

A CONVERSATION with Good Samaritan Sr Pauline Coll

Religious lead fight against sex slavery

By MARILYN RODRIGUES

TODAY there are an estimated 1000 women working as sex slaves in Australia and as many as 300 are smuggled here each year, says Sister of the Good Samaritan, Sr Pauline Coll.

Most come to Australia from South-East Asia with the promise of waitressing or traditional massage work but once they get here they are forced through lies, extortion, blackmail or violence, or a combination of these, to work in brothels for no pay.

Many are afraid of the police and Immigration Department officials, have little or no English or knowledge of where to go for help. If they know enough and are brave enough to testify against their captors they are offered a temporary witness protection visa. Many receive no help at all.

Sr Pauline says that sexual slavery is largely a hidden problem and also just a subset of the global trade in and exploitation of human life which includes the trafficking of woman and children, child sex tourism, trafficking of human organs and poor labour practices.

Sr Pauline is the co-ordinator of her congregation's work against trafficking in women and children and a founding member of the national group, Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, along with Sr Louise Cleary, Congregational leader of the Brigidine Sisters in Australia.

Although she has never met a woman who has been treated this way Sr Pauline belongs to an ever-growing network of organisations, charities, churches and individuals joining a war against slavery - especially the smuggling of women for prostitution - on many fronts and up to the highest levels.

Sr Pauline is happy to work in

the background, developing networks, lobbying and speaking at schools and, earlier this year, at a rally of 120 members of the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes to raise community awareness on the issue.

"The collaborative model is a new way for us to do things," she says.

"With our religious thin on the ground and ageing, we really have got much more power when we work together to change unjust structures.

"We don't have to do all the work ourselves; there are many wonderful younger people and other groups working in this area and we can help them set things up."

The religious network involves a host of men and women around the country, including the Mercy Sisters, Good Shepherd Sisters, Presentation Sisters, Sisters of Charity, Sisters of St Joseph and the Christian Brothers.

It has been working closely with many others, including Melbourne lobby group Project Respect and the Anti-Slavery Project at the University of Technology, Sydney.

The group commissioned Jennifer Burn, director of the anti-slavery project, and Melbourne barrister Georgina Costello to prepare a report on the issue which they presented early this year to the UN Committee for the Eradication of All Discrimination Against Women.

As a result the UN committee made similar recommendations to the Australian Federal Government, including to reform the visa for trafficked women and to provide more support and prevention strategies.

Sr Pauline recently returned from Canberra where she was part of a group lobbying MPs, prime ministerial advisers and

community leaders on those recommendations, particularly for a change to the visa structure. They also met with the Australian Federal Police and church groups such as the Catholic Women's League Australia.

"We're asking them (the politicians) to take some action on visa reform so that the people who are trafficked, especially the women who are trafficked for sexual exploitation, are not victimised twice," she says.

"Presently they can stay for a certain amount of time only if they are prepared to give evidence and act as witnesses for the prosecution."

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans was formed in response to the call of the Union of International Superiors' General, who represent more than 800 congregations of women religious, to commit to the eradication of the trafficking of women and children.

There are five main goals. First, there is a need for research into the extent of the problem in Australia. The figure of 1000 women is an educated guess by Project Respect. There are very few women on the government support programs.

Then there is the need for safe houses for the women.

"There is none at the moment, although the Brigidine Sisters do offer some places," says Sr Pauline.

"Nothing is instant because they have to be set up properly.

"And also to work most effectively you need to get the proper funding.

"These women have got to be protected.

"They've been traumatised and they've also been threatened with recriminations towards their families in their home places."

Another goal is building



HUMAN TRAFFICKING: Sr Pauline Coll in fight against exploitation of women.

networks in the Asia-Pacific region, and to this end Sr Pauline is attending a counter-trafficking training course for religious personnel.

"It's an opportunity to network with our Asia-Pacific counterparts. So many of the women who end up here come from there," she says.

"The lobbying for visa reform is an ongoing work, as is the community awareness raising."

Finally, the group is committed to supporting the Millennium Development Goals initiatives (such as Fair Trade) to reduce poverty, which is a driving force in human trafficking.

Although the issue of sexual slavery in Australia hit the headlines earlier this year, when the first people were charged and the first person was sentenced for keeping sex slaves in Australia, the issue of sexual slavery has been on the radar of Catholic religious and church networks for a long time.

There is even an annual prayer day on July 6, the feast of St Maria Goretti, initiated by the Catholic Women's League to highlight and pray against the sexual violence and exploitation perpetrated against women and children,

especially in regard to trafficking for prostitution. Most of the women who are trafficked here come from China, South Korea and Thailand.

Pauline is encouraged and inspired by the women working in this and related areas.

They include Jennifer Burn and Georgina Costello; Kathleen Maltzahn, director of Project Respect; Melbourne academic Liz Hoban, who runs Project Hope in Cambodia to help lift children out of poverty; Liberal MP Vicky Dunne, for bringing the issue to the attention of her party.

"So many of these wonderful women who are working in this area have been educated by the nuns and told they can do anything," says Sr Pauline.

"We have to mentor these younger women especially as we are getting older.

"It's a very exciting time, a new way to go. It is using our resources in a different way."

Sr Pauline was born and raised in Queensland and believes she must have inherited a "really strong social justice gene" from her father.

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Christmas: community, corporate support

By JOHN O'NEILL

St Vincent de Paul Society

THE essence of Christmas and the spirit of the festive season are manifested in so many different ways.

In the coming weeks, families, friends, colleagues and communities will start to come together at Mass, in neighbourhoods and at parties to share food and drink, fun, laughter and presents. It is a time to rejoice and unite and celebrate this special feast celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. But what is most important and so encouraging is the way that each year, we, the St Vincent de Paul Society, witness these same individuals and communities sharing their time, money and compassion for the good others.

Perhaps it is worth remembering that it was because of the generosity of just one innkeeper that the first Christmas family found assistance in their time of need, when they had little choice and nowhere to turn. This single act of kindness inadvertently affected the history of the world, perhaps the first example of how it only takes a little to help a lot.

Vinnies members and vol-

unteers are kept very busy at Christmas, preparing food parcels and gifts to deliver to those people and families who may be struggling on low incomes and finding Christmas a particularly stressful time. Having this network of some 20,000 members and volunteers across NSW and the ACT allows us to effectively reach out to thousands of families in need every day of the year including Christmas. It is this grassroots faith in action that is the very essence of the Society. But the truth is that our people could not do this essential work without the financial support we receive from the public, communities and the corporate sector.

At Christmas, our supporters often make a special effort to get more involved. With so many charities competing for the good-will that abounds during the festive season, some companies, schools and community groups like to make practical contributions as well as a financial one.

For companies, this is often about promoting charitable attitudes among staff and

providing the opportunities for employees to work together to create positive outcomes for others.

Throughout the year, Vinnies works closely with a number of companies to develop Workplace Giving Programs wherein employees make donations to their selected charities from their pre-tax income. Employers then match these contributions to provide a set monthly donation to the chosen charities. These programs are supported by the Australian Charities Fund and the Charities Aid Foundation to provide ongoing assistance to charities with minimal administration costs.

But for some employees, a virtually "invisible" donation taken direct from their pay packet seems a little lacking in Christmas spirit and they prefer to take a hands-on, practical approach to the concept of 'giving'.

Before Christmas Day, at the Matthew Talbot Hostel, a special delivery arrives at the Talbot's kitchen. This delivery has come each year for as long as we can remember

with the compliments of a high-profile Australian company, which has been a generous and long-term supporter of the work of the Talbot.

The delivery consists of 40 hams and 30 turkeys, which are cooked by Talbot kitchen staff on Christmas Day to provide a traditional Christmas dinner for the homeless people who spend the day with us.

Schools and the input of young people are another source of community support at this time of the year. Many schools and colleges encourage students to embrace the message of Christmas by getting involved helping others. As well as organising large-scale donations of toys and gifts for Vinnies women's and children's refuges, students are also involved in making Christmas hampers containing food, household goods and gifts, which are distributed to disadvantaged families via the St Vincent de Paul Society conference network.

So thank you for the wonderful support received at Christmas time. Thank you

for the range of activities undertaken by community-minded people, corporate groups and schools, which go a long way to making Christmas a whole lot happier for people in need.

This Christmas you can support the St Vincent de Paul Society by making a

donation to the Christmas Appeal. Please call 13 18 12 or visit www.vinnies.org.au

[Written with the assistance of Julie McDonald.]

Keep smiling and God bless.

John O'Neill is NSW/ACT state president of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Question time

Communion for non-Catholics

By Fr JOHN FLADER

ALTHOUGH I thought I knew the answer, I am now confused about who may receive holy Communion in a wedding. Recently I have attended weddings at which the non-Catholic in the bridal couple was given Holy Communion. I asked the priest about this afterwards and he explained that when a non-Catholic marries a Catholic he or she may receive Communion. Also I have seen a non-practising Catholic spouse receive Communion. Perhaps what confused me the most, though, was the invitation by the priest for everyone present to come up and receive Communion. I thought this was not permitted. And finally, can a Mass be celebrated in a wedding between a non-Catholic Christian and a Catholic?

YOU ask questions which I am sure have troubled many others as well, since the practices you mention are becoming more frequent. The Church has very clear norms for giving Communion to non-Catholic Christians, and there are no exceptions for weddings. Canon 844 §3 of the Code of Canon Law stipulates that non-Catholics who belong to one of the Orthodox Churches (Greek, Russian, Coptic Orthodox, etc.) may receive Communion provided they spontaneously ask for it and are properly disposed, i.e. they are in a state of grace.

The reason why they may receive Communion in these circumstances is that the Orthodox Churches have the same belief as the Catholic Church regarding the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Thus it is perfectly acceptable for an Orthodox spouse to receive Communion in a Catholic wedding provided these conditions are fulfilled. Other Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church – i.e. Anglicans, Protestants, etc. – may receive Communion from a Catholic minister only "if there is a danger of death or if, in the judgment of the diocesan Bishop or the Episcopal Conference, there is some other grave and pressing need."

It is hard to see how a wedding constitutes a "grave and pressing need". In any case it is still required that the non-Catholic spontaneously asks for the sacrament, demonstrates that they have the Catholic faith in respect of it and is properly disposed. (Canon 844 §4) To have the Catholic faith in respect of the Eucharist, as already mentioned, includes believing in the Real Presence, and this faith is not ordinarily held by Anglicans, with the exception of Anglo-Catholics, nor by Protestants. And again, the non-Catholic would have to be in a state of grace.

Thus with the exception of the Orthodox, Communion may not ordinarily be given to the non-Catholic spouse in a mixed marriage.

As regards a non-practising Catholic spouse receiving Communion at their wedding, those attending should make no judgment. People should simply assume that the person has received the sacrament of Reconciliation before the wedding and is now in a state of grace. Obviously, if they haven't received this sacrament they will not be in a state of grace and should not receive Communion.

The practice of the priest inviting all those present to receive Communion is clearly wrong, in view of what we have said above. In order to make clear who may receive Communion, it can be good to include a reminder in the wedding booklet that only practising Catholics may receive Communion, but that all others who so wish are invited to come forward to receive a blessing, indicating this desire by crossing their arms over their chest. The priest celebrant too can mention this before Communion.

As regards whether a Mass may be celebrated in a mixed marriage, there is nothing against having a Mass when both spouses are baptised Christians.

Indeed, it is good to celebrate the sacrament of Matrimony within a Mass, since the covenant of marriage is a sign of Christ's nuptial covenant with the Church, a covenant Christ sealed by his sacrificial death on the Cross, and the Mass makes present this sacrifice.

Having said this, when neither partner is a practising member of their Church and when it is foreseen that most of those attending the wedding are in the same position, it may be better not to have a Mass in order to avoid the problems regarding Communion mentioned above.

Send your questions to Fr John Flader c/- The Catholic Weekly, Level 8, Polding Centre, 133 Liverpool St, Sydney 2000, or email to director@caec.com.au

Why some quit the Church

By Fr JOHN CATOIR

Reflections

IN January 2000 the American bishops issued the results of a survey they had commissioned on "why most inactive Catholics have drifted away from the Catholic Church". Here are the results, with added comments of my own:

1. Did not experience God's presence in their Catholic community.

Why, I wonder? Had they lost faith in the Eucharist? They must have, because millions of active Catholics experience genuine comfort from the Eucharist.

Catholics who have remained in the Church can be grateful that we have the gift of faith, and we can pray for those who do not.

2. Did not experience warm, personal caring in their encounters with other Catholics.

Why not? Did they make any effort? A public event like the liturgy is for the worship of God. Granted, parishes should have a gathering place after Mass to encourage interaction and friendship, but it is the responsibility of the individual to make friends.

3. Saw Catholicism as too complex and unrelated to their lives.

In terms of theology, this is understandable. But the church is a complex structure precisely because it is an international organisation. When Jesus

said, "I am the vine, you are the branches", he intended that we stay connected.

4. Was hurt by a priest or sister.

This is enough to make anyone walk away from the Church. On the other hand, if a cop does something wrong, should you reject the entire police force?

Some people sabotage their spiritual well-being by the way they react to scandalous behaviour. We should try not to throw out the baby with the bath water.

5. Came into conflict with Church teaching.

The truth is not multiple. In our society individualism is exalted, but differing opinions can't all be right. The idea that two and two are five is not good math. Faith involves a kind of surrender to the mysteries of faith.

6. Were in a marriage not recognised by the Church.

Some are in good faith about their marriage, believing they are OK with God. I do not question anyone's conscience on this, but such people should know that no one is excommunicated for being in an invalid marriage. The Church is full of such marriages. There's no need to leave the Church because of this.

7. Got too busy and did not take the

time to be involved with the Church anymore.

This will be the feeblest excuse possible when standing before God on judgment day. Trying to explain why you neglected your soul will not be easy.

8. Relocated, but never reconnected with the Church.

If you never were connected, then reconnecting is not really possible. Failing to take responsibility for your spiritual life is like turning your back on the possibility of losing your soul. The stakes are too high to gamble. All of us in the Church have a big job to do to help our neighbours. Jesus said, "There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one lost sheep who returns to God than over 99 who never strayed" (Lk 15). We have to do better in reaching out to them.

Every parish needs a welcoming committee to greet newcomers and estranged Catholics. Most have a variety of ministries to help others carry the burdens of life – like ministries for the grief stricken, the sick, the divorced and separated, for single adults and youth.

We need to encourage all parishioners to use their talents for the good of all. Help to create an atmosphere of emotional comfort in your parish.

Our motto should be: "We care about you, and your spiritual happiness."

Fr John Catoir is a CNS columnist

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"He had a strong social justice bent, honest to the nth degree and deeply spiritual," she says.

"Then as a young woman in the Young Catholic Workers I wanted to change the world into a better place, and the YCW training was brilliant."

Later, she studied at the Australian National University under "brilliant" teachers such as historian Manning Clark and poet AD Hope.

"It was a wonderful time to be there," she said.

Sr Pauline joined the Good Sams in 1959.

"I'd been schooled by them only for a couple of years, but I liked the fact that they were Australian, and they

were not diocesan," she says. "Also the Good Samaritan parable is such a powerful parable."

Sr Pauline believes the work she is currently doing is fitting for her congregation to be involved in, founded as it was by Archbishop Bede Polding to give women in vulnerable positions a helping hand.

A former high school teacher, Sr Pauline most recently worked with Queensland's Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes' Social Action Office. Her particular brief was the environment.

"I went to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

"It was a very interesting experience to be confronted with the enormity of the problem globally, plus the fact that people have been talking about global warming and climate change for perhaps 15 years and it's only now that the politicians are starting to say that they're willing to do something," she says.

"Then there was the fact of going to South Africa itself and seeing the enormous poverty and enormous wealth that exists there side by side."

A workshop on people trafficking will be held in Melbourne and Sydney in February. Email Sr Pauline at Pauline@brisnet.org.au for more information.