



Justice for Women

Tapestry Thread

Devotion for Week 1 - October 2, 2022

By Sylvia Eley

Scripture relates to human trafficking both in biblical times and now. Scripture shows we can address the problem of human trafficking. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Christians care about the issue of trafficking: we believe that all peoples are made in God's image. Do you remember the story of Joseph who was sold by his family into slavery to Potiphar in Egypt? (Genesis 37-50). A modern-day plague to society appeared in the Bible: Potiphar saw Joseph as a source of free labor, and Potiphar's wife expected Joseph to provide sexual favors. Trafficking has been around for thousands of years.

Joseph was a slave with no rights or ways to defend himself. He was jailed like a criminal. Today's society often blames sex trafficking victims for their situation. But there is a message of strength, hope, forgiveness, and love for trafficking survivors. The Church is expected to show love to others. God expects us to look after the disadvantaged.

Even in the darkest times of his life, God was still with Joseph. God has provided the Church with the abilities needed to help those who are victims of trafficking. Christians can make a real difference. We can help free people from oppression, and we can join others in setting the victims free. The community of the Church can focus on encouraging right relationships with God and others. The Church is a family which can provide trafficking victims an environment where they are safe and where they can obtain healing for mental and spiritual health. The Church family is expected to see every person as an image of God; regardless of circumstance, they are to be loved just as God loves them. 1 Samuel 16:7 reveals that the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as humans see; humans look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Victims of human trafficking need to be reunited with God. God wants them to be renewed. The Church must teach what this means. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 the





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apostle Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. “

We must spread the message of hope to survivors of modern-day trafficking. Jesus calls us to do so in Luke 4:18-19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Most merciful Father, inspire and continue to equip us to combat sex trafficking. Pray for the Christian community that we continue our work with your blessings, wisdom, and strength so that we might intervene to stop this violence. God, we pray for comfort of all who are held in slavery, awaiting rescue and their restoration. We pray this trusting and believing in You, Amen.





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Devotion for Week 2 - October 9, 2022

By Sylvia Eley

In last week's devotion, we learned why the Church should care about sex trafficked victims and survivors. This week we will learn how through the Church we can combat Sex Trafficking.

Scripture calls for us to advocate on behalf of those whose voices silenced through oppression: "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9). The Church must intervene in every phase of the trafficking of human beings; protect them from deception and solicitation; to find and free them and assist them once they are freed. Psalm 82:3-4 reminds us, "Give justice to the poor and the orphan; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Rescue the poor and helpless; deliver them from the grasp of evil people." Can we eliminate human trafficking? Maybe not, but we as a Church can curb it; there are a multitude of options available for churches to use.

- **Do what we do best: pray.** February 8th is the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, a wonderful opportunity to start. Only the power of God can end a tragedy this pervasive. Prayer and worship can be used to focus our response to the problem and, can be helpful to survivors. As churches all our works are covered by prayer.
- **Raise Awareness:** January 2023 is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, as decreed by Presidential proclamation in 2010. January is also Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Raising awareness can lead to prevention; here are a few examples:
 - Mobilize our faith communities to build awareness and to recognize and report the signs of trafficking and encourage members of our communities to respond.
 - Host a panel discussion on human trafficking to educate members and advocate.
 - Learn about the laws involved with trafficking.
- **Engage:** We best demonstrate God's healing love through actions rather than





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words. Churches can get involved in community groups that advocate for local anti-trafficking efforts; support the collaborative work of county health and human service departments, law enforcement agencies and multiple nonprofit agencies. Build relationships with local law enforcement to understand how the church can support their efforts to fight trafficking.

- Work to reduce community factors: poverty, serious family conflict, child abuse and neglect, out-of-home placement, running away from home, etc. that make youth vulnerable
- Engage in ministry to at-risk groups. Traffickers prey on and exploit those who are most vulnerable, including teen runaways or teens who age out of foster care; children in the juvenile justice system; adults who are economically vulnerable, and women who experience domestic violence or assault.

In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Working with trafficking victims can be challenging and requires patience. Abused victims have suffered trauma, and healing takes time. When Christians serve them and their needs, they serve Jesus. Ezekiel 34:16 says, “I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.”

Heavenly Father, we make a commitment to stand together in prayer. We pray for their strength and salvation of the victims and survivors, for their protection, freedom, and justice, for their hope and healing. Father, we pray for the conviction, repentance, and salvation of the traffickers and for their criminal enterprises demolished; oppressors arrested and prosecuted. We pray for the implementation of just legislation by those in authority. Father, we pray for your design to raise awareness and to keep the Church stirred to action. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.





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Toolkits and resources geared toward churches who want to engage in anti-human trafficking efforts are available through these websites:

- SA Justice: sajustice.us
- Stop the Traffik: stophetraffik.org
- Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST): faastinternational.org
- Alliance for Freedom, Restoration, and Justice (AFRJ): engagetgether.com/church
- The Salvation Army: salvationarmy.org/ihq/antitrafficking
- Nazarene Compassionate Ministries: ncm.org/trafficking
- Ending Human Trafficking podcast: endinghumantrafficking.org
- If your church is interested in getting involved in anti-trafficking efforts, do not hesitate to reach out to discuss partnering with The Salvation Army STOP-IT program at STOP-IT@usc.salvationarmy.org.





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Devotion for Week 3 - October 16, 2022

By Sylvia Eley

The ecumenical church addresses the issue of sex trafficking through a theological theory founded on missional theology and social ethics. This theological theory should be glocal in nature. The term "glocal" refers to a global construct with an impact on local communities (Engelsviken, Lundebj & Solheim 2011: viii). A glocal theological theory is then necessary as the issue of human trafficking is simultaneously a global and local challenge. There needs to be both the creation of a global life-giving mission through the ecumenical church, as well as the creation of a customized local life-giving mission with key concepts derived from the global initiative, as the Christian God invites his church into a life-giving mission for all (World Council of Churches, henceforth WCC 2012:4). Christians around the world are of one mind that human trafficking is wrong and should be eliminated.

Interfaith Statement to End Trafficking

Together, in honor of our faith traditions, we acknowledge that child trafficking and modern-day slavery violate the fundamental conviction that all people are equal and deserving of the same freedom, respect, and dignity. In solidarity with victims and survivors, we are determined to inspire spiritual and practical action by all global faiths to end the abuse, exploitation, and trafficking of all children everywhere.

The ELCA's social message on "Commercial Sexual Exploitation" seeks to raise awareness of an industry that sexually exploits vulnerable people, especially women and girls. The message addresses the businesses of prostitution, pornography, and stripping, among other activities of exploitation, which are built on the exchange of money for sexual activity. It highlights the system of sexual exploitation as a manifestation of social sin. Turning sex into a commodity magnifies the social injustices that undermine human dignity and tends to dominate people who are created in the image of God. This message calls us to engage in many forms of action to curb sex trafficking, challenge major corporations that profit from pornography and give particular attention to preventing youth from becoming captives and victims of sexual exploitation.





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What does Islam say about human trafficking? In the perspective of the social history of Islamic law, trafficking in any form is prohibited in Islam for violating human rights and dignity. In June 1999 when over 130 religious leaders signed a statement of conscience calling on Congress to pass federal anti-trafficking legislation. The statement explained that “The God-given dignity and integrity of everyone compels us to take action to combat this evil” (Schleicher 1999, p. 17; See also Carnes 2000). “God commands justice, the doing of good, and kindness to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and abominations and oppression: He instructs you, that ye may remember.” – Ah-Nahl 16:90

Churches of Scientology sponsor roundtables and seminars on human trafficking to raise public awareness and get effective action taken to eradicate this international scourge. Scientology Churches around the world sponsor the largest non-governmental information campaign the world over, which has made the Universal Declaration of Human Rights known to more than 900,000 people through public service announcements, booklets, and petition drives.

The Jewish Coalition to End Human Trafficking (JCEHT) was created to broaden the understanding in the Jewish community regarding the crime of human trafficking/modern-day slavery and to work toward its eradication. A confirmation class curriculum on human trafficking is offered at some temples.

The Catholic Church has condemned human trafficking and established social services to help its victims. At the same time, she has called for laws against human trafficking and changes in social systems to address the root causes of human trafficking. The Fathers of the Vatican II, reaffirmed the Church’s historic concern about forced labor, stating that “slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, [and] disgraceful working conditions where [people] are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons” are “infamies” because they are an affront to very nature of the human person. In more recent years, Pope Benedict XVI, Pope John Paul II, and representatives of the Holy See have strongly condemned human trafficking as an intrinsic violation of human dignity that all governments must address. Bishop conferences around the world responded by putting increased pressure on governments to enact new laws and enforce existing prohibitions on human trafficking. The U.S.





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Conference of Catholic Bishops played a key role in getting the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 passed and implemented and has contracted with the federal government to provide services to the victims of human trafficking. Vatican's Handbook on Combatting Trafficking, the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Vatican has released a set of guidelines to help the Catholic community eradicate human trafficking. The publication, Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking, offers Catholic dioceses, parishes, religious congregations, schools, and universities an in-depth reading and comprehension of modern-day slavery to serve as much needed encouragement to anti-trafficking ministries. The publications' points can be leveraged in homilies, education, and media.

Southern Baptists continue to fight against human trafficking worldwide as the issue is acknowledged by the United Nations on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. Southern Baptists have a huge role to play in the prevention of trafficking in New Orleans. The Baptist Friendship House in New Orleans, LA, has served New Orleans for more than 75 years by fight against trafficking in their community. The Friendship House will provide out-of-state transportation to survivors who are in danger, and houses survivors who need immediate shelter and safety. Triad Ladder of Hope in North Carolina is dedicated to eradicating the exploitation, sale and enslavement of men, women, and children. They focus is on awareness, rescue, restoration, and re-entry. The latter three areas involve helping bring people out of trafficking situations, providing them with a safe place for counseling and creating "a safe and healthy environment for survivors to rebuild their lives." Twelve representatives from the Ohio Woman's Missionary Union visited the Friendship House. Jean DiFilippo, president of the Ohio WMU, explained that Ohio ranks in the top ten for the number of calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. The group plans to travel two by two (two representatives together) throughout their convention educating others on the awareness of Human Trafficking.

What does the United Methodist Church say? The 2008 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 61 states that United Methodists "deplore all forms of the commercialization and exploitation of sex, with their consequent cheapening and degradation of human personality. To lose freedom and be sold by someone





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else for sexual purposes is a form of slavery, and we denounce such business and support the abused and their right to freedom. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation or use of children by adults and encourage efforts to hold perpetrators legally and financially responsible.

The involvement of the ecumenical church---- As followers of Jesus Christ and a belief in a God that values human life, the global ecumenical church cannot be disconnected from the world they live in (Gibbs & Coffey 2001:47) Churches are unified in their efforts along with both the government and nongovernment sectors, as well as the local communities and Nonprofits. The churches involvement is about more than finding a feasible way to reintegrate these victims back into society; it is to restore life in fullness to them. The church must counterbalance abuse in life and work together on prohibiting these acts of violence. God is the source of all missions, and the church needs to discern where God's Spirit is at work in the world to join Him in His mission (Balia & Kim 2010:223). Christians are to follow in the path of Jesus Christ in proclaiming freedom for the oppressed and to be representatives of that freedom. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;"- Isaiah 61:1.

Heavenly Father, we come to You in prayer. In Your Name we pray for strength, fortitude, wisdom, integrity, and vision for Christians working to address sex trafficking. God, we pray for You to comfort all who are held in slavery and awaiting rescue and for the full restoration of those who have been rescued. We pray that through the actions of the ecumenical church help bring an end to human trafficking.





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Sources:

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- <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/99>





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Devotion for Week 4 - October 23, 2022

By The Rev. Monica Weber

The goals of the Tapestry team's examination into the sin of Human Trafficking are to increase awareness of this horrific violation of human rights and sanctity, and to recognize the systemic social instability that contributes to trafficking. Victims who are trafficked for commercial sexual activity or cheap labor represent the most vulnerable of populations: persons experiencing homelessness; runaways fleeing violence and abuse; LGBTQIA+ persons cast out by their families; victims of addiction; refugees; and those with mental illness.

Human Traffickers intentionally target the most vulnerable populations: these victims often have no place to go, and no one to reach out to, making them easy targets for predators who entrap them with offers of money, shelter, food, clothing or drugs. Families of victims frequently don't know that their loved ones have been trafficked: communication may have been cut off for months after a final blowup or the 'last straw.'

Human trafficking victims face unthinkable circumstances, but their misery can be compounded in ways we may not even consider. Trafficked young women may have zero access to birth control, and those who become pregnant in America no longer have universal access to abortion, due to the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. Victims may be forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term without prenatal care or proper nutrition, or worse, they may be subject to back-alley abortions at significant risk to their life and health.

The ELCA is not pro-abortion, but rather pro-choice. As a denomination, ELCA Lutherans believe in the sanctity of all life, yet we also hold the conviction that, "Christians are united in Christ through faith with both the freedom and obligation to engage in serious moral deliberation." We recognize that abortion is an issue that requires fervent prayer and honest discussion. We acknowledge that as Christians who depend on the unconditional grace of God, we should never judge another person for making decisions that may be medically or personally necessary, no matter how painful those decisions may appear to be.

The ELCA's Social Statement on Abortion reads, "*We deplore the circumstances*





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that lead a woman to consider abortion as the best option available to her. We are moved particularly by the anguish of women who face unwanted pregnancies alone. The panic and isolation of such pregnancies, even in the best of circumstances, can be traumatic. Poverty, lack of supportive relationships, immaturity, oppressive social realities, sexism and racism intensify her sense of powerlessness. The prospect of having and caring for a child can seem overwhelming.” We pray for all trafficking victims, especially those who are pregnant; we pray for victims forced into clandestine abortions and returned too soon to work, to profit their captors.

God of all life, our hearts grieve the senseless devastation of human trafficking. We grieve the social sins that perpetuate this tragedy; we confess our complicity and failure to advocate for social justice for the most vulnerable among us. Hear us, Lord, as we pray for trafficking victims, that you may keep them safe and lead them out of captivity. Hear us, Lord, as we pray for families of victims and their communities, that they may seek to enact change to prevent this terrible sin against your people. Hear us, Lord, as we pray for victims forced to abort their unwanted pregnancies by unsafe means, without access to medical or psychological care. Hear us, Lord, as we pray for victims forced by their captors to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term. Come, Holy Spirit, fill their hearts with your peace and presence, Amen.

Sources:

- Introduction to the Abortion Social Statement, 1991 ELCA Churchwide Assembly: https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Abortion?_ga=2.7272882.1858266470.1662848031-1600987595.1662848031
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Devotion for Week 5 - October 30, 2022

By The Rev. Monica Weber

This week, Lutherans commemorate the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther wrote much about how to live in the secular world as a Christian, drawing on Jesus' wisdom in Mark 12:17. When asked by some Pharisees whether it was godly to pay taxes, Jesus responded that the faithful should give to the government those things which belong to the government, and give to God the things that belong to God (NRSV).

Martin Luther believed that Christians should not withdraw from the world, but be fully involved in their civic communities, sharing their God-given talents to improve society through public education, social ministry, civil service and by modeling the inclusive love of Christ Jesus through their vocations. Christians should hold themselves and civic leaders accountable, so that humanity may thrive and flourish as God desires.

On November 8, American citizens have the opportunity to exercise their right to vote in the mid-term elections. All 435 seats in the US House of Representatives and 34 of the 100 seats in the US Senate will be contested. Thirty-nine state and territorial gubernatorial elections will be conducted, plus many state and local elections, as we vote our consciences to elect leaders and enact legislation that impacts life in this country.

The right to vote is a privilege of American citizenship, but it is also a weighty responsibility: our democracy affords each eligible voter the opportunity to learn about issues, listen to varying opinions on those issues, and elect candidates whom we entrust with effective governance and the visioning of our future. We give thanks to God for the blessing of democracy, for the right to vote, and for those who strive to honorably and faithfully serve all people as they work to relieve human suffering. This month, the Tapestry focus has highlighted the evils of human trafficking; your vote can help strengthen communities to provide resources for the most vulnerable, desperate populations that are targeted by human traffickers.

The Deliver Fund, a non-profit organization dedicated to ending human





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trafficking worldwide, estimated in a 2020 report that between 15,000-50,000 American women and children are forced into sexual slavery annually, but the report notes that these statistics are difficult to research: the US Department of Health & Human Services estimates the annual number of American sex trafficking victims between 240,000-325,000.

Human trafficking imprisons individuals in a horrific, invisible existence with little chance of escape. Victims of trafficking not only lose their dignity, they lose basic human rights, including the right to make their voices heard through voting. It is important that as Christians, we vote for leaders and legislation that will strengthen our social systems to reduce the threat of human trafficking.

We pray for the courage, conviction and resources to eradicate this unspeakable sin; we pray for victims and their families; and we pray that God's Holy Spirit will stir us to action, to speak for the voiceless. We pray that all Americans will exercise their precious right to vote this November 8, giving thanks to God for the gift of civic freedom we enjoy, and for the gift of freedom from death and sin that we have been given by our baptism into Christ.

Most Holy God, our hearts break as we contemplate the unimaginable tragedy of human trafficking. Protect all victims and fill them with hope; increase their faith to believe that you will never abandon them; make your holy presence known to them in their darkest hour, and lead them to safety. Comfort their families; bless all who work to rescue victims, and bring their captors to justice. By the fire of your Holy Spirit who makes all things new, lead the rescued into healing; inspire us to advocate and speak for the voiceless; extinguish the unchecked greed and desire that fuel this tragedy, that all human beings may be respected, cherished and loved as you intend. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, Amen.

Source:

- Deliver Fund: <https://deliverfund.org/>

