



Dear Students, Staff, and Faculty,

September 8, 2020

I write to you with a broken heart as I need to share deeply upsetting news for our community.

In recent weeks, Loras College received disturbing information about its founder, Bishop Mathias Loras, from a researcher who was examining Bishop Loras' personal records to advance his scholarship work. In the course of his work, the researcher confirmed that the Bishop had enslaved a woman named Marie Louise for 16 years, from 1836 until 1852. Bishop Loras had purchased Marie Louise for \$800 while he was living in Mobile, Alabama. The researcher also found that, although Bishop Loras left Marie Louise behind in Alabama when he moved to Iowa, he hired her out to others and used proceeds from her labor to help build his various ministries here. Doing a new, detailed analysis of historic documents and Bishop Loras' unpublished personal financial ledgers, the researcher showed for the first time the extent of those transactions, leading to a new understanding of Bishop Loras' participation in the system of slavery. While some previous biographers had established the basic facts of the Bishop's slave ownership using his personal letters, the evidence recently uncovered by the researcher challenges past depictions of him.

Upon receiving this information, the administration sought the expertise of its history faculty, one of whom conducted additional in-depth research and confirmed that these facts are indisputable. Further, there is no evidence that Bishop Loras ever expressed remorse for his actions.

Slavery is an evil in any age, and its legacy of dehumanizing injustice persists. Bishop Loras' abhorrent conduct is antithetical to the mission, vision, values, and Catholic identity of this institution. Consistent with these values, Loras College denounces racial injustice and hate in all its forms.

As much as the ideals of our founders and the early Catholic Church in the United States were inspiring, we must realize that they were often lived in direct contradiction to the values we hold today, and which we have long held to be absolute. All too many higher education institutions, government, and other industries benefited in immoral ways from racial injustice and oppression. That we are not alone in confronting this part of the College's past does not absolve us of our duty to address it.

While our colleague completed the research necessary to validate this information, and together with Board Chair **Tony Reardon** ('72), we assembled the Board of Regents and a diverse group of Loras alumni and friends to review what we had learned and to discuss appropriate ways in which the College could begin to take action and move forward in response.

A clear consensus around the following priorities emerged:

Truth – We will communicate about this matter openly and honestly.

Atonement – We must honor the life and dignity of Marie Louise and atone for her enslavement.

Rights and Responsibilities – We reassert our commitment to ending racial injustice within the College and beyond.

Call to Community – We will seek and engage our community in this process.

With these priorities as a foundation, the Loras College Board of Regents has directed several initial actions to be taken in response to what has been learned about the Bishop.

As a first step in honoring Marie Louise’s legacy, the Board will create a scholarship fund in her name, effective with the 2021-22 academic year. It will also create a scholarship fund in honor of the College’s first Black graduate and fifth Black priest to be ordained in the United States, **Fr. Norman Dukette** ('22) (effective with the 2021-22 academic year).

The statue of Bishop Loras will be removed from its current location and placed in storage until we have convened as a community to discuss the impact of this knowledge about our founder, and specifically, whether and in what context the statue could or should be displayed in the future.

With regard to our college’s name, and as expressed by the Regents, the educational experience beloved by our alumni, students, and faculty is not defined by the man. The ideals to which we aspire are and have always been far greater. The College will retain its name while we focus our energy and resources on accelerating and expanding efforts to advance human dignity, diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus, and especially among our leadership, administration, and faculty. We know there is much work to do.

We recognize that not everyone will agree with these decisions. I ask that we all pause and reflect first, and then engage openly, honestly, and civilly as we come together as a community to honor Marie Louise and the facts about her enslavement. I am sure you will have questions, and we welcome them. In collaboration with College Diversity Officer (CDO) **Sergio Perez** ('13), I plan to convene as many conversations as humanly possible in the days ahead. In particular, I wish to connect with our Black students and students and colleagues of color, to listen.

As Iowa’s first college, and sixth oldest Catholic college in the nation, we will continue to advance the inherent dignity and worth of every person, all of whom are made in the image and likeness of God. We are committed to communicating promptly and transparently about the measures we are taking as we move forward, and will provide updates on next steps in the near future. To that end, we have created a [dedicated webpage](#) to help keep you informed and invite your perspectives and those among our alumni community. We welcome your thoughts and suggestions. We will be responsive in our follow up.

May you all help us to forge a pathway toward true Christian, diverse, equitable, and inclusive ways.

God Bless,

James E. Collins ('84)

President

Loras College