

## St. Josephine Bakhita: The AMISTAD MOVEMENT'S Inspiration of Empowerment



On February 8th, 2015 the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita took on its new and globally dynamic dimension as the first International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, we are excited to report that the observance of the day was immensely successful, from a candlelight vigil in Rome, to many prayer services, masses, and the sharing of survivor testimonies all over the United States and the world. The Amistad Movement, as the U.S. Bishops' nationwide anti-trafficking education and awareness-raising campaign, has anchored its message to the brilliant example of this remarkable Sudanese saint, canonized by Pope St. John Paul II in 2000 (the same year that the Trafficking Victims Protection Act was signed into law) and renowned for her empowering example of resilience and audacity. As her "owners" ran the gamut from the extreme savagery of the Arab slavers who kidnapped and beat her close to death, to the kind Italian family who treated her as a relative, her lived experience mirrors the spectrum of horror and the veneer of respectability behind which human trafficking often hides in plain sight. Perhaps even more of relevance to the very founding purpose of the Amistad Movement, St. Josephine Bakhita, in the course of her religious instruction with the Canossian Sisters, heard and understood the liberating message of the Gospel, which prompted her to assert and pursue her innate right to freedom and a more dignified life. Boldly refusing to return to the service of the family that took her to Italy, she fought her case all the way to the Italian Supreme Court, which ruled in her favor, allowing her to live out the remaining forty-two years of her life in loving service to the "Good Master," as she called Jesus, and the religious community to which she belonged. As St. Josephine Bakhita proactively took the initiative to secure her own freedom, so the Amistad Movement endeavors to empower, through education and coalition-building, immigrant community leaders with the tools they need to protect their own communities from the scourge of human trafficking. Guided by the Catholic Church's perennial social teaching on the

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principle of subsidiarity, Amistad seeks to build a network of locally led immigrant community training initiatives meant to continually educate their members on the dangers of human trafficking, and how to avoid being preyed upon by the modern slavers. We continue to urge our readers to share our newsletter with members of their parish communities and social action networks, and to visit the USCCB's anti-trafficking site: <http://www.usccb.org/about/anti-trafficking-program/>