



NEWS ARCHIVE:

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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### Western Canadian social justice leaders gather in Saskatoon



**Standing l-r** : Fr. Nestor Gregoire, OMI; Murray Haybittle of the archdiocese of Keewatin Le Pas; Tony Haynes of the diocese of Saskatoon; Bert Pitzel of the archdiocese of Regina; John Hillian of the diocese of Victoria; Sr. Johanna Jonker of the archdiocese of Winnipeg; Bob McKeon of the archdiocese of Edmonton; Deirdre Kelly of the diocese of Victoria. **Sitting (l-r)**: June Haybittle of the archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas, Daniel Hahn of the archdiocese of Vancouver, Joe McMorrow of the diocese of St. Paul, and Antal Prokecz of the diocese of Calgary.

#### BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

Representatives of diocesan social justice offices from across Western Canada gathered in Saskatoon Oct. 30 to Nov. 1.

The Western Conference for Social Justice annual gathering included discussion about the issues surrounding human trafficking and the sex trade – both internationally and in Canada – as well as an examination of Pope Benedict XVI’s social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*). The event was hosted by the Saskatoon diocesan Office for Justice and Peace.

Justice and Peace Coordinator Tony Haynes reported that the diocesan office was active during the year in the nationwide campaign against human trafficking, following a call from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) to support CWL activities, Haynes said. The Justice and Peace office has also connected with the

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locally-based advocacy group Nashi, while promoting the work of the Saskatoon Police Service in addressing human trafficking.

Guest speakers at the conference Oct. 31 included Savelia Curniski of Nashi, which is raising awareness about the global issue of human trafficking. Nashi is working to help at-risk youth in Ukraine, one of the top seven “source” countries of trafficked persons in the world.

Speaker Cst. Hal Lam, Cultural Liaison Officer, Saskatoon Police Service, addressed the question of human trafficking at the local level.

“The UN describes Canada as a transit, source and destination country for human trafficking,” Lam said. In addition to international human trafficking, involving victims from other countries, domestic human trafficking also exists within Canada’s borders, he said.

The priority is to get help for victims, Lam said, but that is complicated by the fact that victims of human trafficking, whether international or domestic, rarely come to the police for help, although they may go to churches or social agencies.

It is not necessary to cross a border for a crime to be considered human trafficking, Lam added.

Human trafficking involves exploitation and is a horrendous violation of human rights, he said. Unlike traffic in drugs or weapons, when it comes to human trafficking, the human “product” can be sold many times, he pointed out. Threats, fraud or violence are used to control a person for the purpose of exploitation.

Such exploitation might be within the sex trade, such as forcing a person into prostitution or to work in strip clubs, massage parlors or pornographic movies; or it might involve forced labour and servitude.

In Western Canada, Aboriginal women are at an extremely high risk for being trafficked, he said. “Some of the reserves in northern Saskatchewan, northern Alberta, northern

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Manitoba are almost like third world countries. The living conditions are very poor,” Lam reported. “Because of all these factors it makes them easy prey for organized crime to go there and promise them a better life.” Organized crime and gangs will target vulnerable persons, such as newcomers or runaways, he noted.

The longing for a better life also lies behind international human trafficking, where predators pretend to be employers or feign a love interest to entrap women seeking a way to improve their own life or help their family.

Victims don’t seek help for a number of reasons, Lam said. Some have been brainwashed or threaten-ed, others have come from countries where police are feared, and still others fear to dishonour their families – which is a huge factor in some cultures. Some traffickers threaten the families of their victims, or use violence or addictions to control victims.

In Canada, residents of other countries who are rescued from trafficking situations are automatically given a temporary residence permit, which gives them access to health care and other services, he said, noting Canada has enacted new legislation to combat human trafficking that is open ended and easier to enforce.

In discussion about the issue, Archdiocese of Vancouver representative Daniel Hahn noted the Catholic Women’s League’s national effort to raise awareness about human trafficking, particularly as it relates to the upcoming winter Olympics. A pastoral letter on human trafficking from the bishops of B.C. and the Yukon has also prompted discussion and awareness, he said. A similar groundswell of awareness has happened in the diocese of Victoria, the group heard.

Hahn noted that there has also been a “push back” from pro-legalization and pro-brothel forces, aimed at those in the community working to fight the sex trade.

Sr. Johanna Jonker of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg reported that there’s a concerted effort in prevention of human trafficking and protecting at-risk youth in that city.

She noted that six high-profile Canadian men have stepped forward to participate in a “Man to Man” campaign against the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children. The project has

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been organized by a Winnipeg-based national group Beyond Borders.

Efforts are also underway to work with Aboriginal leaders to address the problem, as it becomes clear newcomers to the city from northern reserves are an

at-risk target, she noted.

Bob McKeon of the Archdiocese of Edmonton related how the recent discovery of women trafficked from overseas being rescued in Edmonton was a wake up call for the community

The group agreed the issue involves many complex factors, and is related very closely to poverty.

The Western Conference for Social Justice (WCSJ) is a group of diocesan social justice representatives from Western Canada, mandated by bishops of the Assembly of Western Catholic Bishops to oversee diocesan social justice ministry. Bishop Fred Henry of Calgary is the liaison bishop for the group.