

**VERY LIMITED EXTRACTS FROM
PASTORAL ORIENTATIONS ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING
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PREFACE

Pope Francis attaches enormous importance to the plight of the millions of men, women and children who are trafficked and enslaved. They are among the most dehumanized and discarded of people in the modern world and all over the world. Human trafficking, he says, is an “atrocious scourge,”¹ an “aberrant plague”² and an “open wound on the body of contemporary society.”...

In September 2015, the Holy Father told the United Nations that evils like “human Trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, including prostitution” cannot be met by “solemn commitments” alone. “We need to ensure that our institutions” - and indeed all our efforts - “are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges.”

It is the purpose of the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking* to provide a *reading* of Human Trafficking and an *understanding* that motivate and sustain the much-needed long-term *struggle*. The Migrants & Refugees Section (M&R) began functioning on 1 January 2017. It was established by Pope Francis and is under his direct guidance for the time being. Tasked with addressing Human Trafficking as well as migrant and refugee matters, its mission is to assist the Bishops of the Catholic Church and all those serving these vulnerable groups...

This six-months process resulted in the present Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking, approved by the Holy Father and meant to orient the work of the M&R Section and its partners. The Orientations are for use by Catholic dioceses, parishes and religious congregations, schools and universities, by Catholic and other organizations of civil society and by any groups willing to respond. Besides their implementation in local programs as well as collaboration at a distance, the Orientations also offer key points for homilies, education and media. These Pastoral Orientations are available at <https://migrants-refugees.va/Trafficking-slavery/> in various languages and formats.

The M&R Section invites everyone to engage vigorously in learning, communication and action about preventing and healing Human Trafficking, nourished by reflection, prayer, and the teachings of Pope Francis.

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Under Secretaries

INTRODUCTION

6 The *Pastoral Orientations* are deeply grounded in the Church’s reflection and teaching...At Vatican II the Catholic Church reaffirmed its historic concern about forced labour, stating that “slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons [...] are infamies”
(*Gaudium et Spes*, 27).

Now “**the Catholic Church intends to intervene in every phase of the Trafficking of human beings**” says Pope Francis; “**she wants to protect them from deception and solicitation; she wants to find them and free them when they are transported and reduced to slavery; she wants to assist them once they are freed.**”

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING: THE CAUSES

1. COMMODIFICATION AND EXPLOITATION

17 HT takes control over its victims and puts them in locations and situations where they are treated as commodities, to be bought and sold and exploited as workers or even as ‘raw materials’ in multiple and unimaginable ways...

Narcissism makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their own desires and needs.

Pope Francis, *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, 19 March 2016

The exploitation of others has perversely but quietly been accepted as a means to achieve one’s own pleasure and gain, although the language used may reference the laws of the market: relentless competition to reduce – by any means – the costs for any good and service. Human Trafficking deprives many people of their identity and dignity, and commodifies them to the advantage of a few.

Each year thousands of innocent men, women and children are victims of exploitative labour and sexual abuse, and of organ trafficking...I wish to remind everyone of the duty to combat this abhorrent plague, a form of modern slavery. Pope Francis, Angelus, 30 July 2017

If the human family wishes to stamp out HT, society itself will have to change. In order to bring HT to an end, all people will need to simplify their needs, control their habits, rein in their appetites. "Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few," " John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace* 1990, 8 December 1989, 13, and Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, 222

20 ... ***But the true solution is the conversion of hearts, cutting off demand in order to dry out the market.***
Pope Francis. Address to the Participants in the World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action against Human Trafficking, 12 February 2018

ACKNOWLEDGING HUMAN TRAFFICKING: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

3. RELUCTANCE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE DIRE REALITY OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

23. Despite public commitments by States and non-state actors, and despite multiple awareness campaigns undertaken, there is still widespread ignorance on the nature and the spread of HT...

Particular concern must be shown for migrant children and their families, those who are victims of human Trafficking rings... All of them hope that we will have the courage to tear down the wall of 'comfortable and silent complicity' that worsens their helplessness; they are waiting for us to show them concern, compassion and devotion.

25. Catholics should engage personally... also engage at the community level, in every effort to raise awareness and educate youth so as effectively to prevent and combat HT.

A first task [...] is...breaking the veil of indifference that seems to cover the fate of this portion of humanity that suffers, that is suffering. *Pope Francis, Video Message to the Participants in the International Forum on Modern Slavery, 7 May 2018*

31. ...All Catholics should proactively engage in making societies more just, respectful and inclusive, eliminating all forms of exploitation, especially those that are most ruthless.

37. The Catholic Church is committed to protecting the victims of HT...This begins with reminding parents and family members about their role as first protectors against traffickers

CONCLUSION

47 "I have always been distressed⁵ at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry, 'Where is your brother?' (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Let us not pretend and look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. This issue involves everyone!"
Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 24 November 2013, 211.

The Holy Father prays that "God may liberate all those who have been threatened, injured or mistreated by trade and Trafficking in human beings, and may bring comfort to those who have survived such inhumanity." He appeals to each and every one of us "to open our eyes, to see the misery of those who are completely deprived of their dignity and their freedom, and to hear their cry for help."

Extracts by Simon John March 2025

These extracts represent an attempt to make the 36 page full document more accessible. The paragraph numbers correspond to the original. I have also produced a fuller 6 page version of these extracts. The full *Pastoral Orientations* are available at <https://migrants-refugees.va/Trafficking-slavery/> in various languages and formats. See also Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, dated 15/5/1891,#3 on Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor from Pope Leo XIII at Para 3 "A small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor, a yoke little better than that of slavery itself."