

PRACTICAL ACTION GUIDE 5

ACTIVITIES, WORSHIP AND PRAYER RESOURCES FOR CHURCH EVENTS

What next?

With the signing of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Being on 23 March 2007 by the UK Government, the focus of our social action project now moves to addressing the demand for paid sex and the provision of services to support victims of trafficking. The Government will be able to ratify the Council of Europe Convention when these requirements of it are in place. We commend to you the organisations and agencies working in these fields as potential local partners. You will find them listed on our social action pack leaflet, *Not for Sale*. If you need a copy of the updated *Practical Action Guide 2* concerning the United Nations and Council of Europe Conventions, please call us on 020 7467 5175.

Posters, further campaign information and details of practical steps you can take in your area, are available from CHASTE (Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe), PO Box 983, Cambridge CB23 4WY. Tel: 0845 456 93335. Email: admin@chaste.org.uk. CHASTE and other agencies are listed on the enclosed leaflet, *Not for Sale*. The Salvation Army is also developing new initiatives, particularly regarding safe housing.

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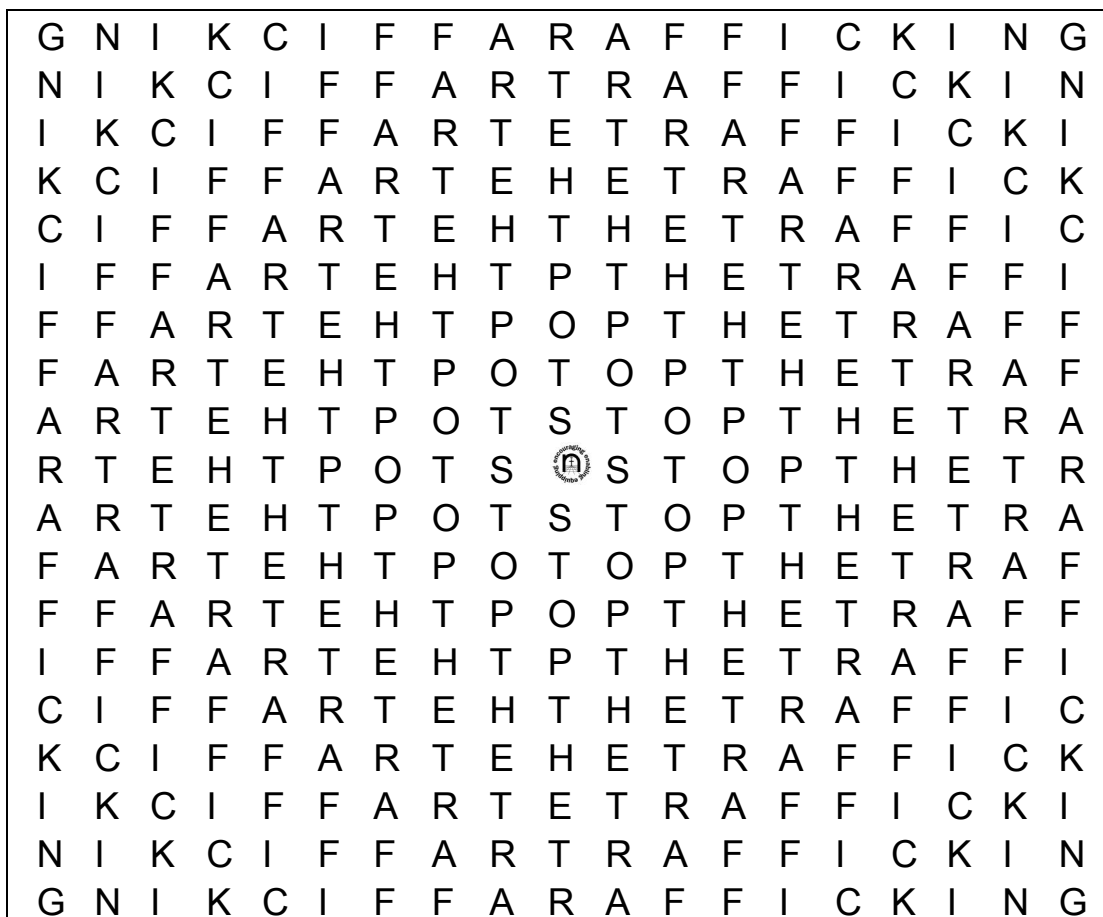
PRAYER IDEAS

Portable Prayer List

Use out-of-date business cards to maintain a portable prayer list. Write a name or topic on each one, fasten the pack with a rubber band, and keep it in your pocket. When walking, waiting, or using public transport, work your way through as many cards as you have time for. The pack will grow over time as you add new people and topics.

Stop the Trafficking Mandala

Start from the Women's Network logo in the centre and work your way out to a corner. Moving horizontally or vertically, you can switch direction as often as you like and *Stop the trafficking* will always be spelt out.



E-mails

Set up e-mail group and send each other prayer ideas and requests.

PRAYERS ON THE THEME OF TRAFFICKING

Set us free, loving God,

from every bond of prejudice and fear:
that, honouring the steadfast courage of the abolitionists
we may show forth in our lives the reconciling love
and true freedom of the children of God,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

A prayer to end trafficking

O God, our words cannot express
what our minds can barely comprehend and our hearts feel
when we hear of women and girls deceived
and transported to unknown places
for purposes of sexual exploitation and abuse
because of human greed and profit at this time in our world.

Our hearts are saddened and our spirits angry
that their dignity and rights are being transgressed
through threats deception and force.
We cry out against the degrading practice
of trafficking and pray for it to end.
Strengthen the fragile-spirited and broken-hearted.

Make real your promises to fill these our sisters
with a love that is tender and good
and send the exploiters away empty-handed.

Give us the wisdom and courage to stand in solidarity with them
that together we will find ways to the freedom that is your gift to all of us.

Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

You could use a response such as “Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer” at the end of each section of these intercessions, or a sung response such as “O Lord, hear my prayer”, and candles could be lit during the prayers.

We pray for the rescue and restoration of the countless number of women and children who have become victims of sexual trafficking:

- for an end to their captivity and sexual abuse,
- for as many safe and secure shelters as are needed to provide for their material needs,
- for loving care takers to provide comfort, solace, and a sense of family,
- for training and education to provide these children with meaningful and productive livelihoods,
- for medical treatment to meet their many health concerns;
- for the Gospel message to reach their ears and be received in their hearts.

We pray for the breakdown of the sex industry, which fuels the sexual trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of women and children:

- for the demise of pornographic magazines;
- for a ban on internet pornography and sex tourism sites;
- for the closure of clubs with nude dancing and stripping;
- for stronger law enforcement efforts the world over to enforce obscenity laws, to fight corruption, and to arrest and convict the pimps, traffickers and “customers”;
- for the permanent closure of all brothels.

We pray for efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex:

- for countries such as New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, Columbia, Thailand, Poland, and Indonesia, currently looking into legalisation of prostitution;
- for the Netherlands, Germany, and certain districts of Australia, where prostitution has already been legalised;
- for the development programs such as “Johns’ Schools” which aim to educate men convicted of soliciting for sex about the harms of prostitution;
- for God to convict the hearts and transform the lives of traffickers, pimps and “customers”.

We pray for the development of impoverished nations:

- for lifting the poor out of poverty to a decent standard of living;
- for meaningful education and employment opportunities;
- for an increase in fair trading practices and ethical economics;
- for an escape from the desperate circumstances that often fuel commercial sexual exploitation and sexual trafficking.

We pray for world leaders, that they will confront sexual trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation by dedicating their time and energy to the issue:

- for the signing of the European Convention;
- for the provision of resources to implement the Convention;
- for those working worldwide to eradicate all forms of slavery and trafficking.

We pray for the church and its response to sexual trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation:

- for aid workers to establish and administer recovery homes for victims of trafficking;
- for an increase in church resources – human, financial, and infrastructural – to be dedicated to meeting the needs of sexual trafficking victims;
- for the church and its leaders to remain pure and not become the perpetrators of child sexual abuse in any form;
- for increased networking and cooperation among all groups working on this issue;
- for the strength, fortitude, and vision of those working to address this issue.

[Adapted from prayers at: www.salvationarmy.org]

A LITANY OF VOICES

Each paragraph is the voice of a woman who has become a victim of the Traffickers. In between each "story" the Taizé chant O Lord hear my Prayer is sung by the congregation / those gathered for prayer.

My name is Odoi. I come from Accra in Ghana. I have never had much and all that my parents had was achieved through working all the hours God sends in degrading, manual tasks that I was just not prepared to do at all. So when this smart young man offered me a job that would take me away from the poverty I grew up in I jumped at the chance. Now sitting in the cell of the detention centre I realise how stupid I was. I knew nothing about that boy. He trapped me and when the police raided the parlour where I worked I had no papers to prove who I was. Now I am to be sent back home, and to what?

*O Lord Hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer
When I call answer me
O Lord Hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer
Come and listen to me*

My name is Tania. I come from Slovenia. During the ethnic cleansing of my country many people lost their communities and the people that they knew and used to trust. We have developed a distrust to our way of life, so I knew that when a group of unknown men visited our village I should not be attracted to them. But they promised so much, a job, a nice place to stay, papers for emigration and a passport. It would give me a chance to earn some money and send it back home. So I went with them. I slipped away at the dead of night not thinking that it would be the death of me. I found myself in a van with several other destitute women being bumped and tossed for hours on end. When we approached border controls we had to keep deadly quiet. We changed vans in dirty lay-bys, and were hurried along so that no one would see us. Sending money back home? I couldn't even send them my address to let my parents know where I was!

O Lord hear my prayer, etc

My name is Ruth. I come from England. The bible tells me that I should be happy to travel but not any more. As a kid my teacher drummed into us not to talk to strangers! When I went to Secondary School there were always a few "boyfriends" hanging around the school gates and after a while I got chatty to one. We would walk as far as the local shops and maybe have a coffee together. Yes, we took time to get to know each other, and several months later as we were finishing for the summer break he asked me what I would be doing for the holidays. I replied that I needed to get some cash and a few days later he offered me some work in a bar. I looked old enough, he said!! One night a man followed me out to the toilets and grabbed me from behind. What he did I cannot describe, but I was threatened and left in no doubt that he meant what he said. Within a few days all sorts were coming at me each with their own particular threat. I feel so dirty. I don't know how to get away.

O Lord hear my prayer, etc

My name is Ariane. I come from Kenya. I am 16 years old. My mother died two years ago, and I ended up living on the streets of Nairobi. One day I met a man who promised me he could get me a good job with a family in England. I traveled there by boat, and then I was taken by car to a house in a big city – I don't know where it was. I was shut in a cellar, and kept prisoner. I was beaten and raped, then I was forced with violence and threats to work as a prostitute. I got pregnant, but hid it for seven months because I was afraid I would be killed. When the man found out I was pregnant, I was forced into a car at night, and we drove for several hours. Eventually I was pushed out of the car into the street, and the man drove away. What am I supposed to do now in a strange city, about to have a baby, with no money, no clothes, no home, no friends?

O Lord hear my prayer, etc

My name is Yanna. I come from a very poor Roma gypsy community in Bulgaria. My husband left me with two children and another on the way. I was offered a job in Greece - €45 a day to look after an old woman. It was a difficult decision to make, but so much money, what could I do? I left my two children with a neighbour, and I travelled to Greece with the woman who had offered me the job. I was taken to a dirty little flat in a backstreet, and locked in with 3 other pregnant women. A man brought us food, but he wouldn't let us out of the flat for two weeks. One day one of the other girls heard him on the phone talking about selling our babies. He said that when one of us gave birth, he would sell the baby immediately, give us €3,000 and get rid of us. We knew we had to escape, so we managed to get onto a balcony and shout for help. The police came and we were rescued, and we could go home. Now I'm afraid that the woman will come back, and punish me for calling the police. What will happen to my children then?

O Lord hear my prayer, etc

My name is Edith. I come from the Dominican Republic. When I got the letter from my cousin telling me about a job in Greece, I was overjoyed. I knew she was doing well there. She told me she had made all the arrangements, and told me where to go to meet someone who could get me there cheaply. When I arrived in Greece, a man came to meet me, saying my cousin had sent him. I was taken to a bar with some other girls. We had to work as "dancers". It was so degrading. None of us were paid for the first three months, then the owner said we owed him for accommodation, food, and clothes. After that we were allowed to keep a quarter of what we earned, but we still had to pay our debts. We were moved from club to club, and if we protested or refused to dance, we were beaten. I've never seen my cousin since I arrived here.

O Lord hear my prayer, etc

My name is Mila. I come from the Philippines. My parents are very poor, so when they were offered \$15 in advance for my work, they jumped at the chance. They believed that I would be safe as a domestic worker in the city. I was only 9 years old. Every day I have to get up at 5 am. My work includes taking care of my employers' children, cooking and cleaning, laundry and ironing, helping in a pre-school, making deliveries, and even looking after pigs. I live in a shed, with no light, no mattress, and only one bucket of water a week for washing. The woman often beats me, and the man and his brother – well, they pay too me much attention. I haven't been paid a cent after all these years. How can I ever repay the money they say I owe them? How can my family ever make enough money to buy me back? I have no-one to turn to.

O Lord hear my prayer, etc

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Newspapers and Magazines

Collect newspapers and magazines with articles about trafficking. Distribute them around the group and give people time to read the articles.

In twos or threes, consider the following questions:

- What might be the underlying causes for the situation described?
- Who is involved? And what are the implications for each person?
- Why do you think they have got involved in this?
- What can be done to prevent this sort of activity?

You could also look at small 'personal' ads, and consider what they're really all about. For example:

"Chinese lady gives nice massage."

"Black beauty would like to meet successful businessman."

"Air hostess has time to spoil you."

These kinds of advertisements appear regularly in newspapers up and down the land. Sadly, not only the services offered, but often those offering them, are not what is claimed. The "*Chinese lady*" may have come to Britain expecting to work as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant. The "*black beauty*" may be only 15, and the nearest the "*air hostess*" may have got to travel the world by being sent, traumatised, onto a flight from Eastern Europe and into bondage in Britain.

Use the articles, the small ads, and the results of your discussions to pray for those involved in trafficking – victims, traffickers, clients, the Police, and other organisations.

2. Price Tags

Give each person a small piece of paper and a pen, and invite them to jot down answers to *one* of the following questions:

- What's the most expensive thing you've ever bought in your life?
- What's the best bargain you've ever found?

Mix up everyone's answers and bring the group together. The group then has to guess which person bought which item.

For discussion (either in small groups, or all together):

We decide what an object is worth by the price we are willing to pay for it. But most of the time, we wouldn't dream of putting a price on the value of a person's life. We know that people are priceless, individuals of infinite worth in the eyes of God.

So why has slavery existed since biblical times, and why is it still prevalent in parts of the world today?

And how can you, as a group and as individuals, respond?

3. Prayer Stations

Using e.g. fabrics, pictures, newspaper cuttings, and other items, create some prayer stations to use as a focus for your thoughts and prayers.

1. You could focus on the country you have twinned with, or
2. On issues concerned with trafficking (see other worship material for ideas).
3. Use relevant newspaper and magazine cuttings, small ads, articles, etc.
4. A biblical focus might use e.g. salt water and bitter herbs (symbols of tears, sadness, pain and mourning), and milk and honey (symbols of promised land, freedom, homecoming and peace).

4. Slave Auction

For a larger event, perhaps you could hold a 'slave auction' and offer your group's skills to the highest bidder. You need a lively, confident, fun auctioneer to host the event and make people laugh, and you need people in your church or group to offer their talents and skills so that others can bid to buy them. This could be anything from cooking, gardening, decorating or babysitting to more specialist skills such as painting a portrait, plumbing, teaching a few words of a language or writing a special poem.

This event is not only a great way to build relationships, have fun and help each other out, but also an opportunity to highlight the plight of slaves and trafficking victims. Do a short presentation on trafficking, and make the point that this event is a bit of fun, with services offered willingly – something which is not an option for the thousands of men, women and children caught up in the various forms of slavery around the world today.

The money you raise could be donated to a charity which helps victims of trafficking. You could also serve fairly traded refreshments.

The main things to remember are to advertise your event well, choose the right auctioneer and keep the first bids realistic so you can build them higher (someone might end up paying £100 to have their car washed but they probably won't be keen to do so straight away!).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING QUICK QUIZ

- 1 How many people are trafficked across the world each year?
1 million 1.5 million 2 million
- 2 What percentage of trafficking cases worldwide involve women?
65% 77% 89%
- 3 What percentage of trafficking cases worldwide involve sexual exploitation?
54% 72% 87%
[Other factors include forced labour, bonded labour, child soldiers, etc.]
- 4 According to the UK Police, how many women and girls have been brought in to the country and forced to work as prostitutes?
2,000 4,000 6,000
[Although may be many more than this]
- 5 How much can a women be bought and sold for?
£2,000 - £3,000 £2,000 - £8,000 £5,000 - £10,000
- 6 Some sex workers are forced to work how many hours a day?
16 hours 17 hours 18 hours
[and forced to have sex with 30+ men a day – that's about two an hour]
- 7 The largest percentage of victims fall into which age group?
16 – 20 18 – 24 30 - 45
[45%]
- 8 How many children (i.e. under 18 years of age) does the United Nations estimates are trafficked across the world each year?
1.2 million 1.5 million 1.7 million
- 9 In the UK alone, between 1999 and 2003, how many trafficked children were rescued?
98 175 250
[Unicef UK said that figure is "the tip of the iceberg"; there is no way of knowing exactly how many people are involved]
- 10 Human trafficking is the
second third fifth
largest illegal industry in the world.
[after the drugs and arms trade]

Answers: 1. 2 million; 2. 77%; 3. 87%; 4. 4,000; 5. £2,000 - £8,000;
6. 16 hours; 7. 18 – 24; 8. 1.2 million; 9. 250; 10. third largest

PASSAGES FOR BIBLE STUDY AND REFLECTION

[All from the New International Version]

But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, "Send them back." *[Isaiah 42:22]*

I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. *[John 10:10]*

They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink. *[Joel 3:3]*

He has showed you, O people, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. *[Micah 6:8]*

For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold. *[Leviticus 25:42]*

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. *[Luke 4:18–19]*

O my comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me. Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?"

"Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?"

"The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved."

Since my people are crushed, I am crushed: I mourn, and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? On that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. *[Jeremiah 8:18–9:1]*

Let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream. *[Amos 5:24]*

Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells or still has the person in his possession must be put to death. *[Exodus 21:16]*

Suggestion questions for discussion:

What could the passage mean in terms of human trafficking and / or slavery?

In the light of this, what is our responsibility with regard to victims of trafficking and slavery?

And to the traffickers themselves?

THE DAUGHTER OF MY PEOPLE
A Litany and Ritual for Victims of Trafficking

Preparation beforehand

Arrange chairs in a circle around a low table or area of floor where a centrepiece can be assembled during the course of the prayer.

Ask each participant to bring a picture of or article about victims of trafficking, or those who live in extreme poverty created by corporate globalization, which permits attitudes that allow human trafficking to exist.

Gather the following symbols for the centre piece: a beautiful piece of fabric, a glass bowl or jug of water, fair trade coffee beans, fair trade chocolate, a rose or flowering plant.

You will need 5 'voices' for the Litany, and 5 people to place the symbols on the centrepiece during the ritual. Quiet music may be played during the Litany and Ritual.

OPENING WORDS

Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, and disgraceful working conditions where people are treated as instruments of gain rather than free and responsible persons are infamies which poison human society, debase their perpetrators and constitute a supreme dishonour to the Creator.

[Gaudium et Spes, 27]

HYMN:

VOICES ON TRAFFICKING:

Leader: Let us open the eyes of our hearts to stories of the daughters of God's people today who are broken, ruined, wounded and destroyed by human trafficking.

Voice 1: Jeremiah 8: 18-23

My grief is incurable, my heart within me is faint. Listen! The cry of the daughter of my people, far and wide in the land! Is the Lord no longer in Zion, is her King no longer in her midst? (Why do they provoke me with their idols, with their foreign nonentities?)

"The harvest has passed, the summer is at an end, and yet we are not safe!"

I am broken by the ruin of the daughter of my people. I am disconsolate; horror has seized me. Is there no balm in Gilead, no physician there? Why grows not new flesh over the wound of the daughter of my people?

Oh, that my head were a spring of water, my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night over the slain of the daughter of my people!

[From The New American Bible]

Voice 2: Alima's Story

Alima is one of six children from a poor farming family in a small, isolated village in the Mopti region of Mali. She had spent most of her life working in the family farm, and enjoyed listening and playing music. At 17 she had to make money for her dowry (trousseau de mariage) and more money for food. Her parents agreed that she should go to Bamako and work as a domestic helper in the capital city. After two months in Bamako, she made enough money to buy a ticket to go to Ivory Coast, and then she and three of her friends left Bamako in search of well-paying jobs in Ivory Coast. The girls were taken to Sikasso and from there an intermediary wanted to take them to a plantation to work as a domestic worker for the owner of the plantation. They were promised CFA 10,000 a month.

When she and her friends arrived at the border post of Niellé, the intermediary abandoned them. The police then intercepted the girls at night in Ivory Coast and after two days in the country, they were sent back to Mali. On January 17 2002, Alima went through Horon-So, a transit centre, where she learned of the dangers of trafficking, received health services, and had some counselling with the social workers. Alima felt that she wanted to go home to her village. The Director of Horon-So

and some officials accompanied her back to her village, and spoke with her parents about the dangers of child trafficking.

Voice 3:

Few westerners are aware that cocoa, the essential raw material in the production of chocolate, is being harvested by children.

Thousands of children are working on coca farms under dangerous and exploitative conditions. Many children have been lured and trafficked from Mali to work long and hard hours on cocoa farms in The Ivory Coast. Few receive money for their labour.

Voice 4:

You can't use my real name. Or even the name they gave me in China. I don't even know what my name should be. I am not the same person who left this village two years ago. My body came back but my soul is somewhere else.

No one recognizes me anymore and everyone who comes to see me...I think they come to stare at me because I am dirty now. I am filthy inside and my soul is empty. I don't know if I can live this way. My mother comes to my room and says 'Lena, you were such a friendly person. I miss you the way you were'. And I say, 'Mama, I am different. Something died in me. I think it was happiness'.

I never thought this would happen to me. I was sixteen when they came to the village. They looked very nice and offered jobs to the girls here in China as cooks. The program looked very good. Three months of cooking school with all expenses paid. Then guaranteed work for one year in an expensive Chinese hotel. Nine other girls and I signed their contracts. They didn't give us time to read them or take them to our parents. I thought our parents would have to sign because we were still in school but they said it was no problem. They were in a hurry and we signed their papers before all the places were gone.

We were so excited when we got our tickets and visas to China and the nice people who came to the village escorted us to the plane. Our families thought we would make good money and be able to help at home. But then, everything was different. Our escorts on the flight treated us like we were criminals. In China they burned our passports. When Masha tried to fight them, they beat her and raped her in front of us. There was only a whore house. The first day in China they took us to a morgue to show us the bodies of two girls who had jumped out of the window to try and get away. They told us there was no way out until we had worked as prostitutes long enough to pay back our debts for tickets and expenses. But then they kept all the money.

I am home because our brothel was raided by police six months later and I was deported. You might think I am lucky but I am not. Someday they will come back for me and if I do not go, they will kill me and maybe my family.

Voice 5:

Trafficking happens here in this country, in this town, maybe on this street.

It is a multi-million pound industry, third only to the global arms and drug trades. Women and children can be bought and sold for as little as £10 or as much as £8,000.

Men, women and children are trafficked throughout Europe for sexual exploitation, cheap labour, domestic labour, baby trading and organ harvesting.

LITANY AND RITUAL:

Leader: Listen! The cry of the daughter of my people far and wide in the land, she who is deceived, abused and enslaved in the textile factories.

Response: Attentive to the cries that arise with one voice from many cultures we will respond as women disciples of Jesus Christ seeing the world with the eyes of the heart and with the compassion of a loving God.

A beautiful piece of fabric symbolizing the just labour of textile workers is place on the floor or small table in centre.

Leader: Listen! The cry of the daughter of my people far and wide in the land, she who is tricked, sold and enslaved in domestic slavery.

Response: Attentive to the cries that arise with one voice from many cultures we will respond as women disciples of Jesus Christ seeing the world with the eyes of the heart and with the compassion of a loving God.

A bowl of clean water symbolizing the freeing of those caught in domestic slavery is placed on the centrepiece.

Leader: Listen! The cry of the daughter of my people far and wide in the land, she who is displaced, underpaid and enslaved in the coffee plantations.

Response: Attentive to the cries that arise with one voice from many cultures we will respond as women disciples of Jesus Christ seeing the world with the eyes of the heart and with the compassion of a loving God.

Fair trade coffee beans are placed on the centrepiece symbolizing the farmers working locally for a fair wage in the freedom of their own culture and land.

Leader: Listen! The cry of the daughter of my people far and wide in the land, she who is exploited in the cocoa fields for the production of chocolate.

Response: Attentive to the cries that arise with one voice from many cultures we will respond as women disciples of Jesus Christ seeing the world with the eyes of the heart and with the compassion of a loving God.

Fair trade chocolate is placed on the centrepiece symbolizing the end to child slavery.

Leader: Listen! The cry of the daughter of my people far and wide in the land, she who is trafficked, disgraced and enslaved in the sex trade.

Response: Attentive to the cries that arise with one voice from many cultures we will respond as women disciples of Jesus Christ seeing the world with the eyes of the heart and with the compassion of a loving God.

A rose is placed on the centrepiece symbolizing respect the beauty of all earth's daughters.

TIME FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING:

As each one shares, she places the picture she has brought with her on the centrepiece.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Prayer For An End To Trafficking

O God, our words cannot express what our minds can barely comprehend and our hearts feel when we hear of women and girls deceived and transported to unknown places for purposes of sexual exploitation and abuse because of human greed and profit at this time in our world.

Our hearts are saddened and our spirits angry that their dignity and rights are being transgressed through threats deception and force.

We cry out against the degrading practice of trafficking and pray for it to end.

Strengthen the fragile-spirited and broken-hearted.

Make real your promises to fill these our sisters with a love that is tender and good and send the exploiters away empty-handed.

Give us the wisdom and courage to stand in solidarity with them that we will find ways to the freedom that is your gift to all of us.

HYMN

Sister Sheila Smith, RSCJ
Canadian Religious Conference
www.crc-canada.org

Material produced for
International Women's Women's Day 2004
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rscjinternational
women of compassion, communion, and reconciliation
<http://www.rscjinternational.org>

HYMN

Human beings, bought or bartered
kept apart by race or creed,
chained by culture or religion,
when, O God, can we be freed?

God, we need your rich compassion,
spirit fire your love on earth,
bringing mercy to our judgments,
recognising human worth.

Help us, God, to love each neighbour,
building through each law and act
justice in our legislation,
changing mercy into fact.

Take away the bonds that bind us
then, in hope of liberty,
we will work and strive for freedom
and for human dignity.

(C) Andrew Pratt 10/3/2007
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Metre 8787
Suggested Tune: Stuttgart or The Carnival is Over

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A BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Trafficking in persons has been described as a modern form of slavery. It is a serious human rights violation and is reported by the United Nations to be the fastest growing form of transnational organized crime.

According to Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring 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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

Therefore, trafficking in persons is a serious crime that involves:

- the movement of people across or within borders;
- threats or use of force, coercion and deception; and
- exploitation, whether forced labour, forced prostitution, or other forms of servitude

Slavery is the oldest form of abuse in human history, especially the sexual slavery of women and children. When we look in the Bible, it is clear that freedom from slavery is a theme that runs like a thread throughout both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Perhaps the most well known example is the Exodus event in the Hebrew scriptures. This is the defining event in the life of the people Israel, when they are freed from the forced labour and dominance of their oppressors and become servants of God.

"For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold." [Leviticus 25:42]

It may seem surprising that upon being freed, the Jewish people of the time use the master-slave metaphor to define their relationship with God. Even in the later Christian scriptures we still encounter this language of slavery. For example, in Luke's gospel, Mary, the mother of Jesus, proclaims herself to be the handmaid (female slave) of the Lord (master).

In traditional biblical interpretations of the annunciation story in Luke 1, Mary's passive consent to a virginal conception preserves her purity and sexual innocence. Her yes allows the plan or dream of another (God) to be fulfilled. She is a vessel to be used in conformity to God's plan.

Jane Schaberg's feminist analysis of Mary as servant or slave offers another interpretation.ⁱ According to Schaberg, a new understanding around the element of consent can bring a liberating aspect to this story. Mary's consent demonstrates, not her powerlessness and victimhood, rather it affirms her inner freedom, her autonomy, her own inner wisdom, as well as her freedom from human masters.ⁱⁱ Although the patriarchal culture in which Mary lived enabled the disempowerment of women, making them dependant on men, Mary encounters a God who protects her outside of the patriarchal social order (in her *irregular* pregnancy) and whose creative presence dwells within her. This is the God who gives life to Jesus.

Today, just as in biblical times, the master-slave dynamic is very much alive. All around the world in our male-dominated, social-economic-political systems, trafficked persons are at the lowest level of human society.

Today we have women, men and children, and sometimes entire families, enslaved in a variety of ways, including enforced agricultural labour, brick making, mining, charcoal production, jewellery making, cloth and carpet making, domestic work, as well as in false adoptions, mail-order bride arrangements, sex tourism and coerced prostitution.ⁱⁱⁱ

The mistreatment of trafficked persons, their powerlessness, largely due to poverty, and the abuse of their human rights are enabled by underlying values that promote attitudes such as *profit before people*. Treated like disposable objects, trafficked persons are powerless and dependant on those whose wills they are forced to comply with.^{iv} In order to feed a consumer-driven, materialistic lifestyle, someone, somewhere in the world has to produce, massively, efficiently and cheaply to keep up with the demand. In order to keep up with the global demand for pornography and prostitution, millions of women, children and men are sold over and over again for profit. How can we say that slavery has been abolished? Is this not reminiscent of the master-slave model of old when other empires have been built on the backs of the poor?

Just as in biblical times, persons who are trafficked have little or no protection in many countries in the world. An encounter with the God of Mary, the God Jesus fully incarnated, gives us hope in the midst of the seemingly irreversible and horrific situation of global human trafficking. Like Mary and Jesus, casting our lot with the future, we too respond with courage^v in our time to the root causes of human trafficking, such as poverty. Like Mary and Jesus, acting outside of the male-dominated social order is not easy. Blessing our broken world, still governed by oppressive, male-dominated systems, politically, socially, economically, religiously – with our faith and our courage we act with hearts that are created for encounters with a God who protects outside of the patriarchal social order and whose creative presence dwells within all people and all life.

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This reflection first appeared in the Summer 2006 edition of Making Waves, an ecumenical feminist journal published by the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada (WICC). The issue was devoted entirely to the global problem of human trafficking, especially how it affects women and children. For ordering information: www.wicc.org

ⁱ For an interpretation of Mary as servant or slave, see Jane Schaberg, The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, Biblical Seminar Series no. 28, 1995: 135-138.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 138.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eileen Kerwin Jones, "Sex in the City: Human Trafficking and the Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children", Counselling and Spirituality Volume 25, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 73-100.

^{iv} For a developed analysis of the commodification of human beings, see Kevin Bales, Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

^v Elisabeth Johnson, Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints, New York: Continuum, 2005: 254