

REP Education Sheet

Religious Institutions Atone with Reparations



The move by the leaders of the Jesuit conference of priests to pledge \$100 million to benefit the descendants of the enslaved people it once owned is the largest such effort by the Roman Catholic Church to make amends for the buying, selling, and enslavement of Black people.

“This is an opportunity for Jesuits to begin a very serious process of truth and reconciliation,” said the Rev. Timothy P. Kesicki, president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States. “Our shameful history of Jesuit slaveholding in the United States has been taken off the dusty shelf, and it can never be put back.”



A document inside St. Ignatius Church in Port Tobacco, Md., lists the names of the enslaved people sold by the Jesuits in 1838 to help keep Georgetown University afloat.

Faith institutions have been a part of the forefront of the growing reparations movement. In 2018, the Catholic sisters of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, who owned about 150 Black people in Louisiana and Missouri, created a reparations fund to finance scholarships for African-Americans at their school in Grand Coteau, La. The following year, Virginia Theological Seminary, which relied on enslaved laborers, created a \$1.7 million reparations fund, and Princeton Theological Seminary announced it would spend \$27 million on scholarships and other initiatives to make amends for its ties to slavery. About 5,000 living descendants of the people enslaved by the Jesuits have been identified by genealogists at the Georgetown Memory Project, a nonprofit group.

Sources:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/us/jesuits-georgetown-reparations-slavery.html>
- <https://www.newsweek.com/2022/08/05/growing-number-religious-groups-are-developing-reparations-programs-black-americans-1727276.html>