

Pope Francis has designated February 8 as ***International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking.***

Pope Francis was elected on March 13, 2013 and on March 31, 2013 he clearly denounced and condemned the multiple forms of violence and exploitation in our world, among the worst, human trafficking.

In his 2013 *Urbi et Orbi Easter Message*, Pope Francis offered his good wishes of joy, justice and peace to all humanity. “Christ is risen!” “Peace in the whole world, (...) wounded by the selfishness which threatens human life and the family, selfishness that continues in human trafficking, (...) the most extensive form of slavery in this twenty-first century!” For more info go to:

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20130331_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html

Again, in his message for the 2014 World Day of Peace – January 1 – entitled *Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace*, Pope Francis expressed his awareness and concern. “In many parts of the world, there seems to be no end to grave offences against fundamental human rights, especially the right to life and the right to religious freedom. The tragic phenomenon of human trafficking, in which the unscrupulous prey on the lives and the desperation of others, is but one unsettling example of this.” <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/pope-francis-message-world-day-peace-2014/2869#sthash.fBQNTqL1.dpbs>

In his 2015 World Day of Peace Message, *No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters*, the Pope offered heartfelt wishes of peace. Recurrent in this document were the themes of dignity, freedom and autonomy. He recognized that, although officially abolished, slavery still exists. It has taken on new forms, among them, human trafficking. “Not infrequently, the victims of human trafficking and slavery (...) end up in the hands of criminal networks which organize human trafficking.” Also, (...) “human persons created in the image and likeness of God are deprived of their freedom, sold and reduced to being the property of others.” It is worthwhile to read the entire text.

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xlviigiornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html

Pope Francis’ Actions: He frequently and clearly denounces human trafficking, has spoken and written about it, and has included it in his now renowned encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Moreover, one of his most noteworthy initiatives is the *Santa Marta Group*, an organization of international police chiefs and bishops from around the world working together against human trafficking. During one of the group’s conferences, the Pope took time to talk privately with victims of trafficking.

Pope Francis invited the General Secretary of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, along with a number of UN delegates to the Vatican. They discussed many world issues, among them, human trafficking and contemporary slavery. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50712#.Vk9LGXYvdVM>

Another notable achievement is the signing of the *Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders against Modern Slavery*. Pope Francis had expressed his desire for a closer look at modern slavery which led to the formation of the *Global Freedom Network*. This group invited religious leaders of all faiths and

nations to sign the declaration. Thirteen leaders signed it and have encouraged other religious leaders to add their names. Below is an excerpt of the Declaration:

December 2, 2014 – We, the undersigned, are gathered here today for a historical initiative to inspire spiritual and practical action by all global faiths and people of good will everywhere to eradicate modern slavery across the worlds by 2020 and for all time.

In the eyes of God each human being is a free person, whether girl, boy, woman or man, and is destined to exist for the good of all in equality and fraternity. Modern slavery in terms of human trafficking, forced labour and prostitution, organ trafficking and any relationship that fails to respect the fundamental conviction that all people are equal and have the same freedom and dignity, is a crime against humanity.

<http://www.pass.va/content/scienze-sociali/en/events/2014-18/jointdeclaration.html>

Suggested CWL Action Items: February 8th is particularly significant as it is the feast of Saint Josephine Bakhita, a Canossian Sister who was kidnapped and sold into slavery at a young age in Sudan. When she was freed, she chose to enter a religious order and spent the rest of her life helping the poor and the suffering. It is all the more appropriate that on February 8, 2016, Catholics all over the world join in prayer.

Indeed, this will be the second instance during which we take time to pray for the many people who are denied their dignity, people with no voice, people who are enslaved. Last year, the *Talitha Kum* Network, a network of nuns helping girls and women rise after becoming victims of human trafficking, initiated the world-wide movement “a light against human trafficking.”

To add to these initiatives, there are many other simple actions we can take: a moment of silence with a group, a reaction to violence on television, a poster in the office on the subject, etc. There is a beautiful CWL prayer service against Human Trafficking that can be found on the CWL National website at cwl.ca entitled *Human Trafficking Prayer Service*. After the prayer there are more suggestions of activities you or your council may like to use.

Together, let us make February 8 a day against slavery.

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