

Roman Catholic Response to Modern Day Slavery
by Sister Susan Francois, CSJP of the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center
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As a global institution that is present in both source nations as well as nations that serve as “markets” for human trafficking, the Roman Catholic Church is well positioned to identify and rescue survivors of human trafficking. Catholic Social Teaching and the fundamental values of our faith also call us to work for the end of modern day slavery.

“We cannot rest until trafficking in human persons is eliminated from the globe.”
~ Bishop Thomas Wenski, Chair of USCCB Committee on Migration. 2004

Theological Position & Catholic Social Teaching

The Church’s response to human trafficking is grounded in a fundamental belief that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and therefore have inherent dignity. Furthermore, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason - selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian - lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord."

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph no. 2414)

Catholic Social Teaching further develops this fundamental opposition to modern day slavery, as well as the moral imperative to rescue and restore survivors and re-abolish slavery.

... [W]hatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator.

(Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, 1965)

The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. ... Such situations are an affront to fundamental values which are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person.

(Pope John Paul II, Letter on the Occasion of the "Twenty-First Century Slavery " Conference, 2002)

Human trafficking is a horrific crime against the basic dignity and rights of the human person. All efforts must be expended to end it. In the end, we must work together—Church, state, and community—to eliminate the root causes and markets that permit traffickers to flourish; to make whole the survivors of this crime; and to ensure that, one day soon, trafficking in human persons vanishes from the face of the earth.

(US Bishops, *On Human Trafficking*, 2007)

As a community committed to the following of Christ, we dedicate ourselves to making every effort to help those who have been victimized to regain their sense of dignity. We call upon all men and women of good will to eliminate the mentality that treats human beings as commodities of commercial exploitation and as objects for pleasure. With God's help this can be accomplished by strong legislation, use of the media, and above all through prayer and good example.

(Bishops of British Columbia and the Yukon, *Pastoral Letter on Human Trafficking*, 2009)

A countless number of people are enslaved year after year in destination communities—urban centers and small towns alike—across the United States. The traders of human trafficking victims often outwit new law enforcement practices by moving victims from hotspots to other regions of the state or across state lines to avoid prosecution. By engaging more with legislative and law enforcement authorities, we help eradicate this scourge that treats human beings as objects.

(Bishops of Illinois and Leadership Conference of Women Religious of Illinois, *Eradicating Human Trafficking*, 2010)

Global Response – Caritas Internationalis

Globally, the Caritas International Confederation—which includes the US based Catholic Relief Services—is in direct daily contact with people and groups who are most at risk of being trafficked, as well as with those in trafficking situations or who have been trafficked.

- ⌘ Trafficked persons may seek help from different services offered by Caritas, such as migration services, assistance for the homeless, or general counseling offered in parishes.
- ⌘ Additionally, many Caritas members have ongoing and well-established assistance programs in place for trafficked persons across the globe.
- ⌘ The anti-trafficking strategy of Caritas is based on four pillars: 1) *prevention & awareness raising*: with at risk groups, educators and professionals, and the general public; 2) *assistance to trafficked persons*: providing safe secure shelter, social, medical, psychological and legal assistance and vocational training; 3) *advocacy*: address the root causes of trafficking and the need for protection and enforcement; 4) *networking*: aimed at improving trans-national assistance and protection for trafficked persons.



US Response—US Bishops Conference

In the United States, the Catholic Church is a major provider of social services to human trafficking through the US Catholic Bishops Conference Migration & Refugee Services program.

- ⌘ The Anti-Trafficking Services program, administered by the Bishops Conference through a contract with the Department of Health & Human Services, provides comprehensive case management services to pre-certified and certified foreign national survivors of human trafficking.
- ⌘ Additionally, in many regions (like Portland, Oregon), the local Catholic Charities organization is the main service provider/recipient of these federal funds.
- ⌘ The US Bishops Conference is currently developing a pilot public awareness campaign for the Catholic community in California that can be replicated across the country.

Women Religious

Roman Catholic vowed women religious have been active in education, advocacy and provision of services both in the United States and globally.

- ⌘ The International Union of Superiors General first addressed the issue of Human Trafficking in 2001. In 2004, they began the “Formation of Women Religious to Counteract Trafficking in Persons” program in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration. This program has provided training and resources to women religious working with poor and marginalized people globally. In 2009 the program formally organized as the “International Network of Consecrated Life Against Trafficking in Persons.”
- ⌘ UNANIMA, a non-governmental organization at the United Nations sponsored by seven congregations of Roman Catholic religious, advocates and educates on the issue of human trafficking. In particular, they promote their “Stop the Demand” campaign.

Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center (Seattle, Washington)

Locally, the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center is actively engaged in advocacy and education to end modern day slavery in our local and global community. IPJC is sponsored by sixteen Catholic religious communities and collaborates with Catholic, ecumenical, interfaith and other groups in our work.

- ⌘ IPJC promotes the “Stop the Demand” campaign through bus ads, workshops, public prayer vigils, and our website.
- ⌘ Through our Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment, we are in dialogue with major companies about corporate policies related to human trafficking in the tourism/hotel industry and in the production of most consumer products.

