

# Gathering of Coordinators for Human Trafficking Conference

Ingenbohl, Switzerland

September 18–26, 2017

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Memory is one of the most captivating gifts that God can give to us. This became clear to me when I turned back the pages of my mind and thought about why I am so passionate about Human Sex Trafficking and getting rid of this heinous crime today.

I recently returned home from an International Human Sex Trafficking Conference at the motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Switzerland. Nine years ago, I was in that same place to attend a General Chapter of our Congregation. During that chapter, our superiors had the foresight to ask Sister Eugenia Bonetti from Italy to come and talk to us about this topic. She reminded us that we now have many co-workers to take care of the needs in our schools and hospitals, and so God may be calling us to a new ministry. We can now meet the need of the times by making people aware of the dangers to men, women and children who are being lured into the crime of Sex Trafficking.



An international conference was called, asking us to “**Stand Up For Human Dignity.**” Our facilitator took us through exercises to help us become acquainted with one another and to know a bit of background in this area in our own countries. (We were twelve Sisters living on four continents) We gave the statistics from each of our provinces/vicariates as to how many Sisters we represent, how involved each province is, and how each of us is involved in Anti-Human Sex Trafficking. We then had a silent meditation in which we each took a colored scarf and held it in our hands. Each said a personal prayer and we then tied our scarves together and laid them on the floor around the center of our circle as a focal point for the conference.



We spent the next days explaining what Human Sex Trafficking looks like in our country. Some of the information I gathered follows. Germany, Austria and Switzerland have legalized prostitution in their countries. Forced marriage is prevalent in West Europe. In the Czech Republic, we heard that this country is a transient area where victims are brought in from other countries. They have many nightclubs, and Sisters go to these clubs to talk to the girls who are being used by criminal police, very often for voodoo rituals. In Uganda, child

marriage is prevalent, and pimps buy humans for organ trade, which is used for witchcraft rituals. Neglected children, school dropouts, and homeless young women are taken for marriages. There are some established laws, but the government has yet to comply with them. Because so many children have simply disappeared, 80 congregations gathered in Nairobi to be educated so they could work together. Primarily, they work in schools so one is available to work on the streets. Finances are almost non-existent. Brazil, a bit closer to home, told us that many of their victims are brought into the country from the north. They work with women ages 16-17 and 22-32. They are women with little education, 59% black people and 40% white. Pornography is rampant, and organ removal is not uncommon. They also have to fight against illegal adoptions.

Sister Tresa Paul from India has become a civil lawyer and works with cases in Delhi, giving a prophetic response to the mission of justice. Basically, she is a social worker, working among the very poor. In India, they also give their services gratis, as we do here in the USA. From her talk and from my experience, I have deduced the fact that Father Theodosius not only left behind dilapidated buildings and large debts, but most of all he left us a rich charisma. He gave us a history of educational awareness as



he creatively went out to make a significant difference in the culture of his time. Tresa told us there are good laws that speak of the equality of men and women but in reality, this is not played out. She has written a book to encourage women to break their silence. She and I exchanged the books we had written, and that simple act has cemented a deep relationship between us – she a young woman and me an older one, now walking the journey together on a road that stretches thousands of miles apart, but our footsteps remain in sync. Her book will eventually be in our provincial library. Our journey is so similar, giving us a prophetic response to a demanding mission of our community. A view from

Eastern Europe (Czech Republic and Croatia) gave us a glimpse of the street work being done there. Sisters go in groups of two or three into nightclubs as a Caritas Group. They become the church on the street. S. Viktoria from Croatia translates informative letters for her community, leads adoration and prayer time for victims, and prepares prayers and materials for the Sisters. She went to Rome in 2007



and became attached to an international conference, attending the first general assembly of RENATE in Poland. She has talked on radio and written letters to local newspapers. She has talked to 40 young priests and to deacons and after each talk, has adoration in the church. At the end of her presentation, she remarked that, in their country, they need a working committee, not just one person.



I was grateful to be the last one to give a presentation, because it seemed to me that our situation was very different. The Sisters were impressed with how much we are doing in our province; of course, I am the only Sister who is working almost full time in this ministry and the only one who has an “assistant” (S. Kathy Lange). Our primary thrust here in the USA is making people aware of this horrible crime. Kathy joined me in July 2017, and we have just finished our 72<sup>nd</sup> presentation to churches of various denominations, civic communities, professional groups of health care and anyone who asks us to come and speak to them. We do not ask for a specific fee but only for gas money and sometimes to defray expenses for printed handouts. For any donations given, we encourage them to make out checks to **Eye Heart World**, an organization that is dedicated to the safe house in Brown County where females from ages 18-25 can come for an intense rehabilitation program of 9-15 months. In the coming months, you will hear more about this home, called **The Rose Home**, so named because a rose is one of the greatest beauties

of God's creation. When it opens up, we can enjoy the breathtaking beauty of God.



On one day, Lea Ackerman came to talk about SOLWODI (Solidarity with Women in Distress) She had gone to Africa as a teacher and then worked in a bank before joining this group. She told us that women in Kenya are very powerful but still experience much injustice. SOLWODI in Germany today has 18 counseling centers with different communities of Sisters working in these centers. Eighty-five Sisters are now working with 2,300 women from 104 countries, many brought from Turkey who are shamed in a patriarchal society. Today, many are also coming from Romania and Bulgaria. In Africa they do not speak about their torture but they can tell of it through dance or acting out. Here self-defense courses are offered. Our coordinators from Hungary and Middle Europe speak of the same type of work with SOLWODI.



One day we went on a field trip as an extension of our information, by taking a bus to a safe house in Allschwil, Switzerland. This is a large home in the middle of the city, where our Sisters house victims of Human Sex Trafficking and domestic violence. Primarily, they offer safety and a place for peace and joy. I did not get the impression that they use skills to rehabilitate as we do here in Brown County in our safe house. We were given a tour and then told the history of the home before we were treated to a lovely dinner eaten outside

on their extensive lawn in the backyard. That evening, we drove to Bremgarten and had a visit with our Sisters. They had us make our own pizzas, rolling out our dough and filling the pizza with a variety of toppings before they put them into a very large outdoor oven to bake. Our field trip gave us time to enjoy one another, see another part of the country and relax so we could join in the work of sharing Human Sex Trafficking for the last few days with renewed vigor.

On the last day, as we “stood up for human dignity,” we shared what we would need to continue our ministry. My thoughts are contained in the following: We feel that the greatest concern at this time is to work with the Johns/Buyers of Sex. This slavery is a business, and like all businesses, there is a demand and a supply. If we can eradicate the demand, there will be no need for a supply. I need to continue my research efforts every day. I will do this through internet articles. In our country, we need to work toward stiffer fines and jail sentences for the buyers of sex and for traffickers. I will continue to ask the Sisters of the USA to work for stricter laws, and instead of putting up photos on posters of the victims, it is time to put up photos of pimps and johns so people will help find them



Each coordinator was asked to develop materials from what we gained together at this conference. This is the reason for sharing the news of the conference with you. It tells you that it was so good for all of us to be together, giving us a new feeling of our internationality. Now, as I go out to give presentations, I have a much broader vision of the worldwide disease, which harms every part of our world. An intensive conference has come to an end, but my life and the relationships that I have renewed, as well as newfound ones, have enriched my vision of ministry. Most of all, it has deepened my religious commitment to our charism and our way of life as Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross.