

# St Josephine Bakhita Feast Day

A Resource for Parish Communities

Thursday 8 February 2024

*"In God's will there is great peace" – St Josephine Bakhita*



## Rationale

The Church exists for mission. The liturgy shapes and nourishes the faithful for mission.

*Liturgy is the source and summit of all the activity of the Church and the 'indispensable source from which the faithful derive the true Christian spirit'. (CSL a. 10 and 14)*

A current concern for all parishes is to grow as missionary communities and to reach out to engage with Catholics who are not active members of the parish. Central to both these imperatives is an active awareness of the signs of our times, in particular issues that concern people. These then become meaningful points of encounter to which we bring the light of the gospel.

The Diocesan Liturgy Council (DLC) has identified in the Feast of St Josephine Bakhita, as an opportunity to reach out and connect with the wider Catholic community who have a strong commitment to social justice, specifically modern slavery and human trafficking.

As the **Patron Saint of Victims of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery**, the feast of Josephine Bakhita provides parish communities with an opportunity both for formation and prayer that people experience as relevant and meaningful.

It is hoped that the experience of prayer focused on current issues will help to form more deeply in the hearts and minds of the community, an appreciation of the integral link between prayer and Christian life and action.

Lex Orandi – Lex Credendi – Lex Vivendi  
As we worship, so we believe, so we live

The DLC established the Josephite Bakhita Working Party to explore this issue and engage with the diocesan community to raise awareness about the Feast and to create a suite of resources that can be used and adapted for prayer by our wide and diverse local community.

This resource is a first step as we look forward to the journey ahead. These are critical issues for a church that exists for mission and has a heart for social justice.

## Josephine Bakhita

On 1 October 2000 **Josephine Bakhita** was declared a saint by the Catholic Church and 8 February was established as an Optional Memorial in the liturgical calendar.

Saint Josephine Bakhita is the patron of Sudan and more recently the patron of victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

Josephine was born around the year 1869 at Dafur, modern-day in Western Sudan. She belonged to the Daju People. In 1877, when she was around 7 years old, Josephine was kidnapped by Arab slave traders. She was forced to walk barefoot about 970 kilometres to El-Obeid and was bought and sold twice before she arrived. Once again, during 1877 to 1889, she was sold again three more times. Josephine was finally given freedom when she was in Italy.

Josephine Bakhita entered the novitiate of Canossian Sisters, at the Institute of St. Magdalene of Canossa in Italy on the 7th of December 1893, three years later she took her vows and was welcomed by Cardinal Sarto. In 1902 she was sent to the Canossian convent in Schio and during her 42 long years of stay there, she was employed as the cook, sacristan and portress, otherwise known as the doorkeeper. While doing these types of minor works she was frequently able to have contact with the local community.

During World War 2 she shared the fears and hopes of the town people, who considered her already a saint as they felt protected by her presence. Bombs, however, did not spare Schio, however, the devastation did not result in any casualties. She spent her last days suffering with pain and sickness, but Josephine was always cheerful. If someone asked how she was going she would reply 'as the master desires'. She died on the 8th of February 1947.

About Josephine, Pope Francis says:

*'(The Church) is charged with showing to all the path to conversion, which enables us to change the way we see our neighbours, to recognise in every other person a brother or sister in our human family, and to acknowledge his or her intrinsic dignity in truth and freedom. This can be clearly seen from the story of Josephine Bakhita, the saint originally from the Darfur region in Sudan who was kidnapped by slave-traffickers and sold to brutal masters when she was nine years old. Subsequently – as a result of painful experiences – she became a “free daughter of God” thanks to her faith, lived in religious consecration and in service to others, especially the most lowly and helpless. This saint, who lived at the turn of the twentieth century, is even today an exemplary witness of hope for the many victims of slavery; she can support the efforts of all those committed to fighting against this “open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ” (10 April 2014)*

**The International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking** is also held annually on 8 February. It focuses on St Josephine Bakhita, highlighting the circumstances of violence and injustice affecting millions of voiceless people. It has become a day of prayer and learning. [Source](#)

*“Our awareness must expand and extend to the very depths of this evil and its farthest reaches, ...from awareness to prayer ... from prayer to solidarity ... and from solidarity to concerted action, until slavery and trafficking are no more”, says Cardinal Peter Turkson (quoted in an [article](#) in Crux).*

## **Social Justice**

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking are critical issues on the international, national and Church radar.

The Catholic Church has a strong commitment to eradicating modern slavery, a stance grounded in Catholic Social Teaching. “At its heart the call to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking is a call to make a choice for respecting the intrinsic and inalienable dignity of every human person” (Archbishop Fisher, 2018).

We acknowledge the impact that commercial activities, including our own, can have on vulnerable people through the practice of modern slavery. A missionary church has a responsibility to take practical action to manage these risks.

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle's [policy on Modern Slavery](#) outlines the steps the diocese will take to work with other Catholic entities, suppliers, business partners and community stakeholders and employees to fulfil a common goal of ending modern slavery globally and protecting and respecting the freedom and dignity of people everywhere.

Exploring this policy and how the parish community embraces it might be an interesting activity.

## Suggested Actions for 2024

### Liturgy – Optional Memorial

On the 8 February you might consider celebrating the Optional Memorial Mass. Following is a Prayer of the Faithful that could be used within the Mass or at other gatherings and meetings during the week.

The options for Mass this day are identified in the Ordo 2024 and on LiturgyHelp.

### *Prayer of the Faithful*

For the victims of human trafficking that they may be brought to freedom and rebuild their lives after the traumatic experiences they have suffered. We pray...

**Give us your light in the darkness, O Lord**

That St Josephine Bakhita, sold into slavery as a child, intercedes with God for those trapped in a state of slavery, so that they will be released from the shackles of captivity. We pray...

**Open us to hope, O Lord**

For all those who are dedicated to eradicating modern slavery and human trafficking that they will have the courage and strength to reach out and overcome challenges. We pray...

**Empower and encourage us, O Lord**

That by our actions as consumers we always reject as gravely wrong any goods or services tainted with slavery. We pray...

**Give us your wisdom, O Lord**

For our governments that they make laws that will protect victims of human trafficking and reject goods and services from sources associated with slavery and forced labour. We pray...

**Strengthen and shape our decision making, O Lord**

That the Church will act to defend and free victims of human trafficking and be a source of love, hope, and faith to bring the vulnerable and enslaved to find healing for their wounds. We pray...

## Guide and teach us, O Lord

St Josephine Bakhita, Patron Saint of Slavery Victims...

### Pray for Us.

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## Mystagogical Reflection

This feast and issue also provide an opportunity for Mystagogical Reflection. The following reading from the gospel of Luke highlights the gospel imperative calling us all to action in response to the issue of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. This is a reflective and prayerful way to read the signs of the time in the light of the gospel.

The resource [Practising Mystagogy](#) outlines the process for reflecting on Scripture. See p. 6

### Luke 4:16-21

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

## Formation

Remembering Josephine Bakhita also invites us to develop a deeper understanding of modern slavery and human trafficking. To quote Pope Francis, it is an invitation, “*to conversion, which enables us to change the way we see our neighbours, to recognise in every other person a brother or sister in our human family, and to acknowledge his or her intrinsic dignity in truth and freedom*” (Pope Francis, 2014).

### Invite a Guest Speaker

There is nothing more compelling than listening to someone share their stories and insights. Maybe your parish has someone who can come and share their knowledge, their story. The Working Party also have representatives that would love to come and visit with any parish to engage in conversation with an interested group. You can contact Fiona on [fiona.duquel@mn.catholic.edu.au](mailto:fiona.duquel@mn.catholic.edu.au), who will organise a visit for you.

## Resources

The following list of resources may help you create opportunities to grow awareness within the parish community and invite people to action.

### Websites

- Visit websites that track the brands you like to use. For example, Baptist World Aid has produced the *Australian Fashion Report* found [here](#). It reports on the fashion industry, and it rates brands on workers' safety, wages and other conditions.
- Learn about Fairtrade products [here](#)
- A video message from Pope Francis reflecting on the ninth International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking - 2023. It can be found [here](#).
- Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) - Education on modern slavery and human trafficking [ACRATH](#)
- Australian Catholic Anti-Slavery Network - ACAN supports Catholic entities to identify and manage, and report, modern slavery risks in their operations and supply chains. [Australian Catholic Anti-Slavery Network \(acan.org.au\)](#)
- Be Slavery Free – seeks to solve the global problem of modern slavery by preventing it from occurring in the first place, though working with industries, education, campaigning, networking and lobbying <https://www.beslaveryfree.com/>
- Caritas Australia has resources that educate mainly school age children, however, these can be easily adapted for parishes [Resources Library | Caritas Australia](#)
- Anti-Slavery International. Founded in 1839, they are the oldest international human rights organisation in the world. They partner with many organisations from around the world, including Caritas and Catholic Mission. [Anti-Slavery International | Fighting for Freedom from Slavery \(antislavery.org\)](#)
- Become familiar with our [diocesan policy](#) and modern slavery and see what else your parish community might be able to do to support it.

### Support

- Domus 8.7 Is an initiative by the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. It helps workers, businesses, or community members to obtain support, advice, and guidance on how to respond to suspected or actual situations of modern slavery. [General 2 — Australian Catholic Anti-Slavery Network \(acan.org.au\)](#)
- Department of Social Services – Support for Trafficked People Program  
The Support Program aids all victims of human trafficking, slavery and slavery-like practices, including forced marriage and forced labour, who meet the criteria. [Support for Trafficked People Program | Department of Social Services, Australian Government \(dss.gov.au\)](#)

## Feedback

This is a new initiative which we hope to grow. This 2024 resource is a first step. The St Josephine Bakhita Working Party would appreciate to hear from you. Please use this [FORM](#) or the QR code to provide your feedback.

With thanks,

Fiona Duque, Officer Worship and Prayer  
With the Diocesan Liturgy Council and the St Josephine Working Party  
(Anh Dinh, Nicki Graham, Fiona Hanson, Daniel Lee, Anton Perera, and John Sandy)



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