

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

In our last article, we discussed praying to God for the things that can help bring about an end to modern slavery. On February 8th, The National Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking, members of our parish and the surrounding area gathered to do just this. However, God is not the only person to whom we can make our requests and with whom we can share our concerns. Indeed, in our prayer life, God may encourage and fortify us to communicate with other people.

Advocacy is an important part of the Church's fight to end modern slavery. Whenever they see a need and an opportunity, our Church leaders call on our secular leaders to support legislation and policies that will combat the causes of modern slavery and help heal its wounds. They invite individual Catholics to join them, but many of us don't know where to start, or are intimidated by the complexity of the issues and the processes involved. Educating oneself on all the relevant legislation and policies, areas of need, governmental bodies and persons involved, and then keeping up with the constantly-changing nature of these things can be a full-time job. Thankfully, someone is already doing it for us. In fact, several someones are constantly working to make it easier for non-politically-savvy and time-crunched individuals to advocate for an end to modern slavery in an informed and caring way. If you have access to the internet, and an email account, the following organizations can help you understand what's at stake, determine what you want to say, and make yourself heard:

Polaris (www.polarisproject.org) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that was born in 2002 when Katherine Chon and Derek Ellerman, then seniors at Brown University, were roused to action after reading horrific descriptions of a brothel located near their school. The day after they graduated, they packed up their belongings and headed to Washington, D.C., with an aim "to create long-term solutions that would change the underlying systems that allow human trafficking to occur." Since then, they have not only done this, helping to pass important legislation nationally and in 48 states, they have also supported victims and provided training to first-responders. Since 2007, they have been operating The National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) (**please note: if you are a victim of or believe you may be a witness to human trafficking, the NHTRC encourages you to call 1-888-373-7888, or text HELP to BeFree (233733) any time of any day or night**). In the Polaris online action center you can read about current areas of need, sign petitions, and raise awareness. You can also sign up for emails that alert you when further opportunities arise. (The email sign-up page can be tricky to find. If you click on the word "search" at the top right of Polaris' homepage and then search for the term "newsletter", the first result should get you where you need to go.)

The Walk Free Movement (www.walkfree.org) is operated by The Walk Free Foundation, a founding partner, along with Pope Francis, of the Global Freedom Network. Walk Free provides opportunities, via their extraordinarily user-friendly website, for you to raise your voice to people in positions of power (government and industry) all over the world. You can scroll down Walk Free's homepage to see a grid full of icons, each corresponding to a petition Walk Free has drafted regarding a current issue in the fight against modern slavery. Click on any icon to learn more about it, read the petition, and see if it is open to people in your location. You can also

register to receive email alerts whenever such a petition could benefit from your voice (the option to do this is near the middle of the top of the homepage).

Catholics Confront Global Poverty (CCGP) (www.confrontglobalpoverty.org) was launched by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services in 2009, when they were inspired by the following words in Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 World Day of Peace message: "Effective means to redress the marginalization of the world's poor through globalization will only be found if people everywhere feel personally outraged by the injustices in the world and by the concomitant violations of human rights." CCGP educates and mobilizes Catholics in the United States to advocate on behalf of people living in poverty throughout the world, including victims of and those particularly vulnerable to modern slavery. At their website, you can see what's important in the fight right now. You can read a briefing on each individual issue, and access well-crafted letters that you can send via CCGP's website directly to the appropriate government leaders. Many of CCGP's calls to action are not immediately concerned with modern slavery, but all are related to poverty, a major factor contributing to modern slavery. If you sign up for CCGP's email list (click on the words "Get Involved" near the top of the page, and you should land on a page that lets you sign up), you will receive a notification whenever there is a new opportunity to educate yourself and advocate for those in need.

The Diocese of Joliet's Justice and Peace Ministry (www.dioceseofjoliet.org/peace) provides similar online resources and opportunities. You can sign up to receive email alerts and newsletters regarding issues related to modern slavery, such as labor, migration, and economic justice (click on the "E-Alert and Newsletter Archive" option near the right of the page, and then, on the archive page, click on the words "Join the Network" near the top). Each time there is a call to action, you will receive background information as well as instructions on how to participate. You can also view previous newsletters and alerts on the website without joining the email list.

Even if you never sign a petition, send a letter, or make a phone call, the information provided by the above organizations can make you a more informed citizen—of the Church and of the world. You will be better equipped to contextualize media messages, participate in conversations, and exercise your civic rights. You may have new questions to ask during the next election season. While the issues will probably remain complex, you may feel less intimidated when someone mentions the evils of "modern slavery" or "human trafficking."

We must not allow such intimidation to paralyze us. In a press conference in the days leading up to The National Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace gave us powerful words about our role in the fight against modern slavery: "Our awareness must expand and extend to the very depths of this evil and its farthest reaches ... from awareness to prayer ... from prayer to solidarity ... and from solidarity to concerted action, until slavery and trafficking are no more."