



European Freedom Network

EFN is a Christian community that exists to fight human trafficking and commercial exploitation in Europe and to seek the restoration of victims in collaboration with strategic stakeholders. We see a world free of Human Trafficking and Commercial Exploitation where every person has the opportunity to live in freedom and dignity and to flourish. Our members and partners represent organizations of all shapes and sizes and they work in all areas of combating human trafficking and commercial exploitation.



The Church as an anti-slavery catalyst

Human trafficking is a wicked problem, and its solution will require the participation of government, civil society and individual actors. Each sphere of society must play a role in combatting human trafficking and exploitation. The Church has foundational beliefs about human dignity, flourishing and freedom as well as the core message of the gospel, and it is our contention that the church is perfectly suited and positioned to be a powerful anti-slavery catalyst.

The Church has a platform to speak out against slavery and exploitation. This starts with discipling members in healthy sexuality, becoming a safe space for hurting people, and being a prophetic voice against injustice. The Church also has the opportunity to speak to the public and with the oppressed. The pressing issue for the church is how to move beyond beliefs and words to actions that fight trafficking and provide support to victims and survivors.

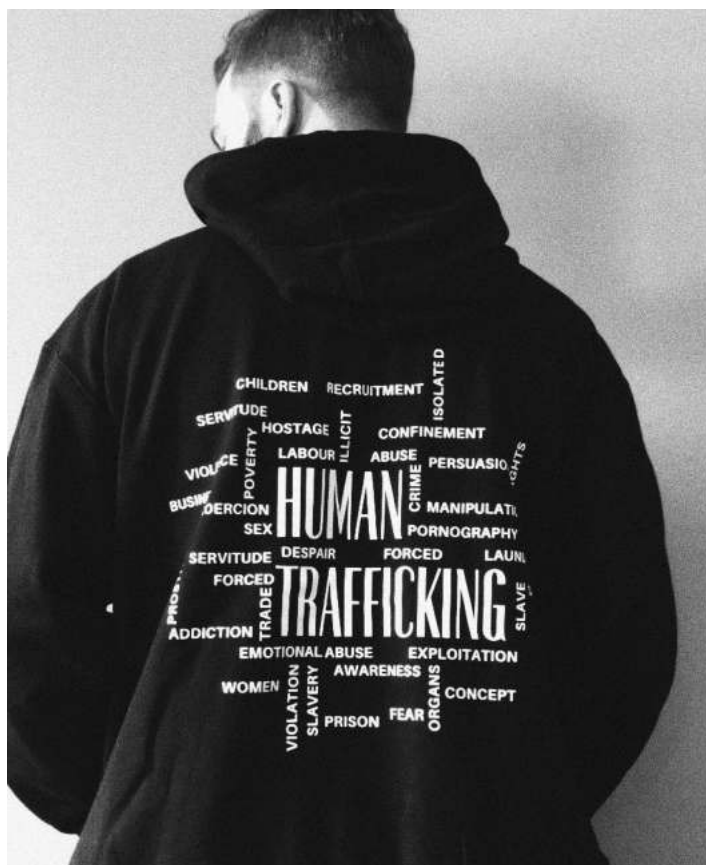
Churches can become welcoming, transformative and healing communities. Many churches are not well prepared to welcome survivors who have experienced severe trauma. This requires intentional discipleship of members, changing expectations of how people may come to and act in a church service, learning not to re-exploiting survivors (for instance, by asking them to tell their stories), modeling healthy relationships, and building a welcome that is durable and committed, not program-driven.

Churches have tremendous potential in preventing exploitation. A church's knowledge of and reach into their community is often unsurpassed. Churches need to understand who in their community is vulnerable to exploitation and how their own resources (a youth program, after-school tutoring, or marriage counseling) can become part of their mission to protect vulnerable people.

Further, the church must not consciously or unconsciously participate in exploitative acts. While this may seem ridiculous, churches can participate in exploitation through a lack of due diligence and by offering "help" that is not helpful.

Due diligence simply means understanding what is happening in a church's supply chain and who is being affected by the choices a church makes. Purchasing decisions can be complex. Churches must do their best to understand who is making the products they buy. Are children involved in production? Are the workers being paid a fair wage? Are workers exposed to harmful practices? Some of these things can be checked online or through trusted organizations. One example is the Chocolate Score Card produced by Be Slavery Free in partnership with EFN.

Churches can also exploit people by providing “help that isn’t helpful.” This includes cash for work schemes whereby a church “hires” a person in need to do tasks around the church such as cleaning or other odd jobs. While this may seem like a win/win for both parties, this does not break the cycle of exploitation but keeps it subtly in place. This can be especially damaging as the person hired may not receive social or employment benefits, or feel they have the power to speak up for their rights or against unfair practices. This also applies to broader decisions regarding hiring, for example in cleaning or catering. Churches must do proper checks (due diligence) before contracting services to ensure that people are paid and treated fairly.



So, how can the church be an Anti-Slavery Catalyst in society?

- Churches should adopt or create their own modern-day slavery policies which includes due diligence, purchasing sex, and viewing of pornography. All staff, volunteers and lay leaders must agree to adhere to this policy.
- Churches must direct their purchasing power to ethical sources, and disciple members in ethical financial decisions, including purchasing power and investments. Christians should avoid not only “vice” investments (like alcohol, tobacco and firearms) but also slavery-prone industries.
- Churches should become welcoming communities: learning how to relate to traumatized people, inviting them into the community and providing appropriate opportunities for participation and service.
- Churches must identify needs and vulnerabilities in its community that allow exploitation to happen, and understand how to use their resources to protect vulnerable people.
- Churches should not sensationalize the issue but commit to understanding the nuanced nature of vulnerability and exploitation, and ethically tell stories of survivors and organizations working in the area.



Contact
Leanne Rhodes