

160th Anniversary of Maryland Emancipation Day

A message from the Catholic Bishops of Maryland
November 1, 2024



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

Today we commemorate a pivotal moment in history: the 160th anniversary of Maryland Emancipation Day, which marks the day the Maryland Constitution of 1864 went into effect and officially abolished slavery within the state. This day, when all those still held in bondage were finally set free, is a profound reminder of the dignity of every human person, a dignity that the Catholic Church upholds as sacred and inviolable.

At the heart of our Catholic faith is the belief that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. Slavery, in any form, is an affront to this divine image, reducing human beings to mere property and denying them their God-given freedom. The abolition of slavery in Maryland was a step towards restoring the fundamental truth that no person should ever be subjected to dehumanization.

As we reflect on the significance of this anniversary, we recognize that the work of justice is never complete. The end of slavery was a monumental victory, but it also reminds us that freedom must be protected, matured and expanded to ensure justice for all.

The abolition of slavery restored not only the dignity of individuals, but also the sanctity of family life, which had been shattered by the horrors of slavery. Families that had been torn apart, sold and scattered could now hope to rebuild and thrive, standing as a testament to the power of human resilience and the grace of God.

As we commemorate this 160th anniversary, we must also acknowledge the enduring legacy of slavery and racism that continues to affect society. This day is not only a time to look

back with gratitude for the progress made, but also a time to look forward, recommitting ourselves to the work of healing, reconciliation and justice. In remembering Maryland Emancipation Day, we are called to deepen our respect for every human person, regardless of race, and to work tirelessly to eliminate any form of discrimination or inequality that persists.

As Catholics, we are called to be active participants in the promotion of justice, standing against all forms of

oppression and advocating for the rights and dignity of all. This day reminds us that freedom is a gift from God that must be extended to everyone without exception.

The words of St. Peter Claver, the patron of African missions and interracial justice, due to his work with those enslaved in Colombia, resonate with us today: "We must speak to them with our hands before we speak to them with our lips." His tireless efforts to serve, comfort and minister to those enslaved echo through time as a powerful example of the Christian call to service and solidarity.

The 160th anniversary of Maryland Emancipation Day is a day of thanksgiving, a day to honor the courage of those who fought for freedom, and a day to reflect on the ongoing work of justice.

We stand in solidarity with all who are oppressed, working for a world where the dignity of every human life is recognized and upheld.

Let this anniversary inspire us to be instruments of God's peace, justice and love, as we continue to journey towards true freedom for all.

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Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore

Most Reverend Roy Campbell
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington

Most Reverend Evelio Menjivar
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington

Wilton Cardinal Gregory
Archbishop of Washington

Most Reverend Juan Esposito
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington

Most Reverend Adam Parker
Auxiliary Bishop of Baltimore

Most Reverend William Koenig
Bishop of Wilmington

Most Reverend
Bruce Lewandowski, CSsR
Auxiliary Bishop of Baltimore