

## ***Let the Oppressed Go Free***

*An artistic response to the issue of human trafficking*



### **About the Sculpture:**

Let the Oppressed Go Free is a bronze sculpture created by world-renowned artist, Timothy Schmalz, that depicts human trafficking slaves being released from captivity in order to bring attention to this societal issue. The sculpture contains 100 figures representing the different faces of human trafficking including sex exploitation, forced labor, debt bondage and more. Men, women, and children can become victims of human trafficking, particularly those from vulnerable communities.

The artist found inspiration from Isaiah 58:6 where scripture talks about 'setting free the oppressed'. The sculpture depicts Saint Josephine Bakhita opening up the underground and releasing modern-day slaves. It purposefully includes figures that span history to demonstrate that human trafficking has been a societal issue for generations. The artwork also showcases males and females, many races and all ages. It includes symbols as well as coins to represent the connection between human trafficking and money.

Schmalz commented, "Awareness is the first weapon to fight human trafficking." He has stated that people suffering are hidden in our society and his intention is to bring awareness to the this tragedy that exists in every country across the world. "This sculpture is going to be an inconvenience," Schmalz declared. "Human trafficking is a problem in our society that is often invisible."



### **About the Artist:**

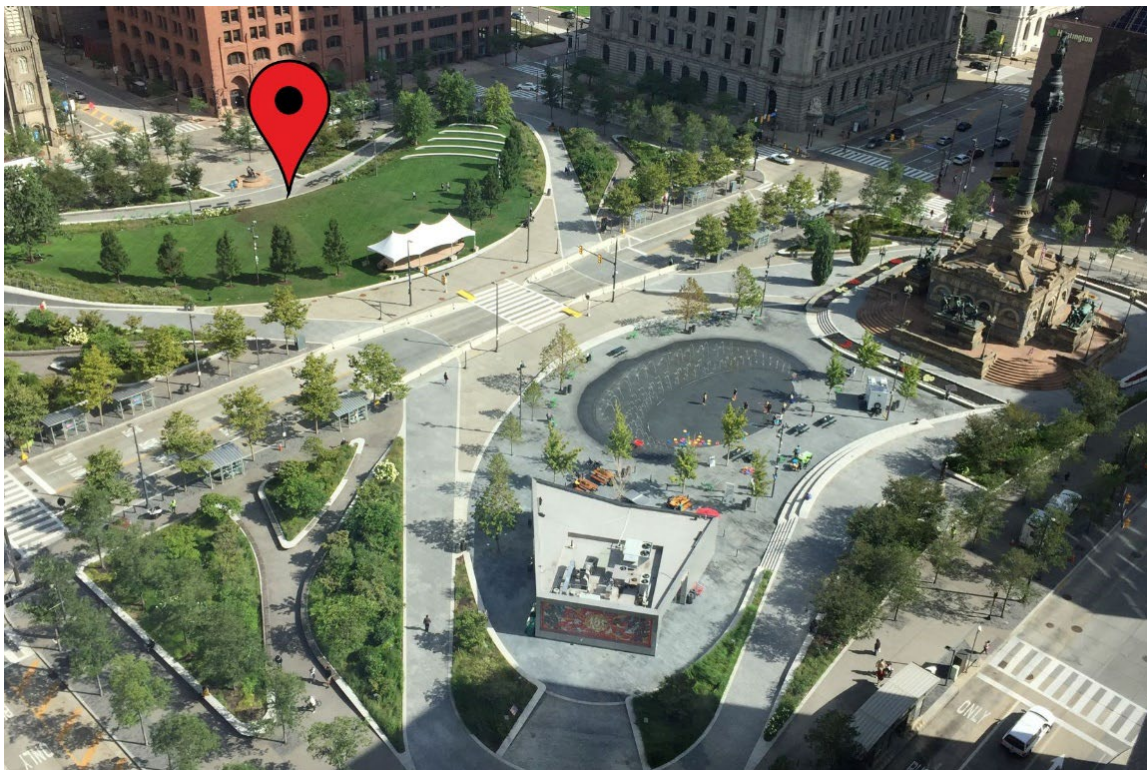
For over 30 years, Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz has been sculpting large scale sculptures. He is a figurative artist with his pieces installed worldwide including in historical churches in Rome and at the Vatican. Although most of his work is based upon a spiritual theme, he also creates large, complex public sculptures in bronze, like Let the Oppressed Go Free. Timothy strives to create epic artwork that connects with audiences through design and details that not only touch the viewer on an emotional level, but also allows them to feel a part of the piece.

### **Sculpture Visits Cleveland:**

The Let the Oppressed Go Free sculpture is traveling the United States before it is permanently installed at Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. Community West Foundation and the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking of Cleveland are bringing the artwork to Cleveland to be displayed on the north side of Public Square from September 27 – March 31 for free public viewing.

The only other copy of this sculpture is installed in Schio, Italy and the artist has no plans to replicate it further. Click to view a video of the unveiling of the sculpture in Schio:

<https://youtu.be/mPmZjgEBYIk?si=WSUAAZPfqw7kZybw>



### Artwork Details:

This life-sized bronze sculpture stands 22.5' long, 4' wide and 8' tall weighing 5 tons. The original sculpture was made from clay at Schmalz's studio. From that, he made a rubber mold which was sent to a foundry to make the bronze cast.



### Background & Context:

In 2017, Community West Foundation purchased a replica of the Homeless Jesus sculpture by Canadian artist, Timothy Schmalz. This single artwork has since traveled to dozens of churches and partner organizations as a powerful public reminder of the importance of caring for those in need. In October of 2020, Homeless Jesus was situated on the grounds of Saint Barnabas Episcopal Church in Bay Village in a location facing Bradley Road Park. Shortly after its arrival, local police were notified of a homeless person laying on a park bench. The call was picked-up by local news outlets, sparking significant public dialogue, along with a flurry of local and national media attention. Issues of privilege, compassion, and empathy, among others, were brought to light.

With this in mind, Community West Foundation expanded the important conversation with the acquisition of five of the six permanent artworks in the Matthew 25 Collection created by Schmalz. The sixth artwork, When I Was Hungry and Thirsty, was acquired several years ago by Old Stone Church and is installed in front of the church on Public Square, in downtown Cleveland. Cleveland is only the second city in the world, following Rome, Italy, to have the full collection of all six bronze figures in the Matthew 25 Collection. A map of locations is available at [www.Matthew25CLE.org](http://www.Matthew25CLE.org).

Timothy Schmalz contacted Community West Foundation about bringing the Let the Oppressed Go Free sculpture to Cleveland.

**About Community West Foundation:**

The mission of Community West Foundation is to advance the health and well-being of our community. The staff and Board of Directors are guided by the words in Matthew 25:35-40. While their grantmaking is based on these teachings, they are not affiliated with any particular religion. Their grantees, friends and donors come from diverse faiths and practices.

For more information, contact Community West Foundation at 440-360-7370 or visit [www.communitywestfoundation.org](http://www.communitywestfoundation.org)

**About the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking:**

The Collaborative to End Human Trafficking equips organizations and individuals with the knowledge, tools, and resources to address human trafficking in our community by increasing public awareness, delivering tailored trainings, and facilitating multi-disciplinary collaboration.

For more information, visit <https://collabtoendht.org/>