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### **Sisters of St. Joseph Collaboration with Meeting Planners Leads to Historic Action Against Human Trafficking**

**ST. LOUIS:** On January 11 St. Louis' Nix Conference and Meeting Management took a historic step to help end child sex trafficking when they became the first to sign the ECPAT Meeting Planners Code of Conduct (End Child Prostitution and Sex Trafficking).

"The Sisters of St. Joseph are the catalysts for where we are today," says Kimberly Ritter, senior account manager at Nix and coordinator of their child sex trafficking initiative.

Ritter became aware of the issue while planning the July 2011 U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph Conference when Sister Kathy McCluskey, CSJ, former executive director of the federation, and the other sisters requested that the management of each hotel being considered for the meeting site be asked about its policies and procedures regarding human trafficking.

"I worked 20 years in the hotel industry and I had no idea this was happening," she says. "And most hotel executives have no idea this exploitation of children exists at their properties."

The sisters' question led the Millennium Hotel-St. Louis to sign the ECPAT Code of Conduct for Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism during the federation's conference, committing to establish policies, train personnel and provide information to guests on the issue.

Nix wanted to sign the code as well, but as meeting planners, they did not meet the criteria. They worked with ECPAT-USA to develop a code for their industry.

"As meeting planners, we represent not just one person sleeping in a hotel one night, we represent 21 thousand room nights in a year, so when we walk in a hotel, we have a voice," says Ritter.

"This level of intervention really addresses the bigger picture," says Sister Patty Johnson, CSJ, currently the executive director of the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. "Nix is raising awareness using corporate power, as so many women religious congregations are doing today."

The Sisters of St. Joseph and Nix continue to collaborate on trafficking awareness and partner with local victims' organizations such as The Covering House and Healing Action Network.

Partnering with Nix makes us very proud," says Johnson. "It shows that citizens and corporations can unite to stop this \$9.5 billion business. I urge others to follow in their courageous steps."

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