

Prayer of St Francis – Respecting Life by Ending Human Trafficking

"Make me an instrument of your peace...

Where there is darkness, light and where there is sorrow, joy."

During April, the Social Justice Committee again offers the Prayer of St. Francis to focus on contemporary justice issues that require action. Although there are many ways to bring light to darkness and despair, human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery where people profit from the control and exploitation of others, is an especially critical issue. As defined under U.S. federal law, victims of human trafficking include children involved in the sex trade, adults over 18 who are coerced or deceived into commercial sex acts, and anyone forced into labor or services against their will (e.g. domestic workers held in a home, factory workers, farm laborers). In the United States, victims of human trafficking include U.S. citizens or foreign nationals, adults or minors, and women or men. Foreign-born victims may be documented or undocumented. Traffickers typically prey on individuals who are vulnerable in some way, including undocumented migrants, runaways and at-risk youth, the poor, and other marginalized groups.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, after drug dealing, human trafficking is the second largest criminal activity in the world and the fastest growing. The Polaris Project for a World Without Slavery estimates there are 20,000 cases of foreign nationals trafficked into the U.S. each year. Statistics on trafficking of U.S. citizens within the country are scarce, but several studies focusing on the sex trafficking of minors estimate there are 100,000-300,000 prostituted children in the United States (World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children). Closer to home, there were 678 charges related to human trafficking filed in Minnesota during 2009, and service providers self-reported working with 450 labor and sex trafficking victims (Polaris Project).

The U.S. bishops call human trafficking "a horrific crime against the basic dignity and rights of the human person, for which all efforts must be expended to end it." A January 2012 report from the Minnesota Catholic Conference of Bishops states, "Minnesota is consistently in the top ten most-active states for human trafficking. One organization that monitors juvenile sex trafficking indicated a 50% increase in Minnesota in 2010...Minnesota has a human trafficking problem and it's time for Catholics to take action."

We at St. Stan's are called by the Prayer of St. Francis to take action and bring "light" to this "darkness" by becoming educated and aware of the causes and conditions of human trafficking. Parishioners are encouraged to attend *Freedom Here + Now: Ending Modern Slavery*, a free event on May 8 at the University of Minnesota featuring national speakers and a documentary on human trafficking (<http://may8freedom.eventbrite.com/>). We can also bring "hope to despair" by calling on our leaders, legislators and law enforcement agencies to implement comprehensive solutions to this often overlooked problem. Finally, we can pray for the women, children, and men caught in the web of exploitation that they find joy through freedom.