



“What is human trafficking?”

Claire Griffin is a Brigidine Sister, former teacher, parish pastoral worker and member of the Brigidine Congregational Leadership Team. Currently living in the Middle Park/Port Melbourne Parish, Claire is the Victorian Co-ordinator of ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans). She also works as a facilitator for different groups in parishes and communities, especially as they review, plan and set goals for their ongoing ministries.

I can't tell you how many times when people I haven't seen for a while meet me they ask: "So what are you doing now?" Some expect I will still be teaching (though that's a ministry I moved on from some 30 years ago!) Some imagine that I'm still involved in parish ministry as I was for almost twenty years. Others, observing the grey hair politely ask if I am retired!

When I respond by saying that I now work voluntarily as the Victorian Co-ordinator of ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans), an organization committed to eliminating all forms of human trafficking and modern day slavery, I receive a variety of understandable responses. At times these have included: "What is human trafficking?" Some people exclaim, "I've heard accounts of human trafficking happening overseas but it doesn't happen in Australia does it?" Others say "But wasn't slavery abolished in the nineteenth century as a result of the work of William Wilberforce?" Such responses are triggers for many lively and engaging conversations about the challenging realities of modern day slavery and human trafficking and the many possible ways we can all play a part in overcoming such evils.

These simple conversations become opportunities to raise awareness of the estimated approximately 40 million people who are enslaved in our world today. These are predominantly women and girls trafficked and exploited into forced labour and forced marriages, in a trade worth an estimated US\$150 billion a year to traffickers, according to the U.N. International Labour Organization (ILO).

In our world millions of young children and women are currently enslaved in India working in clothing and furniture factories and in brick kilns. In Africa young men and small boys are still being enslaved in mining for minerals needed in the production of our mobile phones, smart watches and computers. Others are sold and enslaved to pick the cocoa for the production of some of the chocolate sold in many of our stores. In parts of Asia where millions live in abject poverty and with a lack of opportunities for decent work, innocent young girls and teenagers are trafficked into dance bars, night clubs and brothels for the pleasure of sex tourists, many of whom are Western men. Others are trafficked into debt bondage in the hospitality industry and in domestic servitude, in cleaning the homes of the well-to-do, even in some foreign embassies.



Throughout the world, others are trafficked into the agricultural industry, picking fruit and vegetables for our supermarkets and dining tables or in the fishing industry. They are working long hours in exploitative working conditions, often without any appropriate accommodation or contracts, receiving unjust payments and often having had their passports or other identity documents taken from them.



Many people are still unaware that in October 2011 Pope John Paul canonized a woman called Josephine Bakhita. In more recent years Pope Francis proclaimed her the patron of South Sudan and of those trafficked or enslaved. Josephine was

born in 1869 in the area of Darfur, Sudan. At the age of seven she was kidnapped by slave traders and sold and resold in the slave markets of El Obeid and Khartoum. On several occasions she was treated brutally by her 'owners'; her final experience of slavery was in Italy when she was bought by an Italian diplomat who took her to Italy to care for his daughter. After some time she and the child were left in the care of the Canossian Sisters in Venice and Josephine eventually joined that community and spent her final years as a religious sister.

Each year, her feast day on 8 February is set in the

Church as the World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking and a number of dioceses, parishes, schools

and communities arrange special liturgies and events to raise awareness about modern day slavery and to pray for an end to this abuse. In the words of Pope Francis *"It is not possible to remain indifferent before the knowledge that human beings are bought and sold like goods"*. (May 2014) There is much demanded of each and all of us if human trafficking and modern day slavery is to be eliminated!



Eventually our conversations turn to an exploration of the myriad of possible actions individuals and communities can take if Jesus' dream of all people having life in all its fullness is to become a reality and all can live with integrity, justice and peace (ref John 10:10). **Perhaps the number one thing we can each do is to learn more about the issue of modern day slavery in our countries.** For example, towards the end of last year and after much debate the Modern Slavery Act was passed by the Australian Federal Parliament. We can all tune into the news about this in the media and learn how the legislation will demand that big businesses must work to ensure there is no slavery in the production and procurement of their goods and services.

Simultaneously, reviewing our own patterns of shopping to ensure that we shop ethically when



purchasing

Easter eggs and other chocolate, coffee, tea, sporting goods, clothing or other cotton goods is one very practical way of ensuring we buy and enjoy only products produced without any trafficked, forced or child labour. (The season of Lent is an ideal time for such a review!) Opting for slavery-free products in our pantries, kitchens and staffrooms can become conversation starters about the reasons for the choices to buy ethically sourced products and raises further awareness of these justice issues.

Thirdly, as people committed to living the Gospel through social justice, we can all play a role in advocating for change to overcome the evil trade of human trafficking and slavery in the world. For example, given that poverty makes millions of people more vulnerable to being exploited and trafficked, we can all write a letter to our politicians advocating that foreign aid to impoverished nations be increased rather than further cut. Election time offers an ideal

opportunity to call our elected politicians to take strong action to bring about justice for trafficked



and exploited workers in our country and to ensure that groups and agencies working to support trafficked people in the community are appropriately funded.

In March 2018 Pope Francis issued an invitation that I often repeat at the end of any conversations about human trafficking and slavery today. He said: ***"I invite everyone, citizens and institutions, to join forces to prevent the slave trade and to guarantee protection and assistance for the victims."***

Let us not hesitate in responding positively to his invitation; community groups and individuals looking to take action across the coming year could consult our ACRATH action calendar with a month-by-month plan for taking action:

<https://acrath.org.au/resource-for-parishes-schools-community-groups/>

POPE FRANCIS PRAYS FOR THOSE affected by HUMAN TRAFFICKING ... short video
<https://carmelites.org.au/jpic>

*WHAT IS YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL PULSE ?
HOW DID THE SUMMER CHALLENGES AFFECT YOU ?*

Did you give a thought to the scientists' assessment of the worldwide changes occurring to the ENVIRONMENT?

ACCLAIMED AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR Richard Flanagan speaking from his home in Tasmania summed up the situation for us in Australia ...

"The climate disaster future has arrived.

What has become clear over these last four weeks across this vast, beautiful land of Australia is that a way of life is on the edge of vanishing!

Australian summers once a time of innocent pleasure now are to be feared.

To be anticipated not with joy but with dread.

A time of discomfort, distress and for some fear that lasts not a day, nor a night but weeks and months.

Power grids collapse, dying rivers vomit huge fish kills.

While in the north, in Townsville there are unprecedented floods.

And in the south heat so extreme it pushes at the very edge of liveability, and has become every day.

The future in which the people of Tasmania now find themselves in the evacuation centres, camped in friends and family homes, fighting fires day after week, after month... isn't just frightening, it's terrifying!"



And what are the scientists' saying?:

THE WORLD has had about 1°C of warming so far.

At 1.5°C, we will see:

- More heatwaves, floods and droughts
- Up to 90% of reef corals lost
- Damage to crops and fisheries
- Threats to global economic growth

But by avoiding 2°C of global warming, we will:

- Protect 10.4m people from **sea level rise**
- Halve the number of people without enough **fresh water**
- Reduce death and disease from **heatwaves**
- Make it easier to deliver many of the UN's **Sustainable Development Goals**

The Carmelite NGO and the International JPIC Commission are dedicated to their work of eliminating Human Trafficking throughout the world.

This video shows the work in Zimbabwe through the Carmelite sisters in a project called AGAPE Leona: <https://carmelites.org.au/jpic>



Sr Annah Theresa Nyadombo and Gabrielle Fogarty discuss the work of AGAPE Leona at a JPIC meeting. If you would like to support their work please contact Gabrielle, JPIC Team

The last issue in 2018 of CARMENGO the International publication of the Carmelite NGO contains a lead article on 'SEEKING ASYLUM IN AUSTRALIA', written by Peter Thomas of our JPIC Team. Use this link to access this article to judge for yourself whether there has been any progress in Australia's offshore detention policy in the last year:



<https://carmelites.org.au/jpic>

FOR YOUR CALENDAR – MARCH

1st March – World Day of Prayer – Theme:

"Come everything is ready"

3 March - Clean Up Australia Day

3 March - Project Compassion Sunday

5 March - 1970 International Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

8 March - International Women's Day – Theme in Australia: "More Powerful Together"

22 March – World Water Day

24 March – Saint Oscar Romero of Salvador

25 March – International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

26 March – 1967 Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio (On the Progress of Peoples)*

30 March – Earth Hour (8.30-9.30 pm local time)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY is an occasion to review how far women have come in their struggle for equality, peace and development. It is also an opportunity to unite, network and mobilise for meaningful change. Each year, UN Women National Committee Australia hosts some of the largest International Women's Day events around the country to celebrate global achievements and discuss actions needed to continue accelerating gender equality.

<https://unwomen.org.au/>

PRAYERFUL REFLECTIONS

O God, we pray for all those in our world who are suffering from injustice:

For those who are discriminated against

because of their race, colour or religion;

For those imprisoned for working for the relief of oppression;

For those who are hounded for speaking the inconvenient truth;

For those tempted to violence as a cry against overwhelming hardship;

For those deprived of reasonable health and education;

For those suffering from hunger and famine;

For those too weak to help themselves and who have no one else to help them;

For the unemployed who cry out for work but do not find it.

We pray for anyone of our acquaintance who is personally affected by injustice.

Forgive us, Lord, if we unwittingly share in the conditions or in a system that perpetuates injustice.

Show us how we can serve your children and make your love practical by washing their feet.

Attributed to Mother Theresa of Calcutta

CARING FOR OUR PLANET



WE CELEBRATE this BIG STEP in caring for planet EARTH:

For the first time in Australia a coal mine was rejected on social and climate change grounds.

On 8 February, the NSW Land and Environment Court overturned the application for the Rocky Hill coal mine near Gloucester NSW. Gloucester residents, have been fighting against this mine for *10 long years*. **This landmark outcome sets a powerful precedent for future action against fossil fuel projects.** It means the fossil fuel industry cannot continue to expand if we are serious about tackling climate change.