

Florida Catholic Conference
Ad Hoc Committee on Human Trafficking
Pilot Project on Human Trafficking Awareness

Background

The Church always starts from the central tenet of respect for the sublime dignity of human persons.¹ Catholic Social Teaching maintains that acts that constitute an affront to human dignity, such as slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children as well as treatment of humans as mere tools for profit, are infamies that poison human society.² Today the Church considers its role in combating human trafficking, i.e. modern-day slavery, as prophetic and necessary. The Holy Father has emphasized the need for "a renewed awareness of the inestimable value of life and an ever more courageous commitment to the defense of human rights and the overcoming of every type of abuse."³ Simultaneously, he has expressed deep appreciation for the laudable anti-trafficking initiatives.

To this end, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) has become a leader in the fight against trafficking in human beings. Through a partnership with the federal government and other anti-trafficking organizations, USCCB/MRS has created a national network that provides services and support for rescued victims. Human trafficking is a horrific crime in any form that it presents itself. Since 2000, efforts have been made to prosecute traffickers, protect victims and prevent the phenomenon of trafficking. The USCCB/MRS has identified awareness of this issue as a priority of the first order.

A national public awareness campaign serves the purposes of victim identification as well as prevention of trafficking. The campaign aims at targeting: 1) Mass-attending Catholics of all ages; 2) Catholic middle and high school students and students at Catholic colleges and universities as well as campus ministry programs at state universities; and, 3) Catholic health facilities. Florida and California have been selected as the two states to initiate pilot projects for this public awareness. In December 2009, the Florida bishops approved the establishment of an ad hoc committee to guide the activities of a pilot project in this state.

Purposes of Ad Hoc Committee The Florida bishops' ad hoc committee on human trafficking, which comprises key individuals with expertise in working with the targeted audiences, has three primary purposes: 1) identifying activities and strategies that will educate the targeted audiences of Catholics on the realities of human trafficking; 2) collaborating with dioceses and institutions in implementing these educational activities and strategies; 3) collaborating with state officials, law enforcement and other nonprofit organizations to identify ways in which each of the audiences can engage directly in the fight against this global scourge in Florida.

"Human trafficking is a horrific crime against the basic dignity and rights of the human person. All efforts must be expended to end it. In the end, we must work together—Church, state, and community - to eliminate the root causes and markets that permit traffickers to flourish..."

— "On Human Trafficking"
The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Second Vatican Council, 1965, para. 26.

² *Id.* at para 27.

³ *Pope Backs Nuns' Work to Stop Human Trafficking*, at <http://www.zenit.org/article-26177?I=english>.

Detectives from City of Clearwater will present an evening for teens, their parents, and all interested parishioners on Sunday evening, September 25th at 7:00pm. Topics will include: *Internet Safety Issues and Protecting our Children from Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery.* Human trafficking continues to grow and spread throughout Florida and the U.S. The best defense we have is information. Mark you calendars and plan to attend.