



BECOME *a* SHEPHERD

STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION.
PROTECT, HELP, EMPOWER AND, RESTORE DIGNITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

This past May the parish of **St. Rose of Lima in Short Hills, NJ** celebrated its annual Stewardship Day, an event devoted to performing acts of mercy and charity. This year the day was specifically dedicated to serving survivors of human trafficking through education, awareness and direct service. A cross-section of parishioners, including many middle and high school students, participated in the event.

The morning began in prayer followed by an insightful presentation on the scope and scale of this heinous crime given by Kate Lee, Administrator of the New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking. She noted that human trafficking is second only to drug trafficking in revenues, in fact the International Labor Organization estimates that forced labor and human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry worldwide representing over 40 million victims. * Ms. Lee went on to state that human trafficking occurs in every state in the United States in all demographic communities, with victims as young as 11 being common targets of traffickers. The state of New Jersey has one of the highest incidences of trafficking in the United States. The presentation was followed by a lively Q & A, which brought the crime into sharp focus for the adults, parents and students alike, and set the stage for the service projects that followed.

The hands-on activities were purposely designed to benefit the victims of trafficking, to raise awareness amongst the attendees, the parish, and the community at-large, and to raise funds for the Coalition. Volunteers assembled fifty backpacks for rescued victims filled with basic necessities at the moment of recovery such as: sweatshirts/sweatpants, t-shirts, socks, underwear, toiletries and personal hygiene items. These backpacks will be distributed to federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and service providers who care for rescued victims. Over 1,000 bars of soap were labeled with information about the national human trafficking hotline as part of the national S.O.A.P campaign. S.O.A.P. was started by Teresa Flores, a victim of human trafficking herself who has dedicated her life to helping victims by distributing labeled bars of soap to hotels and motels in areas where trafficking is known to occur. The New Jersey Coalition against Human Trafficking will distribute these throughout the state.



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Other volunteers, including many students, baked and packaged items for a bake sale that took place following the Masses that weekend. Volunteers made and sold 200 awareness bracelets at the bake sale as well. The parish raised well-over \$1000 for the New Jersey Coalition. Information about the Coalition and other educational materials were also distributed at the bake sale. Finally, the student volunteers made a giant banner with the theme "Hands of Hope" signed by the Stewardship Day volunteers and by parishioners after all the Masses. The banner still hangs on the parish grounds in public view to continue community awareness of this important cause.

Stewardship Day was the culmination of a year-long effort by the parish which included a speaker event held last fall in partnership with Christ Church in Short Hills, and a youth ministry event themed around the Super Bowl in January. We are most grateful for the support and guidance provided by St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Triangle, VA, the Diocese of Orlando Human Trafficking Task Force, and the staff of the USCCB and look forward to continuing to collaborate on plans for next year.

The New Jersey Coalition is comprised of over 150 organizations and institutions from across the state, including St. Rose of Lima Parish. They are on the forefront of education, service, and advocacy in the fight to eradicate human trafficking. For more information about the Coalition go to www.njhumantrafficking.org.

If you are interested in more information about St. Rose's efforts contact Deacon David Hughes at davidhughes3@verizon.net.

*Source: <https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/facts>