

Responding to Emerging Social Disadvantage and Human Exploitation

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Opening remarks

- I have planned this as an interactive presentation using the YCS Cardijn framework; I learnt a lot from Brian Lawrence, our organiser for today and one of the YCS animators when I was in year 11 at high school in the late 1960s.
- I am speaking as the ACRATH EO when I speak about Seeing in the See, Judge, Act framework, and then I'll take responsibility for my own thoughts as I explore Judging and Acting. And I like a bit of storytelling.

See - we look at how injustice affects people. We also look at how we are connected to the situation.

- An early aspect of our ACRATH work was working with other groups to establish the rights of six young Asian women trafficked into sexual exploitation in Brunswick St Fitzroy, about 1 kilometre from where we are meeting. Over the past 14 years ACRATH has worked on human trafficking and modern slavery challenges like forced labour, forced marriage and organ trafficking; we work with people who have been trafficked to ensure they are supported and that they can access their rights; we also work to identify system-wide change.
- One of the organisational ideas for today is, I think, to consider emerging social justice challenges, to name them and to work out a nimble Catholic response. Within the world working to stop human trafficking and modern slavery in Australia, some of the emerging challenges today include:
 1. tackling online child sexual exploitation. We ask the questions, who in the Philippines made the child sexual abuse clip? Who posted it online? Who has accessed it online? What infrastructure keeps the images up online? What global systems make the creation of such abuse possible? How is the child now? What redress is she/ he due? How can we make that happen?
 2. assisting overseas students in Australia to avoid sexual exploitation and trafficking. We ask the questions, why do overseas students seek poorly-paid and unregulated work? What responsibilities do Australian tertiary institutions have in this space? How can ACRATH support individual students who have been trafficked?
 3. overturning the apparent default business practice of systematic exploitation of Australia's 1 million+ overseas workers. We have all heard of the 7 Eleven, George Colombaris, Dominos Pizzas and supermarket chains' systematic underpayment of workers. We ask the question, where does systematic underpayment and visa abuse take us into the realm of forced labour and modern slavery? And of course we have some of our own answers to that question.

4. building a robust system of justice and redress for workers in Australia's supply chains. I ask you to take out your mobile phone and hold it in your hands for this section of my presentation. Have children mined the cobalt and coltan minerals used in most of our phones? Who made our clothes? Was it someone in Bangladesh who has been paid \$39 per month, not a living wage in Bangladesh? We ask the questions, what happens when, for example, the Australian health and aged care sectors discover forced labour in the factories in Malaysia that make their rubber gloves? This forced labour was reported in Australian and USA media in late 2019. We in ACRATH have had a joint counter trafficking project with St Vincent's Health Australia (SVHA) for almost three years; we have now located instances of forced labour in supply chains. So what next? Is there a Catholic Health united response to lead in the general health and aged care sectors?
5. working with Pacific Islanders who are increasingly vulnerable to human trafficking due to the impacts of climate change. What is our Australian responsibility to Pacific Islanders who are more and more vulnerable to labour exploitation, especially in NZ and here in Australia?
6. addressing organ trafficking tourism by Australians to Asia and the Middle East. What is our Australian responsibility for Australians who travel to less medically regulated countries to buy a kidney or an eye or another body part? And again we ask what global systems make the creation of such abuse possible?

These six challenges sit in our ACRATH awareness and with our network partners, but each needs to be resourced with a budget and a timeline, maybe \$100K each year for 5 years, to produce results. At the moment we don't have those resources to expand our current work so we can build a Catholic response to these emerging challenges.

- I have outlined where ACRATH started and what emerging challenges we face. Now I'd like to illustrate very briefly our ACRATH current work by referring to four circumstances of human trafficking illustrated in these short film clips as they relate to us in Australia:
 1. [Cleaning contractors](#)
 2. [Restaurant workers](#)
 3. [fruit and vegetable workers](#)
 4. [Minerals such cobalt and coltan used in mobile phone, clothing made in Bangladesh, cocoa harvested in the Ivory Coast and Ghana](#)

I've mentioned lots of instances of human trafficking and modern slavery including sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and forced labour both in Australia and overseas in supply chains of goods and services we use. Hopefully I haven't overwhelmed you with so many examples. So let's now look at these human rights abuses within the context of our faith.

Judge

The framework for judging our situation that I want to use today has three aspects - a UN global human response and two faith-based messages, one from Isaiah and the other from Catholic Social Teaching.

- The message that we need to act on injustice is of course not confined to a faith-based message. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, pulled together in 1948, straight after the massive human rights abuses of World War 2, is just that – a universal call to us as global citizens. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration says:

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

- For our biblical text today I'd like us to pause and consider Isaiah 54: 2; Isaiah says: "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes." (New International Version) I think the text in its context is encouraging the reader about the growth that is coming. Today I think it carries an apt challenge for us as we consider the emerging justice needs of our planet; I see it as encouragement to be ready to tackle the emerging issues, ones we may not even see yet. It calls us to act audaciously and with confidence as new challenges roll in.
- Let's also bring into consideration the rich traditions of our Catholic Social Teaching and in particular the reminder to value:
 - Human Dignity
 - the Common Good
 - Solidarity

I'd like to make one further observation concerning Catholic Social Teaching. We in the community sector in Australia understand that the people affected by the injustice of human trafficking have knowledge, hopes, skills and the power to transform their own situations. Keeping their work and ideas at the centre of our actions reflects the Catholic Social Teaching principle of Human Dignity and helps ensure that our own actions are just.¹ However this is a particular challenge for us in the community network that acts to address human trafficking in Australia. Partnering with human trafficking survivors challenges us to ensure the survivor is not further traumatised by engagement with us. We are also conscious of the survivor's vulnerability to losing their privacy as they work with us.

- So in our judging of this situation, we can ask ourselves, how does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Isaiah text and those aspects of Catholic Social Teaching challenge us?

Act to stop human trafficking

William Wilberforce said, "You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know."

Of course our organisation's website www.acrath.org.au has many suggestions for taking action. In this paper I want to consider three areas of action.

- In my own life – there is the challenge to be an inquisitive and active consumer. We in ACRATH suggest active consumers might engage regularly with a product's website asking for assurance that I as a consumer am not unwittingly participating in a supply chain that involves human trafficking. Active consumers ask about the supply chains of goods when we are shopping. About ten years ago one major chocolate manufacturer informed our network that their research told them that Australian consumers were not concerned about slavery in supply chains. After a concerted consumer campaign, this chocolate manufacturer began work addressing forced labour of children in the harvesting of the cocoa they used.
- Where I have influence – ACRATH challenges people to take action, and the first action they might take is to talk with 5 people within a week. People can take action in their church community, in their workplace, in their gym group, in their book club, wherever they have a community. This community might begin by making a small step in group procurement of

initially their tea, coffee and chocolate to ensure they buy slavery-free products that are labelled to identify that commitment by the manufacturer.

- To be a protagonist within our church. Some challenges I personally face in this framework include:
 - How to be a strong woman? Our particular church, even now in the 21st century, places obstacles to me using my voice in church structures to stop the trafficking of people. So an opportunity like this day-long seminar is welcome.
 - How to continue networking with civil society who may be offended by institutional Catholic church public stances? Since the Royal Commission I have found this an increasing challenge.
 - How to continue and also develop a progressive, social justice focused prophetic voice? I think the Catholic sisters who began our organisation in 2005 had a clear progressive, social justice focused prophetic voice. We have found that that voice is very attractive to young people to whom we present on the issue of human trafficking. In fact one of the factors in some of the major chocolate companies in Australia moving to slavery-free sourcing of cocoa beans was the pressure of large numbers of Catholic school students calling for just that. So the prophetic voice is clear, and we know that it is appealing to young and old as we can show the effectiveness of action over and over again in the past 15 years. Bewilderingly to me, this voice is so under-resourced in the allocation of youth focussed institutional Catholic church resources. But in our organisation and our network partners the voice is strong, clear and prophetic.

In conclusion

I have valued the opportunity to focus on emerging challenges in our counter human trafficking space. As perhaps so often in the community sector, our work can be focussed on responding to the immediate issues confronting us, so it has been a good opportunity for me to step back to ponder the emerging challenges.

I have also valued the opportunity to share this day with people for whom **Delivering Catholic Social Teaching through community services and public advocacy** is a desirable, or rather impelling, call to work for justice together.

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