

St Josephine Bakhita Working Party

Praying for change ...

Background

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking are critical issues on the international, national and Church radar.

The Catholic Church has a strong commitment to eradicating modern slavery, a stance grounded in Catholic Social Teaching. "At its heart the call to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking is a call to make a choice for respecting the intrinsic and inalienable dignity of every human person" (Archbishop Fisher, 2018).

The Vatican, through the work of its 'Migrants and Refugee Office', has produced [Pastoral orientations on Human Trafficking](#).

The Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference, in July 2018 made a [statement](#) backing all efforts to eliminate modern slavery.

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, as a Catholic entity called to live the gospel, acknowledges its role in working towards the eradication of modern slavery practices.

We acknowledge the impact that commercial activities, including ours, can have on vulnerable people through modern slavery practices. We have a responsibility to take practical action to manage risk in our operations and supply chains.

Our policy outlines the steps The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle will take to work with other Catholic entities, suppliers, business partners and community stakeholders and employees to fulfil a common goal of ending modern slavery globally and protecting and respecting the freedom and dignity of people everywhere.

On 1 October 2000 **Josephine Bakhita** was declared a saint by the Catholic Church and 8 February was established as an Optional Memorial in the Australian liturgical calendar.

About Josephine, Pope Francis says:

'(The Church) is charged with showing to all the path to conversion, which enables us to change the way we see our neighbours, to recognise in every other person a brother or sister in our human family, and to acknowledge his or her intrinsic dignity in truth and freedom. This can be clearly seen from the story of Josephine Bakhita, the saint originally from the Darfur region in Sudan who was kidnapped by slave-traffickers and sold to brutal masters when she was nine years old. Subsequently – as a result of painful experiences – she became a "free daughter of God" thanks to her faith, lived in religious consecration and in service to others, especially the most lowly and helpless. This saint, who lived at the turn of the twentieth century, is even today an exemplary witness of hope for the many victims of slavery; she can support the efforts of all those committed to fighting against this "open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ" (10 April 2014)

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The International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking is also held annually on 8 February. It focuses on St Josephine Bakhita, highlighting the circumstances of violence and injustice affecting millions of voiceless people. The day encourages people to stop for a few moments and saying a prayer to God. It also encourages people to learn more about modern forms of slavery and trafficking, to reflect on how their choices might contribute to a system perpetuating this exploitation, and to start conversations about this important issue. [Source](#)

"Our awareness must expand and extend to the very depths of this evil and its farthest reaches, ...from awareness to prayer ... from prayer to solidarity ... and from solidarity to concerted action, until slavery and trafficking are no more", says Cardinal Peter Turkson (quoted in an [article](#) in Crux).

Mandate

Liturgy is the source and summit of all the activity of the Church and the 'indispensable source from which the faithful derive the true Christian spirit'. (CSL a. 10 and 14)

The Diocesan Liturgy Council (DLC) therefore seeks to engage a Working Party who will explore ways this local Church might highlight the Feast of St Josephine Bakhita. With a strong emphasis on social justice, the Council imagines this as a rich opportunity to inspire and shape the community's commitment to social justice in relation to modern slavery and, to form more deeply in the hearts and minds of the community, the integral link between prayer and Christian life and action.

With so many people wanting to live justly and make a difference, we imagine this feast resonating strongly with the wide Catholic community who do not naturally connect with the Church community and its worship.

The St Josephine Bakhita Working Party is established by the DLC to:

- as appropriate, become familiar with the life of Josephine Bakhita and the focus and hopes of the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking that the feast highlights;
- imagine how, as a community rich in diversity, we might celebrate this feast day;
- identify and/or produce some prayer and liturgy resources for this local Church;
- consider the following suggestions from the DLC:
 - highlight this feast on the diocesan calendar. This could include recommending to Bishop Michael that he make a decree increasing the status of the feast in the diocese from Optional Memorial.
 - propose to the Diocesan Leadership Group (DLG) that the annual staff opening liturgy/mass be celebrated on February 8, or as close to it as possible
- brainstorm and think big, while starting with something that is manageable and might be grown from year to year;
- think of a better name for the Working Party as may be appropriate.

Membership

Members are appointed by the DLC. The Working Party is free to identify others who could assist them to achieve their task. It is important that the best wisdom is sitting at the table.

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Responsibility

The St Josephine Bakhita Working Party is the responsibility of the DLC and is accountable to it through Fiona Duque who is a member of the DLC.

Organisation

Fiona Duque will convene and chair the Working Party.

The Working Party determines its meeting schedule and venue to achieve its tasks. It will also determine the process for preparing agendas, minutes and other documentation as may be helpful. Minutes are sent to the Liturgy Office to be tabled at DLC meetings and for filing.

The Working Party is supported by the Office Worship and Prayer. Support can include communication/ email contact, booking rooms if the Working Party decides to meet at the Diocesan Offices, printing, promotions planning, accessing support from Communications and other diocesan teams etc.

The Diocesan Liturgy Budget will cover expenses, though authorisation is required from the Diocesan Manager Worship and Prayer prior to purchase or engagement of services.

Term

The St Josephine Bakhita Working Party operates from its first gathering, aiming to have a plan and any necessary resources in place and promoted across the diocese ahead of February 2024. The celebrations will then be reviewed, and future actions and directions identified. On completion of the review, the Working Party will recommend to the DLC if and how it wishes to continue working on this project.

Some resources

[DoMN Modern Slavery intranet site](#)

[Vatican Encyclical Letter 'Spe Salvi' a. 3](#)

[USCCB Catholic Social Teaching and the Church's Fight to End Trafficking](#)

[USCCB Anti-Trafficking Program](#)

[Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans](#)

Contact

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