

## KENTUCKYONE HEALTH AND CATHOLIC CHARITIES

# Allies in Fight Against Human Trafficking

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“**M**y father was a wandering Aramean” (Deuteronomy 26:5). Year after year, Jews around the world repeat these words as part of their Passover observance to commemorate the exodus from ancient Egyptian slavery. The words reflect the stories of generations of Jews who have been chased out of their homes, again and again, from Crusade to pogrom to Holocaust. The Bible’s clear command — love the stranger, for you yourselves were strangers — forms the basis of the Jewish people’s advocacy for refugees and immigrants of all kinds.

Jewish Hospital, part of KentuckyOne Health, was founded in 1903, with the mission of *Tikkun Olam* (the healing and saving of the world), as a hospital where Jewish refugees and immigrants could receive care regardless of their ability to pay, and where Jewish doctors were allowed to practice. This inclusive mission quickly expanded to include all people in need of healing, and in the 1950s, Jewish Hospital proudly became the first racially integrated hospital in the Louisville area, employing physicians and serving patients regardless of race, religion or nationality.

Jewish Hospital’s mission of *Tikkun Olam* found a natural partnership with the local Catholic hospitals started by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. In 2005, they came together to form Jewish Hospital & St. Mary’s Healthcare (JHSMH), which in 2012 became KentuckyOne Health and included seven Catholic Health Initiatives-sponsored Catholic hospitals from the eastern and central parts of Kentucky. KentuckyOne Health works closely with Kentucky’s Catholic Charities and with the Louisville-based Jewish Family and Career Services to fulfill its mission to care for the underserved, with a particular emphasis on refu-

gees and immigrants, as well as all those in need.

KentuckyOne Health’s shared core values and mission are reflected in several initiatives that bring together both communities’ resources to do sacred work. One such example is a response to what Pope Francis has called “a shameful and intolerable crime,” namely human trafficking. KentuckyOne Health and Catholic Charities have partnered to fight this crime, reflecting Judaism’s and Catholicism’s shared commitment to end slavery for all of humanity.

Sadly, recent statistics show that in Kentucky, just under 700 potential trafficking cases have been reported to state agencies since early 2008 and 71 percent of them involved reports of potential child victims. Although the majority of both potential and identified victims appear to be domestic (i.e., U.S. citizens or permanent residents), at least 100 cases have involved foreign nationals, from as many as 27 countries representing most major parts of the world. Although the majority of reports have involved sex trafficking, there have been 87 identified cases of labor trafficking and as many as 13 cases involving both sex and labor trafficking.



Polaris Project, the Washington, D.C.-based anti-human trafficking agency that operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline, released a report in March 2017 entitled “The Typology of Modern Slavery: Defining Sex and Labor Trafficking in the United States.” In the report, Polaris identifies 25 types of human trafficking prevalent in the United States, based on analysis of more than 23,000 cases of trafficking documented through the National Human Trafficking Hotline between December 2007 and December 2016.

Identified among the human trafficking cases in Kentucky are escort services, illicit massage, outdoor solicitation, residential and domestic work, traveling sales crews, restaurants and food service, peddling and begging, agriculture and animal husbandry, and personal sexual servitude, among others. They reflect the varieties of exploitation in both commercial sex and labor services, which are so often hidden in the seams of our communities, including those in the most rural areas.

Catholic Charities of Louisville is the federally funded comprehensive service provider for sex and labor trafficking in Kentucky. Catholic Charities provides training on human trafficking statewide in order to raise awareness and better identify human trafficking in Kentucky communities. When cases are identified, Catholic Charities assists with screening, emergency housing, interpreters, legal advocacy, case management, basic needs (food, clothing), immigration legal services, mental health services, tattoo/scar removal, and other needs.

Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services has been resettling refugees in the Louisville Metro Areas since 1975. It operates as the official representative of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops in the state of Kentucky, as one of the seven U.S. voluntary agencies that have cooperative agreements with the United States government to resettle refugees.

Together, KentuckyOne Health and Catholic Charities work to ensure that these refugees are able to get their basic health care needs met, but they also address the urgent need to identify and help individuals being trafficked. Being new to

the United States, often fleeing persecution and even trafficking from their homeland, many refugees and immigrants are particularly vulnerable. Some may come to the United States willingly, while others may enter under duress. Still others may be trying to protect loved ones who are being

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threatened in their home countries. Such realities create an especially dire context for refugees and immigrants being trafficked, many of whom don't speak English and don't know their rights.

Inspired by our shared Catholic and Jewish values, both organizations have come together to develop a policy and set of resources for working with victims of human trafficking, as well as to create education and training for health care providers, law enforcement, social workers and others. KentuckyOne Health and Catholic Charities also serve together on the city and state task force to combat human trafficking and raise awareness about how it affects a variety of populations, including refugees and immigrants living in Kentucky.

Every summer, KentuckyOne Health works with several community partners to organize a back-to-school health fair for refugee and immigrant children and their families, providing physicals, immunizations and health screenings and connecting them with health care providers.

Catholic Charities provides resources to refugee and resettled families through its Kentucky Office for Refugees division.

One particularly sacred opportunity to partner together occurred during an Interfaith Passover Seder to Combat Human Trafficking, which was



organized by KentuckyOne Health, in collaboration with Catholic Charities and the KristyLove Foundation, a survivor-led shelter based in Louisville that works to rescue trafficking victims. This seder served to provide education and awareness to the broader community about the issue, to mobilize participants to act, both in terms of providing support to organizations doing this work, as well as to advocate on a state level for justice for victims.

Passover is an especially fitting time to draw attention to trafficking, because it is a time to commemorate the liberation of the Children of Israel from ancient Egyptian bondage. Every year, as the Jewish community celebrates Passover, they read the Talmudic injunction: “*B’chol Dor* — In every generation, we are commanded to feel as if we ourselves were liberated from slavery.”

Sadly, in our day and age, there are far too many people who experience slavery in a very literal way, while countless others have no idea that this phenomenon even exists. Even more tragically, many people are still caught up in the mindset of blaming the victim. For this reason, the need to share these all-too-real stories is all the more pressing.

THE STORY of a 14-year-old girl, who arrived in this country as an infant and whose mother was killed in a car crash. She is now in her fourth foster home, after being in two residential facilities. She was molested at age 3 by her foster parents, who were addicted to OxyContin and would exchange her for sex with neighbors and their drug dealer to get more drugs. She frequently runs away from foster care, has attempted suicide twice and recently tested positive for 10 drugs in her system. She was treated for sexually transmitted infections after returning from three weeks on the street with her “boyfriend” who encourages her to have sex for money.

THE STORY of a 29-year-old man from northern Africa, who was forced to work in the business of a family friend. He was suffering from tuberculosis, yet made to work under threats of violence for 16-20 hours a day, every day, for no pay. He was not allowed to have contact with his fam-

ily in his home country. His identity documents were taken from him. He was allowed access to medical treatment only when his tuberculosis was so advanced that the trafficker feared he would die.

THE STORY of an 11-year-old girl from Central America, who was sold by her parents to a man and woman who brought her to the United States as a domestic servant. She was made to sleep on the floor in the room with the three younger children whom she took care of every day. She had to cook and clean every day, getting up at 5 a.m. and going to bed after midnight. Although she made all the food at the house, she was not permitted to eat the food she made. She was allowed to leave the house only for school, which is the only place where she had access to food. When she started her period, she was not allowed to use feminine hygiene products that the wife had in the house...instead she had to make do with whatever she could find (bits of clothing, etc.), or hide products she could occasionally get at school. She endured frequent sexual abuse by the husband.

THE STORY of a 17-year-old young man whose parents advertised him online for sex acts from the age of 3. While this began in his home country, it continued when he and his family arrived in the United States. They moved around often, and he did not attend school regularly. Men would come to his parents’ house, and the boy would be given a variety of drugs by the buyers who would rape him. His parents told him that if he didn’t comply, they would send him back to his war-torn country and he would surely die. He jumped out of a third-story window to escape and was found by a passerby, naked and barely alive, with broken arms and legs.

These haunting stories, with only a few details changed to protect the individuals’ anonymity, are just a few of the trafficking horrors that happen regularly in our country. Although they happen to American-born individuals as well, refugees and immigrants are particularly vulnerable. As

their hosts and their neighbors, each of us must respond to the moral imperative to fight this “shameful and intolerable crime,” as Pope Francis called it.

Born into an immigrant family, the 19th-century Jewish poet, Emma Lazarus, wrote, “Until all are free, none are free.” These words resonate as a call to action. Lazarus also penned the words inscribed upon the Statue of Liberty — the call that is firmly anchored in our Catholic and Jewish heritages, and etched upon the American psyche as illustrative of our core values of reverence, compassion and integrity:

“Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”  
How many more years will it take until her words become reality for all people?

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**MARISSA CASTELLANOS** works with Catholic Charities of Louisville as its Human Trafficking Program manager. She provides training throughout Kentucky, assists in developing and maintaining statewide human trafficking coalitions and task forces, and works directly with identified victims of trafficking.

#### RESOURCES

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