There's Something Fishy— and Terrible— Going On Here

Editor's note: Years ago I learned about the horrible labor conditions endured by the workers– almost all of them women– harvesting fresh cut flowers. I told my husband never to buy me flowers again (unless they were locally grown) and bemoaned "They've even ruined flowers!" Now I'm learning how "they"- greedy people and businesses– are ruining FISH. It's an important and timely topic for Lent.

Human trafficking is happening in the global fishing industry. Academic studies and investigative journalism reveal abuses of workers who are tricked into joining fishing crews and trapped in this dangerous work. The Apostleship of the Sea, a Catholic charity serving seafarers worldwide writes: "Sadly, there are frequent instances of unacceptable working conditions, unfair wages and even violence or sexual abuse against seafarers. It is widely believed among seafarers that complaining leads to blacklisting by manning agents. This effectively prevents them from working at sea again." It's brutal.

Here are some things we can do during these days of meatless Fridays to be in solidarity with the efforts to liberate these modern-day slaves:

1. Sign the online petition asking SYSCO, a major supplier of food to schools and hospitals, to investigate their seafood supply chain. See the additional page for more details on this effort by the Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking. Consider ordering their postcards to gather more signatures.

2. Contact United States Ambassador to the U.N. Kelly Craft to ask that the U.S. join the *International Labor Organization's Work in Fishing Convention 188*, and *Recommendation 199*, which address matters such as the minimum age for work on a fishing vessel, medical standards, work agreements, occupational safety & health, and social security.

Credit: US Agency for Intl Development

LABELING FOR LENT
AN EFFORT TO PREVENT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Myo's Story

"Trusting his recruiters, Myo believed he was leaving his home in Burma to work in a pineapple factory in Thailand. Yet, when he arrived, he was sold to a boat captain for the equivalent of approximately $430. He was held on the boat for 10 months, forced to work, and beaten regularly. On the rare occasion that the boat docked at port, the officers bribed local police to allow them to keep the fishermen on the boat rather than risking them escaping if they were allowed to set foot on shore. Myo was finally able to escape and sought refuge in a temple. He continues to struggle with deafness, having had his head and ear smashed into a block of ice on the fishing boat."
—2014 Trafficking in Persons Report

"Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke?" Isaiah 58:6

It's not just happening in the other countries...

Thailand, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, Spain and Taiwan have been particularly noted as centers of human trafficking in the fishing industry.

But workplace horrors also happen with fishing crews off the coast of Hawaii and in the crab processing industry in Maryland with immigrants who have special work visas. In 2017, members of Congress from Hawaii introduced legislation to address some of these abuses. We can hope it gets re-introduced soon and passed.

It's not just our food.....

Human consumption of fish caught and processed by slaves spurs the industry, but we're not the only ones. **Pet food** also often contains fish products produced under slave conditions.

Consider buying pet food that does not contain fish.

The Fishing Industry is also destroying the environment.

Certain methods of commercial fishing are much worse for wildlife and ocean habitats than others. Seafood Watch suggests going beyond shrimp, tuna and salmon and choosing more sustainably harvested seafood such as clams, lingcod, mussels, sablefish (aka black cod), scallops, sole, and oysters. At the grocery store or restaurant, ask where the seafood is from and if it's wild or farmed. Refer to Seafood Watch's guide and distribute copies to your grocer and restaurant staff.

Public Policy Weekend

Thank you for collecting signatures opposing physician-assisted suicide. Be sure to make two copies of each sheet and send them along with the originals to the Justice & Peace Ministry staff for your county by March 4. Find their contact info below.

And let them know if you' d like to participate in the upcoming meetings at the State legislators home offices to deliver the petitions.

Take your advocacy one step further and write a personal letter or call your State Senator to express your opposition to physician-assisted suicide. **Senate switchboard phone: 518-455-2800**

Save the Date:

**Annual Diocesan
Social Ministry
Conference**

**Thursday, May 14
Notre Dame Retreat House
Canandaigua NY**

**Commemorating the
5th Anniversary of *Laudato Si***

A Prayer for Lent

Creator God, you call us to repentance and self denial. While we can choose our penances, so many of our brothers and sisters have not the basic needs of life. Teach us humility in our works of penance, so that our fast may be a victory over our own egotism and self-indulgence. Move us to step forward to choose life and protect and restore creation, reject war, promote equity and respect, be community and do justice so that we and our children may live.