

The Saints Peter and Paul Peace and Social Justice Committee invites you to explore the Church's response to Modern Slavery

In a world where violent divisions seem to dominate media coverage, here's something you may have missed: on March 17th of this year, Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, Egypt, and an Australian mining magnate came together to take a collective lead in the fight against modern slavery. This apparently unlikely coalition of religious and secular forces inaugurated the Global Freedom Network, which projects its course of action thus:

The Global Freedom Network is an open association and other faith leaders will be invited to join and support this initiative. The Global Freedom Network will also carry out a programme of coordinated action and activity with international organisations, governments and national authorities, civil society organisations and NGOs, as well as people of good will around the world, to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking by 2020 throughout our world and for all time.

Those are no small words, but neither are the Church's sentiments concerning modern slavery. For example, when announcing that "Slaves no more, but brothers and sisters" will be the theme for the 2015 World Day of Peace, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace said, "Slavery is a terrible open wound on the contemporary social body, a fatal running sore on the flesh of Christ!" Why would anyone be so graphic? After all, most of us in the "contemporary social body" don't see this "wound" unless we go looking for it. Where is it and what exactly does it look like?

The Global Slavery Index report (published by the Walk Free Foundation, a founding partner with Pope Francis in the Global Freedom Network) provides a comprehensive and descriptive definition of modern slavery:

Modern slavery takes many forms, and is known by many names. Whether it is called human trafficking, forced labour, slavery or slavery-like practices (a category that includes debt bondage, forced or servile marriage, sale or exploitation of children including in armed conflict) victims of modern slavery have their freedom denied, and are used and controlled and exploited by another person for profit, sex, or the thrill of domination.

Modern slavery is poorly understood, so it remains hidden within houses, communities and worksites. Criminals are creative and will use any available means to conceal, rationalise, and justify slavery – be it race, ethnicity, religion, gender, caste, 'custom' or any other excuse or vulnerability they can exploit. Modern slavery is not always as self-evident as some other crimes, such as homicide or even theft. Modern slavery involves an extreme abuse of power, which is not always immediately apparent but requires understanding the people and the relationships involved.

Of the estimated 29.8 million people enslaved worldwide, it is estimated that 57,000 - 63,000 of them are enslaved in the United States (both figures according to the Global

Slavery Index report). According to the U.S. State Department's 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report, "The United States is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children—both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals—subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor, including domestic servitude."

In addition, it is easy for U.S. consumers unwittingly to support slavery around the world with their major and everyday purchases. In a time when businesses have difficulty monitoring their own supply chains, consumers often have no idea who is responsible for the labor that goes into the products they buy. As a result, "Our homes and our businesses carry the imprint of modern slavery," wrote Andrew Forrest, co-founder of the Walk Free Foundation and the "mining magnate" mentioned above.

The evil of modern slavery is insidious, and the challenge may *seem* insurmountable. However, in the U.S., the Catholic Church is a major source of hope in the fight. According to Nathalie Lummert, Director of Special Programs in the Department of Migration and Refugee Services at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), "By virtue of our organizational structure and geographical reach, the U.S. Catholic Church early on has assumed a strong leadership role in the American anti-trafficking movement. For over a decade, USCCB has been a leader in the U.S. and global response to human trafficking." Further, Lummert points out that "The Church is in many ways the first place that victims turn to, and sometimes it is the only place that traffickers allow their victims to access." In other words, we are in a place of great privilege and great responsibility in relation to this crisis.

Accordingly, "The Catholic Church has placed the elimination of trafficking as an important priority in the areas of (1) awareness raising and outreach, (2) protection and provision of services to trafficking survivors, and (3) public advocacy to end human trafficking," said Lummert. *Awareness raising*, is what the Peace and Social Justice Committee hopes to do with this series of articles, but, one does not raise awareness for awareness' sake. Therefore, we also hope to provide specific ways each of us may be called to work towards Pope Francis' goal of ending slavery by 2020. Perhaps you will be called to contribute in some way to one or both of the other two elements of the church's response, *protection and provision of services*, and *public advocacy*. Maybe you will be called to pray, make wiser consumer and/or business choices, and spread the word to others. As Pope Francis exhorted us in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone!" There is a calling for *everyone* in the fight against modern slavery, and we hope to help you find yours, so please keep an eye on the bulletin for more information.