



ROMAN CATHOLIC  
**DIOCESE**  
**OF CHARLESTON**

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

## **PRESS RELEASE** — *For Immediate Release*

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### **The Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston works to assist victims of human trafficking**

~ Feb. 8 is the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of human trafficking survivors~

CHARLESTON – According to the 2022 South Carolina Human Trafficking Annual Report, counties that noted the most human trafficking cases are Greenville, Charleston, Richland, Horry and Spartanburg. Additionally, the report says the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) supported 416 cases involving human trafficking, including 399 minor victims and 17 adults.

Feb. 8 marks the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of human trafficking survivors. She was born in the Darfur region of Sudan in 1869 and sold several times as a slave beginning at the age of 7 or 8. Later in life, she gained her freedom in Italy, became a Canossian nun and was declared a saint in 2000.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston honors the life and legacy of St. Josephine by supporting organizations, like Bon Secours St. Francis Health System in Greenville, that assist victims of trafficking.

Bon Secours St. Francis uses a “housing first” model known as Jasmine Road — a comprehensive medical and psychological healthcare housing program centered on spiritual intervention. Through partnering with independent organizations and government agencies, the goal is three-pronged: first to rescue, then recover and finally restore victims of trafficking. By meeting the hierarchical needs of victims — including detox from opioids, food, housing, intervention, therapy, reintegration into the community, and job preparation — the team at Bon Secours helps transform the lives of trafficking survivors.

“Our mission as Catholics is to respond to God’s call,” said Deacon Alex Garvey, a medical doctor and vice president of mission at Bon Secours. “We are God’s people responding to the urgent call to take care of God’s people.”

Pope Francis has rightly called sex trafficking a crime against humanity. The Catholic Church supports efforts that aim to protect people forced into labor exploitation, and specifically assisting minors who have been coerced into the sex trafficking industry. The Church provides affirmative defense of and expungement for these young victims.

### **ABOUT THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON**

Founded in 1820, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston is comprised of 114 parishes and missions, 32 Catholic schools, and 350,000 people. It encompasses the state of South Carolina.

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