

Grapevine

Taking the first step

by *Mary Clemens Meyer, Editorial Advisory Council Representative, Mennonite Women USA*

What connection can human trafficking have to a 50-something white woman living in Ohio? This is what I wondered when Mennonite Women USA first focused my attention on this crime.

Earlier I had seen part of a public television documentary that interviewed young women victims of trafficking. They had boarded planes for other countries, believing they were on their way to good jobs and much-needed income. Instead, they were forced into sexual slavery and held as prisoners. One young woman's story was especially sad. She was from a desperately poor Eastern European family and needed the job to pay for cancer treatment for a younger brother. Instead, she was cut off from her family for years, beaten and abused, and given no money. By the time she escaped and returned to her family, her brother had died.

These stories shocked and saddened me, but I thought, "These things are only happening far away, right?" No, not right. The more I heard about this crime, the closer to home it I realized it was. Recently, my son Chris forwarded to me a report on human trafficking in my own state of Ohio. The headline reads: "Hundreds Forced Into Labor, Sex in Ohio." According to research by a special study commission, about 1,000 American-born children are forced into the sex trade in Ohio every year and about 800 immigrants are sexually exploited and pushed into sweatshop-type jobs. The article cites Ohio's weak laws on human trafficking, its growing demand for cheap labor, and its proximity to the Canadian border as key contributors.

Mennonite Women USA's work on this issue is timely. Trafficking is not a faraway problem; it is right here, exploiting thousands, especially women and children. Becoming aware is the first step toward ending this abuse of "the least of these." 📌



MW USA Mission and Vision

Our mission is to empower women and women's groups as we nurture our life in Christ through studying the Bible, using our gifts, hearing each other, and engaging in mission and service.

Mennonite Women USA invites women across generations, cultures, and places to share and honor our stories, care for each other, and express our prophetic voice boldly as we seek to follow Christ.