



Confronting our history

By Irma Dillard, RSCJ, Member of the Slavery, Accountability and Reconciliation Committee



IN APRIL 2016, *The New York Times* published an article, “272 Slaves Were Sold To Save Georgetown,” featuring Georgetown University.

It was time for our province to confront our own history. Provincial Barbara Dawson, RSCJ, established the Society of the Sacred Heart’s Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Committee, with a focus on the on-going issue of racism in the world and the Society of the Sacred Heart’s participation in the historic sin of slavery. As the group worked together, the committee name became the Slavery, Accountability and Reconciliation Committee.

I agreed immediately to participate. As one of three African American RSCJ in the United States – Canada Province, I felt it my duty and responsibility to get to the truth. I had to know how our foremothers treated the enslaved, as well as find out their names and their descendants.

I believe we must be about what is written in the committee’s mandate: “It is time to listen . . . to telling the fuller story . . . to confront a painful part of our legacy . . . to **commit to truth**, healing and reconciliation for a better future.”

Some of this was accomplished when RSCJ gathered with the descendants in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, on September 23, 2018, to honor the ancestors enslaved on this property. We were able to give the descendants the names of their people.

The ritual, “**We Speak Your Names**,” was powerful – my heart was full! I knew we had done something right! Because enslaved people were treated as chattel, they are rarely found in government birth and death records and, instead, must be traced through the property ledgers of the people who owned them. By using this approach, members of our committee were able to identify a number of descendants.

I believe if Madeleine Sophie were here today, she would have also written to us:

“Let us leave acts, not words.

Nobody will have time to read us.”

Ashé!

Above: Descendants gathered to honor their enslaved ancestors at Grand Coteau, LA, pictured here at the former slave quarters.

Members of the Slavery, Accountability and Reconciliation Committee: Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ (Chair), Maureen Chicoine, RSCJ, Irma Dillard, RSCJ, Marilyn McMorrow, RSCJ, Cathy Mooney and Emory Weber.



rscj.org/news/descendants-gather