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National Welfare and Study Day

Sister Ann-Teresa's talk on trafficking and the work of The Medaille Trust

When we watch a film like *Fields of Mudan* we might imagine that trafficking is going on only in other parts of the world. But traffickers have targeted every city, town and village in the UK. I would like to share with you a true story of a girl who was trafficked to the UK a few years ago. As you listen to this story, please be aware that she is between two and four million women who are trafficked in our world every year.

ELENA'S STORY

Elena was from Lithuania. When she was 15 she had a phone call out of the blue giving her the opportunity of coming to the UK one summer to sell ice cream. She was told that British people love their ice cream and that young people were needed to sell it during the hot weather. Jobs were scarce in Lithuania and this seemed a wonderful opportunity of learning English, earning money and being able to send money home to help her family. The job would be for the summer holidays. The young man who phoned her told her that he and his friends would look after her.

This phone call was followed up by two girls, aged about 18, who told Elena what the job would entail and they made it sound like a wonderful opportunity. They asked her parents to sign a consent form, which they willingly did.

She was driven from Lithuania to Latvia by car by an 18-year-old who told her how great life would be for her in Britain. She flew to Heathrow from Latvia on Baltic Airlines – a low cost airline. As soon as Elena had passed through Customs in Heathrow her passport was taken from her and three other people met her, two men and one woman. The passport would be used for someone else by removing the photograph.

On the day of her arrival in the UK Elena was sold for £4,000 in a café at Heathrow. She was then taken away and raped. After that she was taken to a brothel in Birmingham and had five clients on the first day. All the money went to her owner. She was taken to this brothel every day for 10 days. The girl was 15 and we can only imagine what she went through! After a while Blade got tired of her. He sold her on for £3,000 to a man called Gerry and she was taken to Leicester. In their eyes she was soiled goods because she was no longer a virgin and so her street value decreased. From there she was taken to London where she was sold again for £2,000 and raped on a regular basis for a few days by her new owner. She was sold seven times in three months! But managed to escape.

This was at the Kingdom Club where her owner was in the process of selling her on to someone else. She went into the toilets in the Club and local girls seeing how distressed she was, asked her what was wrong. These girls helped her to escape by distracting the men while she ran away and found a police station. Reflecting upon her ordeal she said: 'I have run out of tears ... I try to forget but sometimes I have nightmares about it.'

Each one of the 2-4 million people has dreams for her life, and each one of these women is totally betrayed. Like Elena, they believe that they are coming to a better situation and that they will be able to help their families.

It is estimated that there are 1.8 million child sex-slaves in the world today, 5,000 of whom are said to be in the UK.

Many of these people will be enslaved within our Parish boundaries, and, as we gather for worship, 'The Body of Christ' in the person of each enslaved woman, will be experiencing rape, degradation and violence on an incredible scale. Within a short time of their arrival in the UK they discover that there is no job for them to do, and that they are now the property of the person who has paid for them; they are beaten, raped and their families threatened, if they don't

comply with their pimp's wishes. On top of this, they are given a bill for the cost of their travel, for their accommodation, clothes and food, while many work 60-70 hour weeks!

Trafficking, the buying and selling of people is the fastest growing criminal international activity.

They come from the poorest parts of the world. Every country in the world is involved in trafficking. Each country is either a source, transit or destination country. Even though we celebrated the Bi-Centenary of the Abolition of Slavery last year, we have more slaves in our world today than ever before.

So what is the situation in the UK? The Home Office gives the conservative estimate of 4000 women being sex-trafficked to the UK each year. Victor Malarek in 'The Natashas' says it is more likely to be 10,000 each year who are sex-trafficked to Britain. Recent BBC undercover work into trafficking in Britain said that at any one time there were probably 25,000 trafficked people here.

Until 2006 the only provision for these 10,000 women were 25 bed-spaces provided by Poppy Project. This is money provided by the Government. A year ago they were given funding for 10 move-on beds.

At the time our awareness was being raised about trafficking, Sister St. Joseph and I were asked to go to Rome to represent the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. We attended the First Pontifical Conference on the Liberation of women in street-based prostitution and trafficked people.

We were very inspired by the Church in Italy and returned to the UK with the intention of inviting people from Religious Orders to come together in order to help trafficked people. Our first meeting took place in October 2006 and it was then that we formed our Vision and Action Group in order to take this forward. This led to the MEDAILLE TRUST.

Vision Statement:

The Medaille Trust desires a world where the trafficking of human beings for sexual, economic and labour exploitation has been eradicated.

Mission Statement:

The Medaille Trust is a charity founded by Catholic Religious Congregations to work for the eradication of human trafficking, and to offer support to those who have been trafficked. Believing in the intrinsic dignity and worth of every individual:

- We provide safe housing and specialist services for rehabilitation
- We raise awareness of these modern forms of slavery.

We have opened 2 Safe Houses in the past 2 years and we have helped at least 36 women and their babies. Each house offers:

- Safety
- Comfortable accommodation
- Therapy
- English tuition
- Opportunities to learn new skills
- Help with asylum claims
- Help to move on

Since we opened the houses 18 months ago, we have helped more than 36 women and their babies. We would have helped more but until a couple of months ago we had no 'Move on' accommodation for our women.

A major break-through:

We have been working closely with a Women's Housing Association and as from January, we now have 5 Move-on apartments and by next January we will have 10. This is wonderful news because when some of the women have been with us for some months, they want more independence. Until now we haven't been able to offer it because they are not entitled to any funding.

Even so, we still need more 'Move on' accommodation for our second house and we are working on it. This second house, which is situated

in the South of England, was the first house we opened, so the women have been with us for a long time. They really need more independent living and hope to be able to provide this soon.

I would like to situate the unfolding story of The Medaille Trust within the context of:

- The Counter-Trafficking Movement within the World-wide Church and of
- The Universe Story

I have already mentioned the first Conference we attended in Rome, but we have become more and more aware that we are part of a worldwide movement within the Church for counter-trafficking. Jo and I were invited to attend a Five-Day Counter-Trafficking Seminar in Rome in October last year. It was called 'Building a Network: The Prophetic Role of Women Religious in the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons.' The emphasis throughout the Conference was on the Call of God to us to be prophetic in our stance against this slavery. The Seminar was sponsored by the Holy See and the US Government, with the aim of strengthening the networks that already exist in the Church amongst Religious Orders all over the world, in our fight against trafficking. This Conference led to the formation of The International Network of Religious against Trafficking in Persons. Women Religious from 26 countries took part in this Seminar, and we had reports from all of these countries. There were times when hearing about the suffering and the depths of degradation experienced by trafficked people was absolutely overwhelming, but at the same time there was a growing awareness of the work being done by small pockets of Religious all over the world. These small groups are now linking, to become networks.

John Paul II, Benedict XVI, the Cardinal and Rowan Williams and Father Shay Cullen are some examples of key men within the Church speaking out against this modern slavery.

I would also like to situate the on-going story of The Medaille Trust within the emerging Story of the Universe. From this New Story of the Universe, we see that we, as a human species, are still in the early stages of our development. In terms of the length of time human beings have been on our planet compared with the age of the universe, it is just a few seconds. We are young as a species, and we need a paradigm shift in our evolution; we need to mature. The fact that so many human beings are being bought and sold every year, and that there are about 1.8 million child sex-slaves in our world, shows the need for a radical change. Since the Industrial Revolution, our dominant paradigm has been one of USE. We look upon the Earth as inert material to be made into goods for our use. Our consumerism has gone so out of control and the large-scale buying and selling of people is one aspect of our wholesale destruction of our planet and its peoples.

Christians have always sprung up to lead the way to a new way of seeing and behaving. Our hope is that, together, we will help to change the dominant paradigm of our world, from USE to CARE, with care for the most vulnerable, being evidence of this change.

We continue to have a sense of God with us in this work of helping some oppressed people to become free, and we continue to listen to the on-going call.

So many Religious Congregations, the CWL, the UCM, and many Churches have been so generous in sharing what they can with the Medaille Trust. The image, which often comes to mind, is the sharing of the loaves and fishes. Through this generosity and faith, God is feeding some of the multitude in our country who desperately need help.

As we reflect on the suffering of so many of our sisters and brothers we do so against the background of Jesus' mission statement which was:

"... to proclaim liberty to captives and to let the oppressed go free..."



Diocesan officers enjoy lunch and each others' company

THE TEAM

Thank you to the National Study days and Welfare team for all the work you have done in organising this years very moving event on human trafficking.



L to R Joyce Madden, Betty Young, Frances Dean and Elizabeth Tindley

The Medaille Trust

I WOULD like to help you to see the work of The Medaille Trust through the eyes of one of the women in our Safe House and through the eyes of one of the workers in a Safe House.

I am a Zambian girl by nationality and am in my late teens. I was trafficked from Zambia into the UK early January 2007. I managed to escape from my trafficker around the end of February. I hated myself, the whole world and everyone in it, I thought I had nothing to live for; back home I lost my young sister, my mum and I never knew my dad. Life has been so difficult.

However I thank God for giving me the strength to hold on and for directing me to the right people. After my escape I came in contact with the Medaille Trust in March 2007, who have accommodated, fed and provided me with some pocket money every week. A lot of things have changed in my life from the time I came to the Medaille Trust. I was so depressed that I attempted suicide I had no hope for tomorrow, my dreams were hopeless, I had no strength in me and I didn't care about anything. All I wanted was to die and forget about all the suffering and pain I went through. I thank God because people at the Medaille Trust didn't give up on me, they showed me love and encouraged me in all the areas I needed help with. I have also been attending counselling, which has been so helpful.

I have made very good friends in the house and I have learned a lot from them for example their cultures, food and now I can even speak a small amount of Thai and Nigerian languages. I have achieved a lot in a short time - I thought it was going to take years for me to feel like a young lady again. I have gained my confidence, I feel pretty again and am even wiser from the experience I have had in my life. The most important thing that has made me happy is being able to go back to school. I am studying Travel and Tourism at the local college, it gives me hope that there is a bright future for me and I can be what I have always wanted to be in life.

My entire special thanks to the manager of the house, the staff and mostly to every one who has made it possible to keep the charity going may God bless you all.

My Story; a staff member at one of The Medaille Trust's safe houses

When I first saw the job advert for support staff with The Medaille Trust I knew God was calling me to play a part in this work. I was horrified that this 21st Century slave trade existed and was moved by the mission statement of the trust and its aims to help those women whose lives had been so brutally affected by this crime.

I have been working in one of The Medaille Trust's safe houses since September 2006 and can honestly say that it has been the most difficult, challenging, and exciting eighteen months of my life! Being a part of a developing project and working alongside women who have complex needs and difficulties has proven to be an extremely steep learn-

ing curve but one that I have no regrets about whatsoever.

I consider it a privilege and blessing to be able to support the women who come to us, helping to empower them and regain their independence and sense of self worth. This is not an easy process and we have come up against many barriers along the way; communication problems (one woman we supported couldn't speak a word of English) and facing the immigration process are to name just a couple.

One of the hardest parts of the work is listening to the women's stories; the abuse and torture, both physical and emotional, that they have been subjected to is beyond belief and heartbreaking to hear about. The frustrating part of the work is that some of these women face rejection or persecution from their families/ communities in their home country and still live in fear that if their traffickers found them their lives may be in danger. Many of our women come from countries where the Police and Government are uncooperative or corrupt and have therefore very little hope of receiving support/ help if they were to return home. It is also very difficult for the women to find the strength and courage to fight through the asylum process in the UK. It sometimes feels like their efforts to have a voice and to have their human rights respected are not met with sympathetic ears.

Despite the difficulties, the work is highly rewarding and enjoyable. We have had many good times in the house, chatting over meal times, celebrating birthdays, barbecues in the summer! As a staff team, we have had the pleasure of watching the women grow in confidence and self esteem, accessing college courses, doing voluntary work, attending local churches, mother and toddler groups and other services within the local community. The women's strength, courage and determination is inspiring. A personal highlight for me was hearing one woman say recently 'As far as I'm concerned my life started in this house. Now, when people ask me, I tell them I was born here'.

I'm excited about the future of The Medaille Trust, the potential is huge and my hope is that we will help thousands more women who have been freed from the trafficking trade. This project is a precious opportunity to offer hope to those in despair.

This is a little snapshot of the work of The Medaille Trust. Our first meeting of Religious in the UK, in October 2005, has borne fruit. This was the meeting where we all agreed to work together to help the victims of sex trafficking in the UK - to pool what we could in terms of finance, personnel and houses. So many Religious Congregations, Churches, the CWL and the UCM, have and are contributing to the work of the Medaille Trust, and so what we have managed to achieve, is thanks to this collaboration. We are experiencing that we can do so much together that we could never do alone.

We have seen a lot of the reality of trafficking and what The Medaille Trust is doing. Now it might be good to look at some of the under-lying causes:

SOME OF THE CAUSES OF TRAFFICKING

A) OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM

This enables one part of the world to be wealthy at the expense of two-thirds of the people on our planet.

People are so vulnerable to being exploited and betrayed because they live in extreme conditions of poverty; they take terrible risks to improve their own lives and those of their families. Traffickers know this and they prey on this vulnerability. They see these poor people as commodities...

The gap between the rich and the poor is fundamental to the problem of trafficking.

B) THE PREVALENCE OF WAR:

We spend so much more of the earth's resources on war than on life.

War destroys economies, destroys communities, destroys homes and breaks up families. It is always women and children who suffer most and are therefore vulnerable to traffickers.

There are thousands of military bases throughout the world and there will be brothels attached to each one. Most of the women in the brothels have been trafficked. They won't have made a free choice about this.

C) A DISTORTED VIEW OF WOMEN

A number of people think that there are two kinds of women:

Those who are to be respected and cherished such as wives, sisters and daughters.

Those who can be used and abused, such as women in prostitution. It is assumed that women CHOOSE to go into the sex industry; that they have made a career choice to become prostitutes. It is believed that these women enjoy what they are doing. This is simply not true.

Desperate circumstances lead women into prostitution. Prostitution is based on a lie. Women involved have to pretend that they want to be doing what they are doing. And those who are trafficked will be beaten if they do otherwise than live this pretence in front of punters.

THERE ARE NOT TWO KINDS OF WOMAN – ONLY ONE – WHO IS THE EQUAL OF MAN – AND MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE. EVERY WOMAN AND GIRL NEEDS TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT, AND NOT WITH ABUSE.

D) DEMAND FOR PROSTITUTED PEOPLE:

In the last 10 years, there has been an increase in the numbers of men paying for sex. The Internet and globalisation have played their part in this, as well as package holidays linked with sex tourism. Many men see the paying for sexual services as a legitimate form of leisure and entertainment. For these men, the increasing commodification of sex and women, provides a context in which, not only is commercial sex normalised, but it is associated with entitlements: with enough money you can buy whoever (whatever) you want. As one man said: 'It's just like going to Tesco's!'

This increasing DEMAND for prostituted people is a major challenge facing us. The Minister, Vernon Coaker recently spoke of sex-trafficking as "one of the vilest crimes that threaten society." He said that all other efforts in counter-trafficking will be futile if we don't tackle DEMAND. He also said that it is 'very important that men take more responsibility for our society.' Our Government is seriously looking at the Swedish solution, where women in prostitution are seen as victims and those who buy sex are criminalised. We will probably follow in their footsteps.

But the issue of demand is more complex, and we need to do more than simply change the Law. We need to change social attitudes and change our perceptions of prostitution and challenge the attitudes of many men.

There are a number of people in our society who have begun this debate already, including Ministers such as Vernon Coaker, Harriet Harman and Jackie Smith.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we Christians could give a more concerted lead in this matter of changing attitudes in society? We would be doing in the context of the Twenty-First Century what our forebears have done throughout the ages.

Father Des Connolly is committed to doing all that he can to bring men together in order to begin to address this major issue.

Today we have tried to give you an insight into trafficking in our world and of how the Medaille Trust is trying to help the victims.

I would like to make some suggestions as to how you might help, if you have the desire to do so and the time and energy. Here are some suggestions:

- Talk about trafficking at home, in work, when socialising, in Church.
- Pray...
- For the victims whose lives are being destroyed through trafficking
- For the men who use these women, children and young men because they are destroying their own lives as well
- For the traffickers. They must have had awful lives to be able to buy and sell people in this way and to treat the people with such violence

For Governments that they will use their power for the most defenceless people in our country

For the Church that it will be more inclusive of women with all the implications of this

Thank You

Your group donated £376.30 to the work of The Medaille Trust, so a big 'Thank you' to all of you.

'The Fields of Mudan'

You can purchase a copy of this film by going into the website www.indieflix.com It costs \$9.95 or around £5.

Please note: Deadline date for items for inclusion in the Autumn (Sep) edition of the Catholic Mother is the 11 August. Names for Eternal Rest column, 18 Aug

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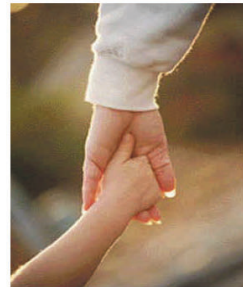
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