



living counter culturally

talk sheet

Prostitution

Issued by authority of the Territorial Commander

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The term 'prostitution' is used to identify sexual intercourse for non affectional purposes, normally for financial gain ...¹

Some call it the world's oldest trade: providing sexual services to another person for payment. Today, it is an industry with an estimated global value of \$US 187.17 billion.²

Reducing the exploitation and risk faced by sex workers is important to The Salvation Army. Globally, Salvationists provide chaplaincy and other practical assistance to prostitutes, and we have been involved in discussion with them about ways to combat the trafficking of humans into forced prostitution. The Salvation Army also assists people wanting to exit prostitution.

The legal status of prostitutes varies around the world. In June 2003, the New Zealand Government passed the Prostitution Law Reform Act, decriminalising prostitution and creating a regulatory framework to safeguard the human rights of sex workers—protecting them from exploitation while promoting their welfare and occupational health and safety. The law change passed by the narrowest margin: 60 for, 59 against.

It is no longer a criminal offence to be involved in sex work in New Zealand—so long as a person is over 18 years of age and consenting. There are restrictions in relation to visa status to safeguard against trafficking and exploitation. Advertising is heavily controlled, but soliciting is not a criminal offence unless deemed 'offensive'.

The stated purpose of the Act is:

... to decriminalise prostitution (while not endorsing or morally sanctioning prostitution or its use) and to create a framework that:

- (a) safeguards the human rights of sex workers and protects them from exploitation;
- (b) promotes the welfare and occupational health and safety of sex workers;
- (c) is conducive to public health;
- (d) prohibits the use in prostitution of persons under 18 years of age;
- (e) implements certain other related reforms.

From the point of view of the sex workers themselves, benefits to the decriminalisation of prostitution have included greater security for health and wellbeing, increased protection of basic human rights, and easier access for those providing advice and support. The 2003 law change also addressed the inequality and injustice that saw sex workers prosecuted, perhaps gaining a criminal record that would negatively affect their future, while customers who purchased sex services were not legally liable for their part in such business transactions.

Speaking to *The Dominion Post*,³ Catherine Healy of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective said sex workers now had a mandate to stand up to inappropriate behaviour from clients and employers. In the past, sex workers may have felt intimidated and threatened by police; but now, they worked together with them. Safe sex is freely promoted, as sex workers can carry condoms without worrying they will be prosecuted for soliciting. Also, clients can be reported to the police for attempting unprotected sex.



The Salvation Army and prostitution

The Salvation Army has shown care for prostitutes since its earliest days. We made an early submission supporting the law change to decriminalise prostitution on the basis that all sex workers are to be given respect and that their safety, health and human rights should be upheld.

The Salvation Army's submission emphasised the view that the sexual relationship is a gift from God to be treated with love and respect—not something to be sold or bought. *It should not be implied from our qualified support for the decriminalisation of prostitution that The Salvation Army endorses the sex industry or the legitimising of sex as a commodity for purchase.*

Today's landscape

In 2007, the University of Otago conducted an assessment as to the size and extent of the operation of the sex industry in New Zealand.⁴ The survey identified three types of prostitution presently operating in New Zealand: street workers, private workers and managed workers.

Of the 2332 sex workers identified throughout New Zealand in this study, approximately 17 per cent were classified as street workers (who sought trade on the streets, predominantly in 'red light districts'). Private workers (typically operating in their own homes or with other workers from shared premises as owner-operated brothels) comprised approximately 31 per cent of the industry. Managed workers (employed in massage parlours or escort agencies) represented over half the sex industry.

A literature review commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and published in March 2005 reported that younger women were the most likely to be attracted to working in the sex industry. This often reflected their own economic position, which may involve being unemployed or in low-paid work, as well as high client demand for young women.⁵ Certainly, Salvation Army founder General William Booth observed that 'the profession of a prostitute is the only career in which the maximum income is paid to the newest apprentice'.⁶

Most of the demand for prostitution services is from heterosexual men willing to pay women to provide such services; therefore, the majority of sex workers are female. Women tend overwhelmingly to be involved in the industry as sex workers or managers. Most male involvement is as clients, although some manage businesses and there are a minority of male sex workers. Many respondents in the study were involved in sex work for a relatively short period of their lives or on a part-time basis while engaged in study or other employment. For a minority, sex work became their principal career and they were still working into their late fifties or sixties.⁷

There is some division within the sex industry along class and ethnic lines, with lower socio-economic and Maori women more likely to be employed in high-risk, lower-paid venues than middle class and Pakeha women. In 1991, the Ministry of Women's Affairs noted that the number of Asian women working in the New Zealand sex industry had increased, largely due to the growing numbers of Thai and Filipino women working in Auckland. This was backed by similar observations from the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective. The Ministry of Justice's literature review notes that 'migrant women working in the sex industry are highly vulnerable to exploitation, with many being brought here by "sponsors" on whom they are completely dependent. Their insecure immigration status and typically poor command of English increases their vulnerability.'⁸

The stigma and attraction

Some will be battling unemployment and poverty ... Others will be in situations where economic pressures are fuelled by addictions to drugs, alcohol, or gambling.
(Ministry of Justice literature review)

Working in the sex industry as a prostitute is no longer a crime, but that does not mean it is a trade we would be comfortable to see headlining a school careers day, or that we would welcome sex workers plying their trade outside our houses or setting up brothels on our street. Most would likely still be highly uncomfortable with the thought of our own daughter or son working as a prostitute.

A brothel manager interviewed by *The Dominion Post* said that if prostitutes are asked what they do, they don't necessarily answer that they are sex workers. 'They might say they're a receptionist or a nanny instead.'⁹

Given the stigma, what is it that attracts people?

Money appears to be the primary driver. *The Dominion Post* spoke to Dorothy, a 22-year-old sex worker and university student studying for her second degree and earning up to \$1500 a day. Dorothy started by working in a strip club, then moved upstairs to work at the brothel, starting at 12:30 am on her first night and returning home at 8 am with \$700.¹⁰

Many sex workers have low educational attainment and few employment qualifications, but some have good educational and vocational qualifications. The latter are attracted to the industry 'because of the promise of greater earning capacity or because of the independence of particular working environments.' The Ministry of Justice's literature review notes instances where teachers and nurses have moved into prostitution after being frustrated at working long hours for relatively little pay.¹¹

While money appears to be the key motivator, 'for the money' can have different meanings and motivations:

*Some will be battling unemployment and poverty in ways that renders sex work attractive as an economic survival option, for themselves and for any dependants they may have. Others will be in situations where economic pressures are fuelled by addictions to drugs, alcohol, or gambling. In some cases, workers may be focused on earning large sums of money to finance particular goals, such as overseas travel, house-buying, or education.'*¹²

Although money is the major attraction, sex workers do emphasise other benefits. These include: relative freedom to work their own hours, autonomy and independence, flexibility to accommodate childcare or study, and high levels of camaraderie with other workers. Some note the advantages of being in a position where they have control over men, as opposed to being in jobs 'where sexual harassment is part of the terrain'.¹³

A study of Dunedin sex workers reported that most joined the industry after being introduced by a friend who was already working.¹⁴ There is a stereotypical view that drug addiction and child sexual abuse are common among prostitutes. The evidence is not clear, but it is 'plausible that the effects of sexual abuse may be linked to subsequent involvement in prostitution'.¹⁵

THE SALVATION ARMY STREET OUTREACH SERVICE

The Salvation Army has operated a Street Outreach Service (SOS) in Christchurch since the mid-1990s, patrolling the streets in a refurbished ambulance. Volunteers from different churches and organisations serve refreshments and get to know those inhabiting the city late at night. This includes sex workers and their pimps. A drop-in-centre was later established to offer a safe, warm and non-judgmental environment for women working the streets. This was rendered unusable by the September 2010 Canterbury earthquake.

NZ Prostitutes Collective Christchurch Coordinator Anna Reed says the service is invaluable for a group of women that is one of the most marginalised in the city. 'They may rely on it in order to get something to eat that night or even to take food home for school lunches,' she says. 'But I think, most importantly, they feel that somebody actually cares about them.'¹⁶

Major Wendy Barney coordinated this work for a time. Most of the woman she met talked about working for short periods to pay off bills and then stopping. 'As my face and some of the volunteers became better known and word on the street was we could be trusted, the more girls would spend increasingly longer times at the drop in. They told us their life stories, talked about life on the streets, explained the unwritten laws out there and when they realised we didn't use this information against them they began to share their dreams and ask for help and look for prayer and talk about ways to change their lives. As they returned each week, the talking about changing their lives became active and we began to lose faces from the street scene.'¹⁷

She recalls the judgemental responses of some Christians to sex workers: 'One of my team told me of meeting a prostitute one night who was crying and shaking. She told them she had just had a woman bike past her and tell her she was 'going to hell'. Wendy said, 'The sex worker was ready to hurt herself that night; she had a church background and had been abused in the church and then a number of other problems, and this verbal abuse was all she could take.'

Normalising prostitution

The normalising of prostitution sends a message that the commercial selling of one's body is an acceptable function in society, and will draw other young and vulnerable people into the business. (Open letter from Church Leaders)

An open letter from some New Zealand church leaders¹⁸ (including Salvation Army representatives) to Parliament when the Bill to decriminalise prostitution was undergoing its second reading, expressed hope that it would not pass into law, saying: 'Decriminalising brothels elevates prostitution to a normal feature of society. As when controls on any activity are relaxed there is bound to be an increase in such activity. We recognise that prostitution is a reality in society, but do not accept that it is a desirable reality.'

The comment was also made that 'while to a small degree exploitation of prostitutes may be reduced ... a much wider form of exploitation is opened up. The normalising of prostitution sends a message that the commercial selling of one's body is an acceptable function in society, and will draw other young and vulnerable people into the business.'

As the sale and purchase of sex is increasingly normalised, this (perhaps ironically) leads to a devaluing of the sex act itself. Sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual intimacy are transferred from within the bounds of a committed, faithful sexual relationship to a consumer experience that can be purchased and experimented with. Care or concern for the other person/s involved in this 'business transaction' is not required.

Viewing prostitution as an acceptable trade helps to promote a view of sex as a purely physical/mechanical act, where multiple sexual partners and frequent sexual experiences are seen to have no direct impact on a person's emotional well-being or the stability and satisfaction of relationships.

Wider acceptance of prostitution also reinforces a view to young people that commitment in sexual relationships is unimportant—even optional. In a society already highly sexualised through fashion, advertising, TV, film and music, we now support the idea that sex can be purchased to meet a physical desire whenever and however required, without the need to develop a trusting relationship in which sexual intimacy can be safely expressed and mutually enjoyed. Yet it is in just such a committed relationship that the deeper and broader human needs for support, understanding and encouragement are met.

It is demand that drives the sex industry—with the customers (or 'johns') keeping sex workers in business. Although prostitution is a voluntary and legal transaction, it is still inherently exploitative. Sex workers pay in low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and depression.

Those who buy sex are not showing regard for a prostitute's right to human dignity or for their emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. Rather than seeing them as of intrinsic value—made in the image of God and worthy of love and respect—customers are encouraged to regard sex workers as mere physical objects. Some 'thing' to be used and then set aside.

Some customers are cheating on their spouses and families, engaging in sex with someone else before heading home to their partner and children. Prostitution impacts the sanctity and security of a marriage relationship by undermining trust between partners. It promotes infidelity and steals intimacy.

'THE MAIDEN TRIBUTE' CASE

The Salvation Army has a strong heritage of fighting against the exploitation of vulnerable people. 'The Maiden Tribute' case¹⁹ is an example from our early history where we worked alongside others to take a stand against child prostitution. This led to the age of consent being raised in 1880s Britain.

British law in the early 1880s said a girl of 13 was legally competent to consent to her own seduction. Girls under eight were not allowed to give evidence against those who had abused them, as it was thought they were too young to understand the oath.

Josephine Butler, a campaigner for women's rights, wrote a letter to Florence Booth, wife of Bramwell Booth, The Salvation Army's Chief of the Staff, about the sale of young girls into prostitution. Florence, a pioneer of the Army's social work among women, had gained an insight into the lives of girls working as prostitutes and the practice of trafficking girls for sex, both in Britain and overseas.

Bramwell Booth was also concerned about the desperate situations many of these girls were in. What he saw prompted him to speak with W. T. Stead, editor of the 'Pall Mall Gazette'.

Stead was an admirer of The Salvation Army and horrified to think that young girls were being bought and sold. He investigated The Salvation Army's claims and published his findings in his paper in July 1885. His articles appeared under the title 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon'.

Salvationists backed Stead's efforts. Catherine Booth, founder of The Salvation Army with General William Booth, addressed gatherings in the West End. She also wrote to Queen Victoria and the Prime Minister, urging that the law be changed. William Booth organised a petition to the House of Commons, securing 340,000 signatures in just 17 days. The petition was driven in a large, open wagon to the entrance of Parliament, where it was carried by eight uniformed Salvationists and deposited upon the floor of the House of Commons.

On 14 August 1885, the Criminal Law Amendment Act became law, raising the age of consent from 13 to 16.

The campaign had gained crucial evidence through the 'abduction' of 13-year-old Eliza Armstrong. As a result, several key players were prosecuted. Their trial began at the Old Bailey in October 1885. Bramwell Booth was found not guilty, Rebecca Jarrett (a recently converted ex-brothel-keeper who had played a major role in the plot) was sentenced to six months, and Stead was sentenced to three months in Holloway jail, despite the jury recommending mercy.

Those who took up this cause were relatively young. Stead was 36, Bramwell Booth was 29 and Florence Booth just 24.

Finding a way out

... exiting from prostitution is best controlled by a combination of good social policy ... and some great on-the-ground social work projects. (MP Tim Barnett)

When Parliament debated the proposed decriminalisation of prostitution for the third time—before narrowly voting to accept it into law—there was still recognition among MPs of the harm prostitution causes. Labour MP Tim Barnett, who introduced the Private Member's Bill, said:

Having accepted that prostitution is here to stay, like it or not, the next thing is to identify what problems it generates. There seems to be broad agreement on that. The list includes operators, usually men, using emotional or physical force to control sex workers; under-18-year-old sex workers being sought by clients; prostitutes being trapped in the sex industry; the absence of any buy-in to common health and safety standards; offensive signage; and brothels being located in sensitive places.

The next stage is to work out the best way of controlling those harms. That is harm minimisation. We know that under-age sex is best controlled by stronger laws against the client—law that can actually be enforced—and that is what is in this bill; whereas exiting from prostitution is best controlled by a combination of good social policy, such as the provision in the Bill to minimise benefit stand-down periods to people leaving the sex industry and some great on-the-ground social work projects.²⁰

MP Matt Robson also took the opportunity to emphasise the importance of a strategy that would 'give people an exit', 'keep our children out of prostitution' and 'give social support to the women and men in the industry, to enable them to come out of it, not enter it'. These were the resources the Government needed to supply, he said.²¹

Some questions to consider:

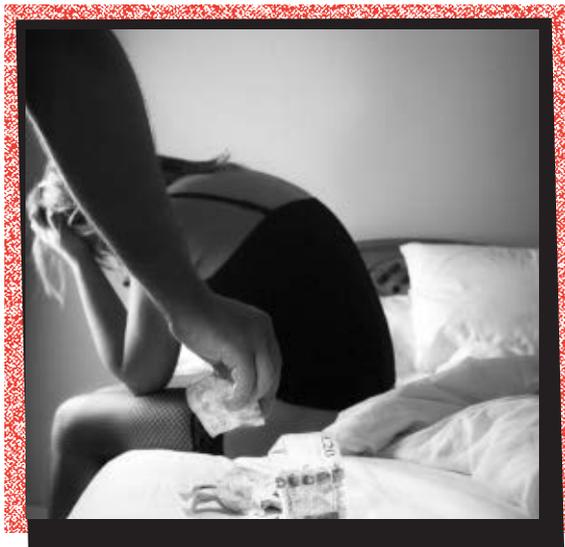
- (1) Do we feel that because prostitution is legal, it is therefore no longer appropriate to question its morality?
- (2) Has New Zealand let the need for strategies to help people leave prostitution drop from its policy agenda?
- (3) What can we do to eradicate poverty and social disadvantage so that prostitution isn't an economic necessity for some?

Welcome into God's Kingdom

Jesus said, '... the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.' (Matthew 21:28-32)

Philip Yancey, in *What Good is God?*, writes about attending a US conference on ministry to women in prostitution, with 45 organisations represented from 30 countries.²² A woman from Costa Rica said she had been sold into sexual slavery at four by her mother. Others, also from relatively poor countries, had similar stories. An Australian woman's story was more typical of sex workers from wealthier countries:

I knew I was beautiful because in school guys always wanted to sleep with me. I would walk into a room and all the men would turn and look. So why not charge for their attention? I signed on with a pimp, and for six months it was wonderful. He put me in a nice hotel room, I ordered room service whenever I wanted, and I had more money than I could imagine.



Then I got addicted to drugs and alcohol. The sex got kinkier as men would watch hard-core pornography and want me to do the same thing. I cannot tell you how unutterably lonely I began to feel. I sat on my bed and watched TV all day until the men came in at night. I had no friends, no family, no life outside that room. I lived under a constant cloud of shame. For a solid year I never got out of bed, I was so depressed.

This young woman found her way to a Christian shelter run by a former top madam. She told Yancey:

You hear that prostitution is a victimless crime ... To me, it's the number-one evil in the world. I know prostitutes as young as nine working in Perth. Every sex worker I know was abused as a child ... I was addicted to the money. When I finally left the business, I feared for my life. Eight times my former pimp has tried to murder me. I meet with religious leaders, only to find they don't want to get involved with this cause. Politicians—some of them are former clients!—simply want to legalise the trade. Things are tight for me financially, but I would rather eat grubs for the rest of my life than go back.

Yancey quizzed the women further, asking how many sex workers they knew, who wanted to get out of the trade. Everyone who spoke agreed: all of them wanted to get out. He writes, 'The sex industry presents itself as a fun transaction between adults, one in which no one gets hurt and there are no consequences. For several hours I had been hearing just the opposite.'

His final question to the group was, 'Did you know that Jesus referred to your profession?' Yancey continued:

Let me read you what he said: 'I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you'.²³ He was speaking to the religious authorities of his day. What do you think Jesus meant? Why did he single out prostitutes?

After several minutes of silence a young woman from Eastern Europe spoke up in her broken English. 'Everyone, she has someone to look down on. Not us. We are at the low. Our families, they feel shame of us. No mother looks at her little girl and says, "Honey, when you grow up, I want you be good prostitute." ... Believe me, we know how people feel about us. People call us names: whore, slut, hooker, harlot. We feel it too. We are the bottom. And sometimes when you are at the low, you cry for help. So when Jesus comes, we respond. Maybe Jesus meant that.'

Jesus' words do not sanction harsh moral judgement on sex workers. Rather, Jesus models an attitude of grace, mercy and forgiveness.

SHADES OF GREY

A personal reflection by Major Wendy Barney

The time I have spent working with individuals involved with the sex industry has given me a wider perspective on this subject. My views used to be black and white, but they now fit more in the grey spectrum. This has been a journey that has not only challenged my thinking but my theology as well.

Much has been written about the desire to see people 'set free' from life as a sex worker, but the reality is that many do not feel that same sense of restriction or the need to be 'set free'. For some, their sense of freedom is defined by what they do, and as a result they find themselves being able to thumb their noses at convention, at the past, and at hurts and pain—emotional and physical. In a world that disempowers them, many sex workers feel empowered by what they do.

I have met a number of women sex workers who profess to be Christian or have a faith in God. A number knew how to talk 'Christian speak', which served to encourage the evangelical outreach volunteer into believing these people had 'made a decision for Jesus'—so naturally they would be 'off the street' soon. When these women were asked about whether that were true and if they would be attending church the response was: 'How can I go to church when I look along the pews and see several clients?', or 'I've tried that, but I missed my family. There was no family there.' I heard several stories of women who maintained their faith outside of any organised 'church' setting because they had been sexually abused in a church setting or by a professing Christian.

How does the witness of the Church affect prostitutes' impressions of Christianity and Jesus Christ? How many 'clients' are sitting in our seats on a Sunday? This may be a side of prostitution we keep quiet about. *What would happen if we were to speak out? Is it time to challenge this among our own soldiers and other Salvation Army churchgoers?* This would likely include challenging the holiday sex trade, which includes (in some cases) issues related to human trafficking.

I would like to challenge Salvationists to see the church through the eyes of a prostitute. I believe this might give us a sense of empathy as we become aware of the 'dirt' on our own hands in this issue. I believe it is important that we own up to the fact that some of those who have sinned against these women and men are us.

Some guiding principles:

- The Christian law is not about what morals are important, but about valuing people in their individual and unique situations. We need to act in grace.
- How law and grace actually looks might be quite different to what we might expect. The important thing is to help people meet Jesus and be transformed by him—but this meeting and transformation does not necessarily happen the way we expect it to happen. Jesus always had the knack of surprising people, especially his own followers!

For many Christians, there is perhaps a sense that we are meant to be 'saviours of the sinners'. We are to go in and save the prostitutes from their situation. But Jesus is the Saviour of the world; we are merely his instruments. Jesus said, 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at [the woman caught in sin]. Sometimes we need 'saving' from our own sins. And we need to be careful not put ourselves up on a pedestal.

A suggested model for engagement

(1) Care:

- we cannot care unless we *first connect*
- befriend and listen with compassion, not condemnation —'seek first to understand, then to be understood'²²
- caring for someone does not mean that you condone their behaviour.

(2) Help:

- support the positive aspects of decriminalisation, such as respect, justice, safety and wellbeing for sex workers
- be available to meet any needs and to help sex workers access further help if required
- provide exit options for those wanting to find a way out of prostitution.

(3) Prevent:

- champion values of fidelity, emphasising the benefits of sexual intimacy within the bounds of committed, faithful and monogamous relationships
- nurture community awareness of how to build and sustain healthy, loving, long-term relationships
- challenge a demand mentality that regards sex as a commodity to be bought and sold, depersonalising sex workers as a 'means to an end'
- protest against the sexual objectification of women, including through sexist advertising, pornography and the promotion of activities such as lap dancing and strip clubs
- guard against the increased sexualisation of girls evident in the merchandising of 'sexy' clothing styles and promote the sale of age-appropriate clothing lines
- promote social policy to address causal factors that can lead to prostitution: poverty, abuse and domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction, unemployment, and a lack of equity in educational opportunities.

Endnotes

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- 6 Bridge C, O'Connell R, 'Cupcakes in the Cathouse', *On Fire* magazine, The Salvation Army Australia, 5 Nov 2011
- 7 Jordan J, op.cit
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- 15 *ibid*
- 16 Hoyle J, 'At Home on the Streets', *War Cry* magazine, The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory, 8 Sept 2012
- 17 Interview with Major Ian Hutson, 2009
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- 20 www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Debates/Debates/b/8/b/47HansD_20030625_00001319-Prostitution-Reform-Bill-Procedure-Third.htm
- 21 *ibid*.
- 22 Yancey P, *What Good is God? On the Road with Stories of Grace*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2010
- 23 Matthew 21:28-32
- 24 Covey S, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Golden Books, New York, 1997

FOR DISCUSSION

Read Matthew 21:31-32—What do these verses tell you about the place of prostitutes in the kingdom of God?

Read Luke 7:36-50—Headline: 'Jesus and a prostitute seen together at a party!' What is your response to this biblical encounter?

Scenario: what if a brothel comes to my street?

With the decriminalisation of prostitution in New Zealand, the likelihood of one of the houses in your street being used as a legal brothel has significantly increased.

- How would you feel about that?

- What responses do you think the people in your street might have to such new neighbours?

- How could you respond in a way that is consistent with your Christian values?

- Will you 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Matthew 22:39)? What might this look like?

While aiming to value and care for our new neighbours, we would also want to look out for vulnerable people in our family/street.

If a brothel introduces nuisances such as loud music and drug use, it may be necessary to involve the police. You can also contact your local council, which can invoke their right under the Prostitution Reform Act to develop bylaws for zoning and advertising of the sex industry in your area. Remember, however, that petitioning police or councils is to be a careful response to your concerns, not a prejudiced reaction intended to marginalise or victimise sex workers.

- What kind of influence might those frequenting or operating a brothel have on your neighbourhood?

- How could you go about protecting minors and other vulnerable people in your area?

What is happening where you are?

- What signs of normalisation/empowerment of the sex industry are occurring in your area? As a church, how can you respond?

- How can you champion healthy attitudes toward sex and sexual purity in your church and the wider community?

- How can we guard against the 'dirt on our own hands' that Wendy Barney raises in relation to the witness of the church?

RECOMMENDED READING

'Turning People into Things', a Talk Sheet examining the increasing sexualisation of life ... 'Stop depreciating sex. Stop paying for sex. Stop purchasing sexual fantasies. Stop spelling sex XXX.' Read online at www.salvationarmy.org.nz/masic or request a copy by emailing masic@nzf.salvationarmy.org

Talk Sheets on various topics are online at:
salvationarmy.org.nz/masic

Salvation Army Positional Statements:
salvationarmy.org.nz/positionalstatements