



OFFICE of the ARCHBISHOP

ARCHDIOCESE OF LOUISVILLE

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June 22, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Greetings in the Lord! I pray that this letter finds you all well and that your ministry is peaceful as we continue in these days of Ordinary Time and summer.

For the past decade, diocesan and religious archivists have discussed ways to open records of enslaved Africans and Native American persons. These records come in a variety of forms including sacramental registers, correspondence, financial ledgers, contracts, diaries, and journals. They illustrate the Catholic heritage of families from one generation to another. They exist in Catholic archives throughout the United States, and they are among the most important and extensive resources for researching the lives of enslaved persons.

How do we begin to acknowledge and reconcile our sins if we do not know our past? We rely on in-depth scholarly research to illustrate the Catholic Church's customs and practices. However, we also need to initiate our own research into our institution's past so we can tell our own story with humility and honesty.

During the past year, a group of interested parties, including members from (arch)dioceses and religious orders, have formed a working committee, Catholic Religious Organizations Studying Slavery (CROSS). The committee is dedicated to exploring ways of promoting open access to these records, assisting organizations in gaining knowledge of their institution's history, and opening a dialog about transparency and truthfulness.

As a result of this work, CROSS has written a "Best Practices Manual" and they are now preparing to hold a two-day conference *Open Wide our Archives: Truth Transparency and Access*, to be held in **St. Louis, Missouri October 30-31, 2023**. Bishops, Congregation Leaders, chancellors, archivists, and representatives of Offices of Racial Justice and Black Catholics are invited to attend and/or send representation from your organization.

I provide with this letter a copy of the conference schedule. Registration will open July 1, 2023. Please refer to the Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists website for more information www.diocesanarchivists.org. I hope that you will share this information with the appropriate parties in your (arch)diocese in the hope that they will attend the October Conference of CROSS.

With an assurance of my prayers for you in your ministry, I remain,

Sincerely in the Lord,

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Archbishop of Louisville



Catholic Religious Organizations Studying Slavery (CROSS)

What is CROSS?

Catholic Religious Organizations Studying Slavery (CROSS) was established in 2021 by 12 men and women representing nine dioceses and three religious organizations, convened to study the records of enslaved peoples in Catholic archives.

It is the embodiment of a discussion that has been ongoing for over a decade in the Catholic archives and history communities, where questions have been raised about access to records of the enslaved.

Our Mission

Recognizing that slavery is a sin, it is our mission to promote open and honest access to the historic record in order to achieve a more comprehensive and truthful telling of enslavement within the Catholic Church in the United States.

Our Purpose

Members of CROSS will work collectively to improve access to the records of the enslaved and those who enslaved them. Additionally, in consultation with descendants of the enslaved, we will promote active engagement with this subject, encouraging discourse on the many legacies of slavery in the United States, and advocating for institutional responses, to a greater effect than would normally be beyond the limited means of each individual member.

Many descendant communities have ancestors who were enslaved to more than one religious order, individual, or institution. Within the past decade, several Catholic dioceses and religious orders have begun examining their histories of slaveholding to acknowledge more fully their participation in the evil of slavery and to work toward repairing the damage wrought by its enduring legacies.

We envision that, in partnership, diocesan organizations, religious orders, schools, and congregations can work to effect greater institutional responses that address the legacies of slavery, benefit descendant communities, and eradicate racism within our respective institutions.



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