

Redemption and Human Trafficking: The Role of the Church in Addressing the Modern Slave Trade

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Abstract

About thirty-five million people around the world are victims of human trafficking. The Church can and should develop strategies for dealing with this problem. It has a Biblical mandate to rescue those who suffer, and its position in society suggests key leverage points for combating human trafficking. One example for anti-trafficking engagement by local churches is Manna Church, which has taken action in its community and in various parts of the world to work against slavery. Using Manna Church as a case example, we offer six proposals for ways the local church can help fight human trafficking.

Introduction

There is an ancient evil that plagues the modern world, a crime against humanity that has raged throughout history and continues to rage today. It lurks in sickly, sinister alleys in Thailand. It sprawls across lush, sun-kissed fields in Brazil. It creeps through hustling hallways of American public schools. It is known as modern slavery or human trafficking, and it is growing so forcefully that it has the “potential to reshape the world order.”¹ Its hallmark is the violence that it uses against the vulnerable, forcing them into slavery to exploit them for profit until it becomes cheaper to kill them or dismiss them. Its victims include girls forced by pimps to have sex with strangers, young boys captured to work as child soldiers, and men and women held in permanent bondage to work off illegitimate debts. Human trafficking affects people of all races and religious backgrounds, forcing them into all kinds of bondage, and it is happening all over the planet.

Slavery in the Modern World

Human-trafficking researchers Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter tell the story of Sandra Bearden, a twenty-seven year old wife and mother of a four year old son, who was convicted of torturing her twelve-year old maid. Seeking an economical way to obtain maid services, Sandra drove from her nice home in a Texas suburb across the Mexican border to an impoverished village near Vera Cruz. There, she offered a job as a maid to twelve year old Maria. Life in America could offer Maria opportunities she would never have in her world, and with her parents' permission, she accepted the job. Sandra then smuggled the girl back into America, where Maria's life turned into a nightmare. Sandra viciously beat Maria and worked her to the point of exhaustion. If Maria dozed off from extreme fatigue, Sandra pepper-sprayed her in the eyes. As Bales and Soodalter explain: “At one point, Bearden tortured the twelve-year-old by jamming a garden tool up her vagina. That was Maria's workday; her ‘time-off’ was worse. When Maria wasn't working, Sandra would chain her to a pole in the backyard without food or water. An eight-foot concrete fence kept her hidden from neighbors. After chaining her, Sandra would sometimes force Maria to eat dog feces.”²

Maria was a modern day slave, and her story, though horrible, is unfortunately not unique. Today there are

1. Louise Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 300.

2. Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter, *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

Forum on Public Policy

an estimated 35.8 million slaves in the world³—more than twice as many people that were taken out of Africa during the entire history of the transatlantic slave trade.⁴ The International Labor Organization estimates that the world's slaves produce \$150 billion in profits.⁵ One of the most commonly accepted definitions of human trafficking comes from the United Nations' Palermo Protocol of 2000, which includes elements such as the use of threat, force, or coercion by perpetrators against victims; the utter control of perpetrators over their victims; and the exploitation of the victim for some sort of profit.⁶ Interpol categorizes human trafficking into four types: 1) trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, 2) trafficking for forced labor, 3) commercial sexual exploitation of children in tourism, and 4) trafficking in organs.⁷ The United States Department of State, in its annual report on the status of trafficking around the world, defines trafficking in seven categories, which include trafficking in child soldiers and domestic slaves.⁸ Slavery, in fact, is so ubiquitous and takes so many forms that it has long evaded clear analytical categorization by researchers.⁹

Although the categories of trafficking are diverse and sometimes complicated, the experience of its victims is brutally simple: they are people “*enslaved by violence and held against their wills for purposes of exploitation.*”¹⁰ Ironically, many victims are at first willing participants in the ploys of their traffickers. In almost all cases, people who later become victims of trafficking have a financial or circumstantial vulnerability that creates an opportunity for someone else to profit from them. Traffickers find powerful ways to capitalize on these vulnerabilities, such as by finding people living in extreme poverty and offering them good-paying jobs in some location requiring relocation.¹¹ Many victims of trafficking leave their homes hoping to earn more money for their families. In cases like this, traffickers transport their victims and then inevitably renege on their employment contracts (if any were given to begin with), refusing to pay what they promised to their “employees.” Traffickers resort to violence in order to maintain complete control over their victims, forcing them to perform hard labor for little or perhaps no pay. The people working under these conditions find that they are not *employed*—they are enslaved. Human trafficking is thus a convergence of violence, slavery, and poverty. Many of the world's poorest people are not merely disadvantaged, but are in fact enslaved by others who use violence to keep them in that plight.¹² Survival for slaves in these situations is linked to their usefulness to their traffickers. If the ratio between

3. Fiona David et al., *The Global Slavery Index 2014* (Australia: Hope for Children Organization Australia Ltd., 2014). [A frequently cited number for slaves in the world is 27 million; this estimate can be found in many sources, usually un-attributed, but it was first proposed by Kevin Bales in his book, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Bales serves as a lead author of *The Global Slavery Index*, which in 2013 published the results of an extensive project estimating the number of the world's slaves to be 29.8 million. In 2014, using an updated research methodology, the team published a second report that estimated the world's slaves to be 35.8 million.]

4. Kevin Bales, “How to Combat Modern Slavery,” Presentation at TED2010: What the World Needs Now..., Video File, 18:01, February 11, 2010. http://www.ted.com/talks/kevin_bales_how_to_combat_modern_slavery?language=en

5. International Labour Organization, “Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Slavery,” accessed September 2, 2015, <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

6. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/25, United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Annex II: Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking, 32. undocs.org/a/res/55/25

7. Interpol, “Types of Human Trafficking,” (2015). <http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Trafficking-in-human-beings/Types-of-human-trafficking>

8. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, *Trafficking in Persons Report: July 2015* (A/GIS/GPS, 2015), 7-8.

9. Shelley, *Human Trafficking*.

10. Bales, *Disposable People*, 20.

11. Bales, “How to Combat Modern Slavery.”

12. Gary Haugen, “The Hidden Reason for Poverty the World Needs to Address Now,” Presentation at TED2015: Truth and Dare, Video File, 22:08, March 19, 2015. http://www.ted.com/talks/gary_haugen_the_hidden_reason_for_poverty_the_world_needs_to_address_now?language=en

Forum on Public Policy

slaves' earning potential and the effort to maintain them becomes unfavorable to the traffickers, they are often left to die of neglect or are killed outright. They are commodities, things to be used up and then thrown away. In the United States in the 1850s, slaves could sell for the equivalent of \$40K to \$80K USD in today's economy; today, the same sorts of agricultural laborers can be bought in India for \$12-\$23.¹³ In the cruel economics of modern slavery, humans are cheap.

Modern slavery reaches into every corner of the world. Three hundred thousand children have been enslaved as child soldiers in at least thirty countries.¹⁴ In conflicts in Uganda alone, there have been 20,000 children as young as five years old trafficked into army service, who besides fighting as soldiers are also forced to perform hard labor, serve as wives to commanders, and even beat other trafficked children, sometimes to death.¹⁵ In Thailand there is a thriving commercial sex trade with estimates of up to 35,000 slaves (this does not include the many prostitutes who are not victims of trafficking).¹⁶ In India there could be up to 20 million slaves held in bonded labor.¹⁷ And while some forms of human trafficking are universally abhorrent, others are perpetrated less ostentatiously. Slavery is always criminal, but it can take the form of the common. Some slaves, such as illegal immigrants, might appear to be regular employees; they may be part of the cleaning staff at a hotel or the dishwashing crew at a restaurant. Others, like Maria, might be housekeepers for seemingly normal citizens living in normal neighborhoods. Still others can be rented for sex and are advertised online. Researcher Roe-Sepowitz, in her study on sex trafficking in Phoenix, Arizona, found 78,000 men were responding every day to the online sex ads for women and children.¹⁸ Cutting across political borders and reaching into all sectors of society, human trafficking is without question a worldwide phenomenon.

Sex Trafficking

All human trafficking is founded in violence and harmful toward its victims, but sex trafficking is an especially horrific form that wreaks extreme physical and psychological damage on its victims. Across the world, sex trafficking often takes the form of large groups of women and children (but also men and boys) being taken from one location to another on false promises—such as better employment opportunities—and then brutally enslaved as commercial sex workers.¹⁹ A different sort of sex trafficking, common to the United States, is the “pimp model,” in which traffickers (called pimps), often working in loose networks, select and recruit their victims through careful strategies and tend to keep smaller groups of women under their control for longer periods of time.²⁰ In the “recruitment” process, pimps win over their future victims by befriending them and developing a trusting boyfriend-girlfriend relationship. In one typical case, a pimp named Corey Davis began dating Shamere McKenzie, a young, attractive woman who had attended college on an athletic scholarship and was a model student. Corey convinced Shamere to start stripping to earn extra money, then began beating her and forcing her into prostitution. As pimps do, Corey masterfully manipulated Shamere physically and psychologically, gaining total control over her. She became his head prostitute, taking on responsibilities that included luring minors into prostitution.²¹

13. Bales, *Disposable People*.

14. Shelley, *Human Trafficking*.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Bales, *Disposable People*.

17. *Ibid.*

18. “Researchers Say Super Bowl Sex Trafficking Included Minors,” narrated by Robin Young, *Here and Now*, *NPR and WBUR Boston*, March 6, 2014, <http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2014/03/06/superbowl-sex-trafficking>

19. Shelley, *Human Trafficking*.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Bales and Soodalter, *Slave Next Door*.

Forum on Public Policy

Sex trafficking occurs all around the world in all social and economic contexts. The city of Atlanta, Georgia, a major economic hub for the southern United States and home of the world's largest commuter airport, is counted by the FBI as one of the top child sex tourism locations in the world.²² Every year, over 100,000 children are substantiated as victims of sexual abuse in the United States, and up to 325,000 children are at risk of *becoming* victims.²³ Child sex trafficking apparently has no age restrictions; in some of its most unthinkable forms, it preys on *infants*. Organized crime groups in parts of South America have sexually trafficked babies to produce pornography and provide sex acts to customers. In one case from 2007, an official reported to the Mexican Senate about families selling their six month old infants to tourists for oral sex, some of whom died from asphyxiation.²⁴ In a single case involving a man from the United Kingdom living in Massachusetts, officials uncovered 4,500 trades of child pornography, many of which involved videos that had been selected to meet the specified preferences of their individual viewers.²⁵ According to one United States prosecutor, 50,000 people are using the internet at any given moment to attempt to sexually exploit children.²⁶

The Biblical Mandate to Rescue

The Bible issues a clear mandate to the Church to rescue victims of violence: “Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?”²⁷ This mandate to act as a rescuer is the center point of the Bible's human rights strategy: when God wants to help people, He sends rescuers. When the spokesperson Moses talks to God about the Israelites' brutal slavery in Egypt, God is moved to act, and his first act is to commission a rescuer: “Then the lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them... Come, I will send you...’”²⁸

In fact, the Bible teaches that rescuing others is more important to God than personal acts of religious devotion: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”²⁹ The Church is called to rescue others, and in the 21st century, this call obliges the local church to join the fight against human trafficking.

Six Proposals for Local Churches

22. Shelley, *Human Trafficking*.

23. Bales and Soodalter, *Slave Next Door*.

24. Shelley, *Human Trafficking*.

25. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Massachusetts Man Pleads Guilty to Solicitation to Kidnap a Child,” May 5, 2013. <http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/massachusetts-man-pleads-guilty-solicitation-kidnap-child>

26. Bales and Soodalter, *Slave Next Door*.

27. Proverbs 24:11-12 (New International Version).

28. Exodus 3:7; 3:8a; 3:10a (English Standard Version).

29. Isaiah 58:6-7 (English Standard Version).

Forum on Public Policy

Authorities and experts agree that a solution to human trafficking will involve all sectors of society actively working together. For a problem that invades all parts of the world and every area of society, everyone is part of the solution. As United States Secretary of State John Kerry has written, “One thing is clear: No nation can end modern slavery alone. Eliminating this global scourge requires a global solution. It also cannot be solved by governments alone. The private sector, academic institutions, civil society, the legal community, and consumers can all help to address the factors that allow human trafficking to flourish.”³⁰ Some researchers are suggesting that civil society deliberately take the lead in finding new ways to understand and address modern slavery.³¹ Local churches occupy strategic positions within civil society, and if they step forward to use these positions to counter slavery, then the results—as one extensive researcher on global trafficking has commented—could be “dramatic.”³²

In an address at the Vatican, Bishop Lynch noted the special need for local churches to collaborate with the government against trafficking, saying that the Church's extensive global network would be important in the fight against trafficking. These extensive networks are defining characteristic of religious non-government organizations, and one of the things that makes them so effective, sometimes even gaining them an edge over their secular or governmental counterparts.³³ The Church is rich with overlapping networks of relationships, organizations, and movements—one of the factors that enable influential organizations to produce truly “world-changing” effects.³⁴ We believe that the Church can change the world by joining the fight to end modern slavery. Below, we share six simple proposals for how local churches can begin.

Proposal 1: Talk about Modern Slavery in the Pulpit

One of the first steps that a local church can take as an anti-trafficking actor is simply to talk about slavery in the pulpit. As religious leaders learn more about the problem, they can share their knowledge and perspective with their congregations, educating them on the problem, instructing them in faith-based perspectives on the issue, and sharing practical strategies for change. Something as simple as talking about slavery in the pulpit might even be a way for churches to mobilize local grassroots movements of anti-trafficking activists. As one study found, churchgoers are more likely to take specific, private action toward a particular agenda when their church experience clearly and directly pertains to that agenda.³⁵ This has proven true at Manna Church. As we have increasingly made the issue of slavery an important part of our members' church experience, we have seen it gain traction not only in official ways, but also in more bottom-up, grassroots ways. Former victims of trafficking are speaking out, members are donating money, and lay people are forming and leading their own outreaches to populations vulnerable to trafficking.

The important thing is to begin the conversation. Leading people out of ignorance is a step in the right direction, even if practical solutions are not yet known. When Pastor Michael Fletcher delivered Manna Church's first sermon on modern slavery in 2011, we only knew enough to share statistics and stories from

30. U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*: Introduction.

31. Kathleen Kim and Grace Chang, “Reconceptualizing Approaches to Human Trafficking: New Directions and Perspectives from the Field(s),” *Stanford Journal of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties* 3, 2 (2007): Legal Studies Paper No. 2007-47, Available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1051601>

32. Shelley, *Human Trafficking*, 319.

33. Julia Berger, “Religious Nongovernmental Organizations: An Exploratory Analysis,” *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 14, no. 1 (2003): 15-39. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1022988804887>

34. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

35. Khari Brown and Ronald E. Brown, “Faith and Works: Church-Based Social Capital Resources and African American Political Activism,” *Social Forces* 82, no. 2 (2003): 617-641. DOI: 10.1353/sof.2004.0005

Forum on Public Policy

government organizations and researchers and to ask congregants to donate their spare change for the next month. That first sermon was like having the first conversation about the “elephant in the room.” Once we collectively saw that slavery was here—here, today, in our world and in our own community—we could start talking about what to do.

Proposal 2: Raise Awareness about Modern Slavery in the Community

Churches can become significant players in the anti-trafficking cause by bringing modern slavery to the attention of the public sphere. The voice of the local church may originate in the sanctuary, but it can resonate throughout an entire community. And while the work they do to educate those within their own faith communities will obviously be religiously informed, churches' awareness efforts in the community could be completely secular in nature—presenting facts, statistics, or educational resources that teach people to identify and respond to signs of trafficking.³⁶

One of the key places in which local churches can raise awareness about trafficking is the school campus. As a mandatory and daily gathering place for children and teenagers, schools represent a hunting ground for traffickers that is consistently stocked. And since schools are filled with young girls, they are particularly well stocked in the eyes of predators who traffic in sex. Students and school staff therefore need to understand what sex trafficking is and how it happens. In the United States, sex trafficking often involves pimps who strategically target susceptible girls and then cunningly and methodologically “recruit” them. If predators have a student-centered trafficking strategy, then local churches could counter with student-centered strategies of their own. Churches could organize “trafficking-free zones,” resourcing students with information on signs, risk factors, and recommendations related to sex trafficking and mobilizing student activists to make and keep their school a “trafficking-free zone.” At Manna Church, church members founded a non-profit organization that provides practical tips to students on how to recognize signs of human trafficking. The organization cooperates with local law enforcement to raise awareness in schools.

On a broader level, local churches can leverage themselves to raise general awareness about the issue of human trafficking in the community at large, perhaps by partnering with national organizations. Manna Church has spearheaded an awareness-campaign for its city in partnership with a national anti-trafficking organization.³⁷ Our comparatively small city had the largest community participation and raised more money than any other city in the nation for two years in a row—beating out cities like Tulsa, Chicago, and New York City. It seems that community members are willing and ready to engage with the anti-trafficking movement, and simply need an opportunity for action.

A final suggestion for ways local churches can be involved in raising awareness about modern slavery is that churches be deliberate about “storytelling” for the cause of abolition. In one sense churches are already story-tellers: the history and culture of the Church is rich with stories as a means of instruction and transformation. Its central message is called the Gospel, a term that means *good news*—in other words, a story worth sharing. In keeping with their tradition of telling stories that matter, churches can take on the task of spreading stories about the problem of human trafficking. Churches can point their storytelling engines toward modern slavery, using their human, technological, and organizational resources to create compelling stories in various media that compel people to take notice.

Proposal 3: Create Anti-Trafficking Missions

36. For example, the Stop the Traffik organization, which works in partnership with the United Kingdom Home Office, manages an online resource called “Spot the Traffik,” available at <https://www.stophetraffik.org/spot>, which teaches people how to recognize signs of human trafficking.

37. The organization was formerly called Stop Child Trafficking Now, and is now HMNTRFK; its website is <http://endhumantrafficking.com>

Forum on Public Policy

Local churches can find effective, lawful, and creative ways to rescue victims of human trafficking and relieve those who are vulnerable. First, a clarification: rescuing victims of trafficking, or assisting those who are at risk of becoming victims, does not mean the church should take the law into its own hands or engages in tactical operations. Rather, churches can partner with other organizations or sponsor their own projects to provide victims with things such as clothing, financial assistance, community resources, employment help, and supportive relationships.

On a local level, churches can reach out to vulnerable communities in their area where human trafficking is or could be occurring, such as areas with large migrant worker populations. Churches could also be ready to serve at high-trafficking special events or regions. At Manna Church, we do this through an outreach program that cooperates on a national level with other organizations to prepare for the human trafficking spike at upcoming Super Bowl games.³⁸ Manna also sends short-term teams to New Orleans, where we work with other organizations in districts that are known to be high trafficking areas. At an international level, local churches can sponsor special projects or send teams or resources to organizations in other parts of the world. Manna Church has partnered with an organization that targets human trafficking between Nepal and India. We send teams to assist the organization with its special projects, but more importantly perhaps, we have adopted this organization as one of our key anti-trafficking partners. In 2013, we paid for 44% of the organization's budget, which helped fund the rescue efforts of 17,534 girls who were being trafficked from Nepal to India to become slaves.

Proposal 4: Partner with Law Enforcement

Churches can help fight trafficking by forging partnerships with their community's law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement agencies work in the trenches and front lines of battle when it comes to victims and perpetrators; they are a key part of the solution to human trafficking. The Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking suggests that collaborations between law enforcement and community organization are so essential to making progress that the anti-trafficking paradigm of prevention, protection, and prosecution ought to be amended with a fourth P--*partnership*.³⁹ At the Vatican's conference on combating human trafficking, Pope Francis called for a partnership between law enforcement and victim-support services (such as the kind offered by local churches).⁴⁰ At the same conference, a group of international police chiefs signed the Santa Marta Commitment, in which they pledged to work to end slavery by building partnerships between law enforcement agencies and the church.⁴¹

An early step for Manna Church toward partnership with law enforcement was participating in regular meetings with police and several other local agencies to discuss the problem of trafficking and how the community could respond. Later, members of our church formed an anti-trafficking organization with a focus on law-enforcement and victim rescue. This organization is now an independent non-profit organization and one of the partner agencies which our church funds. It works with our community's schools

38. This is done through the Skyway Railroad network, a group "abolitionist" organizations that collaborate to replicate the 1800's "underground railroad," as well as create national strategies to combat human trafficking surrounding the NFL Super Bowl.

39. United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking. *The Vienna Forum Report: A Way Forward to Combat Human Trafficking*. Report of The Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking, Vienna, Austria, February, 2008: 59. <http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/humantrafficking/ebook.pdf>

40. Pope Francis, Address given at International Conference on Combating Human Trafficking (The Vatican: April 10, 2014). Transcript available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco_20140410_tratta-persone-umane.html

41. Santa Marta Commitment, Combating Human Trafficking Rome Conference 2014, The Vatican: 10 April 2014. Text available at <http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/Home/Special-Events/Human-Trafficking-Conference-December-2014/The-Catholic-Church-and-Human-Trafficking/Trafficking-Commitment>

Forum on Public Policy

and law enforcement to assist victims and educate the public on human trafficking. Manna Church also cooperates with our city's police forces as it works directly with victims. We have cooperated with the FBI on local trafficking cases, participated in a special police project involving girls in prostitution, and supported victims in their court cases by serving as “victim advocates” when they have no one else to stand with them. Manna has funded the relocation efforts for nine victims, sending them to new areas out of reach of their traffickers or to rehabilitation programs. The director of one of Manna’s daughter organizations, the Fayetteville Dream Center, notes that the organization has become the “go-to people” for our community's law enforcement when it comes to practical assistance with trafficking victims.⁴²

Proposal 5: Establish Rescue and Rehabilitation Centers

Whereas other organizations make prosecution and protection their focus, the Church may be specially suited to help in *prevention* and *restoration*. As Pope Francis suggests, local churches and other organizations in the civil sector have a uniquely victim-centered role in the fight against modern slavery, a role in which they nurture survivors toward “human warmth and the possibility of building a new life.”⁴³ A practical way churches can do this is by founding or funding centers of rescue and rehabilitation. Manna Church has codified much of our local anti-trafficking efforts by establishing a Dream Center, a franchise-style non-profit organization that provides practical relief to vulnerable populations in a community. This organization serves as an extension of Manna Church that allows us to work more directly with victims and with the community. In the last four years, we have provided direct support to forty-one trafficking victims. In 2014, Manna rescued twenty-five victims from human trafficking from Cumberland County.

Proposal 6: Make Abolition Part of the Local Church Mission

Our final proposal serves partly as a summation of what we have already said and partly as a vision for a new role for the modern church. We propose that local churches *make abolition part of their mission*. This idea may be radical, but it is not impracticable—churches can take small, incremental steps toward adopting abolition as a mission. Church leaders could begin, perhaps, by re-envisioning a future without slavery—a world for their grandchildren in which slavery is remembered, not lived. From there, they can lead their churches in re-imagining their organizations as 21st century abolitionists, gradually committing, one step at a time, to being organizations that fight for freedom.

Making abolition part of the mission will lead to tangible changes in the church: abolition will begin to show up as line items on the budget; it will take up time in the pulpit; it will have dates on the calendar and sentences in the annual plan. In our own church, it means that anti-trafficking work has a special claim on our resources and manpower. As our outreach director explains, “Basically, if [a particular anti-trafficking organization which we support] needs something, they're going to get it.”⁴⁴ We deliberately look for ways to mobilize our people, resources, and institution for the cause of abolition. We use our tax-exempt status to collect donations through an anti-trafficking website which has raised close to a million dollars for rescue efforts. At a summer camp we hosted for local students, the students raised money to build a border patrol station for a rescue operation in the high-trafficking borders between Nepal and India.

Churches can discover original and creative ways to help fight human trafficking while remaining faithful to their particular mission and identity. A large congregation of young, metropolitan families might choose to focus on mobilizing its members to create grassroots movements of awareness or fund-raising. A small

42. Kelly Twedell, Director of the Fayetteville Dream Center, in personal conversation, September 8th, 2015.

43. Ibid.

44. Michael Ray, Manna Church Director of Outreach and Missions, in personal conversation, June 17th, 2015.

Forum on Public Policy

parish near a college town that attracts graduate students and faculty might lean toward clarifying public understandings of the problem and proposing local policies that support freedom. As churches incrementally make abolition part of their mission, learning who they want to be and who they feel called to be in a world plagued by trafficking, they can become highly effective contributors in the fight to end slavery.

Conclusion

Human trafficking affects over thirty-five million people around the world. Its victims are people whose lives are defined by the total, merciless control of their traffickers; they are people whose circumstances offer no option for rediscovering freedom on their own. For them, liberation will only come through the hands of another. It will only come through rescue. The good news is, rescue *is* possible. In various places around the world, there are models of effective anti-trafficking practice demonstrating that slavery can in fact be wiped out from particular areas. Kevin Bales, the researcher who calculated the most widely cited estimate of the number of slaves in the world, also calculated what it would cost to liberate them. For Bales, this effort would include not only rescuing victims of trafficking, but also rehabilitating them and restoring them to self-sufficiency and true freedom. He estimated that this comprehensive liberation would cost 10.8 billion USD spread out over about thirty years.⁴⁵ That figure is the amount of money that Americans spend on potato chips in *two years*.⁴⁶

The task of freeing the world's slaves is daunting, but doable. It is possible in our day to make the world free. As Bales says, "The question is no longer, 'Can people be freed from slavery?' The question is, 'How many can be freed and how quickly?'"⁴⁷ Now is the time for the Church to help answer that question. It can become an agent of rescue in the fight to end slavery. Local churches can serve as centers of redemption in their communities. They can be open doors for the vulnerable and a voice that speaks out for justice and freedom. In the midst of the world's darkness, the Church can prove that there is yet a reason to hope.

45. Bales, *Disposable People*. Bales' 10.8 figure was related to his 1999 estimate of 27 million slaves. The cost was extrapolated from budgets for real liberation efforts that involved embedding liberation workers in locations of slavery for multi-year abolition and re-integration strategies.

46. Becket Adams, "Six Things That Americans Spend More on Than the 2014 Midterm Elections," *Washington Examiner* (Washington, D.C.), October 31, 2014. [http:// www.washingtonexaminer.com/ seven-things-more-expensive-than-the-2014-midterm-elections/article/2555534](http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/seven-things-more-expensive-than-the-2014-midterm-elections/article/2555534)

47. Bales, *Disposable People*, xxix.

Forum on Public Policy

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