



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kentucky Catholic Congregations to Receive Prestigious Research Award for Work Uncovering History of Slave Ownership within Communities

WASHINGTON – Three Kentucky congregations of Catholic sisters will be recognized for their research into the history of enslaved peoples within their own communities.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) will award its Fr. Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD, Award for Exemplary Church Research to the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth (SCN), Dominican Sisters of Peace (OP), and the Sisters of Loretto (SL) in a ceremony at Georgetown University on November 13, 2025.

Individuals accepting the award are Sr. Theresa Knabel, SCN; Sr. Rosemary Rule, OP; and Sr. Eleanor Craig, SL. All three were intimately involved in the research identifying the enslaved persons and families within their respective congregations.

“The history of enslavement by Catholic bishops and clergy, by religious communities, and by large swaths of the Catholic laity from 1619 through the Civil War is not well known and ought to be,” Sr. Eleanor Craig said.

Sr. Eleanor Craig is the Loretto Community Historian and previously served as the Director of the Loretto Heritage Center Archives and Museum from 2012-2020. Now in her 80s, she has a passion for bringing injustice to light.

Sr. Rosemary Rule’s interest in the topic of slavery and racial injustice began during the Civil Rights Era, after joining the Dominican Order in 1960. She has a bachelor’s and master’s degree in history and knows well that all history isn’t pleasant.

“It is painful to bring it up, but if you want to be true and have integrity, then you have to accept the past as best you can understand it,” Sr. Rosemary Rule said. “We’re going to acknowledge it and know it doesn’t represent who we are now. It’s important to have some awareness of our evolution in thinking.”

Sr. Rosemary Rule worked with a team of Sisters and Associates in St. Catharine – where the first Dominican congregation in the United States was founded in 1822 – on this research project.

Sr. Theresa Knabel, 89, helped plan the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth's bicentennial in 2012, which included the creation of a monument that named and honored those who were enslaved by the congregation. She has held a lifelong focus on racial justice, education, and truthful history.

"Sister Theresa's passion and commitment to the African American community, reflected through her extensive research, make us all proud," President of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Sr. Jackulin Jesu said. "Her work illuminates our shared history and deepens our collective understanding of truth and justice."

All three congregations have dedicated time and energy to not only documenting the names of individuals and families enslaved in Kentucky in the 19th century but have also put effort into healing and reconciliation with African Americans in their community through recognition and reconciliation programs and outreach.

The Luzbetak Award, named for the first executive director of CARA, is presented annually to a researcher or researchers who have distinguished themselves in the conduct of Church research. Previous award winners include sociologist and seminary researchers Dr. Dean Hoge and Katarina Schuth, OSF, Ph. D., and Patricia Wittberg, SC, a religion sociologist and professor.