



The Face of Human Trafficking

By Melissa Varner

“This is about a woman being used, controlled and dominated,” Kristy Childs said.

Unfortunately, Kristy knows that abuse and control personally.

Kristy left an abusive home life in Missouri at age 12, and truck drivers trafficked her across the country, exchanging food and transportation for sex. Kristy wound up in Denver, under a pimp’s control, control she stayed under for years.

Kristy’s firsthand experience with sexual exploitation gave her the knowledge and sensitivity it takes to work with sex trafficking victims, and it led her to start a shelter for victims in Kansas City called Veronica’s Voice.

Kristy spoke at a public hearing for Missouri House Bill 214, which would impose harsher penalties on human traffickers and provide a defense for victims of trafficking in court.

Despite Kristy’s testimony and testimony from another trafficking survivor, one member of the committee that heard the bill was reluctant to believe Missouri needs this type of legislation.

Apparently, he didn’t know that the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Missouri has prosecuted 41 defendants in trafficking cases, more than any other district in the country.

Deb Hume, co-chair of the Central Missouri Stop Human Trafficking Coalition and assistant professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, said that while more people have realized the issue since the formation of the coalition and the creation of the task force in the Western District of Missouri, some people still have difficulty recognizing that it’s not just foreign-born children who are trafficked.

But American children are targeted, and every year, as many as 300,000 American children (runaways, etc.) are at risk of sexual exploitation, according to the U.S. Department of State.

In fact, one of the cases listed on the Western District task force’s website is about a 16-year-old runaway who was sexually abused and tortured in Lebanon, Missouri. The situation was so severe that her abuser tattooed a bar code on the victim’s neck to mark her as his property, according to the release on the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri’s website.



Human trafficking “constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights.” — Pope John Paul II

Dedee Lhamon, president of The Covering House in St. Louis, an organization to help girls that have been sexually exploited or trafficked, said that part of the reason people are just starting to become more aware of the problem in the U.S. is that so much trafficking is done through the Internet and is unseen.

“It’s not so overt, in terms of, you don’t walk the streets and see these girls on the street corners,” she said.

Some people think trafficking is limited to the coast, when actually, Lhamon said, the Midwest is becoming a hub for human trafficking. According to a 2006 report from the Department of Justice, St. Louis is one of the top 20 “most intense” trafficking jurisdictions in the country.

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The other side of the state is also struggling with human trafficking. Kansas City's Child Protective Services estimates that since 2000 at least one victim of commercial sexual exploitation is identified each month.

Lhamon said the lack of awareness about human trafficking has led to a lack of safe places for victims to seek counseling, which is why she is working with other professionals in the St. Louis area to find a house where girls under 18 who are trafficked for sex can seek refuge and counseling.

Hume echoed Lhamon's sentiment, saying the first step in fighting human trafficking is to get informed, and then to voice concerns to legislators about human trafficking. To help inform yourself and others, it is important to identify and correct misconceptions about trafficking and trafficking laws.

For instance, many people think that for trafficking to exist, there must be some sort of transportation. However, federal trafficking legislation does not require travel to take place for the crime to exist.

Also, some people think of human trafficking solely as sexual exploitation, which happens mostly as crimes against women and girls.

Under federal law, trafficking includes both labor and sex trafficking, and it affects both men and women, boys and girls.

The federal legislation defines sex trafficking as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age."

U.S. federal law defines labor trafficking as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery."

Another misconception, according to Lhamon, is that people think these children

are engaging in this behavior because they want to. It is essential to remember that people who are sexually exploited are the victims, not the criminals.

The Holy See, in an address to the United Nations, stated that treating a woman "not as a human person with rights on an equal basis with others, but as an object to be exploited, very often underlies violence against women." It noted: "an increasing scourge is trafficking of women and girls, as well as various forms of prostitution."

"Indirectly, we might not be speaking up against attitudes that glamorize sexual exploitation."

— Deb Hume, co-chair Central Missouri Stop Human Trafficking Coalition

On a similar note, in a letter for the 2002 International Conference on "Twenty-First-Century Slavery—the Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings," Pope John Paul II said human trafficking "constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. In particular, the sexual exploitation of women and children is a particularly repugnant aspect of this trade, and must be recognized as an intrinsic violation of human dignity and human rights."

The Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in its 2007 statement on human trafficking called Catholics to action, "particularly by educating fellow Catholics and others about the realities of this crime" and by having "parishes serve as a meeting place to discuss this issue."

According to Hume, there are many organizations in Missouri that have people who are educated on this issue and who might be willing to speak at a church meeting or to other groups about the problem of human trafficking to help inform the public.

A lack of public awareness was cited as a key finding in a study conducted by Shared Hope International when they researched sex trafficking of minors in Independence, Missouri. The study suggested using information geared specifically toward children and teenagers about the risk

of commercial sexual exploitation. It also noted that children are bombarded with negative media messages, some of which glorify the "pimp/ho" lifestyle, that need to be counteracted.

After getting informed about human trafficking, Catholics can support programs that work with survivors through monetary or other donations, such as toiletries or bus passes for people staying at their shelter. Currently, The Covering House is looking for a home to buy, and donations to support that purchase.

Catholics who work with young people, or who suspect someone they know might be a victim of human trafficking, should become familiar with the clues of trafficking by visiting one of the resource websites listed on the next page.

According to Hume, another way to fight human trafficking is to think about what you buy and what you watch and how that might support the exploitation (labor or sexual) of other people.

"Indirectly, we might not be speaking up against attitudes that glamorize sexual exploitation," she said.

It is difficult to understand how such tragedies could happen in the U.S., and it's even worse to think that the victims of these tragedies are overlooked or forgotten. It is necessary that the people of the Catholic Church work together to help the vulnerable and restore the dignity of the exploited.

The USCCB Committee on Migration affirmed the commitment of the Catholic Church to end this horrific practice saying, "We cannot rest until trafficking in human persons is eliminated from the globe."

Let's start by ending it in Missouri.

Melissa Varner is the communications director for the Missouri Catholic Conference.

How the MCC is Helping: Anti-Human Trafficking Legislation

The MCC's general counsel, Tyler McClay worked with Rep. Anne Zerr (R-St. Charles) to draft House Bill 214.

House Bill 214 would amend Missouri's current law regarding human trafficking by expanding the definition of human trafficking and by imposing stricter penalties for those convicted of human trafficking. The bill would also authorize law enforcement officials to refer suspected trafficking victims to the Department of Social Services, who would arrange for treatment or other services.

The bill would also allow human trafficking victims to bring a civil suit against convicted traffickers, and allow the attorney general to bring a civil action against anyone who benefits financially from a trafficking enterprise, such as a strip club or pornographic filmmaker. It also requires a convicted trafficker to pay restitution to the victim, regardless of whether the defendant is sentenced to prison or probation.

The bill also authorizes the Department of Public Safety to create procedures for identifying trafficking victims and to establish training programs and protocols to educate law enforcement on state and federal trafficking laws. The bill also allows the Department of Social Services to work with relevant state and local agencies to evaluate services for trafficking victims. The bill allows state agencies to implement programs with nonprofit agencies and non-governmental organizations to provide services to trafficking victims.

The bill passed in the Missouri House last month by a vote of 155 to 0. A companion bill, Senate Bill 331, sponsored by Sen. John Lamping (R-Ladue), was approved by a Senate committee and awaits debate by the Missouri Senate. The MCC is working to ensure that one of these bills is adopted by the General Assembly and placed on Gov. Nixon's desk for his signature.

Human Trafficking Resources

There are a number of resources available throughout Missouri to report suspected human trafficking or to obtain help for the victims of trafficking.

For specialized victim service referrals, call the International Institute of St. Louis at 314-773-9090, or call the 24-hour hotline in St. Louis at 314-369-2305 or in south-east Missouri at 573-680-1650. You can also call the Human Trafficking Hotline 24/7 at 888-3737-888.

Among the safe houses and shelters in Missouri that offer refuge for victims are:

- Veronica's Voice in Kansas City, 816-483-7101 or VeronicasVoice.org
- Hope House in Independence and Lee's Summit, 816-461-4188 or Hopehouse.net
- Catholic Charities Refugee Services, 314-771-2570 or CCSTL.org
- The Covering House in St. Louis, 314-266-9140 or TheCoveringHouse.org

- The Covenant House in St. Louis, 314-533-2241 or CovenantHouseMO.org

- Rainbow House in Columbia, 573-474-6600 or RainbowHouseColumbia.org

To learn more about human trafficking, go to these websites.

- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services, uscbb.org/mrs/trafficking/
- Central Missouri Stop Human Trafficking Coalition, CMSHTC.wordpress.com
- Western District of Missouri Human Trafficking Rescue Project, www.justice.gov/usao/mow/community/humantrafficking.html
- Shared Hope International, www.shared-hope.org
- U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, www.state.gov/g/tip

Trafficking Statistics

- More than 12 million people in the world are being exploited for sex and labor, according to the United Nations.
- 600,000 children under age 18 are involved in pornography or prostitution. (U.S. Department of Justice)
- The average age of entry into prostitution for a child victim in the U.S. is 13 years old. (U.S. DOJ)
- Since 2006, more than 100 victims of trafficking have been identified in the Western District of Missouri. (Human Trafficking Rescue Project)
- At least 75 percent of minors exploited through prostitution are under the control of a pimp. (U.S. DOJ)
- A study by the University of Pennsylvania estimated that 100,000 to 300,000 adolescents are at risk for sex trafficking.
- 70 percent of street youth are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. (Shared Hope International)



How Does the MCC Take Legislative Positions?

The Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Missouri. The Catholic bishops of Missouri's four dioceses form the MCC board of directors. A public policy committee composed of individuals appointed by the board of directors meets monthly to provide guidance to the MCC staff in implementing the general policy concerns of the bishops. The MCC office is located in Jefferson City and its staff is charged with representing the bishops before all three branches of government—legislative, executive and judicial.

The MCC reaches out to all Catholics through its Citizens' Network. Through this network, Catholics receive regular updates on legislation pending both in the Missouri General Assembly and in Congress. Any Catholic can join the Citizens' Network by contacting the MCC at 1-800-456-1679 or by completing the enrollment form online at MOcatholic.org. Network members not only respond to the MCC's calls to action, but they also provide input to the MCC on potential positions on legislation.

Positions taken by the MCC are not all of the same priority or of the same definitiveness. On issues such as abortion and euthanasia, Church teaching is very clear, and the MCC seeks policies that will uphold the sanctity of human life at all stages of development. On other issues, such as those involving health care, unemployment or how best to eradicate poverty, the MCC offers its best prudential judgment on how to further the common good. On these latter issues, the MCC recognizes that there might be more than one approach or solution to addressing the concern raised by the proposed legislation.

What is the MCC Bill Tracker?

The Missouri Catholic Conference reviews all bills filed in the Missouri General Assembly, but only takes positions on a select number of bills for priority action. You can find out the MCC's position on legislation pending in the Missouri General Assembly by visiting the MCC's website at MOcatholic.org. On the home page, click the blue button labeled "Bill Tracker."

Clicking this button will take you to a page of priority issues, such as abortion or welfare. Click on one of the issues. The page that appears will show all legislation in the current General Assembly related to this issue that the MCC is tracking.

The bill tracker will show the bill's name, the number of the bill, the bill's sponsor, a short one-sentence description of the bill, the MCC's position on the bill and a short explanation, and the last action the House or Senate took on the bill.

During the legislative session as hearings and votes are regularly taking place, the bill tracker is updated weekly to show the most recent actions.

Another helpful aspect of the bill tracker is that each bill number (such as SCS SB 369/370 in the picture on the right) is linked to the Missouri House or Senate's web page for that bill. The House or Senate's page will have more information on the bill, such as the text of the bill, which can be downloaded as a PDF, a downloadable summary of the bill and the bill's fiscal note.

Education	
A+ Schools	
Original Bill:	HB 232 Sponsor: Thomson
Amended Bill:	
Description:	Extends eligibility for the A+ Schools Program to Missouri public high school students who have an expected family contribution to college expenses at a level determined by the Department of Higher Education.
Position Statement:	Amend per position: All high school children meeting the A+ criteria, including those who attend Catholic and private high schools, should be eligible for A+ college scholarships. 02/23/11
Last Action:	02-08-11 H Public hearing completed Track Code: DSO, MCCP, PED
Blaine Amendment Repeal	
Original Bill:	HJR 10 Sponsor: Barnes
Amended Bill:	
Description:	Proposes a constitutional amendment repealing the prohibition against state funds being used to support any religion or religious school and specifies that parents have the right to choose any school.
Position Statement:	Support: Repealing the so-called "Blaine Amendment" is an important step toward ensuring that parents can exercise their right to choose a school for their children that corresponds with their convictions. 02/23/11
Last Action:	02-16-11 H Public hearing completed Track Code: DSO, MCCP, PED
School Choice Scholarships	
Original Bill:	SB 369 Sponsor: Cunningham
Amended Bill: SCS SB 369/370	
Description:	Creates a scholarship program for resident pupils of an unaccredited school district to enroll in a different school, including Catholic schools.
Position Statement:	Support: "As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental." Catechism of the Catholic Church (par 2229)
Last Action:	03-31-11 S Set on the Senate Calendar Track Code: DSO, MCCP, PED

Above is a black and white version of the bill tracker on the MCC's website. The bill tracker will provide the position of the MCC on the bill and its current status. By clicking on the bill number, such as SCS SB 369/370 above, you will go to the Missouri Senate's website and see all the information on that bill.