

**SAINTS ALIVE!**  
**ST. JOSEPHINE BAKHITA**  
**February 8**

St. Josephine Bakhita is considered the patron saint of human trafficking.

Bakhita was born in Sudan in 1869. As a young girl, she was kidnapped by Arab slave traders.

The list of the 12 most lucrative global industries begins with drugs, arms/defense spending and prostitution. Human trafficking and pornography also make the list, though these and prostitution comprise trade in human persons and are nearly inseparable.

Bakhita, which means "fortunate", was not her given name; it was the name given to her by her kidnapers. She was sold, resold and resold again and finally given away. She was forcibly converted to Islam. Finally, Bakhita was bought by an Italian consul, in whose home she found "moments of joy."

Freedom from pain and abuse cannot be equated with freedom from slavery. The bounties of charity do not supersede the freedom of empowerment. It seems more likely that the "moments of joy" are more aptly described as moments of relief.



Bakhita was entrusted to the Canossian Sisters of the Institute of Catechumens in Venice. She received the sacraments of Christian initiation and was given a new name, Josephine. She later experienced the call to be a religious, perhaps the first choice she made by herself and for herself.

In Pope John Paul II's homily at her canonization he said, "In St. Josephine Bakhita we find a shining advocate of genuine emancipation. The history of her life inspires not passive acceptance but the firm resolve to work effectively to free girls and women from oppression and violence, and to return them to their dignity in the full exercise of their rights."

Human trafficking has two dirty components: labor trafficking and sex trafficking. Sex trafficking is a scourge in Oregon. The state is known as one of the worst; Portland one of the most troubling cities. Labor trafficking is not easily identified because the problem is not on display on the streets but hidden in homes, restaurants and the fields of agriculture. Labor trafficking is a federal issue while states have legal authority over sex trafficking.

No matter how we define it and describe it, both labor and sex trafficking are slavery and violations of the principles of respecting life and protecting human dignity; what is respectful and dignified when humans are treated as the tools of pleasure and commerce?

As citizens of the world we want to advocate for an end to pestilence of human trafficking. As citizens of God's Kingdom of heaven here on earth we want to pray:

St. Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child and endured untold hardship and suffering. Once liberated from your physical enslavement, you found true redemption in your encounter with Christ and his Church.

O St. Bakhita, assist all those who are trapped in a state of slavery; Intercede with God on their behalf so that they will be released from their chains of captivity. Those whom man enslaves, let God set free. Provide comfort to survivors of slavery and let them look to you as an example of hope and faith. Help all survivors find healing from their wounds. We ask for your prayers and intercessions for those enslaved among us.

Amen.



**ARCHDIOCESE OF PORTLAND**  
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