



News & Notes

LIFE, HEALTH & FAMILY

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Free Those in Bondage

Heavenly Father, You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to sympathize with us in our weakness through His incarnation, redeem our fallen flesh by His death, vindicate us in His resurrection, and lead captivity captive by His ascension on high. Hear our prayers for those caught in the snares of human trafficking. Give comfort by Your Son's wounds to those wounded and exploited. By Your absolution and the promises of Holy Baptism, remove all shame and put to silence every memory of sin in afflicted consciences, that they may know and believe with certainty that what You call clean, no one can call unclean. Free those in bondage and bring the plots of the wicked to nothing. Frustrate all who abuse, support and perpetuate destruction, violence and depravity, and deliver us from evil; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Human Trafficking: Praying for the Wounded and Exploited

Human trafficking, which recently became the world's third-largest criminal enterprise, is a form of modern-day slavery. The United Nations estimates that over 20 million people are missing due to human trafficking. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that between 14,000 and 17,000 people are trafficked every year into the United States.

Human traffickers use force, fraud or coercion to lure vulnerable people into slavery. Despite myths in popular culture, traffickers are often people who know the victim: a family member, close friend or significant other.

By exploiting vulnerability, human trafficking has created an estimated \$32 billion global profit that continues to grow larger every day. It needs to stop. LCMS Life Ministry stands ready to serve those vulnerable to trafficking, those being trafficked, and those rescued from trafficking.



Uncomfortable Realities

BY MIKE MERKER

“What does this look like at the local level? How can I help?”

Those are the questions I asked when a mother in Apex, N.C., opened my eyes to the tragedy of human trafficking. Nicole Bernard became aware of trafficking and, as a parent, refused to sit on the sidelines. She created a non-profit called Shield NC, which is an advocacy group that works to improve the rights of those who are trafficked and enable local governments to respond to this crisis. As a pastor, my learning about human trafficking began as Nicole and the former mayor of Apex initiated a local community forum to strengthen congregations and community agencies.

For years, Jordan Lutheran Church in Apex, where I serve, has sought to be a congregation that lives in our town and serves in our town. We have described this focus as *Live Here, Serve Here*, as we partner with area agencies and volunteers to open the eyes of the congregation to needs in our area. The community forum showed me I had a blind spot in Apex, which carries the moniker “The Peak of Good Living.” I was one who thought this couldn’t take place in my town. Unfortunately, human trafficking is not just about having a supply of people; it is also the demand for people. A more affluent town like Apex can create an atmosphere where people with higher discretionary income may seek out the services of an escort or a person who is trafficked. It is this unpleasant reality that causes many of us to flee even the conversation; yet, as believers called to faith by the Holy Spirit, we are bold to address sin even when the topic is upsetting.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in

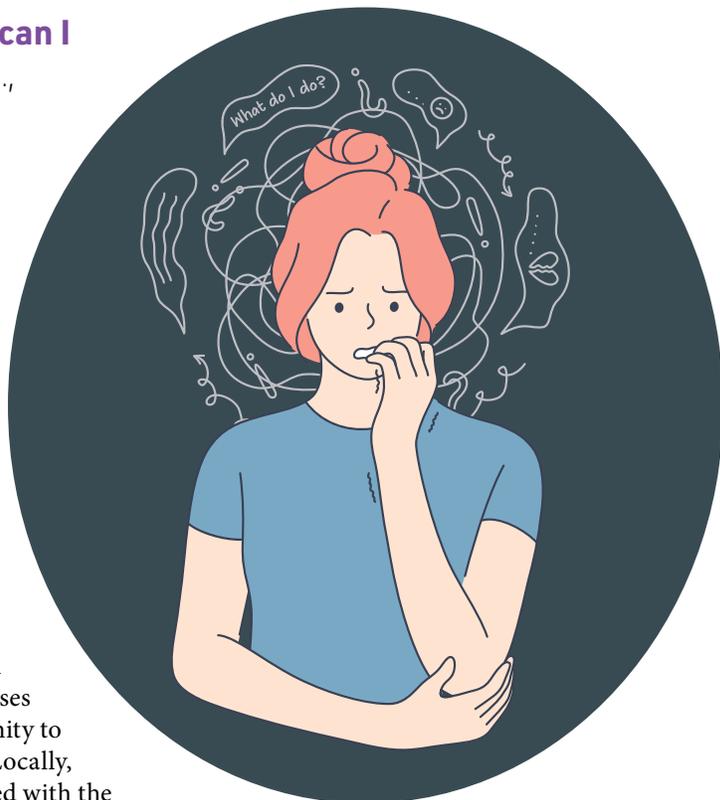
the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. (1 Thess. 4:3–5)

Listening to an uncomfortable reality in your community can be a gateway the Lord uses to give you an opportunity to address the challenge. Locally, I have become connected with the victim advocate on our police force and connected with other faith-based organizations, so I am better prepared to know how to respond to a crisis. In the Carolinas we have frontline organizations like Project FIGHT (Freeing Individuals Grippled by Human Trafficking), which has combated trafficking since 2011 through The Salvation Army. Connecting with local authorities and other agencies is the first step for most congregations who want to know how to help. Another important step can be educating people on the warning signs of children who are at a heightened risk of being trafficked. Training church staff and volunteers to be trauma informed

can create a safer environment for families young and old.

The first step in addressing a problem is being able to recognize something is wrong. I am thankful for Nicole, a mother in Apex who was not content to permit trafficking to happen unchecked in our town. The present darkness of trafficking is vanquished only in the power of Christ’s cross and the knowledge of the empty tomb.

The Rev. Mike Merker is pastor of Jordan Lutheran Church, Apex, N.C.



“As believers called to faith by the Holy Spirit, we are bold to address sin *even when the topic is upsetting.*”

HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

How to Help the Vulnerable

Identify

What does a trafficked person look like? There are many different faces of human trafficking, with sex trafficking through prostitution, mail-order brides or commercial sexual exploitation through strip clubs or the pornography industry forming one of the biggest portions of trafficked people worldwide. Other forms of trafficking include labor trafficking, organ trafficking, panhandling, debt bondage, domestic servitude and recruitment of child soldiers. Essentially, trafficking involves the use of force or coercion to manipulate an individual into doing something. This could involve threats, violence, fraud or the withholding of an individual's legal identification documents.

Though there are factors that influence a person's risk of being trafficked, victims of trafficking come from all countries and demographics. The defining factor that puts people at risk of being trafficked is vulnerability, which comes in many different forms. Socioeconomic instability, social discrimination (based on religion, ethnicity, gender identity, etc.), low self-esteem, mental illness, age, lack of opportunity, refugee status, migrant status and lack of citizenship are often exploited when someone is trafficked, though this list is not exhaustive. Generally, women and children are trafficked for sexual exploitation, while labor and other forms of trafficking include men, women and children.

What can you look for when trying to identify trafficking victims? According to the Polaris Project, people who have been trafficked may let someone else speak for them, may have an unclear story of origin, appear significantly more disheveled than others in their party, seem as though they do not know where they are or how they came to be there, or have other obvious signs of neglect or abuse. To view a full list of trafficking red flags, visit polarisproject.org/recognize-signs. If you notice any of these things, call your local



police department or the National Human Trafficking hotline (explained below) to report your suspicions.

Understand

According to the U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, individuals who are especially vulnerable to trafficking in the United States include children in the juvenile court system or welfare program, members of the LGBTQ community, those with disabilities, children and young adults who are homeless or have run away from home, people from rural areas of the country and people who have low levels of English proficiency. Women and children form the majority of those trafficked into the United States each year for the purpose of prostitution and other commercial sex acts, though men do form a small portion of this group.

Intervene

Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 800-373-7888 or text 233733, available 24/7, to report any suspicions you have. This is also a resource for those who need help to get in contact with those who can provide it. The iPhone app called TraffickCam allows people to upload pictures of their hotel rooms as they travel, helping local law enforcement identify possible places of sex trafficking through photo comparison.

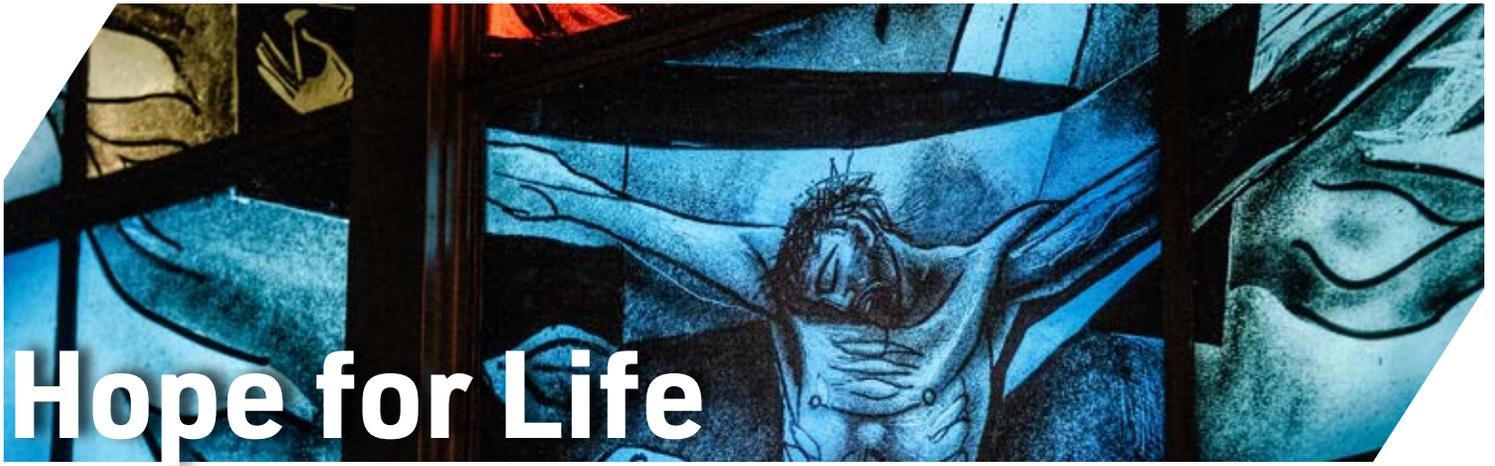
Pray

As Christians, the most important weapon at our disposal in the face of degradation and sin is prayer. Praying for those who are vulnerable to trafficking, who are being trafficked, who have been rescued from trafficking, or who traffic others is an essential part of the fight against human trafficking.



RESOURCES

- polarisproject.org/recognize-signs
- National Human Trafficking Resource Center : 800-373-7888 or text 233733



BY THOMAS EGGBRECHT

Eve was, of course, the first person in the history of the world to give birth to a child. When Cain was born, she said, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord” (Gen. 4:1). Some — including Martin Luther — believe that Eve was, at that moment, thanking the Lord that He had already provided the gift of a Savior following her fall into sin. But that wasn’t yet the case. Original sin had already taken hold. It was passed on to the very first generation of children. Before long, Cain devalued life so much that he killed his very own brother. It was the first of a long and historical pattern showing just how much sinful human beings hurt and harm their neighbors and fail to help them with physical needs. But God did indeed have a plan to restore not only the dignity of life but life itself.

The Apostles’ Creed says that Jesus “was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary.” It goes on: “[Jesus] suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.” The Creed declares that our triune God has redeemed all human life from sin, death and the grave. He provides certain hope for eternal life, even in the face of death. Jesus has guaranteed it by actively restoring what Adam, Eve, Cain and all human beings have destroyed. Jesus is life for you.

1. Read Psalm 139. What does this psalm reveal about human beings? What does it tell us about God? What does it say about the way He values human life?

2. God not only values human life, He gives it purpose. See Jeremiah 1:5. What was the purpose of Jeremiah’s life? How does this verse inform the purpose God has for you? Do you have to be a prophet in order to have purpose in God’s plan? See Romans 8:1–11 and Ephesians 1:3–14.

3. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod has said, “Christians aim always to care, never to kill.” What does this kind of care look like as Christians deliver the love of Jesus from conception all the way to the point of death? See Matthew 25:31–46; Romans 14:7–9; and 2 Corinthians 1:3–5.

4. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). How do Jesus’ life, death and resurrection redeem our own thoughts and actions regarding God’s value of both physical and eternal life?

The Rev. Thomas Eggebrecht is pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church, Casselberry, Fla. This article originally appeared in the January 2017 issue of The Lutheran Witness.

Subscribe to LCMS Life Ministry's New Podcast

BY STEPHANIE NEUGEBAUER

"Friends for Life" is the newest LCMS partner podcast through KFUD radio.

Podcasts have been a trending form of media among young adults in recent years, and LCMS Life Ministry is excited to offer a new way to engage in our ongoing pro-life conversation and activity. Podcasts are a transportable and creative way to become informed, be entertained and build community around common interests and issues.

I'm feeling both excited and challenged as I begin hosting "Friends for Life." Though in recent years I've become an avid listener of podcasts myself, never did I envision being the one on the other end of the soundwaves, preparing content for others to listen to.

As we settled in on a name for the show, we really wanted our title to be warm, comfortable and invitational. What's more inviting than the thought of sitting down in your favorite cozy place for some genuine, meaningful conversation with a friend? LCMS Life Ministry hopes that Friends for Life will become that "place" for people: a place where conversation can be open and genuine about a vast array of life issues, a place where we learn to articulate the value of human life from conception to natural end, a place where the Gospel is potent and

where we hear Christ point us outward, toward our neighbor.

As Lutheran Christians, we have a beautiful theology of vocation. In the Table of Duties, we're never left to wonder, "Who is my neighbor?" Yet at times, we struggle in knowing how to best help or serve our neighbor in their needs. "Friends for Life" is here to come alongside listeners in this struggle. How do we care for our guilt-ridden, post-abortive friend? How do we adjust when we become caretaker for an aging or ailing parent? What kind of help



and hope can we offer to a neighbor with chronic pain or a terminal illness? Lord, another miscarriage ... why? These are just a few of the really hard, really real situations that many of us will face in some way or somehow. But the best way to face them is with a friend, surrounded by community, with words that affirm life, under the cross. That is why we're happy to introduce "Friends for Life."

Stephanie Neugebauer is the former director of LCMS Life Ministry and the host of "Friends for Life."



A Lonely Time

BY ADRIAN SHERRILL

I t is a lonely time. It is not of God. He has not made us to be this way. The Christian shouldn't be alone.

Even before the Fall loneliness was a problem. That problem was beautifully corrected as Adam was given a bride. She was the most glorious thing the Father had ever made. Eve was the cure to loneliness. In her flesh Adam saw that the Father loved him. In her voice he heard the counsel of God. In her help the aid of God. In her smile the joy of God. She was a great gift to him. Together they walked with God. Soon enough they had children and they were less lonely still. Their ears and arms and time were filled as their family grew.

The Christian family is the first line of defense in the fight against loneliness. When strong, the family fights loneliness for others too. The usual path for most of us is to desire and pray for marriage and

family. With all the temptations swirling around, young men should put down the video games (they take and do not give) and talk to a few young Christian ladies, probably the sooner the better. Single Christians can help and be helped too and make stronger the families around them as they are included and join in.

Our flesh and the devil want us to be alone. They delight in separating husband from wife, brother from sister, child from parent. We have to fight against sin, really actually fight it, in and by the Spirit, and not give up on our marriages and family. Alone with the serpent, Adam and Eve fell. Alone against His brother, Cain brought much grief to the family. If you think about your own life you know being alone is dangerous. We should be aware of lonely situations that bring us and others trouble

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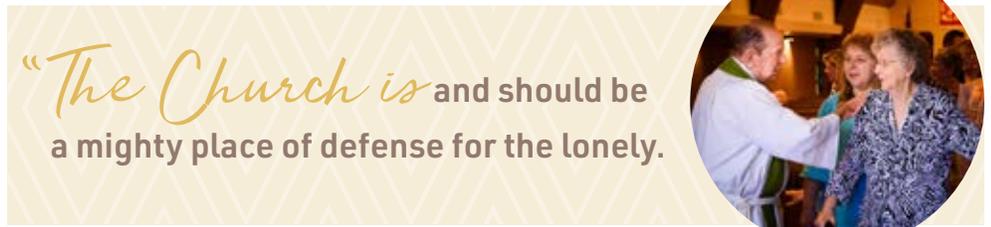
GIVE NOW



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and avoid them. We should never miss church if we can help it. We should lovingly check on those who do. Falling away brings separation, loneliness from God. It happens gradually. Don’t let it.

These situations are times to pray, to get out our hymnals, to sit at the piano and sing, to turn to other Christians for aid and strength, to replace tempting behaviors with specific Christian actions. When it gets really bad, seek out your pastor for private confession and absolution or just some friendship. Don’t be afraid to ask him specifically for thoughts on things that help, about people who might help fill the emptiness and the days. Turn to other Christians, too, that speak the Father’s encouragement and strength into your ears. The Church is and should be a mighty place of defense for the lonely.



“The Church is and should be a mighty place of defense for the lonely.”

If you have Christian eyes, you can look and will notice loneliness is a great cross that many bear. You can help them carry the load and they can return the favor. We all should be mindful of such things in our families and in the church. If you are a mother, don’t let your teenager be sulen and alone. If you are a teenager, don’t let your mother be the same! If you are a young pastor wondering how to help, be mindful of the lonely and unloved.

Don’t be afraid to open your homes, expand your family, share meals, friendships, your very lives. Especially on important days to individuals, young couples, widows and widowers — like their birthday or an important church festival — emptiness can be filled by other Christians. How good to rejoice together on Easter, the very day Christ began again to restore the scattered. Direct your children to be mindful of these things especially as they cheer the elderly. Chances are the elderly will be mindful and loving back towards your children.

The Lord God knows His own and loves us. It is why He insists we don’t forsake the

gathering together of the saints. We have a place at His table here and in eternity. Remember that Christ has bound Himself to His church to the very end of the age. “I am with you always,” He declares, even true when we die and as our body awaits the resurrection, even then never alone. On the Emmaus road, He hears the prayer of the lonely. “Abide with us, Lord, it is evening and the day is far spent!” It is the basis for a favorite hymn to many. There He is revealed to them in the breaking of the bread. The Lord’s meal is always simple and profound, and it is made better when shared with many others.

He is the Bridegroom completed by and rejoicing in His bride born from His side. He walks life’s road with you, prays with

you, shares with you His Father, has joy in you. He is bringing us to a heavenly Eden with the countless company of the saints. He strengthens us when we are weary, giving us courage and a voice to tell others when we are lonely. He wants to hear our cries. His family always grows. By Word and Spirit, He is our constant companion.

We belong at His side and close by the people of God. They our greater family! Our Christian lives get richer as we share them. We encourage one another with the very voice of Christ as we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. If all you were concerned about were lonely people — be-friending them, spending time with them, praying for them, and they you — together we would have much happiness in Christ and enough Christian activity to fill all of our days.

The Rev. Adrian Sherrill is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Denver, Colo.