



**Front: American
Optometric Association
logo for their program to
educate their members
on human trafficking**

MEDICAL MISSIONARIES OF MARY

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Fall
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Please do not be afraid of tenderness! God's style can be said in three words: closeness, compassion, and tenderness. God is like that—close, compassionate, and tender. Be like this with others.

(Pope Francis)

Dear friends,

Tenderness can mean the quality of being gentle, loving, or kind, or a feeling of pain or soreness when touched. It can be considered “soft” rather than “strong.” But I have found that tenderness and compassion are the foundation of much of the good work being done in our world today. In the struggle to care for survivors and end human trafficking, this is so true.

In this newsletter I share with you the evolving nature of our MMM commitment to work against the trafficking of human persons. As you know MMM is committed to healing and providing health care in places where it is not available. In the course of doing that, our sisters and staff become aware in the face of a person, in the listening to their story, of someone who is being trafficked and the compassion for that reality has led over the years to choices to work against the horror of trafficking. When I asked the sisters to update me for this newsletter, I had such a response! It is clear our MMM sisters have responded and joined in these efforts and want you to know about it!

While it is true that the industry of trafficking in human persons is the second largest criminal industry in the world, it is also true that catholic sisters are committed to using their collective experience, influence, and faith to work against this reality. It is not easy, it will not happen quickly, but it is God's work to restore dignity and freedom to human beings and to heal their pain. So, MMM have joined with other Congregations of Sisters who now form a worldwide collaboration working locally to educate, bring awareness, advocate for laws, and care for those who are affected. And that group of thousands of catholic sisters join with government agencies, other non-profit organizations, and churches to work against trafficking.

But it all begins with a personal encounter, listening to the story of another person who has been trafficked and abused, and gradually being moved with tenderness and compassion to find ways to respond. For MMM, we have the mentoring of Sr. Blandina Ryan who brought the reality home to all of us in her work in Benin City in Nigeria, which is the center of the trafficking world in that country. Now, Sr. Justina Odunukwe has assumed responsibility and informs us, “Human trafficking affects the most vulnerable in society: women of all ages, children, the handicapped, the poorest, and those who come from broken families and from difficult situations in society.” It is a terrible abuse of the dignity of the human person. Each year thousands of innocent men, women, and children are victims of exploitative labor, sexual exploitation, and organ trafficking.”

Then we have Srs. Isabelle Smythe and Maura O'Donohue who were engaged in this collaboration in Ireland and Europe. Sr. Mary O'Malley is a pioneer in this work in Kenya and East Africa and has done so much to bring awareness and help to survivors of trafficking. And here in the USA, Sr. Kay Lawlor was part of the team from a Boston Area safe house and our community in Somerville is engaged locally in the Boston Anti-Trafficking Coalition, which includes five Congregations, as well as our national organization, the Alliance to End Human Trafficking.

As you read this newsletter, you will learn there are amazing people collaborating, networking, and trying very hard to respond. MMM is part of this movement and struggle. We can only be there because you are there with us. Together, we are the hands, minds, feet, eyes, and heart of Jesus trying to live his message.

Gratefully yours,



Sister Joanne

Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM
Development Director

A Story of Collaboration Born Out of Compassion

This is only part of the story, but it does open your mind and heart to the efforts being made in our world to help those who are trafficked. In 2000, the United Nations adopted the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. This was the first agreement that acknowledged modern-day slavery, as well as the possibility of men being victims of human trafficking. The definition was also expanded to include organ harvesting, slavery, and forced labor. In March 2007, in an effort to promote a communal global approach to fighting human trafficking, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launched the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT). This initiative highlights a renewed commitment by world leaders to combat human trafficking. As of December 4, 2007, 116 nations had signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.



Formally established in 2009 with the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) as an international initiative against human trafficking and exploitation, Talitha Kum is the Network of Consecrated Life Against Human Trafficking. It promotes collaboration among networks of catholic sisters organized at national, regional, and continental level, actively supporting victims, survivors, and people at risk. MMM was a part of the formation of Talitha Kum.

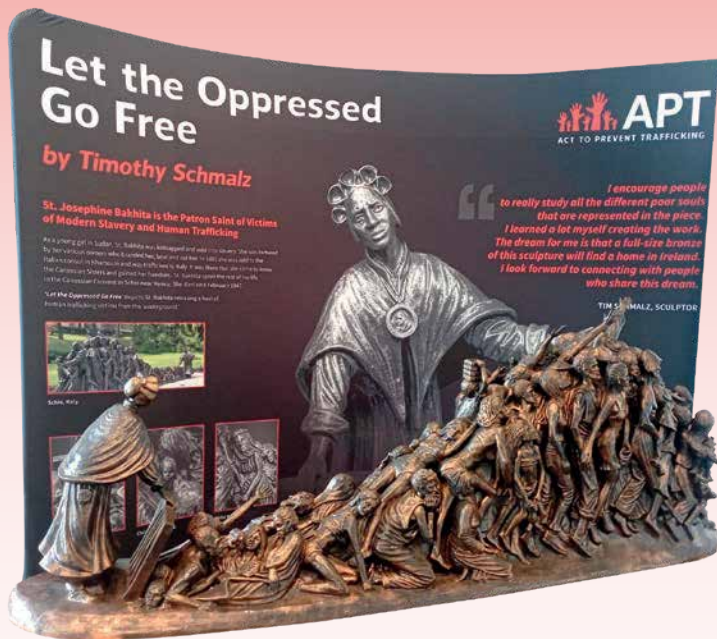
Our Sisters in Ireland have been working with other religious communities through an organization called APT (Act to Prevent Trafficking), which they were involved in establishing back in 2005. In the early days APT worked hard to get legislation against human trafficking on the Irish statute books, and later to criminalize the purchase of sex, which is a key factor in the demand for trafficking. Most recently, there is also great concern for the plight of migrant fishermen and laborers on boats who are at

risk of being captured by traffickers. MMMs were also very active in the establishment in 2009 of RENATE, the Europe-wide network of people working to raise awareness about trafficking and to support those who are survivors of this crime.



Moving to East Africa, founded in 2006 as a response to an emerging human trafficking dynamic in Kenya and the sub-region of East Africa, the MMM Counter Human Trafficking (MMM CHT) unit started work in the Mukuru slums of Nairobi, Kenya. In the subsequent years, the volume and complexity relating to trafficking in persons grew in leaps and bounds. So, Counter Human Trafficking Trust-East Africa (CHTEA) was founded in 2006 to help rescue, rehabilitate, and reintegrate victims of human trafficking in East Africa. CHTEA, based in Nairobi, works closely with other like-minded partners toward eradicating human trafficking in its counties of operations. It is our Sister Mary O'Malley MMM who was and is the inspiration for this work. CHTEA works closely with RAHT (Religious Against Human Trafficking), which was born from the AOSK (Association of Catholic Sisterhoods in Kenya).

And now to West Africa, we learn that the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious (NCWR) is a body of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life recognized and approved by Rome. Among its outstanding projects is the involvement in the fight against human trafficking, which birthed the center called COSUDOW (Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Women) on April 18, 1999. The running of COSUDOW rotates among its members for a three-year term and is renewable. The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (DC) completed their term on May 1, 2024. We thank them for their incredible work in the anti-human trafficking work in Benin City. MMM was called upon to run COSUDOW during the Major Superiors meeting earlier this year and Sr. Justina Odunukwe was asked to take over the running of COSUDOW as its coordinator. Stepping into the role as coordinator of COSUDOW in May 2024 was both challenging and humbling for Sr. Justina. Presently,



Presently, there are four survivors in tertiary institutions studying in different fields of their choice. COSUDOW educates and enlightens the general public, families, and the youth about the menace of human trafficking and irregular migration.”

And finally, in the USA, in April 2013, fifteen sisters who were engaged in anti-trafficking work throughout the U.S. were invited to gather in Washington, DC. Sister Margaret Nacke, CSJ, from Concordia, KS, and Sister Ann Scholz, SSND, Associate Director for Social Mission, LCWR, were instrumental in convening this group. This initial three-day gathering was made possible with the leadership and partnership of Alexia Kelley, president, and CEO of FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities) and the financial support of several FADICA members.

there are three MMMs working at COSUDOW: Sr. Brigid Egbuna is the shelter manager, Sr. Ukachi Ibeh is the secretary, and Sr. Justina is the coordinator. Her journey of combating human trafficking began in 2014 during her sabbatical leave at the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, California, USA. It was there that she discovered that Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination country and that Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, had the highest number of trafficked persons in Nigeria. It was an eye opener that shook her to her core and ignited a passion within Justina to change direction from working as a hospital administrator. When she returned in 2015 after her sabbatical, she requested and was granted permission to work as a volunteer for one year with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficked in Persons (NAPTIP), a government agency responsible for anti-human trafficking in Nigeria. And this is how Justina prepared for her new role at COSUDOW.

Over the years, COSUDOW has sheltered more than 2,000 victims of human trafficking and has rehabilitated, empowered, and reintegrated more than 500 victims. Sr. Justina tells us, “Our primary responsibility at COSUDOW is to provide support to human trafficking survivors by listening to their stories, consulting them in decision-making processes, and tracing their families. It is not a simple matter given the traumas they have suffered. We make sure they have access to medical care, offering them psycho-social support and providing spiritual accompaniment through the services of the Jesuit Agape Community of St. Joseph’s Parish, Benin City. To enable them to be self-sustainable and to have a means of livelihood, the young women are trained in any skill of their choice. Rehabilitation and reintegration follows after working with them for 6 to 9 months.

While in Washington, these sisters met with representatives from the Polaris Project and several government officials who were engaged in anti-trafficking work. They realized the benefits of joining their efforts to become a national network and the public, corporate voice for U.S. sisters on the issue of human trafficking. In 2016, U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking became a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization governed by a board of directors. The membership has grown to include 100+ congregations of women religious, Catholic coalitions working to end human trafficking and several individual partners. In 2018, USCSAHT hosted “Borders Are Not Barriers,” a gathering of all Talitha Kum networks in the Western Hemisphere. In 2023 the organization underwent a change from U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking to Alliance to End Human Trafficking. With a wonderful staff, it continues until today to unite catholic sisters in the U.S. in our efforts to use the energy of compassion in ways that bring about change and healing.



**ALLIANCE TO END
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Founded and Supported by U.S. Catholic Sisters

For all involved in this work, it was a “story,” a “meeting,” a moment where tenderness and compassion ignited a desire to bring about a world where trafficking of human persons does not happen. It is a long-term goal, but we rejoice in the small successes along the way. Your presence with us and support on the journey has given MMM courage and the resources to be a part of this work. And this work is God’s work among us.



STOP
HUMAN
TRAFFICKING

WMM



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