LEGACY OF THE GU272 ALLIANCE

April 5, 2018

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SOCIETY OF JESUS and GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

We, the undersigned academic, social justice, professional, faith and community organizations and individuals, were pleased to learn that in April 2017 The Society of Jesus and Georgetown apologized for the sale of 272 enslaved Africans in 1838 to benefit Georgetown University. It is our understanding that Georgetown issued a report in the summer of 2016, identifying some projects it was considering to make amends for the use of the funds from the sale of Africans enslaved by the Jesuits to help Georgetown become the financially and academically strong university it is today.

We urge The Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) and Georgetown to finalize and implement a process for amends with the descendants of the 272 people who were sold (GU272). Georgetown University avoided bankruptcy after receiving the funds from the sale of the GU272, enabling it to become a robust university. The benefit received by the Jesuits and Georgetown University was to the decided detriment of those men, women and children who were sold. The sale tore them from the land that, although enslaved, they had called home. They were sent on a cruel and dangerous journey from Maryland to Louisiana during which a number of them became ill and some died. The Jesuits, with callous disregard for the well-being of the GU272, sold them to the state that was known as one of the cruelest places for enslaved Africans in the country. Many of their descendants remain in Louisiana, some living in poverty and are in various states of ill-health. Many others currently live throughout the United States. Most, upon learning in 2015 and 2016 of the fate of their ancestors experienced wrenching sadness and anger and are reaching out to Georgetown and the Jesuits to “do the right thing.”

It is critical that the Jesuits and Georgetown University make amends for their conduct by developing, with the descendants, a reparatory justice package. Their conduct through today violates universal spiritual principles as well as the conditions of sale. This will honor the lives of those sold, and provide the descendants of the GU272 with forms of reparatory justice that have multi-generational significance.

You have an historic opportunity to demonstrate how engagement with the descendants of those who have been injured can lead to true racial healing – a healing that takes place among equals – rather than racial subordination that led to the enslavement of the GU272 and other African peoples.
We look forward to learning of the positive steps you take with the descendants as it is absolutely necessary to respectfully and sincerely close this sordid chapter in your history.

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