

September 19, 2016

**Statement on the History of Jesuit Slaveholding in our Province**

The year has seen a focus on the history of slaveholding by Jesuits in the United States. We in the USA Central and Southern Province share that history, for several of our early missions relied in part upon the forced labor of slaves. We have learned more of the pain suffered by the enslaved people and also the enduring wound to their descendants. Slavery continues to affect this nation through the lingering reality of racism and its effects, but its impact falls especially on our African-American brothers and sisters.

We have come to know of and been dismayed by the actions of the Jesuits who came before us. Much of the information contained in current reports relies on our historical records and on the work of Jesuit historians over the last 75 years. We deeply regret Jesuits' participation in this evil institution. No one can reconcile these actions with the teaching of the Church nor with our commitments as Jesuits, but they are an undeniable part of our history. This present moment of heightened awareness calls us to a more intentional response.

Several months ago, we began the process of researching the history of Jesuit slaveholding in what is now the USA Central and Southern Province. As much as possible, we especially want to learn the personal stories of the men and women who were enslaved. We have already laid the groundwork for this research, making a commitment of both financial and human resources. We are collaborating with our institutions in Alabama, Louisiana and Missouri to learn the full truth of our history related to slavery and race relations.

Also part of our history, though, are the Jesuits who worked throughout their lives to bring about racial equality, who spoke out against injustice and took action to promote peace and reconciliation, as well as those who dedicated their lives to ministry to African-American communities. For example, in the face of opposition, Saint Louis University was the first college in one of the fourteen former slave states to enroll African-American students; for ten years, Spring Hill College was the first and only integrated college in the Deep South. Loyola Academy in Saint Louis serves African-American middle school students from North Saint Louis. Although these positive moves, among others, represent important steps consonant with the call of the Gospel, the reality of slavery and its lingering effects asks more of us.

We Jesuits dedicate ourselves to practicing "a faith that does justice." We commit ourselves to advocacy and outreach to the poor and marginalized, especially those who bear the burden of racism. As we acknowledge the failings of our forebears, we will continue to work with our communities to foster a future of peace, reconciliation and right relationships.

*"The process of healing also needs to include the pursuit of truth, not for the sake of opening old wounds, but rather as a necessary means of promoting justice, healing and unity." ~ Pope Francis*