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Catholic Priests Trained to Identify Forced Marriages

Catholic priests and deacons ministering to migrant Catholic communities in the Melbourne Archdiocese will participate in a forced marriage workshop this week.

The workshop, run by Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH), will explore the 2013 legislation, which made forced marriage in Australia illegal.

The workshop, involving many of the Archdiocese's 45 community chaplains, will cover a range of topics, but will support the priests, who are also marriage celebrants, to identify a possible forced marriage and outline reporting procedures to follow.

Louise Cleary CSB, who is a member of ACRATH's National Committee and Fr Peter O'Neill, Peace, Ecology & Justice Coordinator, Columban Mission Centre, will deliver the training. Peter has spent 26 years working in Taiwan with people who have been trafficked and Louise, one of the founders of ACRATH, has spent decades working to combat human trafficking in Australia and globally.

"We know that forced marriage around the world happens across all religion and cultural groups so we are working with many groups, particularly marriage celebrants, to help them identify a forced marriage and what to do if they suspect a forced marriage," Louise said.

The migrant chaplains minister to people from 21 language and cultural groups including Cambodian, Laos, Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, Italian, Polish, Maltese and South Sudanese.

The workshop will cover:

- The forced marriage legislation in Australia
- Legal consequences for marriage celebrants
- Explore various aspects of forced marriage through two cases studies of forced marriage in Australia
- The differences between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage, which is not illegal
- The effects of forced marriage on the person, usually a young woman
- Ways to identify a forced marriage

“Many priests in the months or weeks before a marriage will spend some time with a couple. If a priest suspects one of the parties may not be entering into the marriage willingly, there are practices they can introduce into their interview with the couple to try and find out more. One thing we suggest is to separate the couple during some of the questions and ask particular questions to elicit information,” Louise said.

“Importantly, the workshop will support priests in how best to respond to what they fear is a forced marriage.”

“We know that forced marriage is an emerging issue in Australia and people, likely to be involved in the marriage in some way, need to be aware of this potential risk.”

ACRATH’s forced marriage kit and training, **My Rights – My Future *forced marriage***, is also being rolled out around the country to teachers and frontline workers wanting to respond to people, mainly young women, at risk of forced marriage.

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Caption:

Students, during an ACRATH forced marriage workshop in a Melbourne Catholic school, created a wedding dress of tears using tissues and a padlocked bodice.