

# FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



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## GLOBAL CHURCH CONFERENCE

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This year marked the third year of our church sending a team to a conference sponsored and led by First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley. It is entitled the Global Church Conference and its subtitle has been, for all three years of its existence, "Hearing the Church in the Majority World." That is to say, this a conference in which Christians in America invite other Christian voices from the rest of the world, to hear about the work of the church in places across the sea. It is a refreshing conference, for its wonderful to be able to listen to and converse with Christians in Africa, Asia, South America, the Middle East, to name a few.

This year's conference was on Global Slavery and the Plague of Poverty. It was an ambitious topic, as 5 speakers would be incapable of plumbing the depths of the problems related to these issues. Yet, five speakers was all that was needed to floor me in ways I have never been before. I hadn't really understood, or allowed myself to understand, the depths of the problem of Global Slavery and its relation to poverty. Slavery seems to be such a world away – a dark period in our own nation's history, which was destroyed by the grand crusade of abolition.

Yet, the reality is that slavery still exists today in remarkably similar forms to the ones that plagued the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Young men and women, lured by the promise of lucrative employment (due to their own dire poverty), are essentially abducted and held captive until they repay their "debt" to the captors – usually in the form of abusive labor (for the males) and forced prostitution (for the females). What is usually held over their head is the fact that they agreed to the proposition, or signed a contract (despite the fact that the terms dramatically changed due to the age old method of lying).

It is estimated that over 27 million people still exist in slavery (often referred to as human trafficking). It has economic roots. It's economic on the

side of those sold or captured into slavery – as their own desperate conditions causes them to fall prey to predators. It's also economic on the side of the captors – as the businesses they run are very profitable (they don't have to pay wages). And in particular, the sex trade is very lucrative.

I came away from the conference disgusted by the reality of global slavery. I came away angry at myself for not understanding the depth of it. I came away humbled by the number of biblical passages in the Bible that show concern for the captives and for the poor. I came away more emotionally affected by this topic of discussion than I've been in a long time. In the season of political debates that are feverishly pitched about money despite the fact that we are a blessed nation, my heart has been challenged beyond the voices of those outside our own borders to consider the plight of the people whom God desperately loves. These people are *really poor*. They are *really enslaved, sometime with lock and chain*. These are the ignored and forgotten people of the world – and Christians should pay attention.

The Christians who spoke at this conference were all marked by a vibrant faith in Jesus Christ, reminding me of the great Christian abolitionist William Wilberforce and the former slave trader himself, John Newton – who famously wrote *Amazing Grace*. We need more of them. It was a joy to have Leslie join me during the conference, and we've both been quite impacted by the conference. We had the opportunity to speak with the speakers before and during the conference and their testimonies made it clear to us both that we cannot stand still or silent in the fact of these kinds of global issues. A definite place to start is to research the work of International Justice Mission ([ijm.org](http://ijm.org)) and see how Christians are responding to this global crisis.