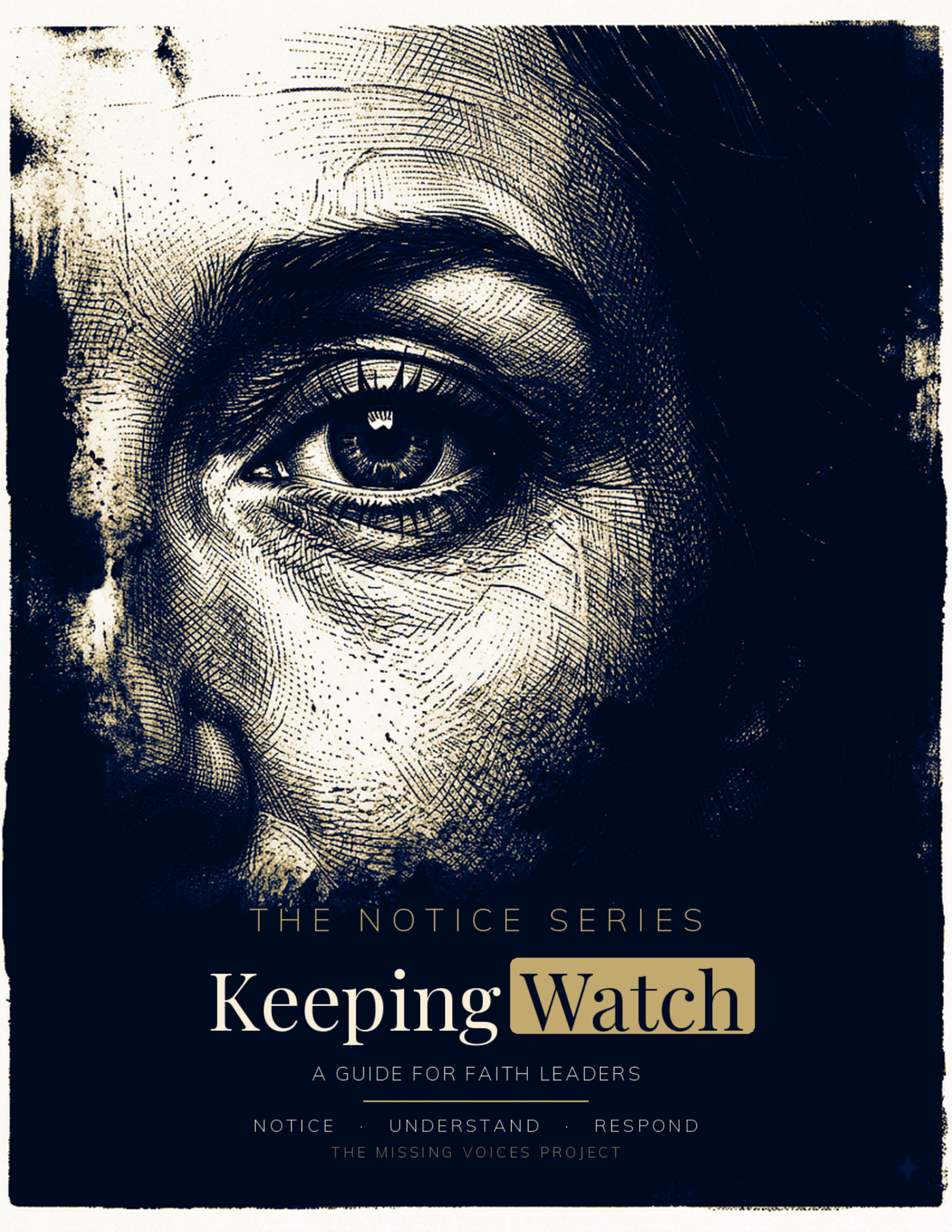




THE NOTICE SERIES

Keeping Watch

A GUIDE FOR FAITH LEADERS

NOTICE · UNDERSTAND · RESPOND

THE MISSING VOICES PROJECT



Start here: the calm truth

Your community is already close to the people this harms.

If most of what you have heard about trafficking involves kidnappings and chains, set that aside. That is not how it usually works, and it can leave you watching for the wrong thing entirely.

The reality is quieter. Most people who are trafficked are drawn in slowly by someone who earns their trust first, using affection, friendship, or the promise of help, and then uses pressure and control to exploit them. It does not require crossing a border, and it can happen to someone who still comes to worship, still lives at home, still looks fine on the surface.

That is exactly why faith leaders matter. You already hold trust. You already see people week after week. You already serve the isolated, the new arrival, the family in crisis, the young person adrift, the very people traffickers look for. With a little knowledge, that closeness becomes protection.

**"You do not have to become an investigator.
You have to be a place where people are safe,
seen, and believed."**

UNDERSTAND

How it actually works

A few realities that cut through the myths, so you recognize the real thing rather than the viral version.

It usually starts with trust, not force

Traffickers commonly build a relationship first, offering love, belonging, money, or a way out of hardship, then use manipulation and sometimes threats to exploit the person. The kindness is the tactic.

It does not require movement

A person can be exploited without ever being taken anywhere, while still living at home and moving through ordinary life. Trafficking is about control and exploitation, not distance travelled.

It targets the vulnerable your community already serves

Anyone can be affected, but traffickers look for an unmet need they can fill: isolation, poverty, a recent loss, unstable housing, newcomer status, a young person who feels unseen. These are the very people faith communities are called to care for.

It often begins online

Recruitment frequently starts on the platforms young people already use, through someone posing as a friend, a romantic interest, or an opportunity.

A hard truth: it can wear religious language

Sometimes those who exploit others use spiritual authority, guilt, or the language of faith to control them. Naming this plainly is part of keeping your community safe, and it is why clear safeguards matter as much as good intentions.

NOTICE

What to watch for

READ THIS FIRST

No single sign proves trafficking, and most of these overlap with other hardships people carry. What raises concern is a cluster of them, a change from someone's normal, and your own sense, grounded in real relationship, that something does not add up.

- ◆ Someone who is always accompanied by a controlling person who speaks for them and will not let them be alone or answer for themselves.
- ◆ Signs of fear, anxiety, or rehearsed answers when asked simple questions about home, work, or how they are.
- ◆ A congregant, especially a young one, with a new and secretive older partner, or unexplained money, gifts, or a second phone.
- ◆ Someone who cannot come and go freely, hand over their own documents, or keep their own wages or identification.
- ◆ A newcomer who seems isolated, whose papers are held by someone else, or who cannot speak freely about their living or working situation.
- ◆ Sudden withdrawal from community, family, and activities the person used to value.
- ◆ Signs of being controlled: needing permission for small things, or fearfulness around a particular person.

The goal is not suspicion of everyone. It is to stay close enough, and safe enough, that a person could reach you if they needed to.

What a faith community can do

Be a place where it is safe to be seen

Survivors have too often felt judged when they turned to a church. The single most protective thing you can offer is a community where a person can disclose hardship and be met with belief and care rather than shock or shame. Prepare those who greet, teach, and lead to respond gently, not to interrogate.

Speak about it openly

Silence lets myths and stigma stand. Naming trafficking from the pulpit, in youth groups, and in small groups helps people recognize it and tells anyone at risk that this is a community that sees them.

Safeguard your own community

Good intentions are not a safeguarding plan. Screen volunteers who work with children and youth, keep to a two-adult rule, never let one adult isolate a minor, and refuse secrecy between adults and children. These practices prevent harm and model what safety looks like.

Serve the vulnerable, and respect their autonomy

The care you already offer, to the isolated, the new, the struggling, is prevention. Offer your faith as invitation, never as a condition of help, and keep the dignity and choice of the person at the center.

Build the relationships before you need them

Get to know your local anti-trafficking and victim services now, so that when a moment comes you can connect a person to trained help quickly.

RESPOND

If you are concerned about someone

Stay calm and keep the relationship open. Do not confront a suspected trafficker, and do not try to rescue or investigate on your own; that can put the person, and you, in danger. Listen, believe, and let the person keep as much choice as possible. Write down what you have noticed.

Who to call

If someone is in immediate danger, call 911 or your local police.

Canada • 1-833-900-1010

The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline. Free, confidential, 24/7, in more than 200 languages, and not the police. Advocates can talk through the situation and connect you to local support, by phone, online chat, or tip form.

United States • 1-888-373-7888

The National Human Trafficking Hotline, or text 233733.

Where a child may be involved, many regions place a legal duty on adults, and sometimes specifically on clergy, to report suspected abuse. Know your local reporting obligations before a situation arises.

You do not need to be certain to reach out. The hotlines exist for exactly the "I am not sure, but something feels wrong" moment.

KEEP IN MIND

What not to do

- ◆ Do not confront a suspected trafficker, and do not attempt a rescue yourself.
- ◆ Do not promise a kind of confidentiality you cannot keep, especially where a child may be at risk or where you have a duty to report.
- ◆ Do not make help conditional on faith participation.
- ◆ Do not share the viral kidnapping and marking rumors; they are false and they crowd out the real message.
- ◆ Do not carry it alone. Refer to trained services and lean on them.

**Be close enough to notice, and safe enough
that a person in trouble could turn to you.
That is the work, and your community can do it.**

SOURCES

Drawn from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Human Trafficking Response Guide for Faith-Based Community Leaders; Polaris Project (how trafficking works, online recruitment, and trafficking myths); the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline, operated by the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, and Public Safety Canada; and faith-based anti-trafficking practitioners.

The Missing Voices Project · Missing does not mean forgotten. Silenced does not mean unheard.