

Pastor's Column

Proposition 35—The Human Trafficking Initiative

Sr. Sheila Novak and Sr. Jean Schafer, Sisters of the Divine Savior, are members of St. Thomas More Parish and their ministry is to those who are victims of human trafficking. I have asked them to share "their story" as my Pastor's Column for this week.

The California Conference of Catholic Bishops is supporting Proposition 35—"The Human Trafficking Initiative."

An insert in today's Bulletin describes the Initiative.

As Election Day draws closer, Republicans and Democrats have their sound bites to get our attention. When Jesus began his public ministry, he announced who would be getting his attention. He stood up in the synagogue and declared his work would bring "release to the captives...freedom for the oppressed." (Lk. 4:18) This was no attention-getting device. It was Jesus' whole reason for coming among us.

Centuries later we still struggle with the need to "release the captives." In our country, it came with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the 13th amendment to our Constitution. We continue to struggle with it today. Now we call it human trafficking. Despite whatever name we give, it is modern-day slavery. Today's tragic statistic—there are more people enslaved in our world now than ever before. The interplay of growing global poverty, global overproduction of cheap consumer goods, and the lure of over-sexualized, over-glamorized life styles set the stage for human exploitation. Desperately poor people look to the U.S. for jobs and security. Exploiters use such people as objects for profit.

At first we Americans thought this was an overseas problem, happening in countries far from our borders. Now, as more incidences have been uncovered, we see

that human trafficking is happening throughout the U.S.—in our own state, even in our own neighborhoods. The victims are not just immigrants looking to survive. Victims include our very own youth, by the thousands, also caught in this violence and coercive exploitation. We are beginning to pay attention.

Many efforts are in place to raise awareness about human trafficking, to provide healing and services so victims regain their lives. One of the needs, especially for immigrant survivors, is housing. In exchange for testifying against their trafficker, they are given a special visa and the permission to work. This process may take between 18 months to two years. Until their status is regularized, they are not allowed to work and therefore have no means of supporting themselves. We have responded to this need by establishing SDS Hope House in North County as a refuge for these persons. It is our way of giving the vulnerable among us a chance at life, following the mission of Jesus—"I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance." (John 10:10)

Members of the St. Thomas More Community sponsored an awareness session and volunteered to help when needs arose. Despite the magnitude of this injustice, each of us can be involved in reversing this terrible crime against humanity. Learn about human trafficking. Look up "human trafficking" on the internet. You will find a wealth of information to raise your awareness. Talk about what you learn with your acquaintances to spread that awareness. Work for legislation that addresses the issue. As you explore, you will get other ideas. What we each choose to do does make a difference! It is a practical way to live our call of following in the footsteps of Jesus.



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