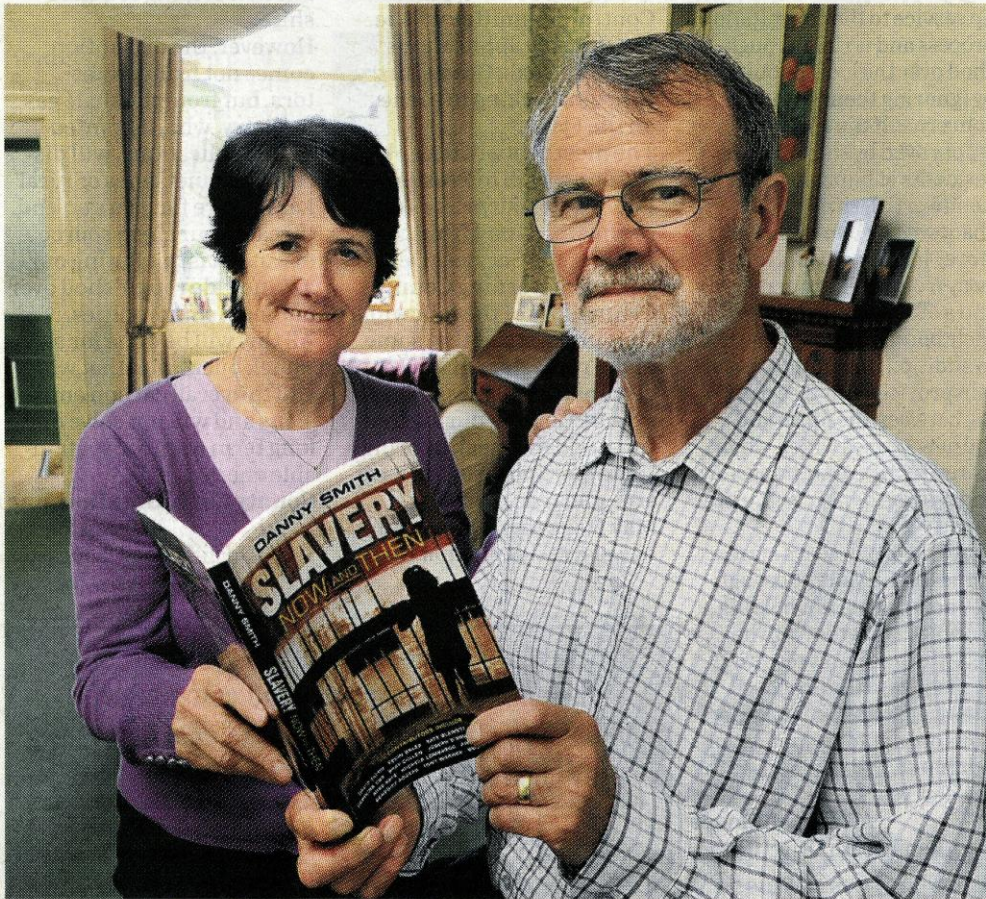


Couple are moved to take on



Anthony Brown and his wife Mary have set up a local group in Clitheroe to combat people trafficking

By MARGARET PARSONS

margaret.parsons@jpress.co.uk
Twitter: @clithadvertiser

In December last year Pope Francis and religious leaders from Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and other faiths came together at The Vatican to call for an end to slavery by 2020.

At the same time Clitheroe couple Anthony and Mary Brown were forming a group to raise awareness of human trafficking when they realised that this growing global epidemic is actually happening right here on our doorstep.

Slavery has never gone away. We may all have visions of wretched starving slaves chained in the hull of a ship arriving at the Port of Liverpool two centuries ago. But the problem is still here with us and, in some extreme cases, the chains do remain.

Realising that slavery comes in many forms – domestic servitude, enforced labour, shop lifting and prostitution, Anthony and Mary, of Eshton Terrace, have become full-

time campaigners believing that the only way to tackle the problem is via massive public awareness and concern, and an ability to recognise the signs.

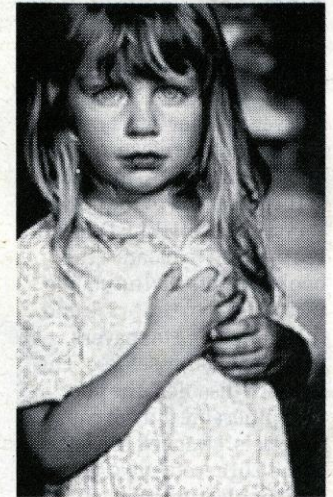
They have started small by forming the Clitheroe and Sabden Parish of Our Lady of the Valley Anti-Trafficking Campaign.

But from little acorns do might oaks grow. They know the fight against trafficking is enormous, but believe that their efforts are already paying dividends in raising awareness. Even the Pope has sent a message of support.

The new Bishop of Salford, the Rt Rev. John Arnold, is an active supporter of the parish group and has promised his full support.

And in the meantime their anti-trafficking campaign is growing daily with email support and fund-raising work ongoing. Like modern day evangelists they are spreading the word far and wide.

It all started last October when Anthony was part of a group of musicians who organised a "Traffik Jam" con-



cert in Clitheroe after hearing about the work of the Medaille Trust – a charity that provides safe houses for people rescued from trafficking. There was an amazing response to the concert which attracted more than 200 people and raised more than £2,000. Now a key part of the group's work is for the Medaille Trust to support its safe houses, and Anthony (68) a retired occupational psychologist for the Employment Service, is its Diocesan

the evil of human trafficking



representative for Salford.

The group has already forged strong links with the trafficking and child exploitation arm of East Lancashire Police and works with other trafficking charities – Stop the Traffik, International Justice Mission and Epiphany. Their members speak in schools for awareness raising and safeguarding, establishes contacts with churches and groups and spreads the word. It also works closely with the charity Caritas Salford which helps vulnerable people, many victims of trafficking. And members of the group were at

Manchester Airport in February training staff to be aware of the signs of victims and traffickers coming through the airport.

Fr John Corcoran, Parish Priest at St Michael and John's RC Church in Clitheroe has been enormously supportive of the Combating Human Trafficking Group, a subject for the pulpit on more than one occasion, in newsletters and on the parish website where the Group has a dedicated webpage. Thanks to Fr John's efforts, hundreds of copies of the Medaille Trust's magazine have been distrib-

uted throughout the area.

All this might sound like a drop in the ocean when there are an estimated 30 million slaves in the world, driven by a massive demand for cheap goods and services and a vast criminal network of organised crime. However, Professor Kevin Bales, president of an organisation called Free the Slaves, has argued that the means to end slavery aren't so problematic and points out that there are three major challenges that we do not have to face: we do not have to win the moral argument against slavery; slavery is not neces-

sary for our economic well being; and the laws needed to end slavery are already on the statute books.

Anthony says: "It is the will of governments and the will of the people, that will ultimately bring slavery to an end. Make them aware and they will care – care enough to learn how each one of us can play our part.

"Making people aware is the main thrust of our Anti-Trafficking Group which is a loose affiliation of anybody of any faith or no faith who

is concerned enough to want to know more. Membership entails no more than receiving and sharing information. It does not have a formal structure or meetings but has enough people at its core to reach out to anyone anywhere where there is a common purpose and a possible link."

Since their Traffik Jam concert, the Browns say there has been an enormous amount of interest and sup-

port and yet despite the vast number of charities with a trafficking agenda, government publicity, media coverage, and TV programmes, awareness of what is happening in the UK is astonishingly low.

Feedback from secondary school children following Anthony and Mary's talks brought comments such as:

'It is the will of governments and the will of the people, that will ultimately bring slavery to an end'

"It's shocking. You would not know if it was close to you."

Anthony believes that while it is ultimately government action and money that will end slavery, awareness raising and a change of attitude is where it has to start.

Take the sex industry and attitudes to sex. Without wanting to take a moral stance, they point out that with a general acceptance of the sex industry the demand for girls, young women, and to a lesser extent boys and men, has made sex trafficking a massive criminal business. The number of UK men

who have used prostitutes is estimated at around 10% and there is a growing trend of men taking their sons to a prostitute for their first sexual experience. We have the lowest percentage figure worldwide for using prostitutes, but most men are probably in ignorance that they may be paying for sex from a woman who has been trafficked.

Forced Labour is also a huge issue. The vast majority of the world's slaves are in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal where whole families are held in debt bondage – by money lenders for whom they must work. They are coming into Europe and the UK for forced labour. Even respectable large employers use agencies to employ staff so they have no need to vet them personally. And so the trafficking goes on.

To learn know more about the Combating Human Trafficking Group, see the website olotv.org.uk/parish-groups/trafficking.

Next week we will look at how the local police take on the traffickers.