

Raising Awareness on the Issue Of Human Trafficking

By Sister Briana McCarthy

The Rochester Franciscans have been actively working on the issue of Human Trafficking for the past six years. After our Congregational gathering in 2011, we, Rochester Franciscans, moved forward with a renewed passion and focus to do our part in raising awareness. Our Chapter Directional Statement outlines several ministry areas where we can all put our energies, talents and donations. Specifically, it states, "We, the Sisters of Saint Francis, rooted in Gospel and Franciscan values, and steeped in contemplation are impelled to speak respectfully and act courageously on issues of oppression and marginalization of women in our church and society."

Human Trafficking, also known as modern day slavery, is growing exponentially in the United States and around the world. Human Trafficking is big business--estimated to exceed \$34-billion worldwide. Children as young as ten years of age are taken for the sole purpose of exploiting them for profit--being kidnapped, sold or tricked into this business. As one young rescued teen said, "No one dreams of becoming a prostitute!" Now we are asking people to substitute the word 'prostitute' with the word 'victim,' as we have become more sensitive to the importance of our language as we expose the reality behind this business.

"An estimated 8,000-12,000 women and children are being sold for sexual services in Minnesota and the number is growing each day. Of those used in prostitution (victims of trafficking): 85% are victims of rape/molestation before the age of 18; 95% use drugs and/or alcohol to numb the pain; 83% are victims of assault with a deadly weapon; 57% have been kidnapped at some point; and 100% are someone's daughter, sister, and/or mother."

Source: *Breaking Free* - www.breakingfree.net

How to confront evil is a question for every generation. Evil often hides in darkness and avoids the light. As Franciscan Sisters and

Cojourners, we feel "impelled to speak out" and to bring light to this subject which has been operating in secret for years. We see human trafficking as a major evil because it oppresses and marginalizes persons, especially women and children. Using a person for sex or for labor debases the human spirit. People are objectified and treated as commodities, rather than persons with God-given dignity and rights.

In Rochester, a number of our Sisters and Cojourners are involved in keeping human trafficking awareness as a focus. One task force, the Human Trafficking Awareness Event Planning group, is developing community events to raise awareness about human trafficking in southeastern Minnesota. This group includes Ss. Anne Walch, Briana McCarthy, Martha Matthews, Marlys Jax, Christine Stanoch and Linda Weiser. Members of the Sisters of Saint Francis Communications Advisory Council have joined this group, including representatives from the Rochester Convention and Visitors Bureau, Rochester Women Magazine, as well as from the Rochester Public Library, Mission 21 and local law enforcement. Another task force continues to give human trafficking presentations throughout southeastern Minnesota. That group includes Ss. Anne Walch, Briana McCarthy, Liz Gillis, Valerie Kilian, Joseen Vogt, Nancy Casey, Linda Weiser, Martha Matthew, Dorothy Hansen and Marlys Jax. The Human Trafficking Awareness Event Planning group sponsored three-days of human trafficking awareness events in Rochester entitled BREAKING THE CHAINS of MODERN DAY SLAVERY on January 10-12, 2013. Upcoming events are planned for March 15, and May 18, with plans underway for additional activities in the summer and fall.

In the Twin Cities, the Rochester Franciscans, along with other religious communities and organizations, are collaborating on legal, educational and legislative topics to stop human trafficking. Those Franciscans taking the lead

Sisters of Saint Francis

in that area include Sisters Joyce Stemper, Judith Chiodo, Betty Kenny, and Cojourner JoAnn Chevalier. Working with The Family Partnership and Women's Foundation of Minnesota, they are actively supportive of the 2011 Minnesota Safe Harbor Act and the 2013 No Wrong Door legislation.

In California, our Sisters Geneva Berns, Kay Wagner and Monessa Overby planned a ritual to raise human trafficking awareness in collaboration with the San Bernardino Diocese and Riverside County Task Force on January 11, 2013.

As Rochester Franciscans, we pray for the release of the victims, for healing of the rescued (survivors), for the transformation of traffickers and johns who abuse children, and for our state and federal officers to pass legislation to put an

end to modern day slavery in the United States. The Rochester Franciscans have a deep bond with the alumnae of the College of St. Teresa. We encourage our graduates to learn more about human trafficking by Googling articles, checking out books and DVDs at your local libraries, and engage your work, social, and church communities to become involved in stopping this evil of our day.

Call or email our contact persons if you would like to host a presentation about this issue. In Rochester, contact Sister Nancy Casey at 507-282-7762; in the greater Twin Cities area, contact Sister Judy Chiodo at 651-739-8350, and in California, contact Sister Geneva Berns at 760-636-1907.

Scenes from January 2013 Human Trafficking Awareness events

**BREAKING
THE CHAINS**
OF MODERN DAY SLAVERY

