

Human Trafficking

The Position of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

A Message from Our President

Dear Brother and Sister Vincentians,

We often require the poor to come to us to start the process of charity. This usually makes sense. After all, people respond better to charity when they are ready to receive it. Yet, not all those impoverished know they need help.

Human trafficking requires a Vincentian response. The rule of St. Vincent de Paul 1.3: “No work of charity is foreign to the society.” So, with the scourge of human trafficking, Vincentians are called to respond with charity.

How can we respond to those being trafficked if they are not directly coming to us asking for help? We as Vincentians are uniquely standing with persons in society with eyes and ears near the places where trafficked persons are victimized. We need to educate ourselves so our eyes and ears are open when we see this issue in our communities and among our neighbors in need. Our response should be increased education, awareness, compassion and changing the throw-away culture which treats humans as objects. To join with our bishops in prayer “one day soon, trafficking in human persons vanishes from the face of the earth.”

-John Berry

What We Believe

Slavery The Catholic Church has taken stances against slavery since 1462, when Pope Pius II declared slavery to be "a great crime" (Magnum Scelus). Yet slavery continued for hundreds of years after, some papal bulls even allowed it for specific races for centuries, but doctrine has developed. St. Pope John Paul II stated in a 1984 letter “every form of discrimination based on race, whether occasional or systematically practiced, and whether it is aimed at individuals or whole racial groups, is absolutely unacceptable.” (To Members of the Special Committee of the United Nations Organization Against Apartheid). Anti-discrimination was added to the catechism in 1992: “The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it: Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.” (CCC 1935)

It is not often that we talk about St. Vincent de Paul himself was taken hostage at Algiers in 1605 and witnessed the suffering of other Christian slaves. (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14036a.htm>). Yet in our own time in the United States of America, slavery continues as Human Trafficking.

Human Trafficking is often thought of as sex trafficking or labor trafficking, but it is bigger than just these forms. Human trafficking is not just the moving of people; human trafficking is when a person is used for commercial benefit. Polaris, an anti-trafficking NGO, identified 25 types of human trafficking in the United States: 18 of which include some form of labor exploitation. Some of the industries involved are manufacturing, agriculture, domestic house work, hospitality, begging, landscaping, traveling sale crews, as well as health and beauty services (<https://polarisproject.org/typology>).

Risk factors for being trafficked: **poverty, homelessness, runaway youth and substance abuse** (<https://www.manassehproject.org/?q=trafficking>). Lack of strong family structures is also a risk. It is important to identify these signs and to notify authorities when we suspect a person is being trafficked. As a person is isolated, they can be used as an object and thrown away. When more people care for a person, the person learns their inherent dignity.

Our Catholic and Vincentian Tradition

Church teaching on the dignity of the human person and the goal of economic life is clear. To this end, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) seeks “to raise awareness among Catholics and others of good will about the devastating impact on vulnerable persons.” USCCB’s On Human Trafficking urges “Catholics to work together to identify survivors of human trafficking and to help rescue them from their bondage.” It states:

“As Catholic bishops, we pledge to use the resources of the Church to help end this affliction. We also pledge to use our teaching authority to educate Catholics and others about human trafficking. 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; to make whole the survivors of this crime; and to ensure that, one day soon, trafficking in human persons vanishes from the face of the earth.”

The Church has instituted human services programs to help victims and the USCCB advocates for changes to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act to better protect child victims of trafficking and to ensure that all victims are more readily identified and provided with care.” <https://www.usccb.org/about/anti-trafficking-program/upload/OnHumanTrafficking.pdf>

“If in a given region the state does not carry out its responsibilities, some business groups can come forward in the guise of benefactors, wield real power, and consider themselves exempt from certain rules, to the point of tolerating different forms of organized crime, human trafficking, the drug trade and violence, all of which become very difficult to eradicate.” (Pope Francis, Laudato Si, 197)

“Such situations are an affront to fundamental values which are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person. The alarming increase in the trade in human beings...presents a serious threat to the security of individual nations and a question of international justice which cannot be deferred.” (St. John Paul II) http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_20020515_tauran.html

“The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.” (Pope Francis, Laudato Si, 81)

Structural Racism and Human Trafficking

“Racism can also be institutional, when practices or traditions are upheld that treat certain groups of people unjustly. The cumulative effects of personal sins of racism have led to social structures of injustice and violence that makes us all accomplices in racism.” (Open Wide Our Hearts, The Enduring Call to Love, pastoral letter, 2018 Fall General Assembly)

There is ample evidence that racial minorities are more likely to be victims of sex trafficking (<https://polarisproject.org/sex-trafficking/>). We know by statistics in certain areas of the United States that more persons of color are disproportionately trafficked. As Vincentians, it is important to be aware of this injustice and aware of the warning signs of trafficking.

What You Can Do

Identify the signs: (<https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/recognize-signs>)

- Illegal Work Conditions: not free to come and go; under 18 and providing sexual acts, works long hours; owes large debt; not paid directly
- Poor Mental Health or Abnormal Behavior: fearful, anxious, depressed, usually fearful of law enforcement
- Poor Physical Health: signs of poor hygiene, malnourishment or abuse, multiple STIs, multiple pregnancies or abortions
- Lack of Control: has few personal possessions, frequently monitored, not in control of own money
- Lack of knowledge of current city or home address. Inconsistent or scripted history