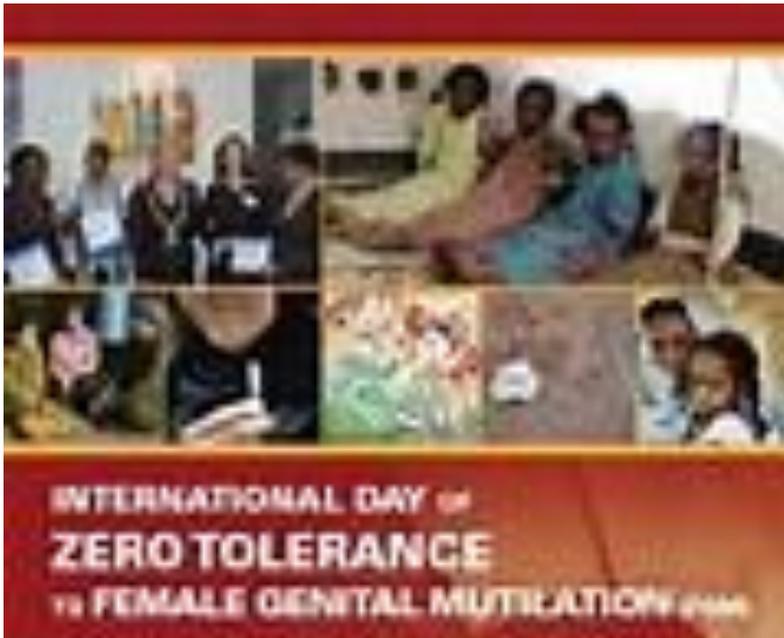


## International Solidarity Days-February 2021

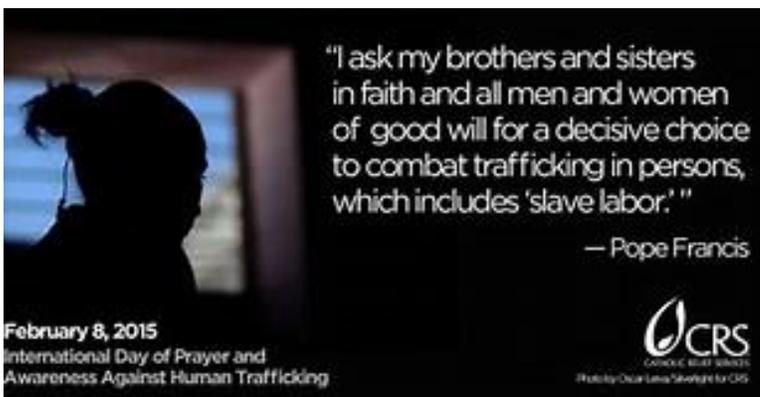
### February 6—International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)



In 2003, thanks to Stella Obasanjo, the then First Lady of Nigeria, "Zero Tolerance to FGM" became the official stance of the *Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC)* and the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights. This date was established as a day dedicated to raising international awareness about this practice and the need to eradicate it. FGM is now considered a form of violence against women and girls and is universally recognized as a form of human rights abuse. In addition, the medical risks, including severe blood loss, infections, pain, later complications during childbirth, and possible long-term negative psychological effects are well recognized. FGM has been declining in recent years, but this day will continue to focus our attention on this form of violence against women until it is truly ended worldwide.

*Holy One, thank you for the wonderful bodies with which you have gifted us. These "earthen vessels" have their origins in the same cosmic stardust that birthed the earth itself. All that you created is good and holy and is to be cherished, protected and honored. We pray that FGM will end so that no woman or girl is abused in this way. We pray that women and men everywhere will come to appreciate that a woman's body is holy just as you created it.*

### February 8—International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking



The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) has designated February 8, the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita—a former slave and victim of human trafficking, as an annual day of prayer and awareness against human trafficking. Human trafficking is recognized as a form of modern-day slavery. Whenever a person is forced against their will, through physical coercion or threat of violence, to work or engage in sexual acts, this is enslavement. Many people in desperate economic situations are lured into being transported to other countries, away from family and friends, with the promise of paying jobs, only to be held against their wills once they arrive. They are exploited and are often unable to free themselves from bondage. Both national and international laws have tried to put an end to human trafficking, and yet the practice persists. This day calls us to become aware of the warning signs of human trafficking and to report suspected cases to authorities. Many victims have been freed because warning signs were recognized and reported.

*O God bless all those who suffer as victims of human trafficking. Help them to know that they are loved and not forgotten. Inspire each of us with determination and courage to report suspected situations of human trafficking. Change the hearts of traffickers and those who profit from human trafficking so that they can feel the pain they are causing and turn to you for forgiveness. Let us build an economy free of human trafficking.*

## February 11—World Day of the Sick

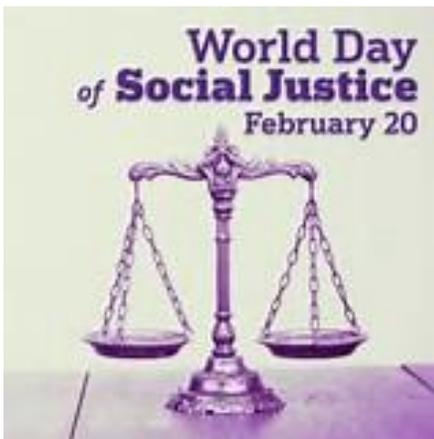


The World Day of the Sick was instituted in 1993 by Pope John Paul II and celebrated on the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes. On this day, Catholics over the world pray for those who suffer from illness or injury, and for those who minister to them. This day is particularly poignant this year, with millions of people in every corner of the world suffering and dying from the COVID-19 pandemic. In his message for World Day of the Sick, Pope Francis writes: *“The current pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in our healthcare systems and exposed inefficiencies in the care of the sick. Elderly, weak, and vulnerable*

*people are not always granted access to care, or in an equitable manner. This is the result of political decisions, resource management and greater or lesser commitment on the part of those holding positions of responsibility. Investing resources in the care and assistance of the sick is a priority linked to the fundamental principle that health is a primary common good. Yet the pandemic has also highlighted the dedication and generosity of healthcare personnel, volunteers, support staff, priests, men and women religious, all of whom have helped, treated, comforted and served so many of the sick and their families with professionalism, self-giving, responsibility and love of neighbor. A silent multitude of men and women, they chose not to look the other way but to share the suffering of patients, whom they saw as neighbors and members of our one human family.”* On this day, let us all reach out to those who are ill with love and compassion. Let us take action to support those who serve the sick—healthcare workers, dietary and housekeeping staffs, family, and friends. May our prayers also comfort, console, and heal each other.

*God of healing, we pray for all who are suffering from illness or injury. May they be blessed with a return to good health and with loving compassionate care from family, friends, and caregivers. We also pray for all those who care for those who suffer—nurses, doctors, health aids, dietary and housekeeping workers, pastoral care providers, lab and x-ray personnel –and all those who risk their own health during this COVID pandemic in order to serve society in essential ways. May all be protected, and may we show our appreciation and offer our assistance whenever we can.*

## February 20—World Day of Social Justice



In 2021, the theme for the World Day of Social Justice is “Closing the Inequalities Gap to Achieve Social Justice”. The corona virus pandemic has made visible to all the severe consequences of social injustice that results in inequalities. Unequal access to nutritious food in poor neighborhoods and poor rural communities has resulted in health and wellness disparities. Lack of access in these same communities to healthcare has made vulnerability to the corona virus, as well as death following infection, much more likely. Economic inequality due to poor paying jobs has left many of the worlds poor without savings to carry them through pandemic times when they have been unable to work due to stay at home orders needed to control disease spread. Many who are unable to pay their rent have become homeless and hopeless. The inequalities in our world existed before the pandemic but have become much more pronounced during it. There can be no peace without justice and justice requires closing the inequality gap.

*Holy One, bless all your people as we struggle to change the complex policies that create and perpetuate social inequality. As we seek to rebuild our global societies after the COVID pandemic, help us to address the root causes of economic, health and social inequalities so that all people may live in dignity, hope and peace.*

**February 28—International Stand Up to Bullying Day—wear a pink shirt**



Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Wearing a pink shirt on this day allows bullies all over the world to see that their behavior of intimidation will not be tolerated. Wearers pledge to stand with victims and to intervene on their behalf whenever bullying is witnessed. The pink shirts also communicate the awareness that bullying can

have horrible consequences such as suicide, whether intended or unintended. Bullying denies the inherent dignity of every human person and is unacceptable. We must put an end to such behavior, whether committed by children in the school yard, or by autocratic rulers of nations who intimidate their own citizens and/or neighboring countries.

*God, we pray for courage to stand up against all levels of bullying. When we witness it, inspire us to speak out so that persons being bullied do not have to stand alone. Help us to lead by example so that all people are treated with dignity and respect, listened to and honored, empowered to be the best person that they can be.*