

**Franciscan Federation Conference 2011**  
**Justice and Peace Resolution – Morning Prayer**  
**Friday, July 29 – 8:30 am**

**Human Trafficking**

Narrator: Each year, the Franciscan Federation Justice and Peace  
(*Glenna*) Committee, with the input of the JPIC coordinators of the member congregations, chooses a topic of resolution – for a common response as a Franciscan family to an issue of concern in our world.

This year, we have chosen the Trafficking of Human beings upon which to focus our advocacy efforts and our prayers.

**Human trafficking** is a modern-day form of slavery. It is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, providing, or obtaining, by any means, of a person for forced labor, slavery or servitude in any industry or site. It includes sex trafficking, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or when the person induced to perform a commercial sex act is not yet 18 years of age.

Victims of trafficking can be found in commercial sex situations, domestic situations (nannies or servants), sweatshop factories, construction, farming and landscaping, fisheries, hotel and tourist industries, panhandling, janitorial services, restaurant services, and in many other circumstances including forced marriages, illegal adoptions and the removal and selling of organs or other body parts.

Poverty and inequality are important factors in making people more vulnerable to being trafficked. As a criminal industry driven by large profits and the low risk of prosecution, trafficking will continue to exist as long as the demand is high and the risks are low.

As we gather now in prayer, let us sing a familiar refrain,  
***The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.***  
(sing twice)

We will join our tears with the victims of human trafficking as we listen to three stories of human trafficking survivors.

Narrator: The Story of Maria....

Reader: Traffickers are very manipulative. They promise young girls good jobs, but once they arrive, they are entrapped into prostitution rings or domestic servitude. They are brought into the U.S. and basically kept captive. It's modern-day slavery.

*Maria:* When I was a little girl, I saw my parents working hard. My dream was to one day have money, to give them the best life and treat them like a king and queen.

Reader: Maria came to the U.S. legally when she was 18 years old, but was soon caught in a sex-trade operation. She was promised a good job, but instead, found herself sold into slavery to an abusive man.

*Maria:* I was afraid. I was terrified. He beat me, he raped me. He abused me physically, emotionally and spiritually. Years went by, I only felt fear – fear all the time. I felt....God has forgotten me.

Reader: Eventually the man was killed by a neighbor and Maria was falsely accused of the murder. She was sentenced to 25 to life in prison. Behind bars, Maria freed her mind. She took classes, received therapy and got her GED. She desperately tried to find a way for the truth of her story to be told.

*Maria:* I chose to use my time productively. I chose to be a better person. I just wanted someone to listen to me, to believe me, to know that I had been telling the truth. I wanted – just a little bit of justice.

Reader: Eventually, she got it. In 2001, she was released after 22 years in prison.

*Maria:* I just kept crying, screaming, laughing, jumping...I just wanted to hug my family, my friends, every person I saw.

Reader: Now when asked about her dream she says,

*Maria:* I'm touching it, feeling it, living it.

***The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.***  
(sing twice)

Narrator: The Story of Miguel....

Reader: Citrus grove owners in Florida hire seasonal laborers to pick the fruit. Many set-up operations that trick laborers into slavery, by forcing them to pay transport fees to the picking sites. On pay-day, the grove owners subtract inflated fees for rent and transportation, leaving little for food and savings. The workers get caught in a never-ending cycle of debt.

Miguel came to Florida believing he could earn more money in one day picking oranges than he could in a week in Mexico. He left his family, and borrowed \$300 to pay the travel fee.

*Miguel:* When I came here, I earned nothing. It was a false dream. In the end, I was working as a slave. I figured when I came to the U.S. I would work, pay off the debt, and save enough to care for my family.

Reader: The workers are forced to live in miserable conditions, often 8 men in a small room, with little or no food and water.

*Miguel:* I was hungry – tired. I working morning 'til night. But they took us to fields where there were trees with not many oranges – so there was not much to pick.

Reader: The Immokalee Workers Coalition runs a local radio station and sends out organizers into the fields to try and teach workers about their rights. One day, an organizer from the coalition came to the field where Miguel was working. The man tried to talk to the pickers, but they were fearful, thinking the organizer was a spy who worked for the grove owners. The organizer agreed to leave, but before he did, he gave Miguel his card.

*Miguel:* The owners threatened to throw anyone who caused trouble into a pond with alligators. They beat one man, the police were called but nothing was done.

*Reader:* This incident gave Miguel the courage to use the phone number on the card. He called the Coalition, and worked out an arrangement for his rescue, along with 3 other men. The rescue was successful and the men found refuge with the Coalition.

Eventually, these grove owners were brought to justice, and imprisoned. But there are more like them, and workers are still exploited and enslaved. The large corporations who purchase the fruit, go un-investigated. Today, Miguel works legally in a factory, and is sending money back to his family in Mexico.

***The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.***  
(sing twice)

*Narrator:* The Story of Rose....

*Reader:* Rose was 14 when her family in Africa sent her to the U.S. with the dream of a better life. Another Cameroonian family in the U.S. had offered to sponsor Rose. For a travel fee, they promised her an education in return for a babysitting job with their family. In reality, she became a domestic slave. She was forced to work long hours for the family, cleaning, and watching the children. She was abused, physically and mentally and never went to school.

*Rose:* I tried to do everything right, so I wouldn't get yelled at or beaten. I would cry at night thinking of my family, my sisters and how we used to play together. I just cried – I missed them. I would cry hoping that one day I would get to see them again.

*Reader:* One cold day, she just couldn't take it anymore. She ran away.

*Rose:* I ran away! My blood pressure was rising. My head was

pounding inside. I had no shoes on, no jacket. I didn't think of anything. I just ran.

Reader: She ran to a local market, begged change and called a man who had been kind to her in the past – he was the cousin of the man who had enslaved her. She sat outside the store, waiting for the man to come get her. While she was waiting, she lost all hope.

Rose: I felt like - I give up! I don't care what happens to my life right now. I don't know anything anymore.

Reader: Luckily, Rose was given the hope she needed. Her rescuer brought her to his home where she found herself in a loving, caring family who fulfilled her original dream. She went to school, and now works as a nursing assistant, with the dreams of becoming a nurse. The couple who enslaved her were brought to justice and are serving a prison sentence.

Rose: Now, I want to finish my education, and hopefully one day, with God's help, I will get to see my sisters again.

***The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.***  
(sing twice)

Narrator: And Yahweh said to Moses....  
“I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt.  
I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave drivers.  
Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings.  
The cry of the people of Israel has come to me  
and I have witnessed the way the Egyptians oppress them.  
So, come. I send you to the Pharaoh to bring the people of  
Israel out of Egypt”

And Moses said to Yahweh,  
“Who am I to go to Pharaoh  
and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”

And the Lord answered, "I shall be with you."

(Ex 3:7-11)

Reader: And Yahweh says, to us.

"I have seen the suffering of the victims of human trafficking. I have heard their appeal to be free of the slave-drivers, the pimps, the sweatshop owners, the abusive field managers. I have witnessed their oppression and their cries have reached me.

Now then, go and work for the liberation of these people. Do not be afraid. I will be with you."

Narrator: God of all people,

awaken our hearts and deepen our commitment to work for a world where every person is free, able to live their lives fully and joyfully.

We ask for conversion of heart for traffickers and for strong laws that protect victims.

Help us to grow in our awareness that we are all connected.

Give us wisdom, inspiration, and courage to stand in solidarity, so that together we will find ways to the freedom that is your gift to all you people.

We ask this in the name of the Savior of us all, Jesus the Christ. AMEN

***The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.***

(sing twice)

Resources:

- Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center – "Prayer Service for Human Trafficking Awareness Day"
- National Human Trafficking Resource Center – "Dreams Die Hard" (dvd)