



FREEDOM SUNDAY

GOD'S PEOPLE
WORKING TOGETHER
TO END HUMAN TRAFFICKING



NAZARENE
COMPASSIONATE
MINISTRIES

STORIES OF THE
CHURCH AT WORK



STORIES: THE CHURCH AT WORK

These are stories of how the Church of the Nazarene is working to offer freedom to individuals who are victims of trafficking and exploitation.

Finding Freedom in a Red-Light District in India: Pari's Story

In the novel *Les Miserables*, Victor Hugo tells the story of Fantine, a young woman who turns to prostitution when it's the only way she can provide for the young daughter she loves. Here is a story of the boundless love of a mother. Fantine is a fictional character, yet her story is true for far too many women around the world. And while many people write them off as women who are no longer worthy of care, a local Nazarene church near a red-light area in a large city in India, has been reaching out to women in prostitution through drop-in centers.

The centers are named "Hope for Life." They have started two centers so far to provide care for children in the area and to provide hope and possibilities for a new life to women like Pari (not her real name).

Pari was born into a small family in a remote village in eastern India. She got an education and married a good man. They had a baby boy, and life was happy. But when her husband passed away, that happiness died, too. The young mother searched for work to provide for her son, but she found nothing.

One day a friend came to her village and invited her to the large city. The friend promised a good job making enough money to care for herself and her child.

But when Pari reached the city, she was taken to a red-light area. She told her friend she could never do that work. Yet when she could not find a job to pay for rent, food, and other needs for her child, she became desperate. With no other options, Pari agreed to work in the red-light area.

"I felt like I was in hell, but there was no other way," she said.

That was 20 years ago. Now, Pari continues in prostitution to provide for her children.

Recently, Pari began coming to one of the Nazarene drop-in centers. There, her children have a safe place to learn and grow. Pari attends workshops on protection and self-care. She also attends weekly prayer meetings.



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When a counselor visited her at home, Pari shared about her past and her deep grief over her life.

“The life I live is the worst life on the planet. I don’t see any hope or anyone who can get me out of it,” she said.

Pari knows this life is not good for her children. “I would like to come out of the pit, but I don’t know how and what I will do for income,” she said.

The counselor suggested taking advantage of one of the vocational training options at Hope for Life. The center offers courses in beauty salon training, bakery production, and tailoring.

Today, Pari is enrolled in tailoring classes and is preparing herself for a whole new life ahead.

To learn more about this ministry, check out the Summer 2018 issue of NCM Magazine at ncm.org/magazine.

Pari’s story is possible because of the generosity of churches and individuals during Freedom Sunday. Gifts given to the Freedom Offering in the past have supported the opening of new anti-trafficking ministries, including Hope for Life. Your gifts this year will support new projects as well as the continuation of ongoing anti-trafficking work.



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Hope for a Victim of Trafficking in Moldova

We will call her Maria*. She is 19 and the mother of two young sons. They live in Moldova.

Maria's mother died when she was young, and her father wasn't around. She and her sister went to live with their grandparents, but things began to fall apart when her grandmother died. After a short while, Maria ran away from her grandfather to the city where her cousin lived. This same cousin introduced her to the streets, and with only a grade-9 education, Maria was prostituted for the first time. She was 13 years old.

Thirteen.

We first met Maria during a volunteer training day for our Mobile Intervention Clinic. A Christian doctor and counselor, both trauma-trained, were teaching five volunteers how to provide pre- and post-counseling for women being tested for HIV/AIDS. While researching ways the church could address the problem of human trafficking in Moldova, we learned that this test is one service women in the sex trade said they would welcome. In response, we turned a van into a mobile clinic to provide rapid HIV/AIDS tests and health checks, as well as referrals to other services.

Maria was the first young woman we approached. We asked if she would like to be tested, and she timidly accepted the offer. Inside the van, she told us how she wound up in this life and was tested for HIV. Thankfully, the test came back negative, but Maria said she was worried that she was pregnant. She asked if we would stay until after she took a pregnancy test that she had already purchased. We agreed.

The test confirmed Maria's suspicions. Her face fell. She said she was considering an abortion—she pitied the life another child might have with her. She still hoped to have more children later in life, though, and expressed concerns about problems with pregnancy after an abortion. The doctor confirmed that risks did exist. I shared with Maria our desire to help women begin new lives. I told her we could connect her with other organizations that can help. I told her we were there to walk alongside her and help in any way we could.

While I spoke, Maria kept her eyes fixed downward, avoiding eye contact. But when we offered to take her to the doctor to get an ultrasound of the baby, Maria lifted her head and said she would like that.

Three of us went with Maria to the doctor, who said her baby was already 11 weeks old. When Maria showed us the sonogram image, we celebrated with her. She didn't talk anymore of abortion from that point.



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Two weeks later, after frequent contact with our counselor, Maria visited a Christian residential restoration program for survivors of sex trafficking. While she didn't make a decision that day, she did articulate a basic hope: "[I want] to have my family together with me."

Maria left the residential program to go back to the streets. Unfortunately, that is common with highly traumatized victims who have known no other life. But we are not giving up on her.

Maria had her baby, a healthy little boy. We threw her a baby shower and offered support after the birth. We are still in relationship with her, and we continue to talk through alternatives for a new life for Maria and her children.

And we still hold on to hope.

Would you pray for Maria? Would you also pray for the many other women who are caught in a cycle of exploitation in Moldova?

To learn more about this ministry, go to ncm.org/trafficking.

Currently, the mobile clinic in Moldova benefits hundreds of people. This story originally appeared in NCM Magazine, Summer 2016. It was written by Rebecca Sukanen, who serves as a Nazarene missionary in Moldova, where she leads church-based anti-human trafficking efforts.

Maria's story is possible because of the generosity of churches and individuals during Freedom Sunday. Gifts given to the Freedom Offering in the past have supported the opening of new anti-trafficking ministries, including the Moldova Mobile Intervention Clinic. Your gifts this year will support new projects as well as the continuation of ongoing anti-trafficking work.



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Finding Family in the Philippines

At 8 and 10 years old, Christine* and her older sister Hannah are already survivors of online sexual exploitation. When a friend invited them over to play, they didn't think anything was wrong. But their friend was already being exploited and had been coerced into inviting them. For two years, all three children were exploited by a man who sold videos and images of them to online buyers.

At Shechem Children's Home, they are able to be children again. The home is an assessment center in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, and it's the first of its kind. Children live at the house for a period of months while the specialized staff helps them to both process the trauma they've experienced and determine what the next best step is. After they leave the house, the children will either return to live with a family member, go into foster care, or live at a long-term shelter.

The online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) is insidious; many children don't realize what they were doing is wrong, or they're told that their actions will help earn money for their family members living in poverty. It's also extremely difficult to prosecute: more than 70 percent of OSEC cases are perpetrated by an immediate family member. Christine and Hannah's story is unique. As soon as their grandmother found out what was happening, she went to the police.

Leody Tan Echavez III, the Nazarene Compassionate Ministries Coordinator in the Philippines, says the staff at Shechem wants to be there to help at every level.

"There's a great need for these children to be accepted, so we accept them," he said. "... We shouldn't focus on what happened to them, but on what God is doing in them right now."

Along with careful physical and mental care, Shechem also aims to address the spiritual. Members of the Church of the Nazarene come to lead devotionals weekly, and the children pray together before meals. The staff at the house says that this is an area where they are seeing God's transformative love at work. Many of the children arrive at the home angry, depressed, and afraid. While months spent at Shechem don't heal years of hurt, there is already a peace that is visible.



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When they first arrived at Shechem, Christine and Hannah cried regularly. Their transition was extremely difficult, and they wouldn't engage with the house staff. Slowly, though, they have become part of the family at the house.

"That is our goal—that it would not become a facility or institution for them, but that it would be a safe space for them to just be a kid," Echavez said.

**Names are changed for protection.*

Currently (as of August 2019), the Shechem Children's Home is housing 12 children.

Christine and Hannah's story is possible because of the generosity of churches and individuals during Freedom Sunday. Gifts given to the Freedom Offering in the past have supported the opening of new anti-trafficking ministries, including the Shechem Children's Home. Your gifts this year will support new projects as well as the continuation of ongoing anti-trafficking work.



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A New View From South Africa

When working in the field of human trafficking, it's much easier when you are able to clearly identify a particular person or group as evil. However, my perception was challenged deeply several months ago.

I was in Cape Town, South Africa attending a conference on the issue of human trafficking. On one night, we went to do some outreach in the city, targeting well-known brothels, which are hotspots of trafficking. I was a bit nervous. It is always hard to go into a new context and area you don't know well.

We arrived at our place of outreach and divided into smaller groups. So many things were rushing through my head, such as, Will people even be open to talking? As the women in our group were talking to some of the women forced to sell themselves on the street, I noticed one young man looking as the group were talking to these women. My first thought was, "He must be the pimp, the one controlling these girls." I looked at him with resentment, thinking, "What kind of person does this?"

I decided to walk to him and start a conversation while the rest of the group was talking to the young women. As I approached him, I tried my best not to let my emotions reflect on my face. The young pimp shared how he had come to South Africa because he was promised a soccer contract, but when he arrived, he was forced to sell drugs and girls.

I asked, "Why don't you just say no and run away?" (as if I could fully understand the depth of his situation). He said he feared for his life, that when he arrived, his traffickers informed him that his choices were to sell or be killed.

I was silent, thinking carefully about what the right thing would be to say. Before I could open my mouth, though, the young man asked, "What are you doing here?"

We were here telling people more about Jesus, I said instinctively. He immediately asked if I would pray for him. That night a group of us prayed for this young man and connected him with a local ministry.

I also met Henry (not his real name), a soccer player and a businessman from Nigeria who was promised a better life in South Africa by his brother. Upon arriving in South Africa, though, there was no job for him. His brother hid the fact that he is a pimp and drug dealer, but when life became tough for Henry financially, his brother pulled him into that life of trafficking.



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Our group shared the gospel of Christ with Henry, who gave his heart to the Lord but was scared to leave his “job.” For a year, others in Cape Town continued to follow up with him, he finally allowed God to set him free. Today, Henry is a new man. He released the girls he was pimping and has now started sharing the gospel with other men who have been trafficked from Nigeria.

Henry has set up a soccer team, and we are encouraging him in the Lord and supporting his team to start playing tournaments. The trafficked men are excited about this, and more of them are considering quitting the lifestyle of pimping girls and selling drugs.

Through these encounters, I was reminded of Matthew 21:28- 32, where Jesus speaks about the parable of the two sons. In verse 31, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”

I realized that I am quick to judge people who take part in the crime of human trafficking. It became clear to me that people who are living in darkness know it. I was so quick to think I understood the circumstances, and because of that I looked at others with disdain. God reminded me that He loves everyone equally, and those caught in darkness might go to Heaven before me.

My prayer continues to be that God would always allow me to see people the way He does, with complete unconditional love, and that I may never think I am better but understand that to be compassionate is ultimately to understand that if one person suffers, so do I. To live a compassionate lifestyle is to suffer together and to act until both people are free from suffering.

This story originally appeared in NCM Magazine, Winter 2015. It was written by Stephen Phillips, who currently serves as a Nazarene missionary in Senegal.