



# Minnesota HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE

## Human Trafficking & Faith Communities

ISSUE • RESPONSE • SOLUTION

### UNDERSTANDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING


Human trafficking is a public health, public safety and human rights violation that occurs around the world and in communities throughout Minnesota. Human trafficking includes both labor and sex trafficking, and international and domestic victims. The Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force (MNHTTF) is working to address and prevent human trafficking through a coordinated, multidisciplinary, statewide response.

### THE ISSUE: FAITH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN ANTI-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS

In recent years, Minnesota has ramped up its efforts to combat human trafficking, creating policies and passing legislation that better protects victims and facilitates the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators. Minnesota has continued to devote resources to a progressive and comprehensive statewide approach to juvenile sex trafficking, and increasing awareness about trafficking. As a result, many communities, including Minnesota's faith communities, are more knowledgeable about this issue than ever before.

A guiding principle of many faith communities, regardless of religious affiliation, is a commitment to caring for and serving the most vulnerable groups in society. Victims of human trafficking are undoubtedly among the most unrecognized, underserved, and often marginalized populations in Minnesota. The missions of many faith communities align with statewide efforts to meet the needs of victims, spread awareness, and take a proactive role in the prevention of human trafficking. A best practice in serving victims/survivors is ensuring that they are allowed to practice their own spiritual traditions and beliefs and are not forced to subscribe to any particular religion or faith tradition to receive services.

Due to their organization and structure, faith communities are currently an untapped resource in Minnesota's fight against human trafficking. When engaging Minnesota's faith communities, proper education and training, as well as the cultivation of effective partnerships with state-



funded organizations will ensure that victims are helped and not harmed, and statewide efforts are supported and not undermined.

### Education and training

Proper education and training is essential to engaging Minnesota's faith communities in the fight against human trafficking. Trainings conducted by non-experts run the risk of spreading misinformation, which can be harmful to the state's efforts to combat human trafficking, as well as cause direct or indirect harm to victims. A best practice is to establish trainings conducted by or with professionals in that field. For example, trainings for law enforcement should be conducted by law enforcement experts who are knowledgeable about investigative methods and approaches; trainings on working with victims should be conducted by service providers and anti-trafficking advocacy organizations which have a demonstrated track records of providing services to victims). Minnesota has many expert trainers that can speak to the specific context of human trafficking in the state, explain and instruct on state laws and local policies, and educate on delivery of victim-centered services. Many of these experts, including some members of the faith community are members of the Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, and serve in leadership roles on the task force (see many of the groups of Sisters on page 3).

### Effective Partnerships

Partnerships between faith communities and knowledgeable advocacy organizations ensure that efforts to address human trafficking in Minnesota are coordinated and, therefore, can effectively address needs or gaps in the community. Most faith communities operate under the guidance and leadership of their specific organization, mission, and doctrines, which generally align with statewide initiatives for the prevention and intervention of human trafficking.

Faith communities are invited to participate in the statewide task force. Without participation on the statewide task force, faith communities that wish to take on human trafficking as a social justice project or ministry run the risk of being duplicative, or missing an opportunity to fill a gap in the current response. In addition, input and direction from expert service organizations can help faith communities discover how they can best respond to this important issue and protect against unintended consequences of intervention such as re-victimization of survivors/victims or the endangerment their own members. Faith communities know the power of working together to accomplish major goals and are, therefore, uniquely poised to contribute a great deal to the current anti-trafficking movement in Minnesota.

## THE RESPONSE: SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIONS

There are many ways in which faith communities in Minnesota have successfully partnered to provide essential support to community-based advocacy organizations through volunteer service, funding, and donated housing. Faith communities have also successfully attended, sponsored, and hosted awareness events.

Model partnerships combine resources in the faith community with the expertise of community-based advocacy organizations who manage service delivery and provide case management. This model utilizes the strengths of each organization to meet the needs of victims, without jeopardizing victim safety and well-being.

### Examples of faith communities engaged in the anti-trafficking movement include:

Catholic Charities of St. Paul-Minneapolis [osj@cctwincities.org](mailto:osj@cctwincities.org)

Interfaith Children's Advocacy Network (iCan) [info@icanmn.org](mailto:info@icanmn.org)

Islamic Center of Minnesota [icm@islamiccentermn.org](mailto:icm@islamiccentermn.org)

Jewish Community Relations Council  
<http://preview2.minndakjrc.org/wp/stand-up-for-israel/justice-squared/>

Joint Religious Legislative Coalition [info@jrlc.org](mailto:info@jrlc.org)

Kwanzaa Community Church- Minneapolis [www.kwanzaachurch.org](http://www.kwanzaachurch.org)

Minnesota Conference of Catholic Bishops <http://www.mncc.org/legislation/current-priorities/>

Minnesota Council of Churches [mcc@mnchurches.org](mailto:mcc@mnchurches.org)

### Communities of Women Religious

School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mankato, MN - Jeanne Wingenter, SSND [Jwing1948@aol.com](mailto:Jwing1948@aol.com)

Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN - Michaela Hedican, OSB [mhedican@csbsju.edu](mailto:mhedican@csbsju.edu)

Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Paul - Mary White, OSB [marywhite0362@msn.com](mailto:marywhite0362@msn.com)

Sisters of St. Dominic, Twin Cities - Martha Wiegand, O.P. [mwiegand34@gmail.com](mailto:mwiegand34@gmail.com)

Sisters of St. Francis, Rochester, MN - Betty Kinney, OSF [kennyosf@aol.com](mailto:kennyosf@aol.com)

Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Twin Cities - Ann Redmond, CSJ  
[annredmond393@gmail.com](mailto:annredmond393@gmail.com)

### Transform Minnesota - The Evangelical Network/Anti-Trafficking Ministries [www.transformmn.org](http://www.transformmn.org)



## THE SOLUTION: IDENTIFYING AND FILLING GAPS

**VOLUNTEER** - Membership in Minnesota's faith communities is diverse and offers a wealth of skill and talent. Attorneys, social workers, educators, and others can donate pro bono service hours to community-based advocacy organizations. Students and ministry groups can commit to working on a service project. Faith communities are encouraged to always connect with a community-based advocacy organization before beginning any service project as advocacy organizations are in the best positions to identify areas of need and to properly train volunteers.

**DONATE** – Faith communities who are able can donate time, funds, or housing, and can host fundraising events. Many victims are in need of a fresh start, including food, clothing, help with legal fines and fees, and assistance with education and relocation expenses. In addition, business owners and leaders can commit to hiring victims who are in need of employment despite gaps in their work history or criminal records that are a result of their exploitation.

**ENVIRONMENT** - Faith communities can be a fundamental source of stability for trafficked persons by providing acceptance and a non-judgmental atmosphere. Many victims who are marginalized by society may not feel welcome in religious institutions due to a fear of rejection and condemnation. By creating and maintaining an environment that is both accepting and healing, victims will feel welcome and will be open to accessing resources and assistance.

**PREVENTION** - Faith communities should not underestimate the role they play in primary prevention. By providing worthwhile activities in which to engage youth, faith communities can combat messaging in mainstream media and other environmental factors that teach youth to objectify, devalue and use humans as objects or commodities. Faith communities can provide education programs that help victims see specific ways to better their lives and/or facilitate men's groups that hold men accountable for the harms caused by their use of and the role they play in normalizing the exploitation of women and children.

**POLICY** - Faith community members can mobilize support for anti-trafficking legislation. Members can make calls to their legislators to request their support of funding and housing bills for sex trafficking victims and homeless youth, as well as legislation that makes it easier for victims who have criminal records to obtain jobs and housing. In addition, members can encourage elected officials to dedicate funding and resources to efforts aimed at arresting and prosecuting pimps, traffickers and purchasers.

**BUSINESS PRACTICES** - Explore how your group can fight the proliferation of internet pornography and solicitation of persons for sexual exploitation. Businesses can proactively work to help provide jobs for trafficked victims, provide funding for the education of survivors, or provide education programs on trafficking for your employees. Additionally, businesses can work to ensure products they use or sell are not produced by slave labor and require employees travel to be secured in hotels and/or airlines that have signed the code of ethics against trafficking.