

Engaging Orthodox Communities in Ending Sexual Exploitation

A Toolkit and Resource Guide



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Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE) addresses the culture, institutions, and individuals that perpetrate, profit from, or support sexual exploitation. Our work includes prevention, policy reform, community engagement, and legal services.

CAASE envisions a community free from all forms of sexual exploitation, including sexual assault and the commercial sex trade.

Engaging Orthodox Communities in Ending Sexual Exploitation is a resource created by the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE) for groups within parishes (i.e. women’s groups, study groups, social groups, etc.) and any other individual of faith who is passionate about ending sexual exploitation. The toolkit provides background information on issues of prostitution in Chicago, including pathways to entry, barriers to exiting, and the role that customers and pimps play in maintaining and profiting from the sex trade. This kit can be used to raise awareness *and* mobilize your community to work towards ending sexual exploitation. As Orthodox Christians, it is imperative that we take action on this issue. As followers of a faith based on social justice and reaching out to those in suffering, there is no choice *but* to be a voice for justice.

This toolkit includes:

- Biblical texts and reflective questions that can be used to help explore issues surrounding prostitution in a way that is relevant to your community.
- Practical action steps that can be taken to eliminate the exploitation of women and children.

Additionally, there are supplemental materials available on our website (www.caase.org/toolkits) where you can find information on Chicago organizations you may want to partner with, as well as movies and books to raise awareness.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood . . . Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

—United Nations, articles 1 and 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

How Orthodox Communities Can Help

Orthodox tradition is rooted in the concepts of love and compassion and these overarching values are often the foundation by which Christians take leadership roles in social justice efforts throughout the world. With a long history of striving to make the world better for all who live here, we believe that Orthodox communities can play a key role in helping to end human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This kit is a tool that can be a catalyst for activism within parishes. The toolkit can be used by groups within faith communities that are interested in working towards social change (women’s groups, social justice groups, young adult groups, etc.). It can also be a useful tool for any individual who is passionate about ending sexual harm.

Prostitution and human trafficking are a violation of human rights that occur in neighborhoods all over the Chicago diocese and throughout Illinois. As long as people remain unaware of the extent and root cause of sexual exploitation, victims will continue to be traumatized. Orthodox communities can be a vehicle for both awareness-raising and advocacy.

This toolkit specifically focuses on the importance of ending the demand for paid sex. We know that ending demand is just one piece in a complicated puzzle to end sexual exploitation. However, we also know that it is the piece that is most commonly overlooked. Providing prostituted individuals with resources and social services is vital for them to be able to exit prostitution. But as long as demand exists, vulnerable individuals will continue to be recruited and coerced into the sex trade. Purchasing sex is never justified, no matter a person’s circumstances. Whenever sex is purchased an industry is supported that profits off of sexual exploitation and harm. That is why we are reaching out to you to help us *end the demand*.

We hope that you will use this toolkit to educate your fellow parish members about the harms of human trafficking and sexual

exploitation, and work with them to identify ways to take action toward change.

“The sexual exploitation of women and children is a particularly repugnant aspect of this trade, and must be recognized as an intrinsic violation of human dignity and rights. The disturbing tendency to treat prostitution as a business or industry not only contributes to the trade in human beings, but is itself evidence of a growing tendency to detach freedom from the moral law and to reduce the rich mystery of human sexuality to a mere commodity.”

—Pope John Paul II

(Letter to Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for Relations with States. “Twenty-First Century Slavery – The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings.” 15 May 2002.)

**“He has showed you, O man,
what is good. And what does
the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your
God.”**

- Micah 6:8

SLAVERY: What is the age old issue?

Ecclesiastes 4:1

¹Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

Human trafficking, a form of modern day slavery, is pervasive nationally and internationally. There are more people enslaved today than at the peak of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

In the U.S., a person is a victim of sex trafficking if s/he is being exploited to engage in commercial sex. A person is a victim of a *severe* form of sex trafficking if:

s/he is being forced, coerced, or tricked to either work or engage in sex for money, and s/he would experience serious harm if s/he tried to leave situation.

OR

s/he is under 18 and is having sex for money--it isn't necessary to prove force or coercion for minors: the law recognizes that children cannot meaningfully consent to sex.

While transportation or movement can be involved in human trafficking, trafficking is simply forced/coerced labor; it doesn't require transportation or movement across borders

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Adopt congregational fasting/prayer: Choose a time of year and a length of time appropriate for your faith community to fast and pray for the sexually exploited individuals in your community. Incorporate into this time opportunities to teach your congregation or group about the issues facing women in prostitution and appropriate responses to the problem.

Ask your priest to address the issue in a sermon:

Raise awareness about sexual exploitation in your congregation by addressing the issue in a religious sermon.

Participate in the National Day of Human Trafficking Awareness:

Every year on January 11th, organizations around the country hold events to raise awareness about human trafficking and take action against human trafficking. Choose an action from this section, create your own, or join an event planned by another organization to commemorate this day.

Pray: Pray for justice and healing in your worship services, small group meetings, or personal practice. Here is one example adapted from a prayer offered by the Sisters of the Holy Family:

God of all peoples, awaken our hearts and deepen our commitment to work for a world where every person is free and able to live their lives fully and joyfully. We ask for conversion of heart for traffickers and for strong laws that protect victims and resources so that they may lead fulfilling lives. Help us to grow in our awareness that we are all connected. Give us wisdom, inspiration, and courage to stand in solidarity, so that together we will find ways to the freedom that is your gift to all your people. Amen

LOVING LIKE GOD: *Why should Orthodox Christians get involved?*

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Matthew 22:36-40

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Prostitution will not end unless we end the demand. By shifting the focus from targeting women in the sex trade to eliminating the demand for paid sex, we believe that we will see a real reduction in prostitution and the harms associated with it in our communities and in our city.

In Illinois, the rate of prostituted individuals being arrested for felony prostitution has increased over 1000 percent since 1995¹. This makes it difficult for women to escape prostitution and pursue rehabilitation due to the fact that an arrest record makes it much more difficult to secure a job or home. The johns, on the other hand, frequently receive lesser punishments, such as car impoundment, fines, and municipal violations, resulting in very little deterrence.

He promised me everything and better. Clothes, cars, house, himself. I was just looking for someone to love and love me. –
Prostitution survivor

Sign up for End Demand Illinois Action Alerts: The End Demand Illinois Campaign is shifting law enforcement's attention to sex traffickers and people who buy sex, while creating a network of support for survivors of the sex trade. Sign up at <http://enddemandillinois.org/>

Watch Demand with members of your congregation: This documentary exposes the men who buy commercial sex, the vulnerable women and children sold as commodities, and the facilitators of the trade within the marketplace of exploitation. You can watch the movie online at <http://www.sharedhope.org/Media/VideoResources.aspx>

Serve fair-trade coffee or have traffick-free chocolate parties: Buy fair trade and traffick-free chocolate and coffee and use them as an entry point for conversations with faith community members and friends about human trafficking, both abroad and in Illinois. Use fair-trade coffee at religious functions and encourage surrounding communities (especially schools and colleges) to do the same.

Learn more about the issue: There are many films and books about human trafficking and prostitution (see supplemental information). Expand your personal knowledge about these issues by checking out any of our recommended resources or facilitate a book club or film screening for a group of friends or your community of faith. Develop action steps based on what you learned from these resources. Reach out to other churches in your denomination or community and engage them in your activities.

¹ Illinois Department of Corrections, *Statistical Presentation 2004* (Springfield, Ill., 2005), 38.

LOVING MERCY & JUSTICE

Isaiah 58:5-9

⁶ “Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed^a go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’
If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking
wickedness,

Research conducted both in Chicago and nationwide, reveals that a substantial percentage of women in prostitution are homeless, survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and are first sold for sex at a very young age.

When we think of a woman in prostitution compared to a victim of sex trafficking, different images often come to mind. We tend to blame women in prostitution for their involvement in the sex trade but view victims of sex trafficking as innocent.

Even though an adult in prostitution who entered the sex trade entirely of her or his own volition is not involved with a third-party is not legally considered a victim of trafficking, it is important to move *beyond* legal definitions to understand the human rights violations experienced by both trafficked and non-trafficked individuals in prostitution.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Build a relationship with your local elected officials: Help your representatives understand how important it is not to revictimize women in their community. Advocate for targeting those causing the harm—pimps, traffickers, and customers—instead of revictimizing prostituted individuals. Most political leaders allot one day per week to meet with their constituents. Call ahead to confirm times and schedule a meeting to introduce yourself and your congregation and offer your recommendations. Chicago residents can find their [alderman](http://www.chicityclerk.com/citycouncil/alderman/find.html) at <http://www.chicityclerk.com/citycouncil/alderman/find.html>.

Talk with faith community members who are government and law enforcement officials: Set up a meeting to discuss the reality of human trafficking and the efforts of anti-trafficking organizations working on the issue. Connect them with ways to get involved in the work of these organizations.

Contact your legislators: Your voice counts! Keep abreast of relevant legislation and support initiatives that provide resources to women and hold perpetrators accountable. An easy way for you and your faith community to voice your opinions and make an impact on this issue is to write, call, or meet your local legislator. Each Illinois legislator has a Springfield office and a community office. And each US legislator has a DC office and a local office. You can find your local and national representatives at <http://capwiz.com/cfw/state/main/?state=IL&view=myofficials#0>.

SERVING OTHERS: *Where are those in need?*

Matthew 25:35-40

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?' ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?' ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,^[a] you did it to me.'

The average age of entry into prostitution is **12-14 years old**.² The overwhelming majority of individuals engaged in prostitution have a history of physical and/or sexual abuse, with estimates ranging from 65 to 95 percent.³

Being abused teaches victims to expect and accept abuse. It also teaches young people how to disassociate their bodies from their minds. *Being able to dissociate is necessary to survive the trauma of prostitution.*

Every 60 seconds, two more children are forced into slavery. - Stop the Traffik

² U.S. Department of Justice. (2007). *Domestic Sex Trafficking of Minors*. Washington, DC.

³ M. Farley et al., "Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder" in M. Farley, ed., *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress* (New York: Haworth, 2003), 33-74.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Add a personal dimension: Sometimes we find ourselves so removed from an issue that we cannot imagine that it is happening in our communities. As a faith leader, you can help raise awareness about sexual exploitation by hosting an "educational hour" and inviting a prostitution survivor or expert to share their experiences and expertise with your congregation. This is a great opportunity to create dialogue on these important issues. If you are interested in having someone speak to your community, please contact Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation at info@caase.org.

Monitor the Media: If you see something in the media that promotes or glorifies the exploitation of women, write letters to the editor and/or producer. All forms of media have avenues for this. If you see advertising or billboards that are offensive or degrading, contact the company or publisher and inform them of your opinion. To access CAASE's guide on how to respond to harmful depictions of the sex trade in the media, please visit: <http://www.caase.org>.

Volunteer: Partner with organizations that are working on this issue. Many organizations/coalitions are looking for individuals to help support their goals through volunteer time, collaborative community efforts, and donations. Work with the members of your parish to identify their skill sets and how they can contribute to the missions of potential partnering organizations. Areas of need are medical care, translation, job placement, housing, legal services, and mentoring. Your faith community can also help by organizing a clothing, blanket, and/or food drive. Chicago-based organizations working to end sexual exploitation can be found in the Resources section of this kit. If you need assistance finding an organization that matches your gifting, please contact CAASE.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS COMMITTED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

Luke 10: 29-37

²⁹But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
³⁰Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. ³²Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. ³³But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. ³⁴He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. ³⁵The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' ³⁶Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" ³⁷He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Individuals involved in the sex trade need a variety of social services and other resources to exit the sex trade safely. Unfortunately, instead of viewing these individuals as victims in need of assistance, society tends to label them as criminals.

Although ample research demonstrates that the customers, pimps, and traffickers are fueling the sex trade and abusing women and girls in prostitution, the criminal justice and legal systems continue to target and punish the victims. This one-sided focus fails to address the root cause of prostitution: the demand to purchase sex.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Connect the issue to liturgical seasons & holidays:

Harness the goodwill of the holidays and holy days when people come together to celebrate what matters to them most to educate individuals about sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Lent: Lent is often associated with giving up something that is pleasurable in our lives. But Lent can also be a time when we give up practices that are unhealthy either to ourselves or society. By focusing on giving up practices that are harmful to the global community, we can connect to the issues of slavery and exploitation in the following ways:

- Raise awareness about how what we purchase, eat, wear, and participate in can contribute to global slavery. Challenge members of your congregation to give up slave-made food, clothes, and other products. Go to www.slavefree.com or www.equalexchange.com to learn more about slave-free products. Free trade items can be purchased for gifts throughout the year.
- Encourage people during Lent (and thereafter) to stop patronizing institutions, stores, and companies whose advertising is degrading and whose commodification of women's bodies helps normalize the existence of the sex trade. Examples are gyms with "pole dancing" classes, TV stations with shows that glamorize prostitution or pornography, and magazines with ads that degrade the dignity of women.

SUGGESTED SERMONS

The Creation of Humanity – Genesis 1:26-27

“Then God said, ‘Let us make the human being (generic ‘man’, ha adam in Hebrew, o anthropos in Greek) in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over cattle’...So God created the human being in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.”

Implications: This text is crucial for understanding gender relations because it shows that the human being is created in the image of God *as male and female*. The Image of God – that which makes us human – is not only present in male & female alike; but the Triune God (first person plural in the text) is fully imaged only in the human community, where male and female coexist. The Divine Trinity, three persons united in the most profound intimacy of one being or essence, provides here the basis for human and gender relations. That basis is not hierarchical power but mutual love and self-giving, which constitutes the life the three persons of the Trinity share from all eternity.

Discussion: In this version of the creation account, which gender comes first or presides? Which gender is called to rule of creation? In this account, is humanity *androcentric* (‘male-centered’)? If not, then who is at the center of human creation? How is this account reconciled with the individualism prevalent in Western culture? Are unloving and oppressive actions toward women by men compatible with the image and likeness of God?

St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (4th Century), speaks to a woman who seemed to doubt that divine dignity was shared equally by men and women: “Woman, like man, is the image of God. You therefore have become like God by your goodness in loving others and your brothers, in loathing evil and overcoming the sinful passions, and *you therefore have the power to command.*” (“On the Origin of Man”, Homily 1:18)

Implications: St. Basil is a very important teacher for Eastern Christian doctrine and moral teaching. His teaching here supports the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 above.

Discussion: How is the “likeness” of God brought to realization in a person, whether female or male? What is the basis of the “power to rule” in St. Basil’s teaching? Is it innate? Is it a gender role? Or is it based on “goodness”? What kind of “power” does this suggest?

St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople around 400, a renowned preacher, teacher of Scripture, and rigorous moral teacher, was marched to his death for calling the imperial court to task for its corruption. Here he comments on Ephesians 5:21-33, which is often taken totally out of context to justify the subservience of the wife in marriage. “When we think of the wife obeying the husband, we normally think of obedience in military or political terms: the husband giving orders, and the wife obeying them. But, while this type of obedience may be appropriate in the army, it is ridiculous in the intimate relationship of marriage. The obedient wife does not wait for orders. Rather she tries to discern her husband’s needs and feelings, and responds in love...Yet such obedience should not be confined to the wife; the husband should be obedient in

the same way. When she is weary, he should relieve her of her work; when she is sad, he should cherish her, holding her gently in his arms...Thus a good marriage is not a matter of one partner obeying the other, but of both partners obeying each other.”

Implications: Relations between men and women are not meant to be based on the power dynamics of the world, for example men subjugating women. The dynamic of gender relations is instead meant to be love – the “authority” of love – which comes to realization in mutual submission to one another. This is not a dynamic for marriage alone, but for society in general; hence St. Paul begins the passage from Ephesians (referenced above) with the command to the whole community (the Church, qahal, ekklesia): “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Eph. 5:21)

Discussion: If one partner does not treat the other with love, what becomes of the authority of mutual obedience in that relationship? Are *demands* from men for obedience and service by women justified by this teaching? Are relations which humiliate, abuse, or “market” women acceptable to the Creator of humanity, with Divine Providence? How should the Church respond to situations where the image of God is abused in women?

St. John Chrysostom, preaching against harsh treatment of women: “Many men frequently try to intimidate their wives. They lift their voices and shout; they demand instant compliance to their every whim; they even raise their arms to force their wives to submit. Wives treated in this way become no more than sullen servants, acting...out of fear...If you treat your wife as a free woman, respecting her ideas and intuitions, and responding with warmth to her feelings and emotions, then your marriage shall be a source blessing to you.”

Implications: Marriage, as an institution, does not justify overbearing treatment of women. Women are not to be treated as servants of men.

Discussion: What place does fear and force have in male/female relations? (The above two quotations from Chrysostom are taken from the book On Living Simply, pp. 72 & 74)

Jesus and Women (with credit to Elizabeth Behr-Sigel, Discerning the Signs of the Times, pp 96-97) Jesus never deals with women in a stereotypical way. He never speaks of “female faults or weaknesses” or of “female virtues.” He does not tell them to be obedient or submissive. He is less interested in “woman” than in the particular women he encounters. With each of them he enters into direct dialogue. Often these women are prostitutes (“sinners”) with whom Jesus sits and dines (e.g., Matt. 9:10-13). Matthew 9:18-22 – A woman with a hemorrhage (which we can assume was a feminine problem) touches his robe. She is supposed to be “unclean.” But instead of condemnation, she receives healing. Jesus rejects the taboo which stigmatizes the woman because of a gender-related illness. John 8:1-11 – A woman is “taken in adultery” and brought to Jesus by the scribes & Pharisees. Nothing is said about the man who was involved, which suggests that the woman was a prostitute. They ask Jesus whether they should apply Leviticus 20:10 and stone her. He bends down and writes in the dust, and then tells them: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her.” They all leave, and he is left with the woman alone. “Woman, he says, “Has no one condemned you?” She replies, “No one, Lord.” He says, “Neither do I condemn you; go and do not sin again.”

Implications: Jesus does not come to condemn. He does not pass judgment or a sentence. He comes to invite people, like these women, to freedom. In the first case, it is freedom from physical infirmity and societal ostracism. In the second, it is the freedom not to be trapped in a way of life that demeans and debilitates. Jesus simply dismisses the past and invites her to start anew. His invitation is not an empty word but a word of grace and power, a re-creating and empowering word. The accusers, whom he sends fleeing, are just the flip side of the users of the woman. Both are finding satisfaction in using and manipulating her for their own differing purposes. Both seek to exercise power over her life. The sin Jesus tells her to avoid is a state of enslavement and alienation, estrangement from divine freedom. “Forgiveness” is essentially granting of freedom, the remission of a bond.

Matthew 26:6-13 – At table in Bethany, as Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to face suffering and death, an unidentified woman comes up to him and pours a flask of very expensive ointment on his head. “The disciples” are indignant at what they see as a waste of money. But Jesus defends the woman who has done a beautiful act “to prepare me for burial...wherever this gospel is preached in all the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” A similar story is found in Luke 7:36-50. Here the woman, who pours the precious ointment on Jesus’ head, is identified as a sinner, which implies she is a prostitute. This occurs at the home of a Pharisee named Simon (the same name as the host of the dinner in Matthew 26). This Simon complains that Jesus is not a prophet or he would have known “what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” Jesus defends her for treating him with profuse generosity, while Simon has neglected customary hospitality toward him. Her sins are forgiven, he says, “for she loved much.”

Implications: These accounts, placed at different times and places in the two Gospels, seem to relate the same story. The Church’s hymns during Holy Week have conflated the two accounts. The woman is identified as a sinner – ritually unclean. Yet she is the one who anoints Jesus for His kingly, messianic entrance into Jerusalem and for his death which overthrows death itself. She’s supposed to be avoided, not touched. Her dramatic action is dismissed as feminine extravagance. But, because of her deep love, she passes from being an outcast to taking a prophetic role as the anointer of the Messiah. By responding to Christ, she gains freedom not only from captivity but freedom to play an important role in the saving work of Christ.. The Church celebrates this woman in a renowned hymn by the Byzantine hymnographer Cassia in Holy Week: “The woman had fallen into many sins, O Lord/Yet when she perceived your divinity, / She joined the ranks of the myrrh bearing women. / In tears she brought you myrrh before your burial...” The woman is portrayed as a new Eve, not hiding in shame as she hears the Lord’s footsteps, but running to embrace them. She moves from debasement & entrapment in a sinful world to exaltation through love.

Discussion: Do the disciples and Simon the Pharisee see the freeing of the woman as their priority? How would their actions keep her in a state of bondage? What is the synergy here between divine grace and human love? Does the woman choose her own destiny here? How do these accounts tie into God’s preference for the outcast and the oppressed, which we find so clear in the prophets and the Gospels?

Repentant Prostitutes of the Desert (Note: In Greek, “repentance” is “*metanoia*”, meaning literally “*a change of mind*”, or figuratively, “*change of heart*”) These stories are recounted among others in Harlots of the Desert, edited by Benedicta Ward, pp. 92-100 and pp 26-56. Maria, the niece of Abraham – Abraham is a

6th century monk of the Egyptian desert whose brother dies, leaving a 7 year old orphan Maria. Abraham takes her in, building a room for her joined to his own cell only by a window, through which he speaks to her, teaches her, and raises her. She becomes a pious and beautiful young woman. At 27 years of age, an evil-minded monk insinuates himself into her confidence and then seduces her –Something we’re all too familiar with from today’s news. Maria is naïve; she is devastated. She despairs of her soul and thinks she has no choice but to leave her uncle and the life she’s had. As a “tainted” woman with no money or family, she sees a brothel as her only option. Abraham has no idea where she is and determines to find out. After 2 years, he does. Putting on soldier’s garb and taking money, he goes to the brothel as a supposed customer. Admitted to her room, he puts his arms around her. She “smells the sweet smell of asceticism” and begins to lament her desolation. Abraham sits with her on the bed, takes off the big hat that disguises him, and says: “What happened, my dear? Who hurt you, my daughter? Why could you not come and speak of it with me? I would have done penance for you...” She replies, “I was ashamed.” “Maria,” he says, “Let God lay it to my account. Let us go back where we belong...To you, your sins seem like mountains, but God has spread His mercy over all He has made.” She goes back with and receives such gifts of prayer that people come to her from all around to be healed through her intercession.

Implications: Maria falls into bondage because she does not understand the love of God. Her uncle is the witness of God’s compassion to her. She responds to it with the freedom to be who she truly wants to be, where she wants to be. Not condemned by the ascetic society of monks, she becomes a vessel of healing.

Discussion: What is Abraham’s first response when he finds Maria? How does he disarm her guilt and shame? What sets in motion her repentance (understanding repentance as metanoia, change of heart)? How does the false characterization of God as an angry, vengeful judge contribute to society’s complicity in sexual exploitation?

St. Mary of Egypt – This is a different Mary, from 6th century Alexandria. She becomes a prostitute at 12, obviously not a free choice. In the course of her work, she comes to Jerusalem and moves along with throngs of people to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre there. Some invisible force prevents her from entering the nave of the church. Overwhelmed by the conditions of her life, she turns with tears to the icon of Mary, the Mother of God, over the door. She prays for help. Freed from constraint, she is able to enter the church and venerate the Holy Cross. She is empowered to make a radical choice which enables her, a lone, compromised woman, to be free of the grip of prostitution. She crosses the Jordan, the traditional gateway to new freedom. There she begins the life of a desert hermit. She is assailed by nightmare fears and by the temptation to go back; but she is courageous and deep in faith. After 47 years, Fr. Zossimas, a priest-monk, happens upon her as she prays, lifted up above the ground, as naked and as bright as Eve in Paradise before the Fall. She is like an “angel in the flesh”, able to cross the Jordan’s waves on foot. After she dies, her body lies incorrupt for a year until Zossimas finds her where he left her. She chooses, by God’s grace, to be free – not without great cost. Her freedom fills her with a power that exceeds anything Zossimas has seen or will see on earth. Implications God is on the side of those who are oppressed. He desires that they be freed -not by force of violence, but by being renewed in the image of his love. Mary escapes from an oppressive world by leaving ‘civilized’ society. In her radical faith and trust, she is transfigured, restored to Paradise.

Discussion: Who was of assistance to Mary in her effort to change her life? Adam & Eve were embarrassed by their nakedness and hid from God. What does Mary's nakedness reveal in this story? What virtues does Mary show which run counter to the old stereotypes of feminine character?

Thank you for using our toolkit for Orthodox Christian communities. We hope that you found the resource helpful. Faith-based communities regularly perform inspiring work that is rooted in love, compassion, and leadership. Therefore, Orthodox Christian communities are in a strategic position to work towards eliminating sexual exploitation. CAASE is always available to answer any questions, suggestions, or concerns that you may have while reading and working with this toolkit. Please do not hesitate to contact us at outreach@caase.org.

We also encourage you to look at the supplemental information provided in addition to this toolkit. These materials include

- Religious statements against sexual exploitation
- Faith-based programs/curricula
- Chicago-based organizations: Direct service/Outreach
- Chicago-based organizations: Advocacy
- Must-See films
- Must-Read books

Lastly, we would greatly appreciate your feedback regarding your experience with the toolkit. You can fill out a brief survey online at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/W5NZRXM>.