

## **The March of the Abolitionists**

*Walking In Yokes And Chains To Apologize For Slavery*

The final stage of the epic seven-year Lifeline Expedition journey will conclude with the March of the Abolitionists, a National Project for the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. The Lifeline Expedition is a Christian response to the legacy of the Atlantic Slave Trade. After the first Jubilee 2000 Lifeline walk in England, teams of Africans, descendants of enslaved Africans and white people have journeyed to slavery sites in France (2002), Spain & Portugal (2003), USA (2004), the Caribbean Region (2005) and West Africa (2006).

The first stage of the March of the Abolitionists will begin in Hull, the birthplace of William Wilberforce, on March 1<sup>st</sup> at the Holy Trinity Church at 09:00. White walkers, accompanied by Africans and descendants of enslaved Africans, will don yokes and chains and attempt a journey of over 250 miles to London recalling the gruelling journeys of enslaved Africans, during the period of the Atlantic Slave Trade. This multinational team will together be dealing with the legacy of the slave trade as it affects our culture today. Their penitential action, appropriately taking place in the season of Lent, will also draw attention to the estimated 12 million people still in slavery today. The journey will end in Westminster on March 24<sup>th</sup> when the team will join the Walk of Witness led by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. ([www.makingourmark.org.uk](http://www.makingourmark.org.uk)).

Kate Davson, a great great great granddaughter of William Wilberforce, will walk with the team at the outset of the march in Hull.

The second stage of the March, called the Sankofa Reconciliation Walk, takes place between June 4<sup>th</sup> and July 11<sup>th</sup> and will link the former slave ports of London, Bristol and Liverpool.

### **The purposes of the March are:**

- to bring an apology for the slave trade (especially the role of the church) and to help those we meet deal with its legacy.
- to engage with schools, public forums and the media about the true history of slavery and abolition, promoting greater understanding, reconciliation and forgiveness.
- to remember the black and white abolitionists of 200 years ago and wholeheartedly support the current campaigns seeking to end the atrocity of contemporary slavery.

The March Organizers welcome people to walk with the core team as they pass through their localities. They also hope to organize a continuous schools relay along the Hull to London route. Schools who participate in the March will be given an educational DVD about the legacy of the slave trade and the work of the Lifeline Expedition.

The Lifeline Expedition has received extensive publicity in recent years including the story about Andrew Hawkins, a descendant of England's first slave trader, Sir John Hawkins, who made an apology for the slave trade in the Gambia at the International Roots Festival - see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5105328.stm>

The March of the Abolitionists is a huge undertaking and walking in yokes and chains in March will be challenging. David Pott, Project Leader, comments, "I have been reminded that it is normal that expeditions involve risks - slave trading expeditions were risky ventures, so as we seek to undo the damage initiated by the slave trade, it should be no surprise that we face challenges. However, on our journey, we will not suffer a fraction of what slaves went through."

**Partnerships:**

The March of the Abolitionists is an initiative of the Lifeline Expedition in partnership with Anti-Slavery International, CARE, Church Mission Society, the Equiano Society, Northumbria Community, Peaceworks, USPG, Wilberforce 2007 (Hull) and Youth With A Mission. The march is also associated with the Set All Free and Stop the Traffik coalitions.

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