



INTERNATIONAL DAY  
OF PRAYER AND AWARENESS  
AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

## PRAYER SERVICE FOR AN END TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

*"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 labor 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."*

Faith Leaders' Universal Declaration Against Slavery, Vatican City, Dec. 2, 2014

### Opening Song:

**Leader:** Let us begin by observing a moment of **silence** in solidarity with the more than 21 million women, men and children who suffer each day from modern day slavery.

**Leader:** Each person forced into slavery has a personal story. . . a story of struggles, hopes and dreams. Let us listen to the story of Bakhita, a survivor of human trafficking.

**Reader 1:** St. Josephine Bakhita was born in southern Sudan in 1869. As a young girl, she was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Sold and resold in the markets of El Obeid and Khartoum, she was treated brutally by her captors. She did not remember the name she was given by her parents. Bakhita, which means "fortunate one," was the name given to her by her kidnappers.

**Reader 2:** In 1883, she was bought by an Italian diplomat who sent her to Italy to work as a maid for the daughter of a family friend studying with the Canossian Daughters of Charity. It was there that Bakhita came to know about God whom "she had experienced in her heart without knowing" who God was. In 1890, she was baptized and received the name Josephine.

**Reader 1:** Later, the Italian family came to take their "property" back to Africa. Josephine expressed her desire to stay. When the family insisted she go, she remained firm, later writing: "I am sure the Lord gave me strength at that moment." With the support of the superior of the Canossian Sisters and the Cardinal of Venice, she won her freedom and later entered the novitiate. For the next 50 years she lived a life of prayer and service as a Canossian Sister before her death in 1947.

**Reader 2:** In the weeks before her death, St. Josephine Bakhita re-lived the terrible days of her captivity. More than once she cried out: "Please, loosen the chains . . . they are heavy!"

**Reader 1:** St. Josephine was canonized in 2000. There is a grassroots movement to designate her as the patron saint of kidnapped and trafficked persons.

1

**Leader:** We hold all impacted by human trafficking in our hearts as we pray Psalm 126 together.

**Psalm Prayer** (*Read Antiphonally*)

1

When God brought the exiles back to Zion  
we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouths were filled with laughter  
and our tongues with shouts of joy.

2

*When women are rescued from the streets  
They are like those who dream.  
Then their mouths are filled with laughter  
and their tongues with shouts of joy.*

3

Among the nations it was said,  
"God has done great things for them."  
God has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.

4

*Trafficked from other nations we said,  
"God has forgotten us."  
Now God has restored us to our homes,  
and we rejoiced.*

5

Bring back our exiles, O God,  
Like fresh streams in the desert.  
May those who sow in tears  
reap with songs and shouts of joy.

6

*Bring back our children, O God,  
from exploitation and abuse.  
May the tears that water their labor  
turn into the songs and shouts of play.*

7

Those that go forth weeping  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

8

*Those who are weeping and afraid  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
bearing their dignity and healing.*

**All:** Glory to you, God of life and freedom, praise and thanksgiving now and forever. Amen.

2

**Leader:** As we listen to the stories of survivors of human trafficking, we pray for the strength of those enslaved as we work to create a world where no one causes terror again. After each story is read, we will pause in silence while a candle is lit, and a prayer is read. We use Bakhita's words as we pray: *Prayer Response: Loosen the chains . . . they are heavy!*

**Reader 1:** "The long working hours made us weak and exhausted... I always felt very tired and much disturbed because the supervisors were scolding me for carelessness in my work. I also suffered from headache and leg pain. I didn't like working at the mill at all."

—A 20-year-old Dalit Girl working 12-hour plus days at a textile factory in Tamil Nadu, India

[Silence; lighting of candle of HOPE] We pray for women who are estimated to make up 80% of human trafficking victims, and for changes in societal attitudes that deny the equality and dignity of women. *R*

**Reader 2:** "Whether it was the police, the army, or the paramilitaries: when they said 'go to the front,' you had to go, and it was hard because we had to walk for days without sleep and hardly eating anything. I was saddest when I saw friends die."

--A young girl, a child soldier at age 11 in Colombia\*

[Silence; the candle of PEACE is lit] We pray for those forced to become soldiers, especially children urged to violence. *R*

**Reader 1:** "We had no choice. There was nowhere to flee; we were surrounded by the sea. After we arrived back to the shore, we were locked inside the room guarded by their men. The workers had to take one trip after another. There were many workers living under the same conditions."

—A young man enslaved on a fishing boat in Thailand

[Silence; the candle of FREEDOM is lit] We pray for those in bonded labor, in agriculture, mines, factories, construction, restaurants, private homes, or anywhere in the shadows, where they are out of sight. *R*

**Reader 2:** "They let me know what would become of me if I told anyone. They told me they knew where I lived, they knew my teachers, they knew my school, they knew everything about me. There was nothing I could do to protect myself. At 14-years-old. I didn't know where to begin."

—An American girl sold by a friend's father and trafficked for sex in Florida, USA

[Silence; the candle of DIGNITY is lit] We pray for young girls and women exploited and objectified in forced marriages and in the sex trade. *R*

**Reader 1:** "Here I found true hell. A world of daily violence perpetrated by men, and by other women, and also by our own families who pretend they're not aware, and take their part of money."

--Nigerian woman, forced to prostitute to pay the 'debt' she owed the traffickers\*

[Silence; the candle of POWER is lit] We pray for those who cannot return home due to the stigma of prostitution, disease or shame, that they receive the solace, healing and support they need. *R*

"Is this not the fasting I have chosen, to loose the chains of injustice. . ." Isaiah 58:6

*Prayer Response: May justice reign in our day*

**Leader:** For those kidnaped, sold, or "adopted" for the purpose of 'harvesting' their organs. *R*

**Leader:** For conversion of heart of the perpetrators, organizers, and consumers who profit from the evil of human trafficking. *R*

**Leader:** That government leaders, corporate directors, law enforcement and all those who serve the public will address the systems that make human trafficking possible. *R*

"He has sent me . . . to proclaim freedom for the captives. . ." Isaiah 61: 1

*Prayer Response: We come as a people of hope.*

**Leader:** For victims of trafficking in our own local communities. May we have eyes to see and act to make our communities slave free. *R*

**Leader:** We believe in hope that working together as a community we can end human trafficking. *R*

**Leader:** We are strengthened by what we have learned and we commit to act on behalf of the dignity of all persons. *R*

**All:** O God, give us wisdom and courage to reach out and stand with those whose bodies, hearts, and spirits have been wounded, so that together we may make real your promises to fill these sisters and brothers with a love that is tender and good. Send the exploiters away empty-handed to be converted from this wickedness, and help us all to claim the freedom that is your gift to your children. Amen.

**Closing Song:**

### **ACTIONS**

**LEARN** about human trafficking - globally and locally

**PRAY** for victims of trafficking and for an end to this slavery

**DEMAND** slave-free products. Buy fair trade when possible

**ADVOCATE** for local and national legislation that protects victims, helps survivors, and prosecutes traffickers

**For more information, visit our website: [www.a-light-against-human-trafficking.info](http://www.a-light-against-human-trafficking.info)**



**"Slaves no more, but sisters and brothers"**

*\*Human Trafficking Around the World: Hidden in Plain Sight, Stephanie Hepburn, Rita J. Simon, Columbia University Press,, 2013*

*Prayer adapted from INTERCOMMUNITY PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER - Seattle, WA*