


Congregation Helps Launch Human Trafficking App

BY SISTER JANET FLEISCHACKER, CSJ



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a piece of light-colored, torn paper. The words "NOT SALE" are written in dark, hand-drawn letters on the paper. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a person's legs and feet in a public setting.

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching compel our congregation to help end human trafficking and to respond to the needs of those who are trafficked. For us, working for the Common Good of all in our society, understanding the solidarity that means we are all one, and especially recognizing the dignity and holiness of every life, calls us to respond to this terrible reality.

In 2015 the congregation learned of an effort by Exchange Initiative and Washington University in St. Louis to develop an app for smartphones designed to help end human sex trafficking. The project was unable to get off the ground without additional assistance. When we learned about this, we were eager to join this partnership and to offer resources toward its development and implementation.

Exchange Initiative, which helps provide resources, information and networking solutions to combat sex trafficking, was founded by the organization that has managed the congregation's conference planning needs for many years. In working with local police agencies, and then with the FBI, Exchange Initiative discovered that their familiarity with the décor of various hotel chains is a great asset in helping law enforcement find women



YOU can help fight human trafficking

1



Grab your iPhone or Android

2

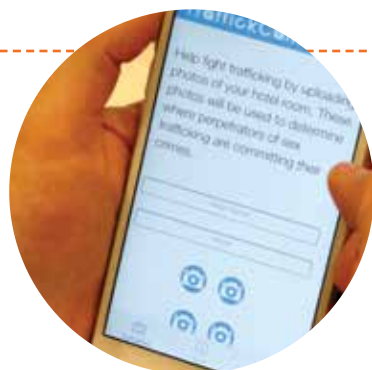
Look for this app and download it for free from the Apple App Store or Google Play



3



Use the app to take and upload photos of your hotel room any time you travel



Over 1.5 million photos have already been added to the database and are being used by law enforcement to help stop traffickers.

and children being sold in hotel rooms. When traffickers post pictures on the web of women or children they are advertising for sex, hotel conference planners can help identify the hotel chain, and sometimes even the city, just by the background in the picture.

The TraffickCam app empowers travelers to help in the fight against sex trafficking by taking photos of their hotel rooms and anonymously uploading them to a national database, which will be used by law enforcement

and investigators to locate victims and their pimps.

Thousands of media outlets, online publications and TV stations have written about the unique app. The story has been shared countless times on Facebook and nearly 19 million tweets have generated more than 27 million Twitter followers.

As a result, hundreds of new hotels have been added to a database of more than 1.5 million photos. This innovative

app is now available for people to download onto their phones. Everyone can join in the work of ending trafficking. The app guides users to take pictures of hotel rooms where they are staying. Pictures taken and marked with a location are sent to a large database available to law enforcement agencies across the country, as well as the Center for Missing and Exploited Children. We have already started to find and rescue a significant number of children and women through use of this app.

Another major effort of the congregation to answer the outrage of human trafficking is a partnership with Healing Action Network in St. Louis. Healing Action Network was founded by Katie Rhoades, a licensed social worker and trafficking survivor. Katie was familiar to the congregation

The TraffickCam app empowers travelers to help in the fight against sex trafficking by taking photos of their hotel rooms and anonymously uploading them to a national database used by law enforcement to identify hotels where trafficking is taking place.



▲ From left, Director of CSJ Ministries, Sister Janet Fleischhacker, CSJ, founder of Healing Action Network and trafficking survivor, Katie Rhoades, and Senior Meeting Planner and Trafficking Coordinator for Nix Conference & Meeting Management, Kim Ritter. All three were part of a panel of presenters during the congregation's annual Assembly meeting in March, 2016, where the app was unveiled.

through her public speaking and education regarding trafficking. In addition to her awareness activities and legislative work, Katie had a vision of an organization that would provide support, safety, caring and services to women who have left “the life” or are struggling to get out of a life of being trafficked. This vision and the capacity to make this organization a reality was compelling to our CSJ Ministries. We are helping Katie as she works to directly assist victims of human trafficking.

These two partnerships, the Exchange Initiative collaboration and the Healing Action Network, let us participate in the front lines of raising public awareness and making concrete efforts to stop trafficking.

Working for the Common Good...the solidarity among us...upholding the dignity and holiness of every life – these principles ground and continue to inspire the efforts of CSJ that all may be one. ■

Sister Janet Fleischhacker, CSJ, is Executive Director of CSJ Ministries, the sponsorship arm of the Congregation of St. Joseph that provides support and oversight of most of the congregation's sponsored ministries. Sister Janet previously served as president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Nazareth, Mich., for 12 years. Before that, she oversaw the client services at the YWCA Domestic Assault Program in Kalamazoo, Mich., working extensively with victims of domestic violence as well as engaging in community education and advocacy related to domestic violence issues.