



**U.S. Catholic Sisters
Against Human Trafficking**

Ending Slavery Is Everyone's Work

Date: April 25, 2023

Contact: Christine Commerce, Communications Director, Christine@SistersAgainstTrafficking.org

Phone: 321-750-4996

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ... FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Catholic Sisters Celebrate 10 Years of Forming Nationwide Effort To Combat Trafficking

BRIGHTON, MI -- Ten years ago, a Catholic sister's inspiration led to a nationwide movement to address human trafficking within Christian and secular communities around the country.

In April 2013, the Obama Administration invited a handful of Catholic sisters to Washington D.C. to attend the release of its second-term policy priorities, addressing the epidemic of human trafficking in the United States. Sister Margaret Nacke, one of the founding members, felt inspired to bring together religious congregations from around the nation to combine their anti-human trafficking efforts after that fateful day. From there, a seed was planted, and an organization was formed that grew to more than 115 congregations of women religious, individual members, faith-based coalitions and secular organizations.

This year, U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking celebrates its 10-year anniversary commemorating this coming together of women religious from around the country that resulted in the formation of a national, faith-based network dedicated to eradicating human trafficking.

"I always think we're better together," said Sister Ann Scholz, SSND, one of USCSAHT's founding board members that organized this initial meeting. "I think we knew that we could accomplish more if we shared our talent and resources and formed a coalition to multiply efforts to end human trafficking. Combining our education resources, our knowledge gained from accompanying survivors and advocacy efforts would make us a lot more efficient and effective in our ministry to eradicate human trafficking."

An estimated 40 million people are trapped in human trafficking around the world, according to the Global Slavery Index. It is a massive \$150 billion dollar industry. Anti-trafficking organizations are working to end this crime with a fraction of that budget. Low risk and high demand make human trafficking the fastest-growing criminal industry in the world, second only to illegal drugs and recently surpassing the illegal gun trade.

USCSAHT President Sister Ann Oestreich, IHM, said 10 years ago there was no public Catholic voice advocating for change and speaking out on human trafficking. The sisters decided to focus on human

trafficking: educating people about what it is, promoting prevention strategies to keep it from happening in the first place, and advocating for stricter laws to punish traffickers and assist survivors.

“We thought we could be that voice,” Sister Oestreich said. “Prevention is key to ending human trafficking, and we know how to advocate. We also know that women and men need access to services to help them heal so that became part of our mission.”

Education, advocacy, and access to survivor services became the three pillars that formed the mission of USCSAHT. Its members envision a world without human trafficking, with a network of services and resources to inform the public, prevent the crime and assist survivors to achieve a fulfilling life. USCSAHT accomplishes these three pillars in a myriad of ways: in-person presentations, [videos and webinars](#), a [website](#) rich in educational resources on all the various aspects of human trafficking, opportunities for advocacy, a book club that highlights books by survivors, prayer and reflection resources, and much, much more.

Advocacy initiatives include human trafficking legislation and the issues that feed into it, including poverty, forced migration, war, gender discrimination, and climate change. There is also strong support for the Equality Model, which supports decriminalizing those who are prostituted/trafficked and providing support to those who seek to exit the sex trade while prosecuting pimps, brothel owners, and buyers.

In addition, USCSAHT supports survivors by partnering with member houses and providing scholarships, whenever possible, to human trafficking survivors. The organization is survivor-informed by its Survivor Advisory Council. “We want to integrate their suggestions and advice from their experiences of being ‘in the life,’” Sister Oestreich said. “Survivors’ voices help us ensure that we are advocating for policies and programs that will bring about genuine healing and provide opportunities for a full and dignified life.”

Sister Oestreich said the hopes for the second decade are to continue to grow its membership, advocate to empower survivors and prevent the crime by expanding its education and outreach. USCSAHT hopes to join with people of different faiths so that together they can be an interfaith force for eradicating human trafficking.

USCSAHT will continue to navigate new changes and growth as it celebrates 10 years of past accomplishments and gears up for its second in-person conference, “Breaking Barriers to End Human Trafficking”. The [conference](#) will be held Sept. 28-30 in Chicago, Ill., where a new name and other initiatives will be announced. All are welcome to attend.

“We not only want to grow and thrive but be effective in accomplishing our mission,” Sister Oestreich said. “We want to empower everyone to join in this mission of ending human trafficking and restoring the dignity of God’s people whose lives have been affected by this crime.”

USCSAHT was founded in 2013 by a group of Catholic Sisters committed to ending human trafficking and supporting survivors. They created a national network of resources and support that includes many different congregations of women religious and mission-aligned partners. Today, this member-based organization has grown to include more than 115 congregations and another 100+ individuals and organizations spread throughout the United States. USCSAHT is also the U.S. member of Talitha Kum, the international network of consecrated life working to end human trafficking.

###