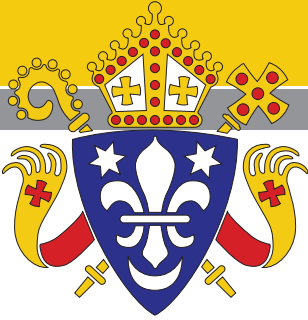


COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Church and Law Enforcement in Partnership

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Trafficking in women from the experience of Sisters Adorers' charism

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Good Morning,

Good morning to you, one and all! In the first place, on behalf of my Congregation, I express the joy of having the opportunity to share in this meeting some of the experiences, from the Charism of Sisters Adorers, as a response to the grave reality of human trafficking, particularly on "trafficking in women for sexual exploitation."

Today, I would like to share with you some of my personal experiences. I have lived for many years, very close to this reality, living daily, with young women from different countries, who have suffered this serious problem, and I know that this reality is not indifferent to the world of religious life either. Many are the congregations who collaborate by providing alternatives to welcome specific individuals, who are victims of this crime. Besides, together with other groups, many are working on prevention and to promote actions of denunciation.

Our Congregation of Sisters Adorers – Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament and of and of Charity - is called, by charism, to give concrete answers to address and combat this serious problem of human trafficking, specifically directing our gaze and projects at the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation. Our mission in the Church is expressed in two words: Adoration / Liberation.

Adore Jesus in the Eucharist continually, in spirit and truth.

Liberate and promote women exploited by prostitution or are victims of other enslaving situations.

Therefore, "breathing" in our Eucharistic spirituality, we, Sisters Adorers, are called to gaze at the world from the Eucharist. We find the same God, whom we adore in the Sacrament, in each of the young victims of trafficking or other forms of slavery, to whom we are sent.

In the mid-nineteenth century Spain, Saint Maria Micaela of the Most Holy Sacrament, our Foundress, in the personal contact with a young girl, "the girl of the shawl" discovered a strong social reality: "prostitution". This reality had a great impact on her and from that moment she begins a journey of search in order to give a response to these young people. Little by little, she tries to shape and bring alive the Charism that the Spirit granted her.

From that time to the present day - over 158 years - , the mission of Sisters Adorers has been unfolding and embodying in projects and activities that respond to the needs and to the new forms of exploitation of women in every age and country. They, the women, are those who "lead us forward" to face the new realities of exclusion and slavery.

As we all know, human beings are trafficked for exploitation with different purposes – for sexual exploitation, as domestic workers, employees in agriculture, for begging, and so on. Women and girls are the most vulnerable to being exploited in the complex world of prostitution. And it is there, almost without realizing, that we observe this reality, "novel" in its forms, although not new in our world: the trafficking in women for sexual exploitation.

Right now our Congregation is present in 23 countries in Europe, Asia, South America and the Caribbean and Africa. We carry out 143 social projects, 40 Schools and 15 residences for young women. In one form or another, our projects "touch" the reality of human trafficking; however, since we are focussing specifically on the topic at hand, we will centre our attention only on those that give responses to this situation. Since

1995, we carry out projects of support, welcome and comprehensive attention to adolescents, young girls and women from different countries and cultural backgrounds, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The response we offer, undoubtedly, is conditioned by the way of understanding this serious social problem; therefore, it is important to explain how we understand and from where we face the phenomenon of trafficking in women for the purpose of exploitation as well as what approach we believe should be taken to tackle the problem.

1. HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND THIS PROBLEM?

We understand that human trafficking is an offence against human dignity and a grave violation of Human Rights. It violates basic principles and rights such as right to life, physical integrity, security, personal dignity and development, freedom of movement as well as the right for not being subjected to slavery, servitude or degrading treatment. The victims of this crime go through visibly cruel, inhuman and degrading situations that place them in servitude and slavery.

2. FROM WHERE DO WE FACE THIS PROBLEM?

As Sisters Adorers, we face the reality of women victims of trafficking, from a specific spirituality and pedagogy: The Eucharistic Spirituality and the Adorers' Pedagogy and Culture, sustained on the following pillars:

- **ANNOUNCEMENT. Announce that liberation is possible**, because there is a liberator and we have experienced it. For us, liberation means having the possibility of achieving one's own identity and not being conditioned to do so. A trafficked woman is violated in her fundamental rights: freedom, integrity, dignity, and is bound and forced to perform an unwanted activity.
- **LIBERATION**, that is, for us, the axis of life and action and that leads us to discover our own evil, our slaveries as well as our possibilities of life and regeneration, buried deep within our realities. Living with a woman victim of trafficking enables us to become companions on the way in a process of growth that goes through "unshackling the enslaved freedom" and encountering the most profound truth, people who are free, with possibilities of change and choice of a new life (Jn 3:3).

For this, some essentials principles:

- Educate in freedom and love. "Without punishment or harshness" (St Maria Micaela).
- Respect the young girls.
- Believe in them.
- Enable every woman to feel herself protagonist of her own process: "just for one girl I would give my life" (St Maria Micaela).
- Ability to enter into relationships, promote and create a family atmosphere.
- Relationships of closeness that educate and help them grow.
- Understanding and kindness with the girls.
- Ascending morals resulting from a coherent life
- Courage and fearlessness when faced with the reality.

- **TEAMWORK.** From our reality of consecrated women “sent to this mission” and together with the lay people who work and collaborate in it, it is essential to work as a team. We – religious and laity –, the agents in this project of liberation, want to situate ourselves boldly and creatively in favour of women victims. The centre of our interventions must always be “women”. We try to facilitate a healing encounter that generates life and this requires and assumes “professionalism and mysticism”.
- **NET-WORKING.** Based on the knowledge of the social reality in the locality where we are situated, we make use of the existing public and private services. We do not want to multiply services, we work in co-ordination with public and private Institutions and especially Net-working, at all levels.
- The complex reality of trafficking moves from well-structured and organized platforms of action. Addressing this problem requires, therefore, a good net-working. Women victims of trafficking hail from different countries and cultures; any intervention has to go through a well co-ordinated work and net-working between the different agents of intervention and the realities from which they come; for this, it is necessary to co-ordinate with organizations among the countries of origin, transit and destination.
- **SOCIAL DENUNCIATION.** To tackle the problem at its roots, in addition to an intervention of comprehensive and direct acceptance of the woman victim and her reality, we need to have a prophetic attitude, which leads us to join other groups and individuals to denounce situations and structures of evil that generate inequality, violence and impoverishment and continuously we touch the effects in the mission. For this action also it is important to work in co-ordination and networking, as in the previous point (Participation in planned activities, mass media, magazines, videos, etc.).
- **SENSITIZATION** as transverse action. At all levels, starting with the nearest. Try to have an impact on the public and private Institutions related to the individual victims of this crime. Since the basis of all this strong social reality is the real situation of our world: Inequalities, injustice, war, violence, corruption, poverty, “feminization of poverty”, gender inequality, prejudice, etc., we cannot be silent companions on the way; before so much injustice, we need to create common spaces for critical reflection and revive our forms of denunciation and collaborate in the transformation of Society.
- An appropriate response requires of us **FORMATION.** This reality by its nature is changeable, it requires of us continuous and updated formation and recycling, and has to be programmed on the basis of regular assessment and reflection and critical analysis of the problem and the responses given. At the same time, to be bold and give appropriate responses to the new situations that arises.
- These are some of the main lines of action that demonstrate how we understand and try to live this specific reality, to which we are sent by mission.

3. HOW DO WE APPROACH THIS TOPIC?

From the perspective of human rights. And, faced with a multi-problematic reality only a **COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTION** is likely to achieve significant changes, that will allow them access to their fundamental rights, as persons and as women.

4. WHAT INTERVENTION MODEL DO WE HAVE?

Although each program, project or activity attempts to intervene by updating and adapting it to the country or concrete reality, for women victims of trafficking, in the Congregation we carry out fairly elaborate and systematized Projects of intervention.

In all of them, we begin with the real need of the young woman, through a process of individualized and comprehensive intervention, so that she may succeed to integrate herself into a desired social reality, as a free, independent person and with the possibility of being an agent of change in her own environment.

At the centre WOMAN in her concrete reality

Women's needs: Comprehensive support:

- Housing
- Protection
- Coverage (Insurance...)
- Revenue (returns/proceeds...)
- Legal Attention
- Social and Labour Insertion
- Psychological Care
- Medical Care

Some aspects and more specific characteristics of this model of intervention:

- Voluntary acceptance of initiating a way out.
- The young woman has to be the protagonist in her own process.
- Individualized attention, respect to the rhythm of each one.
- Processual: through stages marked by specific objectives. Usually with different structures for each of the stages: Contact, emergency shelter, shelter homes and insertion flats.
- Comprehensive care from the various specialized disciplines: Physical-psychological-socialspiritual.

I dare to call it a specific methodology from the "shared table". We, all educators and young women, try to achieve the objectives outlined from a very characteristic field, which is the "everyday life". Living with the young women, in a family atmosphere, in small groups - which we call "Casa Familia / Family Home" – is a continuous challenge:

For them "Young women":

Daily living, along with other people and in relationship with them, promotes and enables the recovery of lost trust. (Sharing spaces, working in groups, confrontation, etc.)

One feels at home, goes on acquiring and integrating habits from active participation in the same. (Specific tasks in the house, time-tables, workshops, meals, leisure time and entertainment, etc.)

In a progressive manner and being accompanied, the young woman gradually recovers trusted and normalized contacts with the environment. (Group outings, language study, training, job search, etc.)

She gradually recovers the lost autonomy that in some way she tries out in the insertion flats. (Rehearsals of an autonomous life and responsible management of time and financial resources, etc.).

To us “educators”:

It enables us to RECREATE life, our life-styles. It demands us to cast “new wine in new vessels”, it invites us once again to make the journey with those of Emmaus, to let His Word enlighten the experience of our lives and inflame our hearts in order to recognize Him in the “breaking of bread”, at each point along the way, in each person with whom we live, in each reality that we discover.

5. CONCLUSIÓN

“The majority of women who are victims of this crime, who receive a specialized support, during the time necessary, rebuild their lives and regain their autonomy and the personal project that one day made them take the decision to leave their country”. Our task as men and women followers of Jesus is a matter of practices of liberation, healing, re-structuring, of life. We cannot remain on the sidelines of the road or as bystanders... We need to question our way of being in the reality and say with Jeremiah: “wipe away the tears; there is hope for the future”.

Thank you for this meeting, all of us together we can make a reality in our lives the feast of inclusion, the Lord’s Supper, in a pluralistic and complex world. It is a challenge that day after day we continue weaving networks and go out to the waysides to tell everyone: “Come to the Feast”, there is room for ALL.

Thank you very much.

