

RAISING AWARENESS OF CHURCH OF IRELAND CLERGY AND LAY MINISTERS ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

The primary object of this study was to highlight the issue of sex- trafficking in NI as one that needs a higher profile within the Church of Ireland. In particular, it aims to raise the awareness of clergy, in the hope that their response will lead to the issue being given a higher missional priority and more people becoming aware of the problem.

A key feature discussed in this thesis concerned the importance of engaging in reflection on the key tenets of liberation theology. This informs the discussion around sex trafficking as a form of exploitation from which people need salvation and liberation.

The approach taken was to use an online survey to identify whether Church of Ireland clergy were aware of this issue and whether or not they would welcome a toolkit that might help raise awareness within their parishes and community. This was combined with semi-structured interviews with a number of professionals from various agencies and organisations whose sole purpose was to address this issue. It was significant to learn that all of the professionals stated that they found the churches the most difficult group to deal with in raising awareness, due to their [the churches] reluctance to engage with the issue.

The findings of clergy surveyed, support my hypothesis statement that a high number of clergy (80%) have little or no awareness of the issue, and any who have at least heard have remained passive and complacent. The study concludes that by engaging with clergy even at this level of bringing the issue to their attention, a high proportion of respondents have stated they would like to learn more through availing of a Church of Ireland bespoke toolkit.