

Feast Day of Saint Bakhita – February 8

February 8, 2019 has been designated by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace as the annual day of prayer and awareness against human trafficking. Pope Francis has called human trafficking a crime against humanity and has urged everyone to unite efforts to eliminate the crime and to free the victims. He states that human trafficking is getting more aggressive, threatening not only individuals but the foundational values of our society.

Why February 8th?

This is the feast day of an outstanding woman who was a convert, a religious woman, a saint and a victim of trafficking. At the very young age of seven, St. Josephine Bakhita was kidnapped and sold into slavery in Darfur, Sudan. She was brutalized by her kidnappers who called her Bakhita which means 'fortunate'. Resold several times, she was eventually bought by an Italian diplomat who sent her to Italy to work as a servant for a daughter of a family friend who was studying with the Daughters of Charity of Canossa. It was there that Bakhita came to know God and was baptized in 1890, receiving the name Josephine. When her family decided to return to Africa, Josephine wanted to remain in Italy since slavery was abolished there. In Italy, she grew in her faith and became a Canossian Sister. For the next 50 years, she dedicated her life to sharing her story of freedom from slavery and comforting the poor until her death in 1947. She was declared a Saint in 2000.

Situation in Canada

Human trafficking is happening in Canada and is destroying the lives of our women and children today. Unfortunately, human trafficking has not been consigned to history.

In December 2014, Canada moved in a positive direction by adopting the **Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA)**. This law focuses on the demand side of prostitution by criminalizing the buyers and profiteers, while at the same time decriminalizing prostituted persons. The law holds the buyers and profiteers accountable for their actions and encourages prostituted persons to exit prostitution and to get help to rebuild their lives. Through this law, Canada has become a global leader and taken a progressive step forward in promoting gender equality, eliminating violence toward women and children and focusing on the demand which is the only proven strategy for change. Many other nations have followed suit and enacted similar laws that target the sex buyers and profiteers.

Now is a critical moment for education and advocacy throughout our country with the general election in the fall of 2019. Our Canadian people need to know that this law must be strengthened and enforced throughout Canada. Any movement to legalize prostitution or decriminalize the buying would only further marginalize our Indigenous women and youth, as well as increase prostitution and human trafficking in our country.

In the spirit of St. Josephine Bakhita and Pope Francis you are invited to join with others in promoting the [Buying Sex Is A Crime](http://buyingsexisacrime.org) social media campaign. We urge all dioceses, diocesan groups, organizations and other interest groups to collaborate on this very important social media campaign to educate Canadians on this grave issue.

In the Diocese of Victoria for further information contact: Annette Turgeon tcrmi@shaw.ca

Here's what you can do

1. Share this website <http://buyingsexisacrime.org>
2. Share this facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/buyingsexisacrime/>

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the inspiring example of Saint Josephine Bakhita.

Saint Josephine Bakhita, you were enslaved as a child; you were bought and sold, you were treated brutally.

Intercede, we implore you, for all those who are trapped in trafficking and slavery. May their captors let them go, and may this evil be erased from the face of the earth.

Saint Josephine Bakhita, once you regained your freedom, you did not let your suffering define your life.

You chose a path of kindness and generosity.

Help those blinded by greed and lust

who trample the human rights and dignity of their brothers and sisters.

Help them to break out of their hateful chains,

to become fully human again, and to imitate your kindness and generosity.

Dear Saint Josephine Bakhita, your freedom drew you to Christ and his Church.

Then God called you to religious life as a Canossian Sister.

You practiced great charity, mercy and joyful gentleness in your vocation.

Help us always to be like you, especially when we feel tempted

to look away and not to help, to reject others or even to abuse them.

Intercede for us so that Christ may fill our hearts with joy as he always filled yours.

O Loving God pour your merciful light into our troubled world.

Let it flood into the darkest shadows.

Bring salvation to the innocents who suffer under sinful abuse.

Bring conversation to the utterly lost souls who hold them captive and exploit them.

Give us all the strength to grow in the true freedom

of love for you, for each other and for our common home.

Amen