

*Dear Class Member,*

*Thousands of refugee children have disappeared in Europe, with law enforcement officials concerned that they are being used by organized crime for sex work and slavery. This tragic story raises the question of what Christians can do to help victims of human trafficking as we seek to follow the guidance of the Bible and the example of Jesus. So caring for vulnerable children will be the topic of our next class.*

*If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.*

The Wired Word invites us to contribute news story suggestions for upcoming lessons. If you have a story you'd like to suggest, post it to The Wired Word forum at <http://thewiredword.squarespace.com/>.



## **10,000 Refugee Children Missing in Europe**

*The Wired Word for the Week of February 7, 2016*

### **In the News**

The migrant crisis in Europe has produced a number of troubling stories, perhaps none more heartbreaking than the disappearance of some 10,000 unaccompanied child refugees. The European Union's law enforcement agency, Europol, reports that these children have disappeared after arriving in Europe, and many are thought to have fallen into the hands of trafficking syndicates. Organized crime might be targeting these young people for sex work and slavery.

According to *The Guardian*, thousands of minors have vanished after registering with authorities. Europol's chief of staff, Brian Donald, reported that 5,000 children have disappeared in Italy and another 1,000 in Sweden. "It's not unreasonable to say that we're looking at 10,000-plus children," he said. "Not all of them will be criminally exploited; some might have been passed on to family members. We just don't know where they are, what they're doing or whom they are with."

One of the most urgent issues in the migrant crisis is the fate of unaccompanied child refugees. According to Save the Children, a staggering 26,000 unaccompanied children entered Europe last year. Europol believes that more than one-fourth of the million refugees in Europe last year were minors -- a total of 270,000 children. "Not all of those are unaccompanied, but we also have evidence that a large proportion might be," said Donald.

A criminal infrastructure has grown up over the past 18 months, focused on exploiting migrants. Mariyana Berket of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe says that "unaccompanied minors from regions of conflict are by far the most vulnerable population; those without parental care that have either been sent by their families to get into Europe first and then get the family over, or have fled with other family members."

Europol has evidence that some unaccompanied child refugees in Europe have been sexually exploited. The agency has also discovered a link between gangs helping to smuggle refugees and gangs exploiting those same refugees for sex work and slavery. "The ones who have been active in human smuggling are now appearing in our files in relation to migrant smuggling," said Europol's Donald. He asked the public to be vigilant, since most missing child refugees are probably still in the community. "If they're being abused it's in the community," he explained. "As a population we need to be alert to this."

Closer to home, the Super Bowl will be taking place today in the San Francisco Bay Area, bringing together an event and a region that are well-known for human trafficking. According to *The San Francisco Chronicle*, the Bay Area has three international airports and a major shipping port, enabling victims of trafficking to be moved through quickly.

The Super Bowl draws a large number of wealthy men who are looking to indulge themselves in a variety of ways. Says Michele Ernst of the FBI, "High-profile special events which draw large crowds become lucrative opportunities for sex trafficking and criminal activity. It's market and demand." The FBI opened a Human Trafficking Operation Center at the start of Super Bowl Week. A trial run for the program resulted in six children being rescued in the Bay Area, with the youngest victim just 12 years old.

And this past week in Blacksburg, Virginia, two Virginia Tech students were arrested in connection with the murder of a 13-year-old girl. According to *USA Today*, the body of Nicole Madison Lovell was found along a highway in North Carolina, about 90 miles south of Virginia Tech's campus. David Eisenhower, a freshman engineering student and member of the cross-country team, was charged with first-degree murder. Natalie Keepers, a sophomore engineering student, was arrested for helping Eisenhower to dispose of Nicole's body. The police statement said that Eisenhower knew his victim before her disappearance and that he "used this relationship to his advantage to abduct the 13-year-old and then kill her."

Around the world, children are vulnerable to human trafficking, sex work, slavery and physical violence. Christians are challenged to be alert to this and take appropriate action, because -- in the words of Europol's Brian Donald -- if children are "being abused it's in the community."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[10,000 Refugee Children Are Missing, Says Europol. \*The Guardian\*](#)  
[Human Trafficking Concerns Are Super Bowl's Dark Underbelly. \*The San Francisco Chronicle\*](#)  
[Second Virginia Tech Student Arrested in Teen's Death. \*USA Today\*](#)

## **The Big Questions**

*Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:*

1. What stories have you heard about human trafficking in your community? How can you be vigilant? For what signs should you be watching? Or do you believe there is no sexual trafficking in your neighborhood? If so, what leads you to think your area is exempt?

2. Sex trafficking in the United States thrives on demand for sexual services. What can the church do to create a culture of healthy sexuality?
3. Where are children most vulnerable in our communities today? How can Christians create safe and healthy environments for them, at home and in church?
4. Online technology creates communication patterns that can lead to abuse. How can parents monitor the online activity of their children? What actions can be taken to reduce the danger of the internet?
5. How has your church been involved in refugee resettlement in the past? What could it do to alleviate the current migrant crisis? Why is the resettlement of children a particular concern to you?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

*We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:*

[Genesis 21:8-21](#)

[Proverbs 14:26](#)

[Isaiah 49:8-26](#)

[Matthew 19:13-15](#)

[Mark 9:33-37, 42-50](#)

[Luke 9:46-48](#)

*In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight into the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.*