



# DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

Pastoral Center

COURAGEOUSLY  
*Living the Gospel*

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Dear Msgr/Father:

In this season of Advent, a time of longing and anticipation, let us remember those who yearn for freedom from the bonds of Human Trafficking. Florida, particularly the Tampa Bay area, is considered a hotspot for Human Trafficking. The pandemic is taking an additional toll on trafficking victims and incidents are expected to spike as Tampa prepares to host Super Bowl LV on February 7, 2021. As Catholics, we are called to preserve the sacredness of human life and endeavor to put an end to this form of modern-day slavery.

The Office of Life, Justice and Advocacy has partnered with the USCCB's Anti-Trafficking Campaign (Become a Shepherd) to promote awareness, education, and action against all forms of human trafficking.

- **Trafficking Free Zones**

The Diocese of St. Petersburg has partnered with the U.S. Institute Against Human Trafficking and the **USCCB Become a Shepherd Campaign** to encourage all parishes and Catholic schools to become **Trafficking-Free Zones**. Participating entities will issue a proclamation declaring the parish or school a **Trafficking-Free Zone**, offer training and implement one or two strategies outlined in the attached flyer. Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in Pasco County, under the leadership of Father Sebastian Earthedath, MST, is the first parish in our Diocese to declare itself a **Trafficking-Free Zone**.

- **Anti-Trafficking Event Planning Manual**

A detailed manual for planning Anti-Human Trafficking events was developed by the Peace and Justice Ministry at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in collaboration with the Pasco County Commission on Human Trafficking. This handbook is an excellent resource for planning awareness events in your parish or school. It will be sent to parishes in January 2021, or earlier upon request.

- **Human Trafficking Awareness Month**

January is recognized as Human Trafficking Awareness Month and February 8<sup>th</sup> marks the Feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, the Patron Saint of Human Trafficking Victims. These make excellent times to introduce your efforts. A resource packet for including bulletin announcements, Prayers of the Faithful, etc. will be sent to parishes in the first week of January.

- **S.O.S. Ministry – Speaking Out on Slavery**

Parishes that wish to take a deeper dive into anti-trafficking efforts are invited to learn more about S.O.S. Ministry – Speaking Out on Slavery, which originated at St. Paul Parish in Tampa. St. Timothy, Espiritu Santo and Nativity Parishes now have S.O.S. chapters and others are considering participation in this movement which seeks to educate about the atrocities of

Human Trafficking encourage advocacy and support local Anti-Trafficking organizations that serve local victims. Leaders from St. Paul and St. Timothy parishes are available for speaking events or to outreach to interested parishes.

- **Pre-Super Bowl Anti-Trafficking Awareness Event on January 31, 2021**

The Office of Life, Justice and Advocacy will soon be promoting a large pre-Super Bowl community-wide event that will bring unity and awareness to anti-trafficking initiatives. This family-friendly event will take place at Grace Family Church in Lutz on Sunday, January 31, 2021. Please be on the lookout for more information about this event and share it with your congregation.

To learn more about Trafficking Free Zones or to be connected to Our Lady Queen of Peace – Peace and Justice Ministry or S.O.S. Ministry, please contact Sabrina Burton Schultz, Director of Life, Justice & Advocacy, at [sab@dosp.org](mailto:sab@dosp.org) , 813-246-6916.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Rev. Monsignor Robert F. Morris  
Vicar General