

Abolition of Sex Trafficking
Book of Resolutions
2008

"Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter." Ecclesiastes 4:1

"But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, "Send them back." Isaiah 42:22

These are hard words of Scripture. Yet, even harder is this Scripture's contemporary reality, daily reflected in the tears of millions of women and children who are trafficked into sexual slavery. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell asserts, "It is appalling that in the twenty-first century hundreds of thousands of women, children, and men made vulnerable by civil conflict, dire economic circumstances, natural disasters or just their own desire for a better life, are trafficked and exploited for the purposes of sex or forced labor. The deprivation of a human being's basic right to freedom is an affront to the ideals of liberty and human dignity cherished by people around the world."¹

This resolution addresses a gaping hole that exists in The United Methodist Church's advocacy concerning sexual violence—sex trafficking. The United Methodist Church has never recoiled in the face of controversial and painful issues such as the myriad ways in which human sexuality is abused. It would be wrong to suggest that this hole exists purposefully. Rather, one can rightly assume that the pervasive existence and deep gravity of the sex trafficking industry has only recently begun to be uncovered. Sex trafficking was briefly raised as a concern for "Responsible Travel" in the 2004 *Book of Resolutions*. However, the daunting statistics have not been discussed, nor has the direct and indirect compliance of U.S. citizenry and businesses in this matter been exposed to the members of the Church. In its prophetic role, The United Methodist Church is called to inform its members and the public at large that an estimated 700,000 to 4,000,000 people worldwide are trafficked each year. Furthermore, the most overlooked aspect of these statistics is the fact that 18,000 to 20,000 people are trafficked into the United States each year.²

Sexual violence in the twenty-first century, through many and varied manifestations, destructively permeates the whole of society. Not only must the Church denounce these issues, such as sex trafficking, both in and outside its own walls, but also, it must embrace its crucial responsibility to witness to the only One who is truly able to offer lasting hope, refuge, restoration, and redemption. The United Methodist Church is called to model that the church universal is the very first place to which people can turn in their hunger for justice, wholeness, and sanctuary. This calling comprises an essential element of the church's identity as the body of Jesus Christ, and, for The United Methodist Church specifically, the identity of being a

¹ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2003. Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

² *Ibid.*

community that carries the Wesleyan legacy of seeking justice and proclaiming the healing that can only come from our reconciling, Incarnate God. The church is given by God to be a place in which broken people—both victims and perpetrators of sexual violence—can be welcomed, heard, embraced with the gospel, and even healed.

The United Nations defines trafficking to be "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or service, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude";

The church has a difficult and awesome responsibility, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to seek justice and Christ's healing in the face of structures of oppression;

And such structures of oppression are well-embedded in the institution of sex trafficking. Therefore, The United Methodist Church, through education, financial resources, publication, lobbying, and the use of every relevant gift of God, shall join in the active battle against the modern-day enslavement of humans for commercial sexual exploitation, i.e., sex trafficking.

The General Board of Church and Society shall lead The United Methodist Church's efforts toward the abolition of sex trafficking for the 2009-2012 quadrennium. On this issue, the General Board of Church & Society shall work in cooperation with the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries. The United Methodist Church shall recognize the urgency and gravity of this issue through a substantial monetary investment toward the galvanization of the Church at all levels to live out her gifts and calling in relation to the abolition of modern day slavery.

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