

Peace begins with Dignity

ACRATH and Talitha Kum invite you to reflect on the global movement of prayer, reflection and action against human trafficking on February 8, which is the feast day of Saint Josephine Bakhita and the *International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking*.

The theme this year was, "Peace Begins with Dignity: A Global Call to End Human Trafficking," which draws inspiration from Pope Leo XIV's powerful reminder that true peace is gentle and humble, born of love, and sustained where human dignity is upheld. The exploitation and objectification of people through trafficking fundamentally destroys the foundations of peace and justice, making its eradication essential to building a just world. Human trafficking is a global wound that denies human dignity and shatters the peace of communities everywhere.

Watch the in a pilgrimage of prayer live recording, as we connected with our global community in our shared mission to end human trafficking and the harm it causes: <https://www.youtube.com/live/VxCpDTpr8bA>

"This day holds special significance in the ACRATH calendar, and we invite you to join our global community in marking it. As we begin 2026, let us come together in prayer and action, reaffirming our commitment to end human trafficking and build a world free from exploitation," said Sarah Puls sgs, ACRATH Executive Officer.



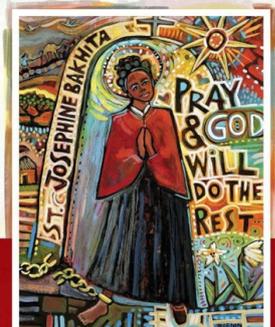
- Joining the online **Pilgrimage of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking** took place on across all continents and time zones and can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/live/VxCpDTpr8bA>
- Download or order your free ACRATH poster via our website. It features information and calls to action.

For more suggested actions, prayers and resources, see: <https://acrath.org.au/take-action/world-day-of-prayer/> and see the recording here: <https://www.youtube.com/live/VxCpDTpr8bA>

Download your poster here: https://acrath.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/IDPAAHT_Bakhita_Poster_2026.pdf

International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking

Peace Begins with Dignity: A Global Call to End Human Trafficking



Pope Francis designated 8th February, the feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, as the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking following a request from Talitha Kum, the worldwide Network of Consecrated Life Against Human Trafficking.

Born in 1869 in Sudan, Josephine knew the pain and sorrow of losing her freedom, when at 7 years of age she was taken by slave traders. She was bought and sold many times in the following decade. Taken to Italy by a family who 'owned' her, she met the Canossian Daughters of Charity, became a Catholic and joined the Canossian congregation. She died in 1947 and was canonized in 2000.

ACT NOW

1. Learn about human trafficking and tell three others. <https://acrath.org.au/the-issue/what-is-human-trafficking/>
2. Pray for the victim/survivors of human trafficking. See Prayer vigil via the QR Code.
3. Purchase goods that have not been tainted by slavery within the supply chain. Look for the logos:  
4. Join the live-streamed online Marathon of Prayer Friday 6th February. See details here: <https://acrath.org.au/take-action/world-day-of-prayer/>



For all resources see: <https://acrath.org.au/take-action/world-day-of-prayer/> or scan the QR code



A Fresh Outlook



Pictured: ACRATH National office staff at ACU, January 2026

ACRATH's national headquarters has relocated to the Australian Catholic University (ACU) in East Melbourne after 14 years at the Brigidine Ministry Centre in Albert Park and before that at the Good Shepherd Sisters' office and meeting space in Abbotsford. This move, made possible thanks to the generosity of partners and supporters at ACU and the Archdiocese of Melbourne, marks an exciting new chapter for ACRATH.

Professor Zlatko Skrbis, Vice-Chancellor of ACU, shared his enthusiasm about the ACRATH move to ACU: "I am thrilled that Australian Catholic University can assist. We are very much looking forward to collaborating with ACRATH."

Our relocation was also supported by the [Archbishop's Charitable Fund](#), a key initiative fuelled by the ongoing generosity of Melbourne's parishioners through the annual Archbishop's Campaign. As Archbishop Peter Comensoli's office states, "these funds are dedicated to supporting local community outreach and mission work: We appreciate your partnership and look forward to the positive impact this support will help achieve."

Clare Condon sgs , ACRATH President, reflected on the move: "For ACRATH, this is an exciting venture. Being at ACU gives us the chance to connect with young students and, hopefully, facilitate important research into the future."

We look forward to embracing the opportunities ahead and continuing our mission with renewed energy and support.

Migrant Workers' Voices Heard

NSW Parliament's Modern Slavery Committee invited ACRATH to attend a hearing to give evidence from our experience with migrant workers, particularly those who are in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. ACRATH Migrant Support Worker Carla Chung travelled to Coffs Harbour in December for the Committee's fifth public hearing. The hearing, part of an inquiry into the risks faced by temporary migrant workers in rural and regional NSW, provided an opportunity to raise concerns about migrant workers' welfare and advocate for stronger protections and support.

Carla shared with us her reflections on the hearing, her experiences working with migrant workers, and her insights on tackling the risk of modern slavery and exploitation. "My role is to build connections and advocate for the welfare of PALM workers, and I interact with workers across Australia, often reaching out to those who may be isolated or at higher risk of exploitation. Being from a Timorese background helps me to break down language barriers and build trust, but I work with all migrant and backpacker workers, regardless of which scheme they're on. We must be present in these hearings to share experiences, raise concerns, and make sure the voices of the workers are heard."

Carla told the Committee that workers are concerned about shortened contracts and work conditions. "Workers are sometimes given shorter contracts and deductions are taken from their wages to cover these (travel, visa, health insurance) fees, and if a poor harvest season comes, they can be sent home with little or no savings". Other workers raised safety concerns about working in extreme heat, not getting medical care when exposed to chemicals, and overcrowding in the accommodation provided by the employers.

ACRATH's work with the PALM workers is particularly important because we know that some of the most vulnerable workers are those who have arrived as PALM workers but leave the program, often because they have not been able to address issues when they arise.

These workers, who have disengaged from the PALM program and no longer have the formal protection it offers, can then be targeted by unscrupulous employers and subject to serious exploitation and slavery-like conditions. By supporting the workers to understand their rights and by advocating with and for them when needed, ACRATH's work supports the workers to be safe and treated justly by their employers.

"I appreciated the opportunity to bring workers' issues to the committee's attention. I am hopeful that the committee listened and will consider these issues before the next busy picking season in September 2026. It's important to start making changes." Carla said

Watch the NSW Parliament hearing [YouTube Link](#)



Pictured: Carla Chung, Coffs Harbour, NSW Parliament's Modern Slavery Committee Hearing, December 2025

Historian Committed to the Cause

Dr Mark Copland is astounded that modern slavery, in its various forms, still occurs. In his new role as an ACRATH National Committee member, he is committed to building on the incredible work of those who have gone before him.

Mark has just been appointed Executive Officer for St Vincent de Paul Society in the Toowoomba Diocese and is no stranger to ACRATH or its work. Previously, as Mission Executive with St Vincent's Private Hospital in Toowoomba, he was part of the St Vincent's Health Australia (SVHA) groundbreaking training program to help key staff identify and support vulnerable people who have been trafficked who present to their facilities. The *Advocates for Change* initiative is part of a wider anti-trafficking project that SVHA began in 2017 in partnership with ACRATH. Mark said in 2022 that he was inspired to become an Advocate for Change because he believes trafficked people are 'often overlooked' in society. He created awareness through training sessions with the hospital's emergency department and other staff.

"As a trained historian, I have been confronted by the taking away of people's liberty throughout the centuries. I have long admired the work of ACRATH, providing concrete support to people caught in slavery and trafficking as well as raising consciousness in the broader community to bring about real change."

The ACRATH National Committee members are:

Clare Condon sgs – President
Carmel Heagerty rsm – National Secretary
Michael Mooney - Treasurer
Annette Arnold rsj - Committee Member
Julia Trimboli - Committee Member
Shane Woods cfc - Committee Member
Eveline Crotty rsm - Committee Member
Andrew Nee - Committee Member
Mark Copland – Committee Member

Pictured: Dr Mark Copland with therapy dog Jasper, volunteers at the Toowoomba Hospice



United Against Trafficking in the Pacific

ACRATH is proud to announce the launch of our new project title and logo, Pacific Connections: Ending Trafficking Through Collective Action. The Pacific Connections project is designed to deliver culturally relevant education, training, and resources about human trafficking and modern slavery across the Pacific region, with a strong focus on combating labour exploitation.

A cornerstone of this initiative is collaboration. Representatives from Pacific Island nations and Timor-Leste will play a key role in shaping and implementing our programs, ensuring that activities respond to the unique needs and insights of local communities.

“We deeply value the experience and dedication of the many individuals and organisations already combating trafficking in the Pacific. Through this project, we aim to build on existing efforts, offering further support, training and resources to amplify our collective impact. On 9 April, we will hold our first online networking meeting, when stakeholders and people already involved in responding to issues like human trafficking and modern slavery can connect, share their involvement, and contribute to our needs assessment and project planning,” said Melissa Halliday, ACRATH’s Community Development Project Coordinator.

Upcoming Events:

- Online Networking Webinar: 9 April 2026
- Online Training Webinar: 14 May 2026
- In-person Training in Fiji: October 2026

If you are involved in anti-trafficking work in the Pacific, we invite you to attend. To register your interest or for more information, please contact Melissa at the National Office:

awareness@acrath.org.au



Call to action February 2026

ACRATH supports the work of many like-minded organisations both in Australia and globally. Many produce resources that can be used in a variety of settings and some have campaigns underway. Our newsletter regularly includes this page, encouraging people to find out more and consider becoming involved in actions and advocacy.



Migrant workers raise concerns at modern slavery inquiry in Coffs Harbour

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-13/modern-slavery-migrant-hearings-in-nsw/106130342>

Modern Slavery Committee meets in Coffs Harbour News of the Area

<https://coffscoast.newsofthearea.com.au/modern-slavery-committee-meets-in-coffs-harbour>

Government issues record fine to NSW business for exploiting migrant workers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fF8h9S8Usvw>

Port Macquarie charity Every Daughter Matters helps stop Nepali girls being trafficked to India

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-21/every-daughter-matters-stops-nepali-girls-being-trafficked/106033126>

PALMed off: The story of modern slavery in Australia

<https://thepoint.com.au/news/260108-palmed-off-the-story-of-modern-slavery-in-australia>

Coroner refers exploited migrant worker's death to federal police

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/exploited-worker-jerwin-royupas-death-sparks-anti-slavery-calls/jpnu1zrrd>

Australia's PALM workers are leaving their employers, becoming 'extremely vulnerable' in visa limbo

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-05/palm-worker-disengagement-new-report/106009270>

A Vision for Oceania Shaped by Faith and Responsibility

<https://www.bbcatholic.org.au/news/latest-news/a-vision-for-oceania-shaped-by-faith-and-responsibility>

Vanuatu nationals celebrate faith and friendship in Bundaberg under the PALM scheme

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-21/vanuatu-workers-sunday-worship-in-bundaberg/106128564>

"Right or wrong, just accept it": Fear and silence in the PALM Scheme

<https://www.migrantjustice.org/2025palmreport>

Anti-trafficking experts urge strong action 25 years from Palermo Protocol

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-12/anti-trafficking-conference-gregorian-university-un-santa-marta.html>

Gippsland vegetable farm accused of underpaying migrant workers

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-17/bulmers-vegetable-farm-charges/106022616>

Talitha Kum

<https://www.talithakum.info/en/news?lang=en>

Global Sisters Report: Trafficking

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/topics/trafficking>

Stop Trafficking Newsletter

<https://alliancetoendhumantrafficking.org/stop-trafficking-newsletter/>



ACRATH in the News

ACRATH was featured in The Southern Cross, a South Australian publication, this week. The article explored our organisation's history, featuring an interview with Executive Officer Sarah Puls sgs and information about our significant upcoming event, 'ACRATH 20 Years of Impact', scheduled for February 12, from 6 pm to 8 pm at St Ignatius Church in Norwood, South Australia.

We invite our South Australian community to join us in celebrating two decades of ACRATH's commitment and achievements. Admission is free, but tickets are necessary. Reserve your spot at events.humanitix.com/acrath-20-years-of-impact.

For more details, read: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/0afebd1b-8445-4784-a9c8-1b8ac0031324> (page 9)

Twenty years of impact

In 2005 a group of women gathered in Brisbane to confront the global tragedy of modern slavery, leading to the founding of ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Australia Against the Trafficking of Humans).

Since then, ACRATH has continued to grow, supporting victims and survivors, advocating for their rights, educating the community and raising awareness about human trafficking and modern slavery both in Australia and internationally.

In June 2025, after more than a decade of ACRATH membership, Good Samaritan Sister Sarah Puls took on the role of executive officer, landing in the middle of the 20th birthday celebrations.

Reflecting on the occasion, Sarah said in the 20 years ACRATH has been active, members have made a great contribution to the understanding of the reality of modern slavery in Australia and had a huge impact on the experience of victims/survivors.

"The government-funded programs which are now so important in responding to the needs of victims/survivors were mostly non-existent when ACRATH began and their

existence is, in part, a result on the advocacy ACRATH did over the years," she said.

"The Support for Trafficked People Program, the Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program and the existence of the Additional Referral Pathway have all been shaped by the advocacy of ACRATH members."

ACRATH was also a key participant in the successful campaign for the establishment of the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act, as well as several other pieces of legislation.

"We are proud of our work but also recognise that we couldn't have done any of it alone," Sarah said.

"We know that our voice was heard and that the outcome has been better support for those who have experienced human trafficking and modern slavery."

ACRATH's identity as a Catholic organisation has been key to raising awareness of slavery and trafficking across the Catholic sector, particularly in the education, healthcare and parish settings.

Sarah said this ranged from practical matters such as tracing supply chains for anti-slavery procurement to completing ACRATH's micro-credentials for



CHANGE AGENT: Sr Sarah Puls (right) promoting the work of ACRATH.

future teachers and health workers to train them in identifying and assisting the victims of trafficking.

She is hoping that ACRATH can continue to build on the work already being done in schools to encourage young people to share their gifts and their deep interest in the issues in a way that fits with their often busy lives.

In Adelaide, ACRATH is collaborating with Young Mercy Links in a 'Near to Peer' program. YML members are trained and are available to speak to, and do workshops with, senior students in schools about issues around human trafficking and modern slavery.

One favourite topic is fast fashion.

"ACRATH's work has always been guided by our learnings from people who have lived experience of human trafficking, modern slavery, and other forms of exploitation," Sarah said.

"Over many years we have learnt from people who are offered support through our Companionship Program As 'Companions' ACRATH members provide a warm, friendly presence – the support of a 'good neighbour' to people who might feel and be disconnected from traditional support systems."

While celebrating its 20th year is a great achievement, Sarah said

there was still much to do.

"There is no decrease in the statistics from around the world about slavery and human trafficking," she said.

"The challenge is to be asking: Where is the need now? How can ACRATH best respond to the needs of today?"

Sarah is a guest speaker at ACRATH SA groups' upcoming event 'ACRATH 20 Years of Impact' to be held on February 12 at St Ignatius Church, Norwood at 6-8 pm. All welcome. Free tickets are available at events.humanitix.com/acrath-20-years-of-impact

ACRATH needs core business funding and additional funding for special projects.

Please consider a regular donation to ACRATH so that we can plan ahead. Thanks.

<https://www.trybooking.com/au/donate/acrath>
or <https://acrath.org.au/donate>

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible

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