

<https://www.catholicwitness.org/one-year-later-renewing-our-commitment-to-set-captives-free/>

Op-Ed: One Year Later: Renewing Our Commitment to Set Captives Free

January 22, 2026

One year ago, I wrote to the faithful of the Diocese of Harrisburg about a scourge that I have come to understand all too vividly: the reality of human trafficking in our midst. January is Human Trafficking Prevention Month and as I reflected upon my first year as the Bishop of Harrisburg, I recalled witnessing the harm human trafficking inflicted on so many innocent victims. As a result, I wrote a pastoral letter, [*Setting Captives Free*](#). In it, I urged Catholics and all people of good will across our fifteen-county region to open their eyes and hearts to the suffering of men, women and children enslaved through forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other forms of modern-day slavery right here in Central Pennsylvania.

At the time, I was deeply struck — and yes, shocked — to learn that trafficking networks operate not only in distant lands, but along our own highways, in our communities, and often in places we would rather not acknowledge. Victims often remain unseen and unheard even while their suffering persists in plain sight.

One year later, I call on our communities to continue forward with renewed resolve. Awareness itself is not enough. The Gospel compels us to translate compassion into action, and to bear witness to the inherent dignity of every human person, all created in the image of God.

Over the past year, we have seen the seeds of that witness begin to take root in our community. Diocesan events on human trafficking have drawn hundreds to learn and engage, offering education on how to recognize signs of exploitation, and how to respond with care and prudence.

We have also seen remarkable partnerships — with law enforcement, social service organizations, advocates, and civic leaders — all committed to restoring freedom and dignity to those who have been harmed. These efforts reflect a shared belief that fighting trafficking is both a law-and-order issue as well as a moral one rooted in the Church's unshakable commitment to the sanctity of human life.

Still, much work remains. We must continue to educate ourselves and our neighbors about the conditions and systems that allow trafficking to flourish — from unjust labor practices to addictions to the pervasive harms of pornography and other dehumanizing attitudes.

We must continue to advocate for public policies that protect victims, support survivors on their long paths to healing, and hold perpetrators accountable. We must encourage healthy, life-affirming communities where exploitative practices are rejected, and the dignity of every person is upheld.

And we must deepen our prayer and spiritual vigilance — offering fasting, sacrifice, and intercession for those still in bondage, and for an end to trafficking wherever it exists.

One year ago, I invited you to join in the spiritual mission of “setting captives free.” Today, I renew that invitation with urgency and hope. In the face of suffering, the Church does not waver or turn away; we move closer, guided by the light of Christ, whose mission is to bring liberty to the captives (cf. Lk 4:18). We need to continue being instruments of that redemption, bringing healing, compassion, and freedom to all of God’s children, particularly those who are hurting, vulnerable, and are most in need.

By Bishop Timothy C. Senior