

Planning a Celebration for December 2, 2007

One week or so before the celebration:

A large poster with illustrations could be prepared and put in a public place. If outsiders are invited, distribute a few posters.

Fact-finding activity:

Invite people to look for information or testimonies on human trafficking. Hardly a day passes without hearing or seeing something on this topic. Radio broadcasts, newspapers, the internet, magazines, etc. During the celebration, people could share some of these.

Setting up the room:

- A large cross that would remind participants of the suffering endured by women, children and men who are victims of trafficking;
- A large candle for the hope that these people would finally come out of the darkness surrounding them, that terrorizes them and keep them as slaves;
- Green plants, expressing the hope that our prayer and commitment will bear fruit;
- An empty vase for the rose that will be brought in during the prayer;
- Suitable music and songs could be used to create the atmosphere. Use whenever appropriate in your setup.

Elements for a Celebration in Three Parts

Part One: Sharing Information

Put the light on when people come in and then dim it to near darkness. After a moment of silent prayer, slowly bring back the light.

Leader: welcomes the participants and introduces the celebration.

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 Organized Crime:

“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.”

Sharing facts and/or testimonies

The leader invites all present who found information on the topic to share it, giving the source of their findings. Others listen.

Part Two: Human Trafficking and the Bible

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 a defining event in the life of the people of Israel, when they are freed from the forced labour and dominance of their oppressors and become servants of God.

A reading from Leviticus 25: 39-42

If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. They shall remain with you as hired or bound labourers. They shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property, for they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold.

Silent pause

Responsorial Psalm:

One of either: Lamentations 5: 1, 10-21

Or: Ps 71: 1-6, 12-15, 20-24

Brief exchanges on 2 short scripture texts

a) Dn 13: 41-43, Suzanna and Daniel's judgment

Since they were elders of the people, and judges, the assembly took their word: Suzanna was condemned to death. She cried out as loud as she could, "Eternal God, you know all secrets and everything before it happens; you know that they have given false evidence against me. And now have I to die, innocent as I am of everything their malice has invented against me?"

Having heard these false accusations, a young boy named Daniel began to shout, 'I am innocent of this woman's death'. Daniel had the two old men convicted. Today, there are still people who stand up for others, who expose rapists, murderers and abusers. They can make a difference and save lives.

b) Luke 13, 10-13

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately, she stood up straight and began praising God.

Which spirits, which evil strengths keep women who are victims of trafficking bent over? What is it that destroys their integrity and their dignity? How can these women be liberated? What could liberate you so that you can act in response to this violence?

Part Three: Declaration and Prayer

Each excerpt of the message that the 30 Catholic sisters gathered in Rome October 15-20, 2007 addressed to persons concerned with human trafficking is followed by a prayer for these persons.

1. To Victims

We say to you who have been trafficked – especially women and children – we stand with you, you are not alone. We will fight with you to release you from your bondage. In solidarity with you, we will confront the traffickers. We challenge unjust systems and those who exploit you. Do not give up hope.

Let us pray for the victims: that they will find comfort, peace, security, and dignity restored to their lives.

2. To Traffickers

We, women religious from across the world, say to you traffickers, "Stop the exploitation! Look at the children, women and men you are destroying with your physical and psychological abuse. By violating their fundamental human rights, you damage, deny and destroy their identities, names and status. We condemn these actions as well as the subtle ways you use to exploit them."

Let us pray for the traffickers: that they will be freed from their lust for money and power, and come to see what they are doing to others whose lives are just as precious as their own.

3. To Demanders and Exploiters

We call on you who exploit women, children and men for commercial sex or forced labour to stop buying human beings, for without your demand, the evil of human trafficking would not exist. We call on you to realize that all women, children and men have equal rights and dignity and that in your demand you cause irreparable harm and lose your own dignity.

Let us pray for demanders and exploiters: that they will be freed from the shackles of their unbridled sexual drives, and realize that their lust deprives others of their right to dignity.

4. To Governments

We acknowledge that many governments have laws against trafficking and call for an increased enforcement of these laws. We further call on the governments of the world to address the issues of economic inequality, poverty and corruption that lead to the destruction of so many lives. The physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological torture of millions of people hidden in back streets, ghettos, hotels and parlours all over the world, is criminal activity. We urge governments to create and implement policies and strong legislation to criminalize the exploiters. Good governance demands that traffickers do not benefit from the vulnerability of others.

Let us pray for the world leaders: that they will faithfully and quickly address the issues that lead to and allow for human trafficking.

5. To Religious Leaders

We appreciate all the religious leaders who have supported us in the fight against trafficking in persons. We call on all religious leaders to end religious practises and customs that discriminate against women and girls, and hence contribute to the attitude of gender inequality underlying the growth of human trafficking in our world today.

We urge all religious leaders to denounce injustice and violence against women, children and men who are exploited or used in the sale of organs. We encourage you to relentlessly use

your pastoral responsibility to defend and promote the human dignity of persons exploited by these forms of slavery.

Let us pray for religious leaders: that they may have the courage to denounce injustice and violence against women and children and that they may always be willing to defend the rights of the voiceless.

6. To People of Good Will

We urge all people of good will to open your hearts to the victims and to act to change the root causes of human trafficking – poverty, gender inequality, discrimination, greed and corruption. Each small action of restoring dignity to another person furthers the dignity of each one of us. Our hope rests in that vision of humanity that honours the principle that no woman, child or man is a commodity for sale. Relying on the love of God, we ask you to join us in our prayers and our actions to eradicate this social and moral evil.

Let us pray for all the people of good will: that they have strength, courage and wisdom to act each time human dignity is threatened.

Adaptation of the Declaration, issued in Rome,
October 22, 2007, cf. www.zenith.org

FINAL BLESSING

**R: God hears the cry of the poor
Blessed be our God.**

I will bless God's name at all times.
God's praise ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in our God,
for God hears the cry of the poor®

Every spirit crushed God will save;
will be ransom for their lives;
will be safe shelter for their fears,
for God hears the cry of the poor.®

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