

The Vitruvian

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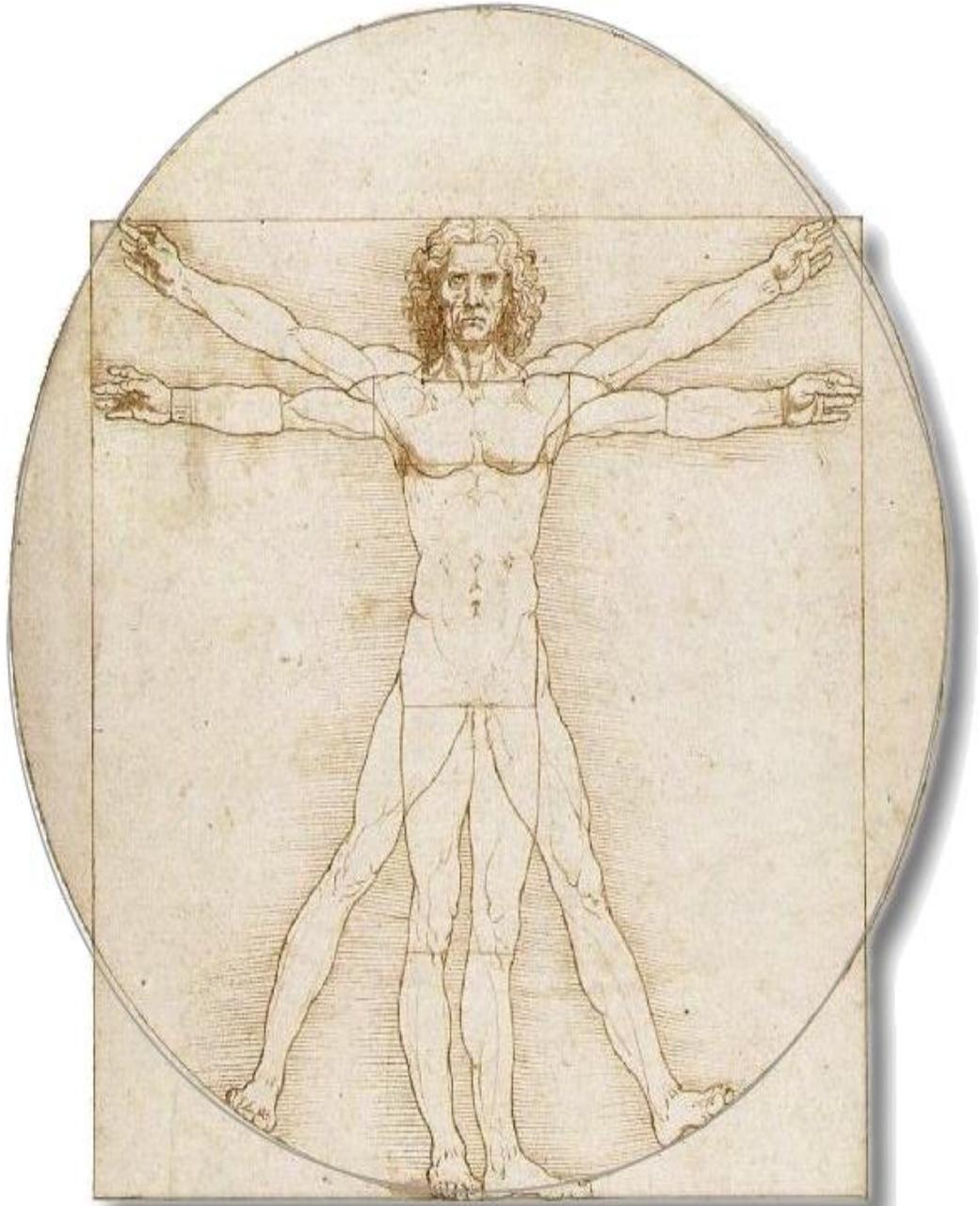
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The Power of The Individual: Dissecting the American Dream to reveal its Multifaceted Definition

Katie Bartlet

Fill in the blanks: “If I have a job as a _____, then I can make a lot of _____ and therefore I will be _____.” The common and generalized idea of the American is to attend college, (graduate of course), and then work a high-paying job. After establishing oneself in the workplace, marrying and producing children is the logical progression written by the standards of society. All of this equates to happiness, obviously. Is this the American Dream? We have been conditioned to use the words ‘money,’ ‘power’ and ‘happiness’ interchangeably, so it seems. This “ideal” way of life mentioned above has been engraved into our minds as the correct way to live, and quite frankly isn’t realistic anymore. So let’s face the fact: According to the U.S. Census Bureau In 2012, the official poverty rate was 15.0 percent, leaving 46.5 million people in poverty. This is equal to the entire population of Canada, plus an extra 10,000 more people, roughly. Clearly, we cannot just say that all of these individuals have failed at finding the American Dream, so it has to do with more than just monetary units.

What is The American Dream? Well, according to the generic Google Search, it’s “The traditional social ideals of the US, such as equality, democracy, and material prosperity.” But what if my American dream is different from yours? What if one American dreamer struggles to make enough money to have food for her young child, and often goes without meals herself? Her American dream is to have her little girl experience a brighter childhood than she was ever given. Or another American

dreamer who was raised from a family in poverty and goes to school every day wearing the same clothes, because that’s all his family can afford. His American dream is to just feel accepted by his classmates. These heartbreaking examples are reality and it cannot be ignored any longer.

A documentary directed by the Academy award-winning filmmaker, Alex Gibney, *Park Avenue: Money, Power and the American Dream* dives deep into this conflict. The film specifically looks at Park Avenue located in New York City. 740 Park Avenue is currently home to the highest concentration of billionaires in the country. Just five miles away from this address, the same Park Avenue runs through the South Bronx, which is home to the poorest congressional district in the United States. The film points out the richest of the rich, while directly down the street there are the poorest of the poor. As of 2010, the 400 richest Americans controlled more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of the populace (150 million). So, maybe the richest citizens in the world have succeeded in finding the American Dream through their material prosperity and abundance of wealth. This just sounds so silly. How can a nation have a one-dimensional idea in which all citizens are supposed to abide by? Although the 400 richest Americans control a substantial amount of wealth for our country, this does not mean they control the way in which we define something as unique as a dream.

The origin of this American Dream came from a man named James Truslow Adams

with the publication of his book, *The Epic of America*. In 1931, Adams defined the American Dream as the “dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.” This sounds appealing and all, but I wonder how this could be truly obtainable. Everyone is certainly not given equal rights, so it seems almost impossible for a nation as a whole to have the same dream.

In a nation which embraces individualism and freedom of expression, comes a place where a copious amount of ideas and perspectives are encouraged. The idea that money equates to happiness and that it is the only defining characteristic of the American Dream is absolutely absurd. As the country progresses, so do the people who define our nation. With that being said, the real American Dream is not just a definitive and universal value to obtain. Instead, it has grown to become an infinitive response to the rapidly diverse population who comprise our “Land of The Free.”

Hunger in Education

Megan Eisenhour

Hungry? So Are Segregated Students in the Lunch Room.

Recent breakfast trends and a review of our current free and reduced lunch programs

“Don’t you ever eat breakfast?” I asked my high school-aged brother as I was taking him to school one morning. “Nah,” he replied, as do the majority of students today. In our hardworking society where parents are working long hours, rushing off to work in the morning, or even in severe cases, are simply not around, ensuring students get a hearty breakfast before school has been placed on the backburner. Even as adults, our bad habits have carried over into many of us failing to nourish our bodies first thing before work in the morning. Countless studies have proven the benefits of eating breakfast: greater mental clarity, being more awake, and even weight loss. Yet, we are

failing to properly nourish our children’s and our own bodies.

According to the survey “Hunger In Our Schools: Share Our Strength’s Teachers Report 2012,” which surveyed over 1,000 K-8 public school teachers nationwide, three out of every five teachers report that their students frequently come to school hungry. Furthermore, 56% of the teachers surveyed believe that the hunger problems in school are progressively getting worse. Yet, 95% of the teachers surveyed said that breakfast helps with increased concentration, better academic performance, and more positive behavior in the classroom.

As the United States of America is struggling to keep up with the education of other industrialized nations, it is essential that we are providing students with the tools they need to succeed, namely a balanced

meal plan. So what can we do to make the meals our tax dollars pay for more accessible to students?

Sam, a student from a low income family, enters the cafeteria line to order his lunch for that Tuesday. The mid-grade hamburgers being served today don't exactly sound appetizing, but Sam hasn't eaten since yesterday's lunch at school, so he orders it anyway. He slides his tray down the rack patiently waiting his turn to pay for his meal. As he approaches the cashier, he looks behind him to see if anyone he knows is around. Sam receives free lunches because his parent's work four combined jobs, and unfortunately, this doesn't quite make the cut for the family. In an effort to quickly communicate to the cashier that he receives free lunches, he whispers quietly in her ear. None of Sam's friends receive free lunches, so Sam feels embarrassed when he has to be "different" and claim his free lunch. Some days, Sam doesn't want to feel different than his peers, so he doesn't eat at all; other days he bears the pain of being "that" student who receives free lunches. The process repeats day after day, slowly depleting Sam's sense of self-worth and dignity.

I'm sure all of us can remember a 'Sam' from when we were in primary school. In some schools there are lots of Sam's; in other schools there are only a few Sam's whose secret seems to spread even more quickly. Some Sam's have it even worse; they must go into a completely separate "free/reduced lunch" line to obtain their meal. Why are we doing this to students? Why are we constantly allowing students to be segregated from their peers? In many cases, students feel too ashamed to travel down the "free/reduced lunch" line or have to proclaim their economic standing to the lunch cashier. Then they are right back where they started: no nourishment. If students don't have nourishment, they

cannot learn, and that creates a very large problem.

This is not to say that free and reduced lunches are bad altogether; it is the way in which they are presented that is the problem. Recently, more and more schools are beginning to offer free and reduced price breakfasts to students as well. Have you ever tried to learn algebra and Shakespeare when you have not eaten since lunch the previous day? A recent article published by NBC News's Education Nation details a trending program called "Breakfast After the Bell." This program, recently adopted by states such as New York, Arkansas, West Virginia, Vermont, and Colorado, requires participating schools to provide breakfast to every student either in first hour or as a "grab-and-go cart." Because every student receives this breakfast, there are no feelings of being ashamed while moving into a separate lunch line or communicating to the cashier. In many cases of schools that have implemented this program, each class has a family-style breakfast during first hour where students are responsible for passing out the meal, eating with manners, and communicating with their peers in a family-like atmosphere. Not only are students receiving a breakfast that will better enable them to learn, they are also learning communication skills and manners necessary for the real world.

While I obviously will argue for all schools to implement "Breakfast After the Bell" in some way based on their own state's resources, there also needs to be a change in the current way that students obtain their free and reduced lunches. While there is such a problem with bullying in schools, it is imperative that the students who receive free and reduced lunches are not singled out from the rest of their peers. Some schools have already begun to transfer over into pin-pad systems and other electronic name

systems that allow cashiers to tell if the student is eligible for a free or reduced lunch. However, many schools still use separate free and reduced lunch lines in addition to the age-old telling of the cashier that the student does not have to pay what everyone else does. Gone are the days of segregation in our classrooms. Segregation in the cafeteria should undoubtedly follow suit.

Hunger, regardless if it is in a student or in an adult, hinders learning and work ability. We are adding to this hunger if we do not

create a safe environment in which students can nourish their bodies. Not only do we need to create breakfast opportunities in every school district, we also need to change the way in which students obtain their free and reduced lunches. Hunger is one of our worst enemies as a nation, whether it is in students or in adults. Creating a safe environment where students can obtain their meals is just a stepping stone to ending hunger. But remember adults and parents, you too will never reach your full potential without a well-balanced breakfast.

Global Warming and the Hunger Epidemic

Marcee Lichtenwald

We are all familiar with the devastating pictures of starving children from Africa. This terrible epidemic has come into our living rooms for as long as I can remember. The commercials claim that just a few pennies a day is all it takes to make a difference in a starving child's life, yet the epidemic continues. The latest estimated figure is that approximately 800 million people worldwide are starving and living in extreme poverty. Although this number is down from past estimates, this is still a staggering figure. The issue of hunger and poverty is not going away and what is missing from these heart-grabbing commercials is that it spreads beyond the borders of underdeveloped countries. In fact, the majority of starving people in the world live in developed countries. While Asia, Laos, and North Korea stand as some the most undernourished in the world, this is an issue that affects all parts of the globe.

In developing countries, nearly one-third of all child deaths are linked to hunger due to poor nutrition and starvation. Poor nutrition is the leading cause of death in children under the age of five due to a lack of access to healthy food supplies. There are several factors that contribute to this devastating figure including rising unemployment, economic crises across the globe, the ever increasing costs of food, the rising cost of fuel (the major link in the rising cost of everything, most notably food), to name just a few. Another major factor that gets little attention is one that we hear about in consideration of other concerns—the ever growing issue of global warming. We are familiar with the environmental concerns related to this issue such as melting ice caps, the dying population of polar bears, greenhouse gas emissions, and yet there is little mention of how this is directly leading to hunger and poverty.

Rising temperatures across the planet is among the many causes in an increase in natural disasters. Floods, tropical storms, high heat, droughts, and fires are all on the rise and acutely damaging to crops. These disasters and their subsequent damage are a direct link to food shortages and the rising cost of food, making proper food and nutrition unobtainable in both underdeveloped, and developing countries. In the last fifty years there has been a shift in the demographics of populations; where the majority of people once resided in rural areas, capable of growing their own food, the larger portion now lives in urban areas where families rely on purchasing food. Rising costs in conjunction with natural disasters has created an overwhelming issue of food insecurities for poverty stricken families unable to afford the cost of food.

Over-exploitation of the environment is another factor in the environmental link to hunger and poverty. Overcropping and overgrazing are crippling the earth's fertility, threatening fertile ground with erosion, desertification, and salination. Food shortages are not only a result of environmental disasters, but man-made damage to the earth's delicate landscape. As industrialists and corporations seeking biofuels continue to purchase farmland from poor farmers, these already struggling farmers are pushed to other areas to re-plow and plant. Increased raising of the land leads to increased deforestation, which as it's well known, is a leading cause of global warming. The issue of corporations seeking biofuels is of particular concern; such corporations are solely concerned with crops that produce fuel alternatives rather than food supply which is a direct connection not

only to the rising cost of food, but increasing gas prices—and as previously mentioned, affects the cost of everything.

As we sit down this holiday season and enjoy our meals and give thanks for all of the wonderful people in our lives, our loving friends and family, our warm beds, our full plates (which is very deserving of our thanks) let's take a moment and remember that there are 800 million people in the world who do not know where that next meal is coming from or when they will enjoy another meal. And while we ruminate over the many implications surrounding this devastating epidemic, let's also consider what we as a society can do to help overcome such desperate circumstances. Aid is the biggest call to action. Just as the commercials advertise, just pennies a day can make the difference in a child's life, and if millions of people with warm homes and full bellies offer whatever assistance they are capable of, this truly does add up to something substantial. As consumers, it is our responsibility to be informed of our purchases and to be conscious of our needs over our luxuries. For such luxuries can surely be at the expense and exploitation of those already trapped by poverty. Corporations bare the greatest extent of responsibility since the ever-growing industries directly result in rising prices, overgrazing of land, and deforestation—all leading causes of hunger and poverty. If those of us within the general population band together with corporate CEO's and the leaders of the most industrial of nations to combat this issue, children will no longer go to bed hungry, and live long and happy lives.

Syria's Conflict

Pat Pickering

In 2010 the Arab Spring brought mass protests for reform throughout the Middle East. A series of violent and nonviolent demonstrations by civilians were met with hardline responses from the regimes of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, as well as many others in the region. The chaos and violence that has erupted as a result of the Arab Spring has highlighted the political instability of the Middle East, particularly in Syria.

Bashar al-Assad is the current President of Syria. His father, who was President before him, rose up the chain of the military and eventually the Presidency through a series of coups. The Assad regime is politically aligned to the Ba'ath Party, but when Hafez al-Assad seized control in 1970 he exploited the power of his party for personal gain, which would cement his family's control over Syria. Religiously, the regime is affiliated to the Alawites, a sect within the Shi'ite denomination of Islam. The Alawite sect makes up an estimated 12 percent of the population, while members of Sunni Islam comprise 70 percent. By promoting himself and others who are aligned politically and religiously, Bashar al-Assad has largely followed in his fathers' footsteps.

The catalyst for the Syrian Civil War took place in Deraa in March 2011. While writing anti-regime slogans on their school, fifteen children were arrested, some of which were allegedly tortured. In effort to have the children released, a protest that reached 3000 members ensued. It was during this protest that the Syrian security forces reportedly opened fire on protesters, killing 4 of them.

Outrage permeated the country resulting in more demonstrations for reform. Through a series of bombardments on Deraa, Assad deployed tanks and other military equipment to quell the resentment towards his regime. Protesters transformed into rebels, and civil war followed.

The protesters started out with a largely unified voice for reform. However, as they shifted from being protesters to the opposition of the regime, they became fragmented into various political and religious groups. These groups range from the Western-backed Free Syrian Army, which contains many defectors from the Assad regime, to the Al-Qaeda backed jihadi group Al-Nusra. Since these groups at least share the common goal of wanting to remove Assad, The Syrian National Council are trying to unify the anti-Assad forces, but have failed due to the political and religious divides among these groups. This fragmentation is not only complicating the arrival of foreign aid, crucial for civilians, but also prolonging the conflict, ultimately adding to civilian casualties.

In May 2012, eyewitness reports stated that the Syrian army bombarded a small village near the town of Houla. Immediately following the bombardment, uniformed Alawites, allegedly affiliated with the regime, attacked and killed 108 people, of which 49 were children. Attacks like these are becoming a regular occurrence. The chemical weapon attacks on August 21, 2013, propelled the conflict to the forefront of international debate. Even though evidence suggests Syrian security forces backed by the government organized it, each side vehemently blames the other for the massacre of hundreds of civilians. The

controversy partly stems from the lack of journalistic reporting in Syria. The Committee to Protect Journalists has labeled Syria the most dangerous place for journalists, and Bashar al-Assad has banned international press, so fact finding is severely limited. Most of the information that comes out of the war torn area is through social media. This lack of concrete information and evidence is affecting how international organizations approach the conflict.

The complications in Syria have created a situation that has led to an international affair. The United States and the United Kingdom have tried numerous times to push through a series of UN resolutions that would allow military action against the Assad regime. However, all of them have been vetoed by Russia and China, partly due to the uncertainty of who was behind the chemical weapon attacks. The UN peace envoy for Syria, consisting of Lakhdar Brahimi and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, have proposed a peace talk conference, called the Geneva II, to take place before the year's end. This conference would consist of a sit-down of representatives from the UN, US, and Russia, as well as representatives from both the Syrian National Council and the Assad regime. The goal of this conference is to find a political and diplomatic resolution to the conflict.

While the diplomatic resolution process moves at a snail's pace, the death toll has exceeded over 100,000 in Syria. Most of these casualties are civilians. In 1982, Hafez al-Assad, the current leader's father, quelled a Sunni Islamist rebellion in the town of Hamas. Over a three-week period of bombing and razing the town, the rebellion was broken and over 20,000 people died. Sadly, a majority of the casualties were civilians.

The same tactics are being applied to the current Syrian conflict, but the sieges on the cities deemed rebel infested are lasting months. Food and medical supplies are blocked from entering these cities, and civilian movement in and out is heavily restricted. To make matters worse within these cities, there are numerous reports that the regime is specifically targeting farms, water resources, and hospitals to flush out the rebels. Reuters sources have quoted Assad security officials as saying that this is their "Starvation Until Submission Campaign." The UN estimates that there are around 2 million people trapped in besieged cities and many of them are literally starving to death. These blockades prevent any foreign aid from getting to civilians, and with the recent outbreak of polio, the conditions are becoming drastically worse for the Syrian people. Furthermore, estimates calculate that 2 million Syrians have fled their country, while over 4 million are internally displaced from their homes.

The atrocities that are taking place every day have prompted Pope Francis to enter the fold. Last September, he sent a letter to the world leaders at the G20 conference in St. Petersburg urging them to seek a peaceful resolution for Syria. He wrote, "lay aside the futile pursuit of a military solution", and continued, "Rather, let there be a renewed commitment to seek, with courage and determination, a peaceful solution through dialogue and negotiation of the parties, unanimously supported by the international community." A few days after he sent the letter, the Pope appealed to the leaders again at a prayer service by asking them to do everything in their power to help pull humanity from a "spiral of sorrow and death."

While most Americans will be overindulging in the jollity of Thanksgiving, the plight of the Syrians will continue.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is to meet with Pope Francis regarding the situation in Syria. This meeting may be a godsend for the Syrian people, but still it is too little too late for the over 100,000 killed in this conflict. While people are coupon cutting

and holiday shopping on Black Friday, the struggle for basic survival continues for many Syrians. Let us hope and pray that they can have better words than “Black Friday” to describe the events in their homeland.

Our Continuing Coverage of Human Trafficking:

The Human Toll of Today’s Modern Day Slavery

Megan Eisenhour

A small article published by CNN on November 14, 2013 could have easily fallen through the cracks of acknowledgement for many readers who are unaware of the severity of human trafficking. However, the anti-human trafficking advocacy world caught it. After investigating a film company out of Toronto for over three years, law enforcement agencies from all over the world came together to make nearly 350 arrests and free over 380 children from sexual abuse and trafficking.

Of the 348 arrests made: forty were teachers, six worked in law enforcement, nine were pastors and priests, and some were doctors and nurses, according to CNN’s “Police: Sex abuse arrests in Canada began with probe of company.” The common misconception by citizens unaware of the world of human trafficking is that “thugs” and “pimps” are the brains and driving force behind human trafficking. Sadly enough, it is these businessmen, doctors, police officers, teachers, priests, and other trusted members of society that are the ugly face of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is considered a modern-day slavery that typically involves physical and emotional bondage or force to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act. Unlike typical media where victims are often shown as young females, trafficking victims can be of any nationality, age, gender, or race. According to material presented by Second Chance and The Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition, 40% of Toledo women involved in the sex trade were commercially exploited before they were 18 years of age. The following experiences occurred at least a year before they were exploited to this percentage of them:

- 58% had a much older boyfriend
- 26% had a close family member with a mental illness
- 26% were worried about what to eat and where to sleep
- 26% had a close family member in the sex trade
- 32% were homeless

- 26% were involved with child protection services
- 11% had difficulty making friends
- 53% had a poor family
- 53% had difficulty in school
- 53% dropped out of school
- 53% were raped

Furthermore, trafficking victims are prevented from obtaining help or escaping the situation through power and control by the trafficker. Traffickers use tactics such as sexual abuse, isolation, emotional abuse, intimidation, coercion and threats, economic abuse, physical abuse, denying/blaming/minimizing, and false privilege to keep victims brainwashed. According to the Rescue and Restore Campaign by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, there is simply not enough awareness in our communities to combat this human trafficking.

So what can we do to help?

If citizens of every community learn to recognize the signs of human trafficking, it will undoubtedly enable a greater number of victims to be identified. Education, then, has become a very important part of preventing human trafficking. According to Celeste Rollins, student at Lourdes University and volunteer with Second Chance, “The biggest thing we need to do is awareness. It’s no longer that you have to travel in numbers, because they [the traffickers] travel in numbers.” As the film company just detailed above demonstrates: it’s not just the “thug” on the side of the controlling human trafficking. It’s the innocent parties, the businesses, and even high school adolescents who are behind this modern slavery.

One of the easiest ways to recognize human trafficking is to know what to look for and

how to ask the right questions. For example, a possible trafficking victim may be: accompanied by a controlling person, is not allowed to speak on their own behalf, does not control their own schedule, money, I.D. and travel documents, is transported to or from work, lives and works in the same place, has debt that is owned to an employer, is unable to leave their job, has bruises, depression, and fear, and is overly submissive. If you notice any of these signs, simple questions to ask the victim include:

- What type of work do you do?
- Are you being paid?
- Can you leave your job if you want to?
- Can you come and go as you please?
- Have you or your family been threatened?
- What are your working and living conditions like?
- Where do you sleep and eat?
- Do you have to ask permission to eat/sleep/go to the bathroom?
- Are there locks on the doors/windows so you cannot get out?
- Has your identification or documentation been taken from you?

While it is not the point for citizens of a community to put themselves into danger while pursuing a trafficking victim, these identification and questioning techniques can be used in a variety of public situations. Not every trafficking victim is kept locked in their home; many traffickers take their victims out into public places such as malls and restaurants where they can easily be recognized if citizens know what to look for.

If you have the slightest belief that yourself, someone you know, or someone you identified out in public is a victim of human trafficking, you are asked to immediately call the 24-hour National Human

Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-3737-888. The National Human Trafficking Resource Center can help you determine if you have encountered a human trafficking victim, find local resources for victims, and communicate with local social service organizations that can help victims begin to rebuild their lives.

In the Toledo area there are three local organizations that focus on preventing and combatting trafficking and helping the victims. The Daughter Project is a long term group home for trafficked youth in Northwest Ohio. Second Chance is a program that provides trafficked victims with short term housing, assessments, case management, and helps to connect victims with other local organizations. The Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition is directly partnered with the Resource and Restore Campaign founded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement and coordinates anti-trafficking efforts within the Toledo community. Through these local

organizations, every human trafficking victim in the Toledo area will be able to find help and be connected with resources.

For many of us it is difficult to believe that something as violent and offensive as human trafficking is happening frequently under our own noses. Human trafficking does not only happen in a run-down hotel in the bad parts of town. Human trafficking often occurs in the rural “safe” areas, the local mall, and even out of your own home. The best way to stop and prevent trafficking is to be aware of what is going on around you. If you’re a parent, make sure you check up on your children when they say they are going to a friend’s house or a party. Young adults, be aware of what is going on around you when you’re walking to your car after a late shopping trip. Awareness and education by all citizens is the first step to combating human trafficking. If we’re persistent, our combined efforts will eventually create a safer Toledo for generations to come.

The Vitruvian Mission:

“As a Lourdes University student organization we will strive towards the same excellence in written and visual communication that is the goal of university learning outcomes. The content of The Vitruvian shall reflect the integrity, intellectual curiosity, and service to global society that is inspired by the evangelical pursuit with truth inherent within Franciscan ideology. The Vitruvian is born of the Necessity for awareness and will spark an interest on campus and ignite a global conversation.”

CALL FOR WRITERS!

The Vitruvian is looking for committed staff writers, freelance writers, business/marketing majors, artists for design layouts/photography, and any articles of interest you would like to submit as well any poetry or short stories you would like to feature in one of our issues. Please contact us via email at Vitruvian@lourdes.edu