



Bishops of Florida Call on Catholics to Fight the Evil of Human Trafficking

January 11, 2011

Updated February 1, 2011*

On this tenth anniversary of the passage of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), we call upon the Florida faithful to be actively engaged in the fight against the evil of human trafficking. The Human Trafficking Awareness Campaign is intended to educate those who may come in contact with victims in churches, health care facilities, schools or the community so they can identify and report in order to rescue victims from their abusers.

The U.S. State Department estimates that 600,000 - 800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders each year and approximately 14,500 – 17,500 of them are trafficked into the U.S. annually, luring them with promises of money and then selling or using them in bondage*. Profit over people places at risk women and children forced into prostitution, pornography and sexual entertainment to meet the huge demand of customers. Florida, a prime destination for traffickers because of agriculture and tourism, also depends upon workers in the fields, hotels, and other labor intensive industries. This extreme exploitation destroys the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health of the victims, leaving them scarred for life.

A troubling trend is the exploitation of minors in domestic sex trafficking. These youth, under age 18, are the runaway and throwaway children in society picked up on our streets and forced into sex acts in exchange for food and a bed. We grieve for the children whose innocence has been sacrificed in the name of greed and monetary gain, a shocking example of “man’s inhumanity to man.”

In a 2007 pastoral statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Migration, the bishops wrote: “Human trafficking is a horrific crime against the basic dignity and rights of the human person. All efforts must be expended to end it...to ensure that, one day soon, trafficking in human persons vanishes from the face of the earth.”

As we reflect on our human bond with each other and the words from Matthew 25:40, “as you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it to me,” we call on Catholics to become educated about the scourge of trafficking in society. Our vulnerable brothers and sisters, trapped by poverty or circumstances, are waiting for us to help free them from bondage so they may be made whole and restored to health.

Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski
Archdiocese of Miami

Bishop Victor Galeone
Diocese of St. Augustine

Bishop Robert N. Lynch
Diocese of St. Petersburg

Bishop John G. Noonan
Diocese of Orlando

Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ
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Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito
Diocese of Palm Beach

Bishop Frank J. Dewane
Diocese of Venice

Auxiliary Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
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* This sentence revised per U.S. State Department estimates.