

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

When was the last time you prayed for world peace? Maybe not as recently as the last time you joked about praying for world peace. "It's just so vague," you may say. Unless it comes from the mouths of babes, "world peace" sounds like the prayer of the comically naive or the comically disingenuous.

However, you may very well have prayed recently for an end to the manipulative recruitment tactics of militants from the so-called "Islamic State," or for an end to the drug-related violence that forces many from Central America to seek refuge in the United States, or for greater respect for women and girls in places where rape and violence against women are still seen as somewhat socially acceptable, and all of these things contribute to "world peace."

This relative discomfort with praying for grand causes suggests that it is much easier to pray about something if we can "put our finger on it." If we can imagine what the end we seek "looks like," we feel more connected to our prayer, more honest, and more focused.

Our Church leaders are encouraging us to pray for a big cause: an end to modern slavery. This is almost as big as "world peace," and certainly related to it. If we are going to pray for this "end," we would do well to know how we might envision it. For what specifically can we pray? Against what specifically can we pray? What might our specific intentions be?

In his 2015 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis gives us some ideas. He discusses several causes of slavery, as well as several commitments that must be made, and some that are already being made, to end it and to heal the scars it leaves behind. We can use these problems and solutions to inform (really, in-form, or *form within* us) our prayer intentions. They can be a guide, an outline, and/or a series of imaginative springboards for our own prayers for a truly free world. Of course, there are as many ways to pray as there are children of God and moments in time. The Peace and Social Justice Committee provides the following list in the hope that the Holy Spirit might guide you to pray as only you can.

Pope Francis begins by making clear that the fundamental cause of slavery is always "the rejection of another person's humanity." He then points out some of what we might call the more "proximate" causes:

*Poverty, exclusion, and scarce, even non-existent, employment opportunities* create conditions under which people will take great risks in order to provide a better life for themselves and/or their family members. These risks often place them in the hands of slavers.

*Lack of access to education* not only contributes to poverty, exclusion, and lack of employment opportunities, but can make it more difficult for people to distinguish a wholesome employment opportunity from a trap designed to enslave them and/or their family members.

*Corruption* is another cause of slavery. As the Pope explains, “Slave labour and human trafficking often require the complicity of intermediaries, be they law enforcement personnel, state officials, or civil and military institutions.”

*Criminal activity* is enabled by corruption, and it, too is a cause of slavery. Not only is slavery itself, to a large extent, illegal, but slavers often operate their human trade in tandem with other criminal enterprises. They may force their victims to participate in prostitution or drug sales, making their victims feel shame and fear, thus creating dependence and securing their “investments.” Along with this, we must remember that the criminals engaging in these activities may themselves be victims of the various causes of slavery herein mentioned. Compassion must accompany all of our prayers, even our most impassioned cries for justice.

*Violence, armed conflicts, and terrorism* make people desperate. Like victims of extreme poverty and other causes of slavery, victims of these conditions will often take great risks to escape, exposing themselves and/or their families to potential exploitation. Those who do not escape are often kidnapped and forced to fight as combatant slaves or sold as sexual slaves.

Finally, the Pope laments that the slavery that results from the above realities occurs largely within *a context of general indifference*. Even if we do not consider this a cause *per se*, it is certainly an enabling factor. Pope Francis reminds us that in spite of this indifference, we can be very grateful for the ongoing work of *religious congregations* to provide assistance, rehabilitation, and social reintegration for victims of modern slavery. He makes special mention of the work of women’s congregations.

However, he continues by saying that this work is insufficient, in itself, to solve the problem. “There is also need for a threefold commitment on the *institutional level*: to prevention, to victim protection and to the legal prosecution of perpetrators,” he says.

*States* can act on this commitment through legislation, policies, and other initiatives (all of which must be executed and enforced in practice) regarding *migration, employment, adoption, the movement of businesses offshore* and *the sale of items produced by slave labour*. He adds, “The role of women in society must also be recognized, not least through initiatives in the sectors of culture and social communications.”

Since traffickers often depend upon global networks, a commitment on behalf of *intergovernmental organizations* is needed to coordinate the anti-slavery efforts of independent states and place pressure on states that need to change.

*Businesses* must pay their employees dignified wages, provide them with dignified working conditions, and be vigilant to ensure slavery does not work its way into their supply and distribution chains. Similarly, *consumers* have a responsibility to disincentivize business practices that do not demonstrate a commitment to end slavery. Every purchase is an opportunity to do this.

Finally, “*Organizations in civil society*, for their part, have the task of awakening consciences and promoting whatever steps are necessary for combating and uprooting the culture of enslavement,” says the Pope.

These areas of darkness and light should give us plenty of specific prayer intentions. You can use your own words, use the words of your favorite traditional prayers, use gestures, use images, use silence... just use your heart. . **Finally, please join us for a special prayer event on February 8th, in the Holy Family Chapel from 2pm-3pm. This is the Feast Day of St. Josephine Bakhita (a survivor of modern slavery) and the National Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking. We will pray the Rosary, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and hear a brief presentation from Women at Risk, International (W.A.R.). We look forward to seeing you then, and we will continue, in upcoming bulletins, to explore different ways you can join the fight against modern slavery.**