

Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Today's Society: The Role of Women

The first Westminster Women's Outreach Conference took place on Saturday 20th November 2010. It was at the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster where Mrs. Ollie McEwen hosted and organized the conference with the help of the Steering Group. She spoke of the way in which the Holy Spirit was moving in our midst to reach out, mentor, encourage and empower women within their families, church and communities.

Sister Jane Middleton welcomed the 220 attendees to the conference and introduced the special guests at the conference in particular: Dr. Pauline Webb, former Vice President of the Methodist Conference, Mrs. Jill Baker, President Designate of the Methodist Women in Britain and Mrs. Femi Cole-N'Jie – President of Women's Network, London District.

Mr. Richard Taylor, the father of the late Damilola addressing the Conference theme, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Today's Society: The Role of Women" spoke of the day almost 10 years ago that his young son was killed by a gang of youths and admits he still finds it hard to forgive his son's attackers. Damilola Taylor was days short of his 11th birthday when he bled to death in a stairwell on a south London estate on November 27th 2000. He died in an ambulance 30 minutes later. He said: "**We come to England because we believe the streets here are paved with gold," said Nigerian born Mr. Taylor. But the UK that I used to know in the 70s has changed. Breakdown of family life, unemployment and lack of education for some young children is leading to a culture of youth violence. He mentioned how his wife Gloria always forgave but for him the perpetrators must repent and show remorse**". Richard Taylor has since set up the [Damilola Taylor Trust](#) in his son's memory, which now delivers motivational talks in schools and communities to help stamp out youth crime.

Other speakers at the conference included Baroness Kathleen Richardson OBE, campaigning journalist Ejós Ubiribo and Tracey Ford who have also lost relatives through violence as well as reformed south London gangland member, Sheldon Thomas, who shared his Testimony.

Baroness Kathleen Richardson spoke about violence being one of the great issues of our society: how do we break the cycle of hurt and how can we live in peace in a multi-cultural and multi-racial society, she asked. She spoke of the importance of women's role in today's society adding: "Once women came together out of weakness but today we meet out of a sense of power and strength, because we know we have a lot of influence."

Also speaking were activist journalist **Ejós Ubiribo**, who lost her brother Junior to gun crime in 2002. Ubiribo has since joined Trident Independent Advisory Group, Metropolitan Police Special Task Force which deals with gun crime in the black community. Former gangland member **Sheldon Thomas**, spoke about his violent past: "I took matters into my own hands when my brother was beaten up by skinheads and when nothing was done about it, so at the age of 13 years I formed my own gang to take matters into my own hands. I used to beat up white people and when I got bored with that I beat up black people. That was my way of dealing with anger, but no more". Sheldon was the most notorious gangster in Brixton but now heads up TAG, an inspirational Training for Gang Members. **Tracey Ford**, whose son was killed, age 18, spoke about losing a child. "I didn't know how I could carry on, but helping others in similar situations is helping me too," she said.

Ending the Conference was the Revd. Marcia Da Costa who reflected on Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Mrs. Ollie McEwen, thanked everyone who was present; those who had helped to make this first conference of Westminster Women's Outreach both a challenging and inspirational experience. The next conference is being planned for Saturday, 25th June 2011