

Understanding and responding to human trafficking



This program will help you understand what human trafficking is, what is being done to stop it and how you can participate in those efforts. It is a much wider problem than most of us realize because it is often so well hidden, but it is the third-largest criminal industry in the world.

By the end of this program, you will have read stories of women and men who have survived trafficking, know what several organizations are doing to combat it and be able to begin to discern how your church can best work to stop trafficking in your community.

What is human trafficking?

“Modern slavery—be it bonded labor, involuntary servitude or sexual slavery—is a crime and cannot be tolerated in any culture, community or country ... [It] is an affront to our values and our commitment to human rights.”

Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State

The United Nations defines human trafficking as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Facts and statistics

Human trafficking is the third-largest criminal industry in the world, after drugs and arms trafficking.

The Polaris Project, an anti-trafficking organization, has compiled these facts:

- More than 12 million people worldwide are trafficked for forced labor or sexual exploitation.
- More than 200,000 children are at high risk for sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in the United States every year.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence provides these statistics:

- More than 80% of trafficking victims are female.
- 50% of trafficking victims internationally are under the age of 18.
- Annually, an estimated \$9.5 billion is generated through trafficking activities, with at least \$4 billion attributed to the international brothel industry.
- Between 2001 and 2005, only 140 defendants have been convicted of human trafficking in U.S. courts. This represents a 109% increase from 1996-2000.

How to Use This Resource

The goal of this program is to learn about human trafficking and what is being done to stop it. You will learn how human trafficking is defined by both the United Nations and the U.S. State Department and discuss facts and statistics about trafficking.

You will read stories of women and men who have survived trafficking, learn what several organizations are doing to combat it and begin to discern how your church can best work to stop trafficking in your community.

Allow three to four hours for study and discussion. This program can take place over the course of an afternoon or could be divided into two parts for a two-week Sunday School or women's group seminar. The only other things you need are pen and paper.

There is an optional section that requires a laptop and projector for viewing several photography projects documenting the lives of trafficked persons in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Similarly, the organizations that you will read about and discuss all have helpful, informative Web sites, and your discussion could be enhanced by having the opportunity to explore the Web sites together.

Discussion questions

Did you have any pre-conceived notions about human trafficking? Did the definition and facts presented challenge any of these pre-conceived notions?

Are there aspects of trafficking that you had not previously considered?

What do you think about the low rate of prosecution of traffickers?

Have you heard stories of trafficking survivors? What about stories of the arrest and prosecution of traffickers?

Forms of trafficking

The U.S. State Department defines eight major forms of trafficking. It is by no means an exhaustive list, but a close look at each of them will help us gain a better understanding of the magnitude of the problem. (See <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/what/index.htm>)

Forced labor: Also referred to as involuntary servitude, forced labor often results from the exploitation of people who are especially vulnerable because of socio-economic and political factors. Poverty and high rates of unemployment contribute to this vulnerability as well as political corruption, conflict and discrimination.

Bonded labor: This form of trafficking often overlaps with sex trafficking because it is coercion through financial means. Men and women become victims of bonded labor when an employer exploits an initial debt that a worker takes on as part of the terms of their employment.

Sex trafficking: While sex trafficking can occur within bonded labor and also affects children (for which there is a separate category), the U.S. State Department defines sex trafficking as “when an adult is coerced, forced or deceived into prostitution—or maintained in prostitution through coercion.”

Debt bondage among migrant laborers: In many cases of debt bondage among migrant laborers, an initial debt is incurred in their home country for transportation into another country. The financial debt then becomes a means for their employer in the destination country to keep them in bondage. In many cases, debt bondage arises when a worker’s status in the destination country is dependent on his or her employer; their legal or illegal status in the country becomes a means of coercion.

Involuntary domestic servitude: This form of human trafficking is a category separate from involuntary servitude/bonded labor because of the nature of the workplaces in which these workers live. These workplaces are typically private residences, which makes it more difficult for them to be inspected by authorities and makes the workers more isolated.

The State Department notes that “investigators and service providers report many cases of untreated illnesses and, tragically, widespread sexual abuse, which in some cases may be symptoms of involuntary servitude.”

Forced child labor: This form of trafficking carries the same definition of forced labor but applies strictly to children. There are particular indicators of the forced labor of children, such as “situations in which the child appears to be in the custody of a non-family member who has the child perform work that financially benefits someone outside the child’s family.”

Child soldiers: This is a form of human trafficking that “involves the unlawful recruitment or use of children—through force, fraud or coercion—as combatants or for labor or sexual exploitation by armed forces. Perpetrators may be government forces, paramilitary organizations or rebel groups.”

Child sex trafficking: This form of trafficking is the use of children in the commercial sex trade. “There can be no exceptions and no cultural or socioeconomic rationalizations preventing the rescue of children from sexual servitude. Sex trafficking has devastating consequences for minors, including long-lasting physical and psychological trauma, disease (including HIV/AIDS), drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social ostracism and possible death.”

What to do if you suspect trafficking in your community

The Polaris Project operates The National Human Trafficking Hotline. Call 888-373-7888 or email NHTRC@PolarisProject.org if you suspect trafficking in your community.

These are signs to look out for that might be evidence of trafficking:

- inability to move or leave jobs
- evidence of being controlled
- signs of physical abuse
- fear or depression
- no forms of identification



The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence also operates four hotlines. Operators have access to interpreters in most languages:

- Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Task Force: 1-888-428-7581
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-888-799-SAFE
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE
- National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD

Discussion questions

Were any of the eight forms of trafficking forms that you had not previously considered? If so, which ones, and do you consider them forms of trafficking, or do you think they are issues that should be considered separately?

Were the definitions helpful? Can you think of ways the forms overlap?

Were the five signs of trafficking listed by the Polaris Project helpful? Are you better prepared to recognize trafficking in your community?

Stories of trafficked persons

Somaly Mam

The tragedies that befell Somaly Mam in her childhood intersect with the political unrest that devastated the country of her birth, Cambodia. She was born in 1970 or 1971; the exact year of her birth is unknown. By the time she was five years old she had been abandoned by her parents and left in a mountain village with her maternal grandmother. During this time, Cambodia was being carpet bombed by the American military. In 1975, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge rose to power and she was abandoned by her grandmother. The reasons for her grandmother's disappearance are unknown; during the period of Pol Pot's rule, 1975–1979, one in five Cambodians were killed. When Somaly was nine a man appeared in her village claiming to be her grandfather; Vietnam had invaded the country the year before.

Somaly was taken across the border into Vietnam by the man claiming to be her grandfather. Upon arrival in his home, she became his servant. Sometimes he rented her out as a day laborer and she went to work in nearby rice paddies. When Somaly was twelve years old, her grandfather began to sexually abuse her. A Chinese merchant in the village raped her after her grandfather sent her there on an errand. Immediately following the rape, Somaly attempted to drown herself in the Mekong River.

Two years later, when Somaly was fourteen, her grandfather sold her to a man, her “husband,” to pay a gambling debt. The Cambodian village that she moved to with her husband was littered with landmines, landmines laid by the Khmer Rouge and landmines laid by the armies fighting the Khmer Rouge and unexploded shrapnel from the American bombing of the country. Her husband, a violent man who beat her as frequently as her grandfather, was a soldier who was gone for long periods of time fighting the Khmer Rouge, which was now an army based in Thailand. Less than a year after they married, he left with his company for the Thai border and never returned. Her

grandfather, however, did. He demanded that she pack her things and took her to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, and sold her again, this time to a brothel where Mam worked for four years before escaping after witnessing the brutal murder of a close friend.

Today, Somaly Mam is a leading anti-trafficking activist. She is the founder of AFESIP. The acronym stands for Acting for Women in Distressing Situations, an NGO [non-governmental organization] that operates an investigative and legal team that works with Cambodian police to rescue women and girls from brothels. Additionally, the organization operates shelters and runs rehabilitation and training programs. Of her work with trafficking survivors, Mam says, “I share everything they’ve been through. It’s as if we are the same person. I wear their scars on my body and in my soul. We don’t need to say much to understand one another.”

Lucas Benitez

Lucas Benitez is originally from Guerrero, Mexico and came to the United States when he was sixteen, hoping to find work to support his five brothers and sisters (see <http://www.bioneers.org/presenters/lucas-benitez>). Virtually every interview he gives begins with the same story. Benitez is one of the founders, and current co-director, of Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), an alliance of migrant farm workers in Immokalee, Florida. The story he starts his interviews with is powerful and captures the importance of CIW’s work.

In 1996, a tomato picker arrived at CIW offices covered in blood. He had been terribly beaten by his crew boss for requesting a water break. Lucas Benitez went to work quickly organizing coalition members—the majority of them from Mexico, Guatemala and Haiti. Together, they marched to the home of the crew boss carrying the worker’s bloodied t-shirt like a banner. The next day not a single worker went to work in the crew boss’ fields.

Benitez reports, “The other crew leaders were watching. Since then, there have been no reports of physical violence in Immokalee to workers in the fields.” CIW has held onto the t-shirt; it is stored in a file drawer: “It’s like having an iron ball and chain from when there was chattel slavery. It demonstrates the exploitation we faced, but also the anger and valor when we got united and acted like a community, not a labor reserve.” (See <http://motherjones.com/politics/2004/07/power-pickers>)

Immokalee is the largest farm worker community in Florida. CIW has approximately 4,000 members who work for large agribusiness corporations. The majority of these migrant workers travel up and down the East Coast following seasonal harvests (see <http://www.ciw-online.org/about.html>). In the tomato fields of Immokalee the rate of pay is 45 cents per bucket, which means that workers have to fill 125 buckets, or pick two tons of tomatoes, to be paid \$56 a day. Coalition of Immokalee Workers calls itself a “community-based worker organization.” The work of the coalition is organizing its members to advocate on their own behalf. In the years since it’s founding, CIW has worked to free more than 1,000 men and women from slavery.

In 2001, CIW launched their most successful campaign yet, their boycott of Taco Bell. Working closely with student, community and faith groups, the “Boot the Bell” campaign demanded that Taco Bell take responsibility for the welfare, the working conditions and wages, of the farm workers who supply their tomatoes. In 2005, Taco Bell agreed to all of the workers’ demands, including paying a penny more per pound of tomatoes. Of his work, and CIW’s work, Lucas Benitez says, “Picking is dignified, honest work that deserves to be treated as such. This community of workers is ... clearing the path for those who will come behind us. It’s not something that can wait for others. It has to come from us, who’ve worked in the fields.” (See <http://motherjones.com/politics/2004/07/power-pickers>)

Herlyn Marja Uiras



Bishop Mark S. Hanson washing the feet of Herlyn Marja Uiras during the 2008 Ecumenical Pre-Conference on HIV/AIDS in Mexico City.

Herlyn Marja Uiras is a survivor of human trafficking; she was kidnapped in Namibia and forced into prostitution in South Africa. Because she was a prostitute, she was unable to negotiate the use of a condom and contracted HIV. Eventually, Uiras was able to escape South Africa and returned to Namibia, where she began a regimen of anti-retroviral medication to treat her HIV. She was at the Ecumenical Pre-Conference representing Churches United Against HIV and AIDS in Southern and Eastern Africa.

After Uiras told her powerful story in a plenary session, Bishop Mark S. Hanson asked if he could wash her feet and the feet of Sophie Dilmitis, an HIV-positive woman at the conference representing the World YWCA. Before washing their feet, Bishop Hanson said, “I am absolutely convinced that we as religious leaders and we in the religious community that so shunned and shamed people with HIV and struggling with AIDS... must begin first by engaging in public acts of repentance. Because absent public acts of repentance, I fear our words will not be trusted.” (See http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/Resources/FeatureStories/archive/2008/20080803_fbo.asp)

Discussion questions

How do you think the legacy of slavery in this country affects American perceptions of modern-day slavery?

What are the common threads that you recognize in all of these stories?

Where do you recognize the complicity of North Americans and Europeans in these stories?

What do you think the church can do to practice solidarity with these men and women?

What do you think of Bishop Hanson’s act of repentance at the Ecumenical Pre-Conference on HIV/AIDS in 2008?

What can your church do to combat trafficking in your community?

Begin to discern how your church can involve itself in the fight against human trafficking by examining the work of several anti-trafficking organizations. Each brief synopsis of the organization is followed by some of their simple advocacy suggestions.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

www.lirs.org

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) has been serving refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers, detainees and other migrants for over 70 years. LIRS is one of only ten national organizations that resettles refugees on behalf of the U.S. government. In addition to their work with congregations and communities resettling refugees, they also provide job training and support and are one of only two organizations in the world that offers specialized foster care for refugee children resettled without parents or guardians.

You can participate in LIRS' Stand For Welcome campaign for immigration reform in the following ways:

Plan a prayer vigil in your community as a means of standing in solidarity with immigrants.

Dedicate intentional moments in your weekly Sunday services to increase awareness and spiritually connect members to the issue.

Sign up with the LIRS action center. You can stay informed and up to date on issues related to the rights of refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers and detainees.

Polaris Project

www.polarisproject.org

The Polaris Project is a large anti-trafficking organization based in Japan and the United States. It takes its name from the North Star that guided slaves north to freedom. Their approach to combating human trafficking is far-reaching, including direct outreach and victim identification, providing transitional

housing, operating the national hotline listed here and advocating on the state, federal and grassroots levels.

Visit the Polaris action center at www.actioncenter.polarisproject.org to sign up for updates on issues and legislation related to human trafficking.

Polaris also offers a list of 10 ways you can publicize their hotline:

1. Dedicate your Facebook status to the hotline for a week.
2. Put up hotline flyers (available online) in bus stations.
3. Tell 5 friends to put the hotline number in their cell phones.
4. Hand out information (pamphlets are also available online) about the hotline at concerts, fairs and community events.
5. Talk about it. Tell your friends, teachers, teammates, co-workers and family members about the Polaris action center.
6. Invite your friends over to watch a movie about trafficking (a list of movies and books will follow) and tell them about the hotline.
7. Post the hotline number on your Web site or blog.
8. Put up hotline posters in the windows of local businesses.
9. Ask a teacher, politician or other local leader to talk about human trafficking and the hotline.
10. Post hotline flyers in motels and hotels in your area.

Like LIRS, a central goal of the Polaris Project is to help trafficking victims transition into new lives. Polaris aims to meet the basic needs of its clients (food, transportation, counseling), and while most clothing items can be donated second-hand, for hygienic reasons undergarments must be new and are therefore in constant demand.

Polaris also **encourages volunteers to donate gift cards**, such as grocery store and Target cards, for victims involved in Polaris Project Client Services or living in transitional housing. There is also a link on their Web site that enables volunteers to shop online at Target.com for furnishings for the transitional apartments.



Coalition of Immokalee Workers

www.ciw-online.org

Since we spent some time reading and talking about Lucas Benitez and his work with CIW, here are CIW's suggestions for engaging in the fight against modern slavery.

Since CIW's agreement with Taco Bell, the coalition has brokered agreements with Burger King, Whole Foods, Bon Appetit Co., Compass Group, Aramark and Sodexo as part of their Campaign for Fair Food. The coalition is now campaigning for the supermarket industry to also recognize the right of farm workers to a fair wage.

CIW's website has downloadable letters and postcards (<http://www.ciw-online.org/tools.html>). They suggest that on your next trip to the grocery store you download, print and sign one of the letters to Giant, Kroger, Martin's, Publix and Stop and Shop.

You can download postcards for Publix, Kroger, Ahold or Chipotle, and you can special order them for your congregation on the CIW website.

In keeping with CIW's mission of grassroots organizing, CIW has created the Alliance for Fair Food. This alliance brings together human rights, religious, student and labor organizations to "promote principles and practices of socially responsible purchasing in the corporate food industry that advance and ensure the human rights of farm workers at the bottom of corporate supply chains."

For more information on the Alliance for Fair Food, visit www.allianceforfairfood.org and their partner websites:

Student/Farmworker Alliance: www.sfalliance.org

Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida:
www.interfaithact.org

Just Harvest: www.justharvestusa.org

Additional anti-trafficking organizations

Free the Slaves: www.freetheslaves.net

Amnesty International for Women:
www.amnestyforwomen.de

Freedom Network USA: www.freedomnetworkusa.org

Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking:
www.castla.org

Anti-Slavery International: www.antislavery.org

Discussion questions

Think about your own engagement with this material. What was most surprising? Which of the stories most inspired you? What do you want to learn more about?

Do the missions of the organizations discussed here have principles or values in common with your congregation's mission and vision?

Which issues related to trafficking do you think are most pressing in your community?

How would you describe your experience in this session to a friend? What was positive? What was negative?



Building on your engagement with the program and what you've learned, what aspects of this program would you most like to bring into your larger church community?

Are there previous activities or awareness-raising efforts that your church has engaged in that you think might be effective springboards for anti-trafficking work?

More resources for raising awareness

One of the many reasons eradicating human trafficking is so difficult is because too few people realize the sheer magnitude of the problem. Consider any of these books and movies for a book group or movie night.

Books

The Road of Lost Innocence, by Somaly Mam

Disposable People, by Kevin Bales

What Is the What, by Dave Eggers

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier, by Ishmael Beah

Selling Olga: Stories of Human Trafficking and Resistance, by Louisa Waugh

Movies

Born into Brothels

Children for Sale

Children Underground

From the ELCA and Women of the ELCA

See www.womenoftheelca.org/trafficking

See www.elca.org/justiceforwomen

Photo essays

Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay,

by Mary Ellen Mark

<http://www.maryellenmark.com/frames/falkland.html>

Mary Ellen Mark worked on her photo essay (linked above) during the 1970s. The resulting book was published before the start of the AIDS pandemic. Do you think the work is still relevant?

Do you have a different reaction to the photographs than to the stories that were read? Is one more powerful for you than the other?

Not Natasha, by Dana Popa

<http://www.danapopa.com/gallery.php?ProjectID=218>

Popa's series is contemporary. Do you think it better illustrates the problem of human trafficking? Why or why not?

While there are portraits in the series, many of the images are details of rooms. How do these photographs resonate with you? Do you think they are more or less illustrative of the lives of these women?

The Price of Sex, by Mimi Chakarova

<http://www.priceofsex.org>

Unlike Mary Ellen Mark or Dana Popa, Mimi Chakarova is of the same background as the women she photographs. Chakarova, like her subjects, is from Eastern Europe and grew up there after the fall of the Soviet Union. Do you think that this connection is evident in her work? If so, how?

Of the three photo essays, is there one that you think most effectively communicates the stories of trafficked women?