

## **PHOEBE: Gender justice**

Hi, I'm Phoebe and I'm the chair of the Provincial Youth Committee, and also the 18-25 rep for Edinburgh diocese. I'm really sorry I can't be with you all in person today, as you watch this I am currently sat in my Sociology exam down in Cambridge so being here in person was just not going to be possible.

We are very grateful to Standing Committee for allocating us a longer slot than we are used to at General Synod this year, and we wanted to use some of this time to discuss issues that are really important to us as young people. We hope that this will not only be informative of what is troubling the young people in your church today, but also a call to action so that we can move towards not only a more just Scottish Episcopal Church, but a more just world.

Before I begin this first topic there are two things I need to say. Firstly, we are going to be discussing gender justice which includes topics of misogyny and gender based violence. These are very emotive topics and whilst it is really important that we cover them, please do take care of yourself and step out if you need to. Secondly, you may find some of what I say to be challenging for you. We are not looking to call you out, we are looking to call you in. To call you to action on a matter which is extremely important to us and is a fundamental part of who we are; a church that works together to, as laid out in the 4<sup>th</sup> Mark of Mission, "*transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.*" Please therefore listen to the following with that in mind.

I came to you last year and told you that I was scared of the world I was growing up in. That the world, rather than taking steps forward towards gender equality, seems to be taking steps backwards in regards to women's choices, safety and freedoms. I look around a year later, and nothing seems to have changed.

In Scotland, one woman is murdered every 45 days (Scottish Police Authority, 2024) and 61,934 incidents of domestic abuse were recorded in 2022-23 (Scottish Government, 2024). Most (83%) of the cases were committed against women, although Scottish Women's Aid say the figure was likely to be significantly higher as many cases are thought to go unreported. When you read headlines about violence against women, there often seems to be something missing. If you read the headline:

*Woman dies after attack while walking dog*

Would you know that this was a murder committed by a man? You have likely seen headlines around the increasing number of women and girls who have been harassed, stalked and assaulted, but did any of those headlines read

*Increase in male perpetrated violence*

The problem with the reporting on this subject is that by focussing on the victims, it seems like this is an issue for women, when really the issue is that the vast majority of gender based violence is committed by men. This is not a violence against woman issue, it is a male perpetrated violence issue. So why is this important? Because women and womens organisations have been working endlessly for gender justice, to make the world safer for women, but without addressing men and the underlying structures and culture which perpetuates the problem, this work will never be done.

You may well have noticed the recent rise in misogyny amongst younger men – I can assure you that younger women have. And while fear of attacks or abuse remain an unjust constraint on our freedom and safety, aspects of misogyny permeate our every day lives, whether it is in the way our male counterparts speak to us, speak about us behind our backs, or treat us as friends, romantic partners, or colleagues. There are a lot of underlying causes of this rise in misogyny and gender based violence. Video games, movies, television shows, bloggers—all reinforce images that show women dominated and assailed by men. The failure of legal systems to enforce women’s human right to be free from violence persists everywhere. And yet too many of the young men I speak to think that women’s rights have gone far enough. The Accredited Official Statistics on Criminal proceedings in Scotland show the conviction rate for rape is consistently much lower than for other crime types: the overall conviction rate in Scotland for rape and attempted rape was 48%, compared to 88% for all crimes and offences. The failure of our legal system to protect victims of male perpetrated violence against women seems to support people like the Tik Tok influencer named Andrew Tate who was free to use the social media platform to promote misogyny and violence to women. Tate was banned from Twitter for saying women should “bear responsibility” for being sexually assaulted. He was later reinstated on the platform, now known as X. Where is the accountability or consequence for these actions?

You may not feel that there is a connection between Tate, who was charged in Romania in January 2023 with rape and sex trafficking, and the church. But when the BBC interviewed him he said he was a “force for good” and that he was “acting under the instruction of God to do good things.” 20% of men aged 16-29 when polled said they supported Andrew Tate. There are 20% of men who are hearing that God is instructing male domination, oppression and violence against women. And what I really want you to know is that these men are not strangers hiding behind computers, or mythical creatures who only emerge at night down dark alleys. The young women in your churches know them, we work with them, and we live alongside them.

We want to grow up in a world where women are safe, free and respected, equally represented across leadership positions and free to make the same decisions men are about our own bodies – who has access to them, and what healthcare we receive. With your action, we can start here, in the Scottish Episcopal Church.

**LEY-ANNE:**

Do we as Piskies have a loud enough voice to take action and counter this rise in online misogyny? Do you, as a man in leadership, be you a Bishop, Dean, Provost, Rector, Lay Rep, Vestry member, youth leader, whoever you may be in this community, use your platform, however big, to give a message which is contrary? Do you partake in Thursdays in Black which has been adopted by this church every week and share about it on social media or use it to provoke discussion by donning the badge?

On International Women's Day this year the government made new commitments to combating gender based violence. Surely we, as a church can commit to the same.

We said we would call you in, not call you out so here is what the PYC is asking you to do.

Challenge inappropriate behaviour and encourage men and boys to disengage in harassment and harmful jokes. Speak up about gender-based violence to counter misogynistic messages and play your part in changing the culture. Support Thursdays in Black every week, and be courageously public about it. Generate a shared understanding that gender-based violence should not be tolerated as should any other crime. Respect the physical space of women and listen with courtesy and consideration when they speak. Proactively manage social media and entertainment channels and discuss any content that is disrespectful and degrading. Celebrate the achievements of women. Support women in leadership positions and work towards achieving gender parity in these leadership roles.

Thank you, and we can't wait to see you take up this mantle.