

Pastors, Law Enforcement Create Divine Dragnet to Fight Human Trafficking

Pastors in Ohio's Richland and Ashland counties are activists. They're reporting suspicious activity to law enforcement, advocating pornography be declared a public health emergency and holding prayer vigils to support U.S. Marshals operations.

In the last month, the numbers of children rescued and alleged sex offenders arrested are unprecedented. An interdenominational prayer assembly focusing on the welfare of women and children was followed by a series of raids.

Operation Safety Net involved the rescue of 25 children from human trafficking.

A week later, Operation Moving Target led to the arrest of 27 people in northern Ohio for sexually explicit online conversations with undercover agents posing as children.

"The police say they've never seen anything like it," said Bruce Philippi, pastor of Journey Life Center in Marshfield, Ohio. He is one of 74 co-signers of a resolution connecting pornography with sex trafficking and requesting local and state adoption. Passage of the resolution would align Ohio with around 15 other states which have adopted similar resolutions.

In contrast to legislative changes minimizing sentences for pedophilia in California, Ohio's Attorney General Dave Yost has waged war on sex-related crimes, especially human trafficking. Since taking office in January 2019, he has launched the Human Trafficking Initiative with the goal of ending labor and sex trafficking in Ohio.

The pastors' example of speaking out and working with law enforcement is impacting their congregations. Recently, two women from Philippi's church recognized a teenage girl out of place with three adult men at Cedar Point Amusement Park. They photographed the girl, who had a black eye, and the men; notified park employees; and called the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-373-7888).

"I just knew something was wrong," said Candace Williams. "We were scared when we realized the guys were pointing at us. My friend wanted to just leave. I felt like no one else was seeing what we were seeing. Everyone was on their phones."

A flurry of activity ensued with park security and police. Williams later received a message that the girl was safe. The testimony was shared at Philippi's church. Local newspapers picked up the story.

The pastors and their parishioners are encouraged—taking a stand changes lives. From Oct. 2-9, Journey Life Center is hosting 24/7 prayer.

"Whenever Christians remain silent, the outcome is usually bad," said Philippi. "We need to speak up peacefully and we need to pray" (2 Chron. 7:14). {eoa}