

Human Trafficking

Modern Day Slavery in Our Midst

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"Human Trafficking is a crime against humanity. We must unite our efforts to free the victims and stop this increasingly aggressive crime..."

—Pope Francis
Address to Diplomats
December 12, 2013

Over the centuries in numerous locations throughout the world the deplorable practice of slavery was commonplace, gravely violating every modern notion of human dignity. The fact that populations across the globe were kidnapped, transported over great distances, and forced into deadly labor against their will has left a lingering disbelief in the annals of history. While the 19th century witnessed an abolition of the institution of slavery, most are unaware that a form of modern day slavery exists, including in First World nations such as the United States as well as the State of Michigan.

The modern slavery that lingers in our midst these days is known as "human trafficking," a horrific crime against the fundamental rights and the dignity of all people. The United Nations Protocol on Human Trafficking defines it as "the recruitment, transportation, harboring or receipt of persons by means of force, fraud or coercion." The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reports that, according to the U.S. State Department, every country in the world is affected by human trafficking. The United States is no exception, serving as a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children—both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals.

Human trafficking is the second fastest growing criminal industry in the world. It has been estimated by USCCB that nearly 17,000 men, women, and children are trafficked from overseas each year, and in Michigan estimates have indicated that dozens of

girls under the age of eighteen are sold into sex slavery each month. Sadly, the faces of human trafficking are many, including individuals of every race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and income level. Trafficked victims include those forced into the sex trade. They may also include, for example, young men who clear tables at a restaurant, maids forced to work long hours in an everyday neighborhood without pay, the people who pick the fruit that families enjoy. Trafficked victims fall into many sectors of society; most if not all go unnoticed.

In recent years the Catholic Church—through the USCCB, local dioceses and parishes—has become a national leader in helping victims of human trafficking. Because of the work of the Church, the trafficking of human persons has become more widely documented and confronted. Many highly effective programs have been developed at the national level to raise awareness and to assist victims, both spiritually and

physically. After being denied a renewal of its national contract by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services because of the Church's teaching on abortion and contraception in 2011, the USCCB has developed effective new programs called The Amistad Movement and SHEPHERD aimed at raising awareness and empowering local communities to fight back against human trafficking. In Michigan, the Legislature and Office of the Attorney General have recently put forward legislation and recommendations to fight trafficking. Still, much work needs to be done in order to address and put an end to this modern form of slavery.

The purpose of this **focus** publication is bring to the attention of the Catholic population in Michigan the problem of human trafficking, to help raise awareness of warning signs, and to further discuss ongoing efforts to promote the dignity of every human person in our midst. ■

Confronting Human Trafficking in Michigan

In 2006 the Michigan Legislature passed a bill banning human trafficking in the state. Four years later, elected officials strengthened the law by increasing restitution for victims of human trafficking. According to the measure, victims became able to recover costs related to their time spent in captivity, such as medical costs, and were granted the right to recognize the value of the years of their lives lost while captive. Due to these efforts, Michigan prohibits forced labor or services by:

- Causing or threatening physical harm;
- Physically restraining or threatening to restrain;
- Destroying or confiscating a passport, other immigration document, or government identification;
- Using blackmail, or threatening to cause financial harm or exerting financial control over another person;
- Benefitting financially or receiving anything of value from participation in a human trafficking venture; and
- Recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for labor or services for the purpose of holding that person in involuntary servitude or debt bondage.

Recognizing that additional tools were needed in the fight against human trafficking in Michigan, the Office of

Attorney General assembled in March 2013 the Michigan Commission on Human Trafficking and released its final report to the Governor's office shortly thereafter. The Commission included representatives from the Attorney General's office, the Governor's office, law enforcement, the legal community, and members of the Michigan Senate and House of Representatives, both Democrat and Republican. Highlights of the report included the need for legislation regarding safe harbor, increasing penalties for "johns," updating the prostitution code, and enacting a human trafficking awareness poster law.

The Michigan Legislature has taken strides to confront human trafficking by addressing policies that complement recommendations from the Michigan Commission on Human Trafficking. These measures have included expunging criminal records for crimes committed as a victim, establishing a Commission on Human Trafficking in state law, and implementing safe harbors for those who were victims of their own purported crimes. Michigan Catholic Conference has testified before legislative committees in support of these measures by speaking to the importance of treating victims as victims, rather than criminals, and respecting their right to dignity as human persons. According to MCC testimony: "The state as a whole, and the Catholic community in particular, have an obligation to defend and promote the dignity of every human person, show compassion

and provide assistance for victims, and work to remove the scourge of human trafficking from our society. This is not just an international issue. It is an existing problem in our state.”

It is anticipated that additional measures fighting human trafficking will be forthcoming, including increased penalties for traffickers and examining ways to address housing needs for victims. ■

The U.S. Catholic Church's Anti-Trafficking Program

While Michigan is examining the scope of human trafficking in the state, as well as the effectiveness of laws, it is important to note that the federal government has also addressed human trafficking. In 2000, six years before the enactment of Michigan's legislation, Congress enacted the Trafficking Victim's Protection Act as the first comprehensive federal law to protect victims and prosecute their traffickers. The Act was most recently re-authorized in 2013. Major components of the law include:

- The establishment of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, which publishes an annual data report on trafficking each year;
- The creation of a T Visa for foreign victims of human trafficking and their families to become temporary U.S. residents;
- The development of pilot shelter programs and grant programs to assist local and state enforcement efforts; and
- Mandated restitution to be paid to victims.

Between the years 2006 and 2011, the USCCB Migration and Refugee Services Office received federal grant money from the Department of Health and Human Services to provide assistance to victims of human trafficking, helping more than 2,232 victims and over 500 of their family members. After the USCCB lost its grant, the organization began to focus on new initiatives that empower local communities to protect against human trafficking—in a manner consistent with Catholic teaching. As modern slavery is often hidden in society, it is important that individuals across the country are able to recognize the signs and be willing to stand up for those around them whose human dignity is under attack. Two major education initiatives of USCCB include The Amistad Movement and the SHEPHERD toolkit, both of which develop community leadership at the local level to address the crime.

According to The Amistad Movement, education and awareness tools are used to empower local communities in the fight against human trafficking. Named after an uprising

of African slaves on a Cuban ship in 1839, the movement works with local churches, as well as cultural and community groups, to teach at-risk immigrant communities within the United States to stand up against human slavery. Through the relationships that individuals and groups form during training, local communities can identify how best to partner to recognize trafficking, support survivors, and raise awareness. The training also encourages individuals to take important steps toward reducing demand for slave labor by paying more attention to the products they purchase.

In January 2014, during National Migration Week, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops launched the Become a SHEPHERD toolkit, another key educational initiative. SHEPHERD, an acronym for Stop Human Trafficking and Exploitation, Protect, Help, Empower, and Restore Dignity, allows individuals across the country to learn about the experience of suffering as a result of human trafficking. The toolkit includes resources for holding prayer services, conducting information sessions, and becoming an ethical consumer. Additionally, SHEPHERD highlights the need for prayer and a personal commitment to ending human slavery. ■

“The state as a whole, and the Catholic community in particular, have an obligation to defend and promote the dignity of every human person, show compassion and provide assistance for victims, and work to remove the scourge of human trafficking from our society. This is not just an international issue. It is an existing problem in our state.” —Michigan Catholic Conference

St. Josephine Bakhita, Pray for Us

Josephine Bakhita was born in 1869 in Sudan and sold into slavery as a young child, where she experienced physical and moral humiliation and suffering. As she grew older, a diplomat bought Josephine and brought her to his native country of Italy to take care of his family. When the family acquired a hotel in a new city, Josephine was left with the Canossian Daughters of Charity and introduced to God, which inspired her to live out her faith while testifying to her personal experience with slavery. She was later freed and worked within the community by cooking, sewing, and attending to the door of the Institute of St. Magdalene of Canossa. She battled years of painful sickness, and in February of 1947, it was Mary Most Holy who freed her from all pain. Her last words were: "Our Lady! Our Lady!", and her final smile testified to her encounter with the Mother of the Lord. Her example demonstrates the importance of the fight against slavery and the protection of the dignity of all persons, especially those on the margins of society. She was canonized by Blessed John Paul II on October 1, 2000.



St. Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child and endured untold hardship and suffering. Once liberated from your physical enslavement, you found true redemption in your encounter with Christ and his Church.

O St. Bakhita, assist all those who are trapped in a state of slavery; Intercede with God on their behalf so that they will be released from their chains of captivity. Those whom man enslaves, let God set free.

Provide comfort to survivors of slavery and let them look to you as an example of hope and faith. Help all survivors find healing from their wounds. We ask for your prayers and intercessions for those enslaved among us.

Amen.

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Keys to Identifying Human Trafficking Victims

- Tearfulness or signs of depression.
- Unexplained bruises, cuts, or other signs of physical abuse.
- Never is alone and/or always has someone translating or answering questions on their behalf.
- Not in control of their own finances.
- Presents with secrecy or unable to answer questions about where they live.
- Inconsistent details when telling their story.
- Has no identification such as a license, passport, or other ID documents.

Screening Questions for Potential Victims

- Can you leave your job or house when you want?
- Where did you get those bruises, or is anyone hurting you?
- Do you get paid for your employment?
- How many hours do you work?
- Are you or your family being threatened?

What to Do When You Suspect a Case of Human Trafficking

- Ask the person if you can help them find a safe place to go immediately.
- Call and make a report at the National Human Trafficking Hotline at (888) 373-888. The hotline has language capabilities.
- Call the USCCB Anti-Trafficking Program staff at (202) 541-3357 if you need to talk through the case and gather more guidance.

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