



Georgetown University Report on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation

September 1, 2016

Dear Brothers,

Today, Georgetown University released a report from the university's Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation. In September of 2015, Georgetown President John DeGioia convened the group, chaired by Fr. David Collins, S.J., to study Georgetown's historical ties to the institution of slavery and, more importantly, to examine and interpret the history of sites on campus while providing recommendations for dialogue, reconciliation, reflection and deeper understanding.

For the last eleven months, the group has thoughtfully examined a notorious mass sale of slaves organized in 1838 by the Jesuit leadership at the time to plantations in Louisiana. The revenues from the sale of these 272 men, women, and children helped rescue Georgetown, the nation's first Catholic college and our first Jesuit university, from serious debt. The details of the sale comprise one of the most shameful chapters in our history.

Mindful of this history, the Society of Jesus in the U.S. has worked for decades to contribute to racial and ethnic reconciliation in this country. A statement from the Maryland Province detailed this commitment, which includes more than 40 years of research and study by Jesuit historians examining Jesuit slaveholding.

Thanks to the ongoing research, we know more and more of the history. Attention has turned recently to the names of the slaves who were sold and to the stories of what happened to them after the sale. We are being introduced to the slaves' descendants living today across the country. Many of these descendants continue in the Catholic faith that their great-great-grandparents were once taught by their Jesuit owners. Like us, they are learning something new about their forebears, something shocking, something gut-wrenching. They are coming to know, "This is where we come from. This has shaped who we are." So are we.

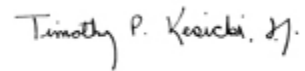
Sadly, this tragic legacy is not limited to Georgetown. Saint Louis University, working closely with the Central and Southern Province, is taking a look at its own historical connections to slavery. So too is the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, where President Philip L. Boroughs, S.J., recently reminded us that the "act of remembering sometimes demands that the College community face painful and unjust moments in its history." This is one such moment for them and for all of us.

Racial injustice is still a powerful force shaping our society, and we must recognize that we have contributed to this legacy. We do the descendants and this past a disservice if we decide that this is someone else's history, another school's, another province's.

This is a time for humility, a moment for healing and reconciliation. It is a moment where we can pray for the healing power of Christ with, rather than merely on behalf of, the families of those who were once enslaved. In this way, we don't do this alone, nor do the descendants. Rather, we do it together: broken, sin-scarred, and yet people of faith.

As we consider the sinfulness of earlier generations, let's also be alert to what the Maryland Province has named the "moral blindness" of our own times. Seeing the errors of our ancestors is a challenge to examine our own conscience for the blindness affecting it today.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy P. Kesicki, S.J.".

Timothy P. Kesicki, S.J.
President