

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

As the title of this series suggests, we have been gently inviting readers to join Church leaders and other people of good will in their various efforts to end modern slavery. Now, we will take a more imperative tone. Learn this number: **1-888-373-7888**. Commit it to memory, write it down, make up your own Tommy Tutone-style jingle for it (it takes some work, but it can be done, and this writer will sing her version for you if you ask), whatever it takes. In fact, if your cell phone is within arm's reach, put it in your contacts right now. Just do it. You may regret it later if you don't. For a contact name, you can enter "National Human Trafficking Resource Center" or "NHTRC" for short. This article will focus on why you want to have that number etched in your (or your device's) memory, and when you might want to use it.

The NHTRC is a national hotline and resource center serving victims and survivors of human trafficking and the anti-trafficking community in the United States, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. It is operated by Polaris, a non-governmental, non-profit organization, and funded by the Department of Health and Human Services and private donors. Victims and survivors of human trafficking can contact the NHTRC for help, such as comprehensive service referrals (including emergency and after-hours needs) and/or just to talk about their situation. Community members, law enforcement and service providers can report tips, and access training and other resources. The NHTRC can be contacted via phone at **1-888-373-7888** (toll-free, 24/7, every day of the year, available in more than 200 languages), via the anonymous online Tip Reporting Form at <http://traffickingresourcecenter.org/report-trafficking>, and via email at nhtrc@polarisproject.org. Their website, where you can access valuable information and resources, is www.traffickingresourcecenter.org. Additionally, victims of human trafficking can text **HELP** or **INFO** to **BeFree (233733)** for help planning their escape, finding safety, and/or connecting to services in their area.

If you are not a victim or survivor of human trafficking (praise God!), you may still be a witness. Modern slavery is not as uncommon or removed from us as we would like to think. Since they began taking calls in 2007, the NHTRC has received at least 2,666 calls from and reported at least 650 human trafficking cases in Illinois. Top venues and industries for these cases have included, among others, **hospitality, domestic work, health and beauty services, restaurants and food service, retail and other small businesses, and agriculture**. You probably encounter or engage with one or more of these industries on a regular basis. Transit hubs, like airports and truck stops, are also areas of concern. Illinois is home to several, and you probably pass through some of them on occasion, if not regularly.

The NHTRC wants you to keep your eyes open for the following "red flags." These are conditions a potential victim of human trafficking may exhibit:

Common Work and Living Conditions:

- Is not free to leave or come and go as he/she wishes
- Is in the commercial sex industry and has a pimp / manager
- Is unpaid, paid very little, or paid only through tips

- Works excessively long and/or unusual hours
- Is not allowed breaks or suffers under unusual restrictions at work
- Owes a large debt and is unable to pay it off
- Was recruited through false promises concerning the nature and conditions of his/her work
- High security measures exist in the work and/or living locations (e.g. opaque windows, boarded up windows, bars on windows, barbed wire, security cameras, etc.)

Poor Mental Health or Abnormal Behavior:

- Is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous/paranoid
- Exhibits unusually fearful or anxious behavior after bringing up law enforcement
- Avoids eye contact

Poor Physical Health:

- Lacks medical care and/or is denied medical services by employer
- Appears malnourished or shows signs of repeated exposure to harmful chemicals
- Shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture

Lack of Control:

- Has few or no personal possessions
- Is not in control of his/her own money, no financial records, or bank account
- Is not in control of his/her own identification documents (ID or passport)
- Is not allowed or able to speak for themselves (a third party may insist on being present and/or translating)

Other:

- Claims of just visiting and inability to clarify where he/she is staying/address
- Lack of knowledge of whereabouts and/or of what city he/she is in
- Loss of sense of time
- Has numerous inconsistencies in his/her story

It is important to point out that this list is not exhaustive and not all victims exhibit these conditions. It is also important to remember that common misconceptions about victims of human trafficking (that he or she will appear “foreign” or “abused”, will be ready to receive help, or will self-identify as a victim of a crime, to name a few) are just that—misconceptions.

If you suspect you have information about a potential human trafficking situation, the NHTRC wants you to contact them using any of the methods given above. You do not have to give your name or any other identifying information unless you feel comfortable doing so. If you don’t feel comfortable talking on the phone, you can send an email or use the anonymous online Tip Reporting Form. NHTRC staff are trained to evaluate any and all tips, and determine the most appropriate next steps. They receive “wrong number” calls, “hang-up” calls, prank calls, and

calls completely unrelated to human trafficking. They can very well handle a tip made in good faith by a concerned individual, even if it turns out to be a “false alarm.” For more information about the NHTRC’s confidentiality and reporting practices, what victims and survivors can expect when they contact the NHTRC, and about human trafficking in general, please visit the NHTRC website (www.traffickingresourcecenter.org).