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Do You Benefit from Slavery?

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What would you do if you knew your fast-food burger, the steel in your car, the leather for your shoes or that shiny hardwood floor came as a result of slave labor?

Scholars in Global Solidarity from the University of Dayton, working in partnership with Catholic Relief Services, hope to make sure you know after a journey deep into the Amazon forest later this month.

They will embark on a 10-day trip to Brazil starting June 16 to examine labor trafficking and meet with government and church officials in Brazil's capital, Brasilia, to map strategies to combat the problem.

"We need to speak out on the behalf of the victims of trafficked and slave labor," said Vince Miller, University of Dayton Gudorf Chair in Catholic Theology and Culture. "We want help people see the 'real cost.' We so seldom see where the products we purchase come from. There is so much slave labor involved in goods we take for granted."

One group of scholars will head to a region where the Catholic Church helps poor landowners defend farms threatened by large ranchers and logging operations. Another group will visit a project that resettles trafficking victims, another will work with advocacy groups preparing to combat trafficking during the upcoming 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics.

The scholars from the University, which include faculty from religious studies, human rights, philosophy and sociology, will join with other Scholars in Global Solidarity from St. John's University (N.Y.) and the University of San Francisco on the trip. The Scholars in Global Solidarity work under the umbrella of Catholic Relief Services, the Catholic Church's official relief and humanitarian development arm which serves more than 100 million people in nearly 100 countries.

"We hope to form partnerships as academics to help advocate for people trapped in slave labor and communicate this to people in the United States," Miller said. "We also hope the trip deepens our ability to explain these issues to our students." That was exactly the intent of Catholic Relief Services when forming the program a year ago.

"By sharing assets and resources, Scholars for Global Solidarity will take us to the next level in our work. This is a case when we are more than the sum of our parts. All benefit when social justice education is shared," said Joan Rosenhauer, executive CRS vice president for U.S. operations.

Catholic Relief Services chose the University of Dayton because of its established record of commitment to education, research, advocacy and service in the areas of global justice and peace.

The University of Dayton is a pioneer in human rights education. In addition to starting the country's first undergraduate human rights program in 1998, the University began offering one of the nation's first bachelor's degrees in human rights studies in 2008.

Later this year, The University will be hosting a conference on human rights advocacy. Juan Mendez, U.N. special rapporteur on torture, and Alex de Waal, executive director of the World Peace Foundation, will deliver the keynote addresses. Other participants include the children's rights advocacy director for Human Rights Watch, the former executive director of Amnesty International USA and the program director for WITNESS.

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