

Group aims to end human trafficking

Written by Nancy De Gennaro The Daily News Journal
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Photo illustration by The Jackson Sun

What: EndIt Movement seminar

When: 7:30 p.m. March 8

Where: First Baptist Church, 200 E. Main St., Murfreesboro

Admission: Free

MURFREESBORO — Illegal trafficking of human beings is happening, and it's happening right here in Rutherford County.

“I didn't even know this was going on. I just thought slavery had been abolished, at least it had been in the United States,” says 23-year-old Ben Parris, a member of the youth group at

First Baptist Church and one of the organizers of the EndIt Movement Worship and Awareness seminar about the prevalence of human trafficking. The event is set for 7:30 p.m. March 8.

To raise awareness, youth at First Baptist Church will host the free seminar, which will feature Last Call 4 Grace's Candy Carter, among other speakers who have dealt with human trafficking cases first-hand. The event is being held in conjunction with the International Justice Mission's Stand for Freedom movement, which is going on Tuesday through March 15. Visit ijm.org/stand for details.

Idea for the local EndIt seminar came after youth from First Baptist attended the national Passion Conference in January.

“Our college students walked away with not only an understanding of the fact slavery exists in the world today, but in somewhat staggering numbers that folks just don't understand,” says David Cates, First Baptist minister to youth and college students.

According to figures from the EndIt Movement, 27 million men, women and children are in some sort of slavery or bondage.

“The main point of this is to do what we can to raise awareness. We'll have prayer stations set up to pray against and we'll be praying about it constantly (during the event),” Parris says. “(The speakers) will also be talking about situations in Murfreesboro and possibly ways we can help prevent (human trafficking), and if we see signs of someone being trafficked, what we can do.”

In early February, two men were arrested in Murfreesboro in connection with a child prostitution ring. Two females were rescued and returned to family members. This is one of many cases over the years concerning human trafficking.

Because of its geographic location and proximity to main highway and interstate routes, Murfreesboro has become a sort of hub for human trafficking, Cates says. In fact, SuperBowl Sunday is one of the biggest days in the nation for human trafficking.

The issue, says event organizer Caitlyn Osborne, is a complex one.

“Human trafficking is prostitution, but it is also any form of forced labor,” explains Osborne, a First Baptist youth member.

Overwhelmed by the knowledge of human trafficking, Cates said youth members decided the first and best thing they could do right now is raise awareness through the seminar.

“If you are like me, you want to do something (about human trafficking). However, nothing can truly change until people know about it,” Osborne says. “I feel it is a duty of each individual (to help). It all kind of goes back to the Golden Rule, as cliché as that sounds. But if you were being enslaved, wouldn’t you want someone to come free you and, at the very least, know about your situation? One thing taken from people who are enslaved is their hope. We need to restore that hope.”

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