



FREEDOM FIGHTER

**BASEBALL EXEC KEVIN MALONE WORKS TO GET CHRISTIANS
OFF THE SIDELINES IN THE BATTLE AGAINST CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING**

BY KEN WALKER

With its Golden Knights bringing home hockey's Stanley Cup last spring, a Formula 1 auto race in mid-November, its first-ever Super Bowl next February, and expectations of professional baseball and basketball soon to follow, Las Vegas is turning into "Sports Town USA." Not that it needed another tourism draw. Some 32 million visitors already come to the southeastern Nevada gambling mecca annually, an average of more than 615,000 a week.

But there's an ugly side to Sin City, one that Kevin Malone is determined to expose. By fighting the human trafficking that goes on there, he hopes to put a dent in its "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" reputation while raising awareness of this issue nationwide.

The former general manager of the Montreal Expos and Los Angeles Dodgers has devoted a decade of his life to this cause. Although he started in L.A., about five years ago he relocated in an effort to combat the seamiest side of trafficking: children who are routinely bought and sold for sexual pleasure. Malone estimates there are more than 5,600 victims in Nevada, the bulk of them in the Las Vegas area.

"We're angry, mad and upset about everything under the sun," says Malone, cofounder of the U.S. Institute Against Human Trafficking (USIAHT). "So why are we Americans not upset about our children being sold as sex slaves?"

Early last year, the battle against child trafficking inspired him to organize Kids Not For Sale as a companion effort to USIAHT. He and his wife, Marilyn, are striving to enlist more communities in preventing children from being ensnared in the sex trade. That often happens between 12 and 14 and involves a family member taking advantage of them.

"I've made enemies, to be honest," Malone says of his efforts. "I'm okay with that. Protecting kids is more important than having friends or not having enemies. I'm going to keep fighting."

It's an expensive and often frustrating fight; USIAHT's cofounder bowed out three years ago because of burnout. Bringing restoration to youthful victims costs \$55,000 to \$100,000 a year per child, leaving potential donors shaking their head at the return on investment. Although the ministry once operated a home for trafficked boys just north of Tampa that helped 35 males ages eight to 17, it had to shut down. The state's child service agency decided there weren't

enough victims to continue their referrals and financial support.

At one time USIAHT had 20 employees, but with the boys' home closing the number has dwindled to eight. That doesn't count Marilyn, who handles all the ministries' bookkeeping and accounting as a volunteer.

"Here's the key: prevention and intervention," says Malone, at 66 still full of drive and energy. "I've got to get ahead of it. I've got to go after the pimps and the johns—the buyers—to stop them. I spend a lot of my resources doing training and programs. Not just on awareness, but education on preventive measures."

That includes utilizing technology. In addition to social media, Malone is working with technology companies to send messages to buyers. That happens by "scraping" phone numbers off X-rated websites and sending texts promising help if they want to get out of their depraved lifestyle. Bots and artificial intelligence are also part of USIAHT's effort to maximize their dollars to deter demand.

"I can stop the demand and cut the supply," Malone says. "I spend most of my time on demand now. Based on what I know and knowing who's doing what, there are hundreds of thousands of kids being trafficked in America every day. I know it because I live it."

A CALL TO MINISTRY

Malone didn't start out to lead a ministry, although as a teen he considered becoming a priest until he discovered girls. In addition to females, he pursued his love of baseball and eventually landed a scholarship to the University of Louisville. At the age of 21, he had an encounter with the Holy Spirit while reading *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale.

While the book has drawn criticism from many quarters, Peale used Scripture to make various points. While reading those Bible

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verses, Malone recognized he didn't have a personal relationship with Christ.

"I had a lot of head knowledge," he reminisces. "I knew about Mary and Jesus, the apostles, and the heroes of the faith but I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus. It says in Isaiah 55 that God's word won't return void. It was in reading Scripture that I realized I didn't know God."

"I went from a crazy, partying guy doing stuff you wouldn't want to write about to a guy carrying his Bible around campus and sharing the gospel, telling people about Jesus. I had a radical transformation."

His path to ministry didn't follow a straight line. First he went to play minor league ball for one season before enrolling in an independent Baptist seminary. After meeting Marilyn (a business major at the companion university)

and getting married the following year, Malone went back into baseball for 17 years.

He started with the California Angels as part of the scouting and player development staff and later had stints with the Expos and Minnesota Twins. After getting a World Series ring in 1991 as the Twins' advance scout, he returned to Montreal and rose to general manager in 1994.

After disagreements with management, Malone left for Baltimore, where as assistant GM he helped assemble clubs that made the 1996 and '97 American League championship series. That brought a call from the Dodgers near the end of the 1998 season.

Malone's two-plus seasons at the helm were marred by controversy with some other baseball executives and the media. While it didn't end well, the longtime baseball aficionado isn't



A COMMON CAUSE

When Kevin Malone and social media director Jeremy Hicks started planning USIAT’s new five-part video series, “Advocate,” they wanted an effective spokesperson as the narrator.

They found one in Malone’s former pastor, Francis Chan. The best-selling author’s stirring, emotion-laden pleas form a perfect backdrop to accounts of trafficking victims that unfold in the short videos.

“I think I’m somewhat responsible for Kevin’s passion toward this issue,” says Chan, who leads a group of San Francisco house churches when he’s not speaking somewhere across the nation. “When I first understood its scope, I cried myself to sleep and felt strongly that God was telling me to treat these victims like my own children.”

Among those featured in “Advocate” are New Orleans Saints’ quarterback Derek Carr, Clark County (Nevada) Director of Juvenile Services Jack Clark, and a noted Las Vegas pastor, Benny Perez.

“People have to understand that this is absolutely occurring,” says Aaron Ford, Nevada’s first-ever Black attorney general. “It’s occurring under our noses sometimes.”

Available for free at [Advocateseries.com](https://advocateseries.com), the videos rolled out in late July, along with a handbook small group leaders can use to help participants dig deeper. The videos and guide are also available through RightNow Media.

One of the series’ most common stories is the introduction to trafficking by a family member. Says Brooke, a former prostitute: “I was groomed by my mother. I was taught to use my body to get what I wanted and to lie, cheat and steal.”

“A person doesn’t have to beat you to death to trap you,” adds Oree Freeman, who was groomed by a woman at a crack house but today is free and serves on the ministry’s board of directors. “I thought I might as well get paid for (sex).”

Chan hopes the series stimulates more awareness, especially among churches.

“I think awareness is huge,” says Chan, who inspired several members of his former LA-area megachurch to get involved in anti-trafficking causes. “For them to be aware of the scope, that it’s not just something that happens overseas, will help. My hope is that people will think a little more deeply about who these children belong to and who is their Creator.”

sorry it’s over. In a 2022 interview with *Los Angeles Times*’ reporter Bill Shaikin, Malone talked about his focus changing from winning games to saving lives: “I don’t think I’ve had that since I got fired by the Dodgers.”

During his time in the major leagues, Malone admits he sacrificed family time in an effort to win world championships. Not only did Kevin reconnect with Marilyn and their two children, leaving baseball gave him an opportunity to work as an assistant to his pastor, John MacArthur. Periodically traveling with the leader of the nationally-known Grace Community Church and working in donor relations opened Malone’s eyes to another side of life.

“I saw the blessings of helping others and my faith not just being a hobby on the side,” Malone says. “I went on my first mission trip to Israel with (Masters University professor) Will Varner and fell in love with Israel. I’ve been there eight times now and work with two mesianic ministries and another non-Christian outreach.”

JOINING THE FIGHT

The profound change in Malone’s life didn’t take place until after he started attending Cornerstone Community Church, then pastored by best-selling author and speaker Francis Chan. Unbeknownst to Malone, Chan had already sparked a grassroots movement with sermons on trafficking, which Chan first learned about from another conference speaker.

His advocacy sparked the formation of several anti-trafficking initiatives: Michael and Carol Hart sold their custom home and most of their possessions in 2002 to start ZOE International, with operations in several countries. Soon after, Lana Vasquez launched Life Impact International, whose work focuses on children in the border area of Thailand and Myanmar.

After working with Life Impact, in 2014 Sandy Schmid started Second Story, an all-volunteer thrift store whose proceeds go to fight human trafficking. In 2010, Shannon and Taylor Sergey organized Forever Found, which offers training, prevention and child rescue in Southern California and India.

Malone’s own awakening came on a 2009 mission trip with ZOE International, which operates a home in Thailand for trafficking victims. There they met children ages four to six who had been victimized. While showing



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him what was happening in southeast Asia, Malone says God was also alerting him to the problem here. He says many people don’t understand the U.S. has a major issue, with American men the leading consumers of sex with children.

“I believe God has me right here because I know a lot of people and my baseball background opens doors,” Malone says. “It gives me meetings with different people. I don’t want to just make people aware; there also has to be a call to action. There has to be an opportunity for people to be involved and we try to do that.”

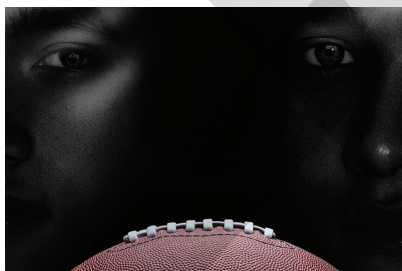
Still, his entry into this field took several more years. At the time involved in a Mercedes-Benz dealership, Malone spent evenings and weekends researching the issue. Then a crisis struck home: his son overdosed and was declared brain dead. Doctors finally advised pulling Shawn’s feeding tube, saying if he woke up he would be a vegetable.

Instead, his parents moved him to a Colorado hospital specializing in treating traumatic brain injuries. After 60 days in a coma, Shawn opened his eyes. Eighteen months later, he graduated from the University of Southern California.

At the end of 2013, Malone sensed God calling him to fight trafficking with this message: “I gave you your son back. I want you to give sons and daughters who have been trafficked back to their families.”

The first organization he formed was Protect the P.A.T.H. (People Against Trafficking Humans), which in 2016 gave way to USIAHT. In addition to offering numerous resources on its website, the organization conducts community-wide seminars aimed at educating law enforcement, prosecutors, legislators and the general public on the signs of trafficking. Among the many indicators a young person is a victim are signs of physical abuse (burn marks, bruises or cuts),

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A TEAM EFFORT

After coordinating anti-trafficking efforts at Super Bowl LVI in Los Angeles, Kevin Malone hopes to get the chance to repeat his success next February 11 in Las Vegas. Anti-trafficking efforts during the Super Bowl are largely funded by a \$100,000 grant from the National Football League.

As chair of the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force for the LA Super Bowl Committee, in early 2022 Malone directed a network of groups like It's A Penalty, Inner City Visions, and kNot Today. The latter is led by then-Indianapolis Colts (and now Carolina Panthers) head coach Frank Reich, wife Linda, and daughter Lia.

The Alliance Against Human Trafficking reported 70 adult victims were rescued, eight minors recovered, and 494 sex buyers arrested. In the lead-up to the game, the U.S. Human Trafficking Hotline reported a 20% increase in reports over the previous year. Within a week of the game, 17 of 36 missing children were reportedly recovered by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and law enforcement.

Its public awareness and educational campaign focused on public engagement, business involvement, assimilating faith communities, nonprofit agencies and government partnerships. Among its activities were video messages from NFL players that aired on airlines, in airports and via local media; a public service video; a booth at the Super Bowl experience; and the Reichs participating in a panel discussion at the Super Bowl Breakfast.

Despite this experience, Malone says he met with widespread indifference when he first offered his services to various state, county and local authorities in Las Vegas.

"It's mind-boggling to me, that they don't want somebody to come in who knows what they're doing," Malone says. "I'm praying and asking God what to do. I have a good relationship with all of them. There's something going on. I think it's spiritual warfare."

"EVERYONE CAN'T DO EVERYTHING, BUT EVERYBODY CAN DO SOMETHING."

sexualized behavior, inappropriate dress, or new friends with a different lifestyle.

Malone says there are four basic steps to reducing demand and holding perpetrators accountable:

1) Voting and political involvement aimed at holding elected leaders accountable for protecting children.

2) Getting trained, spreading the word and volunteering to join the ministry's "Abolitionist" street team. The latter includes forming affiliations with local organizations focused on prevention and victim care, social media posts and monitoring actions to fight trafficking in the community.

3) If you see something, say something. Involve law enforcement or other authorities if you see something suspicious. One example is the New Jersey pastor who once helped rescue a woman who had been trafficked after she fainted at a mall coffee shop.

4) Donate to USIAHT or other groups who are involved in the cause.

FACING SKEPTICS

There seems to be no better time for heightened awareness of the trafficking problem, considering the box-office bonanza of *Sound of Freedom*, the action film starring Jim Caviezel and Mira Sorvino. Outdrawing *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* at its July 4 premiere, the film generated more than \$100 million in receipts its first three weeks in release. It chronicles the story of Tim Ballard, a former special agent for the Homeland Security department who quit his job to rescue children.

Despite the fanfare that greeted the movie, skeptics of the picture

of widespread trafficking abound. In its profile of Malone, the *LA Times* noted that estimates can be so exaggerated that in early 2022, *The Atlantic* magazine headlined its look at the phenomenon "The Great (Fake) Child-Sex-Trafficking Epidemic."

The Times story also said that the Polaris Project, which operates the federally funded U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline, reported contact with just over 11,000 likely victims of sex trafficking in 2020. Most were adults.

Malone says such reports offer comfort to those who like to deny widespread trafficking even exists. He understands, saying the idea of a young boy or girl raped 10 to 15 times a night is so evil and disgusting the general reaction is to turn away.

"I can respond to that with information, data and research to prove it is happening," he says. "I believe it's a spiritual issue. I believe the enemy is basically blinding eyes to it. Or people say they don't know what to do."

"I have so many trainings and so much information, that's not an excuse. There's stuff everyone can do, even if it's just writing to your politicians or volunteering at your church or a youth center. Everyone can't do everything, but everybody can do something."

Right now, Malone is hoping someone reading these words will accept the challenge. ▀

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