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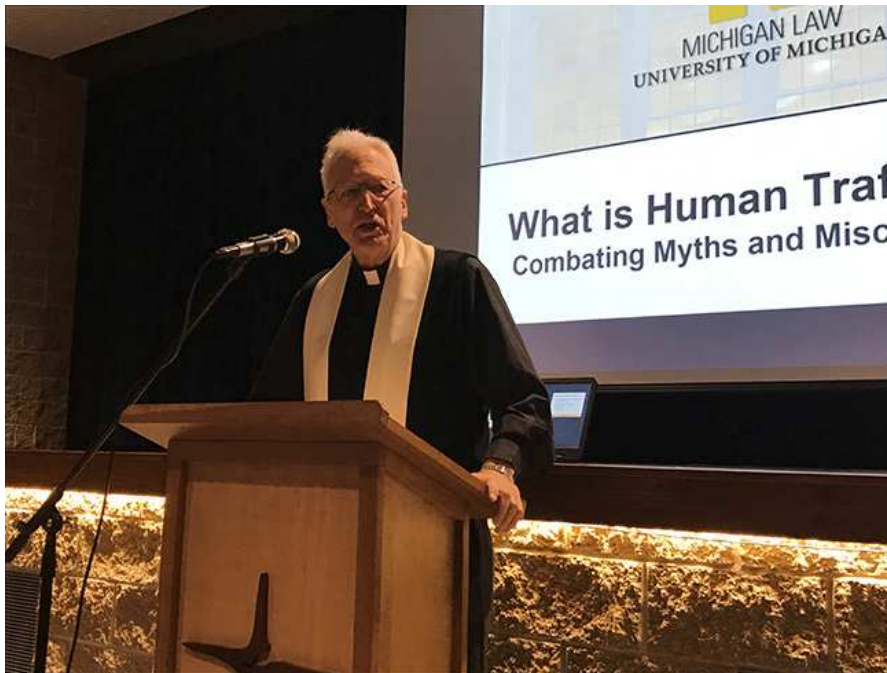
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WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE ADDRESSES HUMAN TRAFFICKING



Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of the Diocese of Lansing, giving the opening invocation to kick-off the conference.

You've repeatedly heard the Holy Father speak out against the modern-day form of slavery: human trafficking. Pope Francis calls human trafficking a "crime against humanity." As Catholics, we understand how important it is to recognize this atrocious form of organized crime that effectively makes slaves of 20 million people worldwide. We must ask ourselves: What am I doing to shine a light on human trafficking?

The [Michigan Catholic Conference](#) decided it was time to bring this issue out of the shadows. MCC recently hosted "From Darkness to Light: Human Trafficking and Our Response," a daylong conference in collaboration with the Diocese of Lansing, Livingston County Catholic Charities and St. Vincent Catholic Charities. The goal was to bring the community together to learn about the issue of human

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trafficking and organizations working to end it, and to discuss ways to raise others' awareness.

Almost 300 people participated in the gathering. Several bills pertaining to human trafficking have been introduced in Michigan in the past few years, so the conference was timely.

Joyce Dixon-Haskett, a clinical social worker and one of the keynote speakers, is a human trafficking survivor. "If we cut down on demand, we cut down on supply ... and someone's child can go home at night," she said. Her message sums up why a conference like this is so important.



Survivor Joyce Dixon-Haskett sharing her experience of human trafficking. Annie Bennett, MCC communications and outreach associate, provided the impetus for the conference. In 2016, Bennett participated in the **GIVEN** conference in Washington, D.C., a weeklong immersion in faith formation, leadership training and networking for young Catholic women leaders. Through this conference, Bennett had the opportunity to develop an event to engage her community in learning about and acting for justice. Therefore, she developed plans for "From Darkness to Light" and prepared to engage Michigan in dialogue and learning around the issue of human trafficking.

Bishop Earl Boyea, Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, and Paul A. Long, president and CEO of MCC, encouraged parishes to participate, and stressed the importance of engaging in discussions on human trafficking.

Bennett hopes the conference will help other Church leaders to raise awareness about human trafficking. Others also noted the value of collaborative efforts.

"If we want human trafficking to end, the therapist's office cannot be the only safe place in our communities," said Andy Soper, founder of the Mannasseh Project, a program of community education and advocacy for victims of human trafficking. Our Catholic communities can help create safe places for victims and work to prevent trafficking.

The USCCB's Anti-Trafficking Program (ATP) has made significant progress in educating, advocating and providing training and technical assistance on this issue. Through this support, Catholics across the country are working firmly to protect the life and dignity of the most vulnerable.

The MCC has made great strides in engaging the community and providing ways for people to get involved and take action on the issue of human trafficking. In the summer of 2016, MCC worked with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services to promote a Catholics Confront Global Poverty action alert on human trafficking. As a result, Catholics across the state called on the government to ensure transparency and accountability in businesses' supply chains. All of us have the power to speak up and urge the government to care for the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

"From Darkness to Light" is a wonderful example of how communities can come together and address an issue like human trafficking. To learn more about the conference, check out their [website](#).



Keynote speaker Bridgette Carr, founding director of the University of Michigan Human Trafficking Law Clinic, speaks about combating myths and misconceptions about human trafficking.



Conference Panel: (L to R) Sr. Barbara Cline, FSE; Meredith Reese, Vista Maria; Jeremy Ashcroft, FBI; Kelly Carter, Attorney General's office; Jay Kommareddi, MI Human Trafficking Health Advisory.

Thank you, Annie and the Michigan Catholic Conference, for bringing this important topic to light in your community!

Catholics Confront Global Poverty is an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services. As the official voice of the Catholic Church in the U.S., we call on Catholics and our nation to defend the lives and dignity of people living in poverty worldwide, through advocacy and action.

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