

Justice Peace Links

Justice and Peace Committee – Churchwide Coordinating Team – Presbyterian Women

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Human Trafficking Toolkit and PW Action Day



Photo courtesy of UNICEF

Children living on the street or in slums are more vulnerable to being exploited or trafficked. In Gonaives, Haiti, a 14-year-old girl living on the street works as a prostitute to earn money for food and clothing.

Introduction

January 11, 2013, is Human Trafficking Awareness Day and the first annual PW Action Day! PW Action Day was cocreated by the Mission Relationships Committee and the Justice and Peace Committee of the Churchwide Coordinating Team. The idea behind this day is that once a year Presbyterian women around the country will join together to take action on an issue that is important to them. One of the issues important to Presbyterian women, where we feel lots of energy and an urgent desire for change, is human trafficking. Therefore, the CCT committees chose it as the issue of focus for the first annual PW Action Day.

January 11, 2013, falls on a Friday, but feel free to hold events through the weekend and honor this day in worship on Sunday, January

Stories

Arlene Gordon

No book of any number of chapters can tell the whole story of what it is like to be in bondage. I have heard many stories in my lifetime and read many pages about my ancestors being in slavery. I have read and listened to stories of their journey as they were imported from Africa to the New World in boatloads and used as field hands or house servants. I have read about and met others who, despite the odds, pursued freedom and succeeded. And just when you think that you have put it all behind you, a new form of slavery raises its ugly head.

In the state of Florida where I reside, labor trafficking is the most prevalent modern form of slavery, but other forms of human trafficking persist. Pam Bondi, Florida's attorney general, says Florida is a hub for human traffickers. She has worked to make Florida a zero-tolerance state for human trafficking, saying "Human trafficking robs people of their dignity and deprives them of their most basic human rights." Human trafficking is a 32-billion-dollar industry that exploits men, women and children. In my state, we see modern slavery in the agricultural industry where slavery rings prey on hundreds of farm workers. Victims can be found not only in the fields but in homes, where they do domestic work, in restaurants, sweatshops, factories, at construction sites, at nail spas and massage parlors, and on the streets of our cities.

The majority of people who are trafficked are female—and many are children. Many female trafficking victims are forced to perform sex acts for money. A woman who has been trafficked in this way can become so

13! This issue of *Justice & Peace Links* is based on the *Human Trafficking Toolkit* created by the Human Trafficking Roundtable of the PC (USA). The roundtable brings together staff members from several ministry areas within the PC(USA), including Presbyterian Ministry to the United Nations, Presbyterian Hunger Program, Child Advocacy, Immigration, Presbyterian Women and Presbyterian Men, for the purpose of working together to raise awareness, formulate policy and address the issue of human trafficking. Read more from Martha Gee, convener of the roundtable, below, and download the full toolkit at www.pcusa.org/humantrafficking.

What Does Our Church Say?

There are many PC(USA) policy statements about human trafficking that have been affirmed by the General Assembly, including

- “On Condemning International Trafficking In and Sexual Exploitation of Children,” 217th General Assembly (2006)
- “Resolution in Support of Ongoing Partnership Work with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and the Campaign for Fair Food,” 217th General Assembly (2006)
- “On Preventing the Trafficking of Women, Internationally and Nationally,” 218th General Assembly (2008)
- “A Resolution to Expand the Church’s Ministry with and Advocacy against Human Trafficking,” 218th General Assembly (2008)
- A 2010 resolution by the 219th General Assembly that the PC(USA) urge the United States to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), including Article 6, which ensures that governments take all measures available to suppress all forms of trafficking and exploitation of women

Read more about these policies by downloading the *Human Trafficking Toolkit* at www.pcusa.org/humantrafficking.

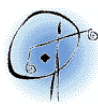
ashamed of what she has been forced to do that she will not admit that she is a victim of trafficking for fear of law enforcement. I understand her dilemma—many of my ancestors were in the same situation during the institution of slavery in America. What is different now is that human trafficking can happen to anyone. People are often drawn into it by their situation—perhaps they are in financial difficulty and need to make some quick money, or are hoping to find a better life.

All of us must be aware of this gigantic and demoralizing problem. It has been estimated that more people are held in slavery today than during the height of the transatlantic slave trade. That is mindboggling! Though this issue is complex, we can work as a community and as individuals on broadening our understanding of the issue of human trafficking and work to eliminate it by advocating for stronger laws and better training and enforcement, and organize in our communities and churches to work against it.

Raul Fernandez-Calienes, professor at St. Thomas University, and Jonas Georges, pastor of All Nations Presbyterian Church, have worked diligently in the Presbytery of Tropical Florida to keep this very troubling issue before us as a presbytery and as congregations. Those of us who are privileged to live in freedom from slavery because of the hard lives and determination of our ancestors can relate to this horrible crime that needs to be stopped. Everyone needs to make a special effort to understand the scars that slavery leaves on the human psyche. Just as important, we need to work toward healing by helping those who are still in bondage find their way to freedom. In doing so, we will be working toward justice for all who are victims of slavery in any form.



Arlene W. Gordon is an honorably retired teaching elder in the PC(USA) and serves as the president of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus.



What Does the Bible Say?

The Bible includes many stories about enslaved people and those who enslave them. Choose one or more of the following stories to study:

- Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (Genesis 12:10–20)
- Sarah, Abraham’s wife, and Hagar, his concubine (Genesis 21:1–21)
- Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37–50)
- Hebrews as slaves in Egypt (Exodus 1:1–14)
- Moses’ mother and sister (Exodus 1:8–2:10)
- A Concubine’s Killing (Judges 19)
- Book of Ruth
- Book of Esther
- Letter of Paul to Philemon

For Discussion

- Who has the power in this story? Who acts? Who is acted upon?
- Where do you see tactics used by traffickers in this story? Can you identify different kinds of slavery, both ancient and modern: sexual slavery, forced labor, chattel/property slavery, debt bondage?
- Compare the story to Arlene and Martha’s stories. Are there parallels? What has changed? What has not changed?
- Does someone in the story right the wrong or bend the situation toward righteousness? Where is God in the story?

Martha Gee

One must never forget that slaves are first and foremost people. Their lives are filled with sorrow and injustice—but also . . . they are touched with humor and joy. Just like regular people. Just like free people.

—Richard Holbrooke,
former U.S. ambassador*

Type in the words “human trafficking” on your search engine, and thousands of websites and articles will pop up for your perusal. Dozens of organizations and groups, many of them faith-based, seek to raise your awareness—and raise funds for their work—by emphasizing the horrors of human trafficking and its assault on the human dignity and basic rights of those enslaved for forced labor or sex work. Images of exploited people and mind-boggling statistics of the number of enslaved people certainly motivate people of faith to respond. And really, who could argue with that? Of all the evils that violate the humanity of millions of men, women and children, surely modern slavery is among the most abhorrent.

Children, the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, represent a significant percentage of those trafficked. As a woman of faith and a child advocate, I am moved to take action to end human trafficking and to ensure that enslaved persons have the abundant life that Jesus Christ yearns for all God’s children to have. Yet, in my work with the PC(USA)’s Human Trafficking Roundtable, I have learned that *how* we respond is as important as *whether* we respond. As Christians who value each person as a unique child of God, it is incumbent on us to be sure that we keep the trafficked person’s right to self-determination at the center.

I have learned a lot from reading, attending trainings and talking with people who are doing work on the ground to address modern slavery—people in law enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and social service agencies. But the insights I value the most have come from people who were once



Get Involved

Download the PC(USA) *Human Trafficking Toolkit* at www.pcusa.org/humantrafficking. The toolkit includes several good resources and action ideas, including

- Pray for those who are trafficked, their traffickers and those working to create and enforce laws to end trafficking.
- Learn more by reading articles, taking a quiz to test your trafficking knowledge, finding out what a “human-rights-centered” approach to human trafficking looks like, getting a theological perspective on trafficking, and more.
- Find out how you can host a free training from Freedom Network USA, sponsored by the PC(USA), or another option for workshops and seminars in your community.

trafficked themselves. I have heard men and women who were trafficked for forced labor share responses that were most helpful to them. I have listened as women trafficked into the sex trade speak of how they are now living the life God intended, and of the kind of help that enabled them to make good choices. And I have heard a young woman of just over 18, who had gotten away from the life of sex trafficking into which she had been forced at age 14, tell about her excitement at the prospect of now completing high school and even attending college, thanks to the help of Christian friends.

As Presbyterian women prepare to engage in a national day of action on the issue of modern slavery, it is my prayer that we remember, as Richard Holbrook observed, that trafficked people are first and foremost persons capable of making their own decisions and living out their own dreams. May our responses honor those capacities.

* Quoted in *Trafficking in Persons Report 2011*, “In Memoriam: Richard Holbrooke (1941–2010),” U.S. Department of State.



Martha Bettis Gee serves as associate for child advocacy and networking in the Compassion, Peace and Justice area of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and is currently the convener of the PC(USA) Human Trafficking Roundtable.



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