

# LUTHERAN OFFICE FOR PUBLIC POLICY *in Wisconsin*

## MISSION MOMENT

### Our Work With Human Trafficking Is Making a Difference!

Thank you for your weekly offerings that get sent on to your synod and a portion to our larger church through your mission support, for without it, we would not be able to be a healing presence in a world that desperately needs Jesus. Here's our story:

**By Deacon Vicki Hanrahan, Assistant to the Bishop for Synodical Life**

On March 27, 12 Wisconsin state representatives and approximately 50 concerned citizens gathered at the State capitol for the *Assembly Committee on Children and Families public hearing on Assembly Bill 41*. Under this bill, a person who is under the age of 18 may not be prosecuted for committing an act of prostitution. Many compelling arguments were made in favor of this bill and the fact that 25 states have already passed it, strengthened the arguments.

As one of 50+ concerned citizens, I wanted to share some powerful moments where I saw God's presence at this public hearing where law and gospel informed our common goal of protecting the rights of victims and safe harboring them through the social services process instead of the criminal justice system.

I got off the elevator on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor with several of the people speaking in favor of the bill and they were excited to see that a line was forming to get into the room. I was happy for them because sometimes just showing up as a member of the beloved community is all it takes to affirm to each other that what we are about to do is important and matters.



As we entered the hearing room, we filled out a voting registration form where we could indicate our position on the bill and whether we were there to speak to it. Several from our synod spoke eloquently in favor of the bill: Shown here at the microphone are the Rev. Cindy

Crane, Director of Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin and LOPPW Hunger Fellow, Kelsey Johnson, and LOPPW volunteer, Margaret Staniforth. Later, at the microphone were Women of the ELCA including Helen Sheahan, President of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin WELCA group & Margo Holzman from Dekorra Lutheran's women's group, Shirley Paulson, East Central Synod of Wisconsin WELCA and Lori Wells, President of the NW Synod of Wisconsin's WELCA group. The chairperson commended their testimonies. Also present were representatives from League of Women Voters, State Public Defenders Office, the Department of Children and Family Services, Human Trafficking Task Force of Greater Milwaukee, and the National Council of Juvenile Justice to name a few.

After nearly 4 hours of testimonies, the session adjourned. Before closing, Chairman Snyder read out loud the names of people voting and speaking for Assembly Bill 41 and one could hear the echo of "ELCA" behind each of our names. One of the authors of the bill, Representative Jill Billings who is an ELCA member of the La Crosse Area Synod, could be seen smiling at ELCA members present. Billings, other legislators, LOPPW, and friends have shared passion and years of walking together to try to care for God's children. This was one of many spirit-filled moments.

This is a mission moment that filled me with awe and gratitude for the opportunity to be a voice for the survivors of human trafficking. For all of us in that hearing that day, I can speak with bold and daring confidence that our presence and voices spoke very loudly that we are Lutheran, we are Church, we are Church Together and we are Church for the Sake of the World. What a beautiful witness to our faith!

#### **Why is this so important? Here are some sobering statistics:**

- There are an estimated 36 million people in modern-day slavery in the world today.
- Human trafficking (both sex and labor trafficking) is the fastest growing organized crime and is the second largest criminal enterprise in the world.
- Human trafficking generates \$32 billion per year in profits.
- 98% of sexually trafficked victims are women and girls.
- In the United States there are an estimated 100,000 – 300,000 children prostituted each year.
- 33% of children that run away are lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home.
- Mortality rate for prostitutes can be 100 times greater than the general public.
- The average age for being sex-trafficked is 13.
- Sex trafficking has been found in every county of our state.
- 46% of prostitutes attempt suicide.

#### **Wisconsin Sex Trafficking of Minors**

It is difficult to determine how many youths are being sex trafficked in Wisconsin because even though it is pervasive, it is very covert. To date (2017) cases have been reported across the state in every county, and as awareness of sex trafficking increases professionals are recognizing more youth who are victims of trafficking. Jan Miyazaki, the director of Madison's Project Respect, said that in her work with local women in the sex trade, she encounters between 50-75 cases a year involving force, fraud or coercion. A community educator who works with Milwaukee minors in the sex trade said she has come into contact with more than 100 young people in the past year that she believes fit the definition of human trafficking victims. Milwaukee was referred to as "The Harvard of Pimp School," in the November 2, 2015 article in The Guardian. However, many of the traffickers have moved into suburban and rural areas. The Internet as well as public places are used for recruiting. It is common for traffickers to spend significant time tracking potential girls and boys for prey and they often work in team.

As Human Trafficking is one of the priorities of Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin, Rev. Cindy Crane, Director of LOPPW, shares "The passage of this bill would place Wisconsin law in alignment with federal law, and would enable trafficked youth to receive human services rather than be re-victimized by being treated as criminals. We have supported this bill for three legislative sessions, each time it has come closer to passing."

**Would you like your congregation to be more informed? Invite LOPPW to speak by calling Rev. Cindy Crane at 608-270-0201 and by checking out other speakers such as Dawn Heath on the synod's Speaker's Bureau to invite people who have made Human Trafficking their life's work. <https://scsw-elca.org/resources/speakers-bureau/>**

**More on the Assembly Bill 41 - <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab41>**

**More on the Talking Points -<https://www.loppw.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/45/files/2019/03/Talking-Points-and-Info.pdf>**

