

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

When I was a little girl, my grandmother (Ma) had so many words of wisdom to share with all of us. They were hopeful words and I am sure they helped shape us into positive people. Last year was a true test of that wisdom, however, especially a favorite expression of hers that “God only gives you what He knows you can handle”.

Seriously, Ma? Covid-19, depression, unemployment, financial stress, anxiety, self-harm, suicide, cultural shaming, bullying, cancel culture, hate speech, divisiveness, isolation, quarantine, domestic violence pandemic, telemedicine, to name a few! Now we need to add one more. Can we handle it? According to Ma there is no doubt.

So with some reservation, I offer one more challenge. January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Is there such a thing by the way – in Deerfield? The answer is a simple ‘yes’. In fact, Chicago is fifth in number of human trafficking related identifying phone calls in the United States. Yes, it exists in our area and we need to be informed about it and then take pro-active steps to eliminate it.

Human trafficking is modern day slavery. It is the action of illegally transporting adults and children from other countries to exploit them for labor or commercial sex use. Promises of a better life are made to the poor and uneducated in exchange for a lengthy work commitment in the United States to pay off transportation costs. Unsuspecting people are brought here in caravans, freight trucks, railway cars or on foot across borders. They give up their passports, live in cellars, are often abused or denied education and work as our housekeepers, nail techs, landscapers, and laborers. They are hidden in plain sight, yet invisible to most of us.

So what can we do about Human Trafficking? First, we must acknowledge that it exists; the Deerfield bubble is not an exception. Look around and you will see these people – the ones afraid to make eye contact or speak with you.

Second, we should work collaboratively with other churches and non-profits who are involved in problem-solving the issue. There really is strength in numbers and we do not need to reinvent the wheel.

Third, we must deliver materials and make resources available to our parishioners. There are free websites with posters, flyers and tear- offs that we can put in restrooms for everyone to see.

And lastly, we need to develop a referral network for survivors of trafficking. All of this is very manageable. Ma was correct. We CAN DO IT. God gave us the ability to tackle one more issue. Who knew? We just need a little less talk and a lot more action!

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