



CHILDREN OF THE IMMACULATE HEART

Restoring All Things in Christ ~ Serving Survivors of Human Trafficking

Volume 2 Number 2 March 2017

A Message From The President

Dear Family, Friends and Benefactors,

There is a very real sense in which one could say the origins of CIH are in Rome. The first time I stepped foot in the Eternal City I was an 18-year-old Evangelical Protestant university student making my first major discovery of the Catholic Church. One of two books we had to read before the trip was Margaret Visser's *The Geometry of Love*, about the church of St. Agnes outside the walls, where the early virgin martyr was buried. Little did I know what a journey the good God had set out before me, and how St. Agnes and I would cross paths many times.

Many years later my dear friend Devanie Cooper and I were having dinner, discussing the upcoming founding of Children of the Immaculate Heart and what exactly our mission would entail. Street outreach or housing, rehabilitative programs or preventative ones? As we were talking, we knew this work could involve risks to ourselves and it dawned on us that it was the vigil of the feast of St. Maria Goretti, a modern-day virgin martyr whose aspirations were only separated from those of St. Agnes by time in history. At the age of 11, Maria Goretti refused the advances of her friend Alessandro when he tried to rape her and paid for it with her life, though she forgave her murderer on her death bed. Devanie looked at me as this realization sunk in and joyfully commented that if she were to die a martyr, it would atone for all of her sins! While there were many



Massimo Stanzione. *Saint Agnes*. 1635-1640. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

ways in which we did not realize what we were "getting ourselves into," there is another sense in which we did and were given the grace by God to accept this mission entrusted to us. In the following weeks, the discussions continued, and we realized that we were not just interested in getting a woman out of bondage, or letting her know that someone cares, even though that is our primary goal. We are interested in seeing entire institutions shut down by the power of God's grace.

Two years after this conversation, I had the happiness of returning to Rome. This time I had been Catholic for nine years, and it was a real pilgrimage with a friend who was about to enter a Carmelite monastery. We enjoyed a beautiful walk through the city one Sunday evening, taking advantage of the churches that were open later than usual.

Entering the Piazza Navona, we gladly discovered that Mass was being said in the church of St. Agnes in Agony. There I prayed fervently for the work of Children of the Immaculate Heart and for its future and truly felt that God heard and was pouring out his grace for us. When the church closed, we went to dinner. Only then

did I pull out my guidebook to read about St. Agnes in Agony and to my great surprise I read that the site of the church was formerly a brothel that the city prefect had threatened to put Agnes in if she did not give in to the advances of his son. But Agnes was steadfast, with the liturgy celebrating her as saying, "At my side I have a protector of my body, an angel of the Lord" and "when Agnes entered the house of shame, she found an angel of the Lord ready to protect her" (Lauds ant. 2 & 1). You can imagine my joy when I realized that the former "house of shame" is now a place in which the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God is daily offered to the Father, in which glory is given to God without ceasing! This inevitably made me think of the aforementioned conversation with my friend a few years earlier, where we wanted more than one girl out of a house of shame; we wanted the house of shame to close.

May the good God give us the grace of perseverance in the face of all trials that we too, in union with Christ, might labor tirelessly for the salvation of those entrusted to us. During this season of Lent, may St. Agnes intercede for us, she who was only for Jesus, "For Him alone I keep my troth, to Him I surrender with all my heart" (6. Ant.).

Continue reading to learn about the minors' home that we just signed a lease on, and please keep us in your prayers as we go through the licensing process!

In Cor Jesu et Mariae,

Grace Williams

Grace Williams
President/Executive Director

2017 Banquet and Silent Auction a Success!

By Jenna Christakis

On Saturday, February 11th, Children of the Immaculate Heart held its Fourth Annual Banquet at Our Mother of Confidence Catholic Church. CIH was graced with the presence of about 225 guests and three guest speakers, of whom the first was Summer Stephan, Chief Deputy District Attorney of San Diego County.

Ms. Stephan, a key player in the formation of the San Diego Human Trafficking Task Force, explained that “there are between 4,000-8,000 victims of sex trafficking in the San Diego area” and “these victims are on average between the ages of 14.5 and 15.5 years and 80% of the victims are American.” She stressed that these are “our children” being trafficked, not foreigners as is commonly assumed. Currently, Ms. Stephan is heading the rebuild and reform movement for survivors of human trafficking in San Diego County.



Guests enjoy an elegant dinner and dessert

The evening's second speaker was Father Alphonsus Maria Hermes, O. Praem., of St. Michael's Abbey in Orange County. He spoke passionately on Love Incarnate, expressing how the evil objectification of human beings is due to a rejection of Christian charity, the self-giving love of Christ, and that the sin of lust “depersonalizes man, turning others into objects” that can be



CIH President Grace Williams speaks with Fr. Alphonsus Maria Hermes

used, bought, and sold. To conclude, Father urged the attendees to combat this warped view of the human person with a renewal of Christian love - selfless giving and respect for the dignity of each and every human life.



Attendees stand and applaud following the speech of a CIH client

The guest speeches ended with one of CIH's own clients sharing her story of surviving human trafficking here in San Diego and allowed the audience to see this crime against humanity from the perspective of the survivor. She expressed how, for seven years, she was brainwashed into thinking that she was worthless, that no one would ever love her like her trafficker claimed to because she was “just a prostitute.” However, she finally realized that “love is not humiliating you or putting a fist to your face when you don't want to sleep with someone.” Fortunately, this strong young woman found the courage to break away from those lies to pursue a better life for herself and her children. In the closing of her talk she expressed how she “hopes that one day [she] can help a girl break those same chains that once trapped [her].” This young woman is currently going to college in the hopes of becoming a case manager and starting her own non-profit to make her hope of helping other trafficking victims a reality.

The evening was eye-opening, tearful, and inspiring. Thank you to all who attended that evening, helping us raise over \$17,000! A special thanks goes out to our many volunteers who made it a seamless event – and thanks especially to Pernicano's Ristorante for doing the catering! It was, as always, fabulous!



JENNA CHRISTAKIS is a marketing intern for CIH and a student at John Paul the Great Catholic University. She will receive a double B.S. degree in Film Producing and in Business Sales and Marketing in September of 2017.

An Interview with a CIH Client

By Sophie Piconi

Every day I am blessed to work with the women and children of CIH. Their smiles, hopes, strength, and conviction to make a new life for themselves and their children are nothing short of miraculous.

These women and their children have seen and lived the darkness and pure evil of the sex trafficking world. But now they are out - they are starting over. They are safe, and for the first time they have a home, they are healing, they are reuniting with their children and putting the pieces of their lives together.

To know these women, their stories, and their dreams for the future is to truly love them. I am thrilled to share with you, CIH supporters, an interview with one of our amazing women. "Georgia" has been with CIH for just over one year. Her story is harsh, ugly, and gut-wrenching. It is her past and now she lives for today and the brightness of her future.

Please note "the track" is the area of town known for prostitution and "the life" is the subculture of sex trafficking.

How old were you when you fell into the life and how did you meet your first trafficker?

I was 17 years old when I fell into the life. I had pretty much been on my own since I was fifteen when I had my first child. The man I was in a relationship with ended up going to prison and I ended up on the streets sleeping in a car with my son who was 8 months old. I was stressed about what I was gonna do. I was sleeping in a car and I didn't know I was living on "the track." One day I was in my car at a gas station, crying with my son cause he was crying. He needed his diaper changed and he was hungry and I didn't have any money or anyone to ask for help. A man approached me and asked me if I was okay. He bought my son diapers and milk. He told me he had somewhere I could shower, clean up and get a meal. I stayed with him for about four days. Then he started saying I have to start pulling my own weight. He told me he knew how I could get money easy. That led me to stripping, then that wasn't enough, so I started doing massages, finally that wasn't enough, so I started having sex for money.

Can you tell me a story about what a day in the life is like?

A day in the life really consists of the pimp you deal with. A lot of pimps...like to be around their work, which is their girls. Other pimps have their girls on autopilot which means they are on their own - checking into hotel rooms alone, driving themselves to and from the track.

On a regular day in the life I would wake up at about

4am catch the early morning traffic (johns/buyers) on the track and stay out for about 4 hours in hopes to make \$300. Then I'd go take a nap and shower and then work the lunch shift 12:00 to about 2:00. I'd relax until about 5:00 and then work the night shift. Sometimes you never get a break - the phones keep ringing, the track keeps going and it's a sleepless night. Sleeping with man after man and never complaining. Because if you do to you'll get beat. You get blisters on your feet from walking so much. Always away from your kids and family.

How many days of the week were you forced to work, and how many hours a day?

I worked Monday through Saturday. Sometimes all day multiples hours. Sunday was family day. I would get to see my kids and hang with my pimp and other girls.

Did your trafficker ever hurt you or anyone close to you?

I had multiple traffickers, some were all about control. I use to refuse to be controlled so I got bad beatings cause sometimes they wanted me do embarrassing and degrading things and I would refuse or I would defend the other girls when they were getting beat. I remember many nights getting beat so bad I would pass out. I'd waking up bleeding, with black eyes, welts, cuts, bruises, a broken jaw, fractured ribs, sometimes I used to wish I would never wake up. What really motivated me to endure all the beatings and pain was my family. My trafficker threatened to hurt my family. My last trafficker was the worst. He branded me with his name and kidnapped my daughter. He knew I was gonna leave him so he kidnapped my daughter and beat her cause he said she reminded him of me. My baby girl was only three years old at the time. He beat her so bad she had a black eye, busted lip, bruises all over her back and legs, belt marks and fist marks. He had the nerve to record the whole thing - this man was so evil! He also got me pregnant and beat his own baby out of me.

Did you ever try to leave and if so, what happened to you?

Yes, I tried to leave many times but I was so brain-washed to believe that love was supposed to hurt and love was about being degraded and that that's all I was good for or all I would ever be. Back then there weren't any resources to help - no housing, no nothing. So I never had time to ever really heal and deal with a lot of issues that I have because I never felt safe or able to relax. I would be like "Why am I suffering being broke when I know how to get money?" So I would always go back and let my trafficker brain wash and hurt me more.

Can you tell me about when you met Grace Williams?

I met Grace Williams about one year ago and I thank God every day she is in my life. I was so broken and lost when I met her - living in hotel rooms, trying to figure



out what was gonna be my next step, trying to find a job and trying to feed my kids. I was still turning dates while my kids were at school so I would have a roof over their heads and food to feed them. When I met Miss Grace she told me she wanted to help me and give me an apartment and the basic needs I needed. I had heard that so many times I didn't believe it at first.

What has the past year been like since being a part of CIH?

A year later and here I am in my own place (apartment). My kids and I just had our first real Christmas and Thanksgiving, something we have never had before. I have been able go back school and work. I have accomplished so many things in the last year.

What are your hopes and goals for the future?

My hopes and dreams are to continue to stay positive and around people who really love me and care about me, like Miss Grace and Miss Sophie, and to not get sucked back into the life. I wanna continue going to school, get a job where I can support myself and my children and continue be a good mother. I hope to one day run my own non-profit and be able help girls like myself because I can know what they are going through. I hope to be able become an advocate about human trafficking and let people know what human trafficking victims really go through and why we are the way we are.

SOPHIE PICONI is a CIH Case Manager, wife and mother of two, and a long-time non-profit executive.

CIH has leased a house to become The Refuge!

We have officially signed a lease to a beautiful Spanish-style hacienda that, Lord willing, will soon be transformed into the Refuge. As you may know, San Diego currently has no long-term housing programs for trafficked minor girls. This much-needed service in restorative care has been developed by CIH's staff and consultant over

the past three years and we are now only months away from opening! Please keep us in your prayers as we seek a letter of support from the Department of Probation and Child Welfare Services and move forward with the licensing process.

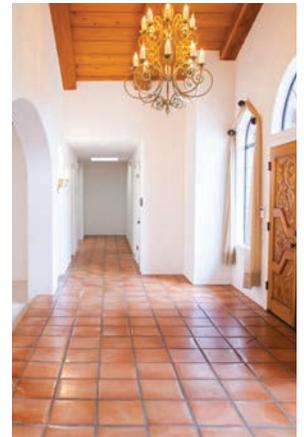


CIH Consultant Loren Fardulis and President Grace Williams discuss the layout of the new home

We are seeking for immediate hire a House Manager for the home. Experience in residential treatment required. Please visit our website for a complete job description: <http://childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org/employment/house-manager>

Please contact us if you have furniture or other household items that you would like to donate. Please note that we will not be able to take everything, but are very grateful for all of your donations. Modest clothing and shoes for girls ages 12-17 can also be donated, in addition to board games and books.

Thank you for your generous support over these last years! Please be assured of our prayers for our benefactors. As we approach the feast of St. Joseph, we entrust this home to his care and ask him to provide for it just as he provided for the Holy Family!



Entrance of the new home

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Last stage of fundraising for The Refuge

Please consider donating to help us reach our final goal to be able to open The Refuge!

Please visit
ChildrenOfTheImmaculateHeart.org
for details