

petite Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania journeys



Yes, Virginia, slavery *still* exists.

Human trafficking is slavery. Long ago, recognizing that everybody deserves to be free, the United States abolished slavery. And yet, here we are, in a country and world with a flourishing human trafficking industry.

There are two major types of modern slavery: sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Other forms include organ removal and mail order brides/forced marriages.

And it happens everywhere. According to the 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report, published by the State Department, “the United States is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children—both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals—subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor, including domestic servitude. Trafficking can occur in both legal and

illicit industries or markets, including in brothels, escort services, massage parlors, strip clubs, street prostitution, hotel services, hospitality, sales crews, agriculture, manufacturing, janitorial services, construction, health and elder care, and domestic service.”*

Yes, it’s even happening in *your* community. One of the biggest challenges in addressing this issue is getting people to recognize that.

January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

Yes, it's even happening in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Erie is considered a “pass-thru” city for traffickers because of its proximity to three interstates. Handlers bring victims here to be sold multiple times before moving them to a new location.

In 2017, there were two successful trafficking prosecutions in Erie; both defendants pled guilty. Devonte Lucas was convicted of sex trafficking, and Thomas Petoff pled guilty to overseeing a multi-state trafficking scheme. Their victims were advertised for sale on the now shutdown website backpage.com. They were eventually rescued at the since demolished El Patio Motel during a sting operation. In the summer of 2019, a federal case against a suspected multi-state human trafficking ring made its way into Erie County with the raid of a local massage parlor.

These events have heightened awareness that human trafficking does indeed happen here in Erie as it does in many U.S. cities and towns, including your own. 

What we're doing about it

Since 2005 when we collaborated to host a three-day human trafficking conference, we remain dedicated to this issue. Some of our local efforts include:


We're part of **Coalition Force – Erie**, coordinated by the **Ridge School of Intelligence at Mercyhurst University**, which brings together more than 130 partners to work with government, law enforcement, and others to expand awareness of the trafficking problem and develop strategies to eradicate it.

We collaborate with the **Lutheran Women's Association** and **Gannon University's Center for Social Concerns**, who have placed more than 5,000 bars of specially wrapped soap in area hotel



rooms as part of the **SOAP (Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution) Project**. The wrapper features the National Human Trafficking Hotline number.

We worked with the **Crime Victim Center of Erie** to educate the **Erie County Drug and Alcohol Coalition** about the connection between human trafficking and drugs.

We advocate in **support of PA House Bill 1513**, which will replace existing signage in PA rest stops with updated, more relevant information and increased visibility for victims. 

For more information on our local initiatives, visit www.ssjerie.org.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania were awarded the 2019 Human Rights Award by the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church for raising awareness of human trafficking in Erie and beyond.

SSJ Federation and Human Trafficking



In 2011, the **U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph**, working with **Nix Conference and Meeting Management**, influenced the hospitality industry when the management of the **Millennium Hotel** in St. Louis, MO, host for the Federation's gathering of 900 sisters, agreed to sign the **Tourism Child-Protection Code of Conduct from ECPAT-USA**, formerly End Child Prostitution and Trafficking.

The Federation's 2016 event in Orlando focused on labor trafficking and the exploitation of farmworkers and featured a human rights and immigration attorney

and a discussion about the **Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW)**, a worker-based human rights organization. The Caribe Royale Hotel also signed the **ECPAT Code of Conduct** and agreed to only serve FairTrade coffee and tea and fairly sourced tomatoes and cucumbers.

Many SSJ congregations are members of the **U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking**, a collaborative, faith-based national network that offers education, support, survivor services, and advocacy.



what can you do?

Make a New Year's resolution to take action to help bring awareness and eliminate this modern form of slavery. Here are some suggestions:

Educate yourself. Research various sources and learn all you can about human trafficking.

Wear Blue. Wear the color blue on **Human Trafficking Awareness**



Day, January 11, and encourage others to do the same.

Download TraffickCam. This free App lets you upload photos of hotel rooms when traveling. These photos can help find perpetrators who advertise photos of victims in hotel rooms. **TraffickCam** provides a database of images that investigators can search to identify hotel room locations.

Support PA House Bill 1513. Send letters to Representative Jim Cox at 209 Ryan Office Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120-2129 asking him to consider moving this bill to a vote.

Support socially responsible businesses, including hotels that have signed the **ECPAT Code**, organizations that sell fair trade/ slave-free goods, etc.

Learn the signs. Go to **www.ssjerie.org** for more resources and a guide to recognizing human trafficking.

Call the National Human Trafficking Toll-free Hotline. Specialists are available 24/7 to take reports of potential human trafficking.

888-373-7888

one love *shared*

During this Holy season, we celebrate the greatest gift ever – that One Love shared with the world through the birth of Jesus. And we are reminded that the gifts we are given, we are given to share (*inspired by Peter 4: 10-11*).

Last year, the love you shared changed thousands of lives. Whether you made a gift, offered a helping hand or held us in prayer, you strengthened our ministries and made it possible for us to be present in new ways to neighbors in need.

Your gifts to the **Sisters of St. Joseph Mission & Ministries Foundation** provided:

- care for the Sisters
- shelter for homeless men in Erie and Meadville
- housing and mentoring for women and children striving to rebuild their lives
- career awareness education in inner-city elementary and middle schools; and
- food for the hungry throughout the Diocese and beyond.

But our work is far from done. The needs of the dear neighbor continue to grow.

That's why, as you make your year-end gifts, we ask you to consider the **SSJ Mission & Ministries Foundation** annual fund. Your gift – of any size – will help us to continue sharing love and hope with those who need it most.

If a gift is not possible at this time, please keep the dear neighbor in your prayers. And as always, we will do the same for you.

“Even a seemingly small act of generosity can grow into something far beyond what we could ever ask or imagine – the creation of a community of love in this world and beyond this world..”

— Henri Nouwen

Use the enclosed envelope or **DONATE ONLINE** at www.ssjerie.org

introducing *petite Journeys!*

To be timely and responsive to the needs of the day, we're introducing *petite Journeys!* This new format allows us to connect with you more frequently, on a smaller scale, and it provides for timely news and opportunities for action on social justice issues. It also allows us to be better stewards of resources. We're calling this scaled-down newsletter *petite Journeys* as a nod to our French roots. We will continue to publish one full-length issue of *Journeys* each year, which will include the SSJ Mission and Ministries Foundation annual report.



*SSJ LEADERSHIP: (l-r)
Carol Morehouse, SSJ;
Mary Drexler, SSJ;
Phyllis McCracken, SSJ*



**National
Human Trafficking
Hotline**

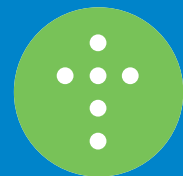
**1-888-373-7888
TEXT 233733
(BEFREE)**

January is human trafficking awareness month. For years, Sisters of St. Joseph congregations have worked to raise awareness and support initiatives to eradicate this crime and tend to the needs of victims and survivors. We are dedicating this first issue of *petite Journeys* to this pressing issue and we encourage you to help us in responding to this need.

As always, everything we do, whether it be preparing this newsletter or ministering to end human trafficking, is done to bring about unity. Our Christmas message, which is included in this issue, reflects that.

SSJ Leadership

we
remember



Deceased Sisters:

Mary Francis Becker, SSJ

August 20, 2019

Mary Margaret "Peggy" Balizet, SSJ

August 29, 2019

Deceased Associates:

Susan Hamric

August 14, 2019

Ronald Miller

August 26, 2019

Ruby Schaaf

September 24, 2019

Jean Hausmann

October 26, 2019

Karl Ballard

November 5, 2019

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*one love
one heart*

Our prayer
this Christmas ~
that all may be one.