I wish to try and apologise to you for his (Paul Cullen's) actions, for the way the diocese responded to them and most importantly, for the abuse and hurt each of the victims and their families have continued to experience…"

He also apologised to the people of St. Anne's parish for the hurt Paul Cullen has caused them. "…I can well understand your very real feeling of having been betrayed by him as your parish priest…."

He finished by pledging his commitment, and that of the Diocesan safeguarding team, to ensure that everyone in this diocese is kept safe, especially the most vulnerable.

He promised that his door, and the door of his safeguarding team, is always open to anyone affected by abuse.

The church was open all day for group prayer sessions including listening to recorded testimony of survivors and praying the Way of the Cross through the Voice of Victims. Prayer stations were set up around the church for personal prayer which helped people to reflect and pray for the victims and survivors.

Fr Dominic Allain, from 'Grief To Grace' (https://www.grieftograceuk.org/) who provide retreats for victims and survivors of abuse, and Antonia Sobocki, from LOUDfence UK, (https://loudfence.com/) a pro-healing and reconciliation movement, joined them for the day and spoke to both groups and individuals.

As part of the day, a LOUDfence was held where people are invited to tie ribbons and tags of all colours and styles to railings, around trees and inside the church as a visible act of solidarity with the victims of abuse; this enables people to pray for them and send messages and prayers of support.

Everyone is invited to come and have a look at the display of ribbons, messages and prayers which will be on display for the next few weeks.

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(Above) St. Anne's, Buxton, LOUDfence display of ribbons and tags in solidarity with the victims and survivors of abuse.

(Above) Prostration of clergy at the Prayer Service for Victims and Survivors of Abuse at St. Anne's, Buxton.

(Below) 'Speak out' prayer station in front of the main altar at St Anne's, Buxton.