

**Modern Day Slaves Living Within Our Midst**  
**A Statement by the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey on Human Trafficking**  
**January 10, 2014**

The nanny for your neighbor, the young woman who does your nails, the young man clearing your table at a restaurant, the people who pick the fruit you enjoy - each of these could be a victim of human trafficking – modern day slaves living within our midst.

Human trafficking is a crime against the basic dignity and rights of a person. Sadly, human trafficking is flourishing throughout the world. According to Catholic Relief Services:

- Human trafficking is a \$32 billion industry worldwide.
- At least 12.3 million people are trafficked worldwide.
- More than 1 million children are victims of trafficking.
- On average, only 1 person is convicted for every 800 trafficking cases worldwide.
- People are trafficked in 161 countries including the United States and even in our own State of New Jersey.

*How do individuals get trapped into the bondage of human trafficking?* Traffickers lure poor and vulnerable men, women and children with false promises of good jobs, education, and money. No sector or industry is immune from human trafficking. Victims have been identified in agricultural fields, restaurants, construction sites, factories, hotels, spas, and even private residences. Undocumented persons eager to find work are easy prey for human traffickers.

Once lured, the traffickers are able to keep their victims from seeking help by confiscating identification documents, using threats of violence against the victims or their family, as well as subjecting the victims to physical, psychological or sexual abuse.

Recently, Pope Francis called human trafficking a crime against humanity that threatens not only individuals but the fabric of the family and the basic values of society. In a December 12, 2013 address to the new Ambassadors to the Holy See from seventeen nations, the Holy Father called upon governments and all people of good will to unite in a global effort to free victims of trafficking.

We, the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey, accept Pope Francis' challenge and we urge all Catholics to join with their neighbors in fighting this grave violation of fundamental human rights, especially the sexual exploitation of women and children.

For many decades the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has been a leader in fighting human trafficking worldwide. In New Jersey, the Catholic Church has worked with the New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking to raise awareness of the importance of identifying victims of human trafficking and most important to help rescue victims from their bondage.

We also have cooperated with USCCB's *Amistad* program which works with leaders of the most vulnerable immigrant groups to help them identify victims and raise awareness of human trafficking within their own communities. Recently, we conducted a highly successful program

that helped leaders of the West African communities of Newark to reach out with assistance for victims in their local communities.

Because of the efforts of law enforcement, faith-based groups, elected officials and others, New Jersey has made a start in raising awareness about the devastating impact of trafficking on individuals and society. An important accomplishment was the Legislature passing and the Governor signing into law the *Human Trafficking Protection Prevention and Treatment Act*.

Today, we encourage all people of good will to make a commitment to increase their efforts to eliminate the root causes of trafficking.

Today, we ask communities to give priority to eliminating the markets that permit traffickers to flourish.

Most of all, today, we ask all people of good will to make every effort to help survivors of trafficking to heal so that they might be able to live safe, healthy, productive and happy lives.

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**For information on how to identify human trafficking victims; how to locate law enforcement resources; and how to join others in combating the evil of human trafficking, please visit: [www.njhumantrafficking.gov](http://www.njhumantrafficking.gov).**