



FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

JOINT PROJECT BETWEEN
THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY CENTER IN BETHLEHEM AND
THE COMMISSARIAT OF THE HOLY LAND IN CANADA



Pastoral Introduction

On the occasion of Lent 2017 and in the wake of the Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis on *The Joy of Love (Amoris laetitia, March 19, 2016)*, it is relevant to share a Way of the cross prayed and written by fourteen families of Holy Land and Canada. Pope Francis wrote: “God’s indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace, it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning through the way of the cross. The Gospels clearly present the example of Jesus who... proclaimed the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation that restores God’s original plan (cf. Mt 19:3).” (No 62)

During the highlights of the liturgical year, Lent and Holy Week allow the joyful reunion with the source of all communal and individual faith: Jesus, Christ and Lord. In addition to the liturgy, some devotions favor a deep assimilation of the way of Jesus and his choices by having these actually experienced and prayed. The *Way of the cross* is an ecclesial devotion that unites the lives of Jesus and Christians, proposes a catechetical itinerary and calls out to worshipers in view of bringing about significant change in the daily lives of Christian families and individuals alike.

This devotion assists believers to remain contemporaries and committed witnesses of the particularly meaningful *events* and places in the life of Jesus and the history of salvation: Jerusalem and each of our communities. It appears an opportune time to offer our country’s faithful, in 2017, an original version of the *Way of the cross* whose symbolic and catechetical title is *Families on the Way of the Cross*. It is suggested that the pastoral text update for the families and our communities the challenges of a life of faith to reinforce an effective solidarity with the Churches and the Christians of the Holy Land and the greater Middle East.

This *Way of the Cross* is designed for pastoral use during moments of parish prayer, as well as for groups or gatherings on Good Friday or to be part of public processions or vigils which have been the practice in some cities. It can be repeated throughout the year, whenever worshipers wish to experience that devotion as based on the challenges of love. It can also serve as a personal meditation any time.



Each station includes:

- One verse from Scripture describing the event experienced by Jesus;
- A brief meditation that evokes a challenge of faith and, over time, a further step towards conversion;
- A prayer to Jesus or to the Father by the community as it comes together and prays in making its journey in faith;
- A hymn to provide a transition from one station to the next, and which reminds the community that we can experience in song what it means to be faithful on the journey.

The leaders of this *Way of the Cross* are invited to make adaptations according to local circumstances and settings. It is intended to be a “working tool”.

Different voices can be used to lead the *Way of the Cross*. This can help show how each station has three dimensions: the Word of God, the meditation and the prayer of those who are assembled.



Suggestions for hymns

The hymns that are listed are simply suggestions. Communities are invited to draw from their own repertoire and heritage. Most of the hymns suggested here are from the *Catholic Book of Worship (CBW III), Pew Edition, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000*.

Beginning of the Stations

Take up Your Cross (353); When Jesus Comes to Be Baptised (350); Come and Journey with a Savior (476); We walk by Faith (495); No Greater Love (599).

Between the stations

Stabat Mater Dolorosa (694); Be with Me, Lord (357); Have Mercy on Me (364, 1-10); Behold the Wood (379); The Lord Jesus Christ (436); Eye Has Not seen (482, 1-4); Acclamations for the Stations of the Cross (355/356); Jesus, Remember Me (380); O Lord, Hear my Prayer (491); Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive (620); God is Love (473); God, Whose Love in Jesus Found Us (501); No Greater Love (599); When Love is Found (629); Where There is Love (631), Ubi Caritas (376).

Following the dismissal

Great God of mercy (361); Jesus, Lord (365); O Cross of Christ (368); Tree of Life (373); The Lord is Now Exalted (377); When I Behold the Wondrous Cross (382); Only This I Want (516); Lift High the Cross (436).





Service begins in a prayerful silence

*P: / In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.*

R: / Amen.

OPENING REFLECTION

Dear brothers and sisters,

Pope Francis wrote recently*: “God’s indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace, it heals and transformed hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning through the way of the cross.

The Gospels clearly presents the example of Jesus who...proclaimed the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation that restores God’s original plan (cf. Mt 19, 3).”

We have come together to experience the way of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and the faith journey of families in our communities. Let us be aware of the gift of love, the challenges we encounter, and our need to remain faithful and to persevere in love.

We keep watch with Christ and we pray for love and peace in our country, in our families and in the land of Jesus.

Opening hymn

**Pope Francis, The Joy of Love, No 62, March, 19, 2016*





STATIONS OF THE CROSS





1st STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus is condemned to death

When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for Passover, and it was about noon. And he said to the Jews, "Here is your king!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." (John 19, 13-16)

Meditation

Yesterday the crowd was crying out "Hosanna!" and today it is shouting: "Crucify him!" Pilate washes his hands of the whole matter.

Jesus, Living God having become a man, endures the greatest suffering. How painful it must be to experience this moment brought about by ingratitude, taunts and the abandonment of men by being condemned to die on the cross.

We have also experienced the pain caused by slander. We can imagine this immense suffering.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, give me the courage to fearlessly bear witness to the truth, help me to never slander or condemn anyone, and while contemplating your suffering, give me the strength to bear patiently slander and gossip. Amen.





2nd STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus carries his cross

Then Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. (John 19, 16-17)

Meditation

Like you, in the days of your Passion, we pick up our cross in the everyday setting of our family commitments.

Each day, our lives as a couple represent an invitation to choose one another, to love as one heart, beyond illness and the aging of our bodies. Our children ask for our caring attitude in support of their aspirations and to help them deal with the worries attached to the challenge of reaching their goals. We also respond graciously to the requests of our grand-children even if this translates in self-sacrifice and we accept to go to the extra mile to remain true to human and Christian values.

Prayer

Jesus, grant us the strength of your shoulders so that we can consent, with serenity, to carry the cross of our family commitments, as a couple, with our children and the children of our children. Amen.





3rd STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus falls for the first time

Come to me, all you are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11, 28-30)

Meditation

At the end of an agonizing night when he was flogged, made to wear a crown of thorns, taunted and abandoned by all, Jesus suffers in his soul and in his body. He yields under the weight of the cross. He finds the strength to pick himself up in his overwhelming will to save us.

Everyone falls on the wayside and loses heart before life's difficulties. But a single look towards Jesus helps us to get back on our feet.

Prayer

Jesus, you told us: "Come to me all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest." Lord, forgive us each time that we forget your invitation. When we are overburdened, allow us to trust in you. Amen.





4th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus meets his mother

Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed -and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Luke 2, 34-35)

Meditation

How precious it is to encounter a relative – a parent- when we are in difficulty, condemned, suffering, even close to dying! How precious it is to be assisted by someone who truly cares for us and loves us!

At some point Jesus would meet His mother along the walk up to Calvary. What a great consolation Mary was to her Son! If God put enmity between the serpent and the woman, then the desolating force of evil against Jesus was perhaps for a moment forgotten by the opposing force of consolation that Mary was. The consoling love from Mary’s obedience and presence during the passion was something like a gulp of water to a man dying of thirst.

The love between Mary and Jesus is what we must aspire for, and meditating on their encounter is a powerful way for us to grow in love for Jesus and our Blessed Mother.

Prayer

Jesus, each time we encounter in some journeys of suffering a beloved presence we know that we are blessed. May this experience be a miracle in unique moments of suffering and faithfulness. Amen.





5th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country; and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. (Luke 23, 26)

Meditation

The executioners wanted Jesus to endure the utmost suffering. To this end they requisitioned Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross for him lest he die before his crucifixion. The Lord accepts this assistance to bring to a close the endeavour of our salvation.

In our daily lives in the Middle East, families suffer from persecution, war and dispersion. All of us are in need of a citizen from Cyrene. Who among us will be a citizen of Cyrene for his neighbor?

Prayer

Enlighten me Lord, that I may not be an indifferent witness of the suffering of those around me and that I might be that citizen of Cyrene for my neighbour. Amen.





6th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1, 29)

Meditation

Seeing and encountering Jesus changes everything in our lives. Fear diminishes, doubt is erased, and our lives are healed and consoled. At this station, we have two examples—from the Bible, we see John the Baptist, and from Tradition, we have Veronica.

At the first sight of Jesus, John the Baptist declares, "Behold the lamb of God". And when Veronica first met Jesus on the way of the Cross, she instantly acknowledged him and laid herself down in service to Jesus.

God wants to reveal himself to us every day in our life. It begins with simply giving God permission: permission to reveal himself, permission to transform us into the saint we were created to be. God wants to imprint his face on us, so that our life will portray him, just as Veronica's veil portrays Jesus.

Prayer

Jesus, I thank you for inviting me into relationship with you. I admit that I have often ignored this invitation. Today, I desire to encounter you, transform any and all areas of my life. Amen.





7th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus falls for the second time

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12, 24)

Meditation

Jesus stands alone under the weight of the cross as well as of evil, injustice and violence. The scornful look belittling Jesus' suffering does not suppress the strength of his will and he gets back on his feet.

It is difficult to shake off the weight of our failings. So many times we experience remorse only to fall once again, which weighs down the heart of the suffering Jesus.

Prayer

Jesus, make of us witnesses of love, justice and peace for everyone around us. Enlighten us so that we may see our own weaknesses, and so learn to repent and pick ourselves up once again. Amen.





8th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus meets the daughters of Jerusalem

A great number of people followed Jesus, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me; but weep for yourselves and for your children." (Luke 23, 27-28)

Meditation

As we look to Christ making his way towards his Crucifixion, we see that in his most difficult suffering, he still tries to console and offer comfort to others. He speaks to mothers, who by definition will put their children's before their own.

As followers of Christ, we should all try to make our prayers and petitions not for our own suffering or laments, but for others. We should follow in his painful steps, offering prayers not for our own needs, but endlessly for those around us.

Christ came to serve the world. He humbled himself to the point of death. He puts our very lives before his own. His compassion is endless. And even in his worst suffering, he never stops giving himself.

Prayer

Merciful Lord, help me to care more about others than myself. To put their needs before mine. Help me to remember that others have problems too. Help me to respond to them, even when I'm busy or preoccupied with my own problems. Amen





9th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus falls for the third time

He did not say that on his own, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. (John 11, 51-52)

Meditation

Jesus at the limits of suffering drops to his knees for a third time. Yet he gets back up and continues to climb to Golgotha for our redemption. His greatness shines fourth in the depths of his weakness.

In our own lives we encounter meaningless suffering and weakness if we do not associate such an experience to your way of redemption.

Prayer

Jesus, conqueror of all weaknesses, allow us to carry our daily cross by arming us with your strength. As Saint Paul declares: "When I am weak then I am strong." Amen.





10th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus is stripped of his garments

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." (John 19, 23-24)

Meditation

I struggle to keep myself together, to keep my clothes. I struggle to protect myself from being totally exposed to those who love me most. I have established an impressive persona: my money, my career, my authority. What would they say if I gave this away?

I dare not give this up; it's too risky. The struggle is intense; any moralizing about the duty to love falls on deaf ears. The darkness comes...My world has shrunk to down to one person. Where is the joy in this solitude?

But then I feel my heart in my chest, beating. My life is given and received; our lives are chosen and experienced together. I remember Jesus who freely and peacefully gave away himself to all those in need. In my heart, I desire an intimate encounter with the abundance of peace, love and joy that Jesus freely gives to all.

Prayer

Lord, grant me the wisdom to let go of myself and embrace the needs of my family today. Help me to open my heart to those I love and trust your example that true joy is found in giving without cost. Amen.





11th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus is nailed to the cross

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. (Mark 15, 25-27)

Meditation

The executioners have chosen for Jesus the most infamous and humiliating death in view of cancelling his precedence, ensuring he will be forgotten by the entire world and destroying the memory of him in all the people for whom he was the Master.

In the end this served no purpose except to make his presence, his divinity and his royalty dearer. Jesus lived as a Master and he dies as a King.

We are also brought to experience many temptations and difficulties that we tailored to our capacity to endure, but to our shame, we fail to remain steadfast.

Prayer

Jesus, as you forgave your executioners, grant us also the grace to forgive and the strength of your faith, to overcome temptation and that we may become your witnesses. Amen.





12th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus dies on the cross

Then Jesus crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23, 46)

Meditation

On the Cross Jesus has shown the ultimate sign of his love to us. He accepted freely the most horrible tortures so we, his children could be saved.

As families who strive to live good Christian life we also experience the moments of isolation, despair, and pain. When conflicts, diseases, and grief affect us; when we are at the crossroads or are crucified by the evils of our situations we turn our hopes to Jesus because he is the only one who can truly understand us and who can provide us meaning and relief.

As God's children saved by the cross, suffering and foremost love of Christ we can bring the fruits of this generous love to our families and to the world.

Prayer

Jesus, on the Cross you have experienced voluntarily the depths of human suffering in all its dimensions. You, more than anyone else, know the depth of suffering in our hearts and in our families. Please continue accompanying us in our difficult moment, provide us with your comfort and lead us to your Father. Amen.





13th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus is removed from the cross

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (John 19, 33-34)

Meditation

How can we see life spring forth from the death of Jesus? Jesus accomplishes the prophecies. From him life overflows, he lightens up our eyes, he transforms in Life death itself. A family faces no greater difficulty than this experience.

With Mary, we feel the suffering and the sadness in spite of the tenacious hope, when Jesus is brought down from the cross and she receives in her arms, lifeless, his heart pierced. How many families in these times of violence experience similar suffering? Mary, grant them to live like you in faith and hope.

Prayer

Jesus, when water and blood came out from your pierced side, you manifested your divinity to the world by the sacrifice of the cross. Forgive us, Lord, console us, purify us by your blood and free us from sin to rise with you on judgement day. Amen.





14th STATION

FAMILIES ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus is laid in the tomb

Joseph of Arimathea took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn where no one had ever been laid. It was the preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. (Luke 23, 53-54)

Meditation

There are moments in life as well as places we would rather avoid. The same for some people we are uncomfortable with, people we would rather not pay a visit or be around regardless of circumstances. I looked out the window a while back. Things again have gone wrong for our neighbour. Everyone is hurrying about. A stretcher can be seen in the glaring lights of the ambulance.

Surprised, I suddenly notice my mother. She is there, by our neighbour's side. In our home tonight still there is a partying mood. My brother is back. Once again I look outside and then inside myself. Something seeks to put words on a feeling deep in me. Like a courage that is growing. Next time I will be by my neighbor's side.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we wish to embrace in our tenderness people experiencing tragedy. Grant that our faces glow with your lights so that our peace also becomes little by little their peace. Amen.



Concluding Prayer

O Creator, may our families always be that blessed and first community that we honour and cherish.

As you continue to make all things new, may we hear your invitation-in all creation-to receive and share all that is good and true with each other.

O God, we also face many challenges and crises in our lives and world. May our families continue to be the first and constant community that shows us how to live intimately and respectfully with all people, and all Creation.

May all Glory, Praise, Honour and Thanksgiving be shown to you, Father of all mercies and compassion, Jesus Saviour and Guardian of our souls, and Spirit of peace and communion.

(An extract from Prayer for families, 2016, December 9, National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples)



Dismissal

*Let us stand together and welcome God's
peace and blessing.*

*P: / May Almighty God bless us, the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

R: / Amen.

Closing hymn





This *Way of the Cross* is a joint project of fourteen (14) families related to the *Franciscan Family Center in Bethlehem* and the *Commissariat of the Holy Land in Canada*.

The *Franciscan Family Center* was established in Bethlehem in 2004 to provide professional counseling to those Christian families who have suffered psychological trauma from the armed conflict in Bethlehem as well as providing educationally sponsored programs for children and adults. The Center collaborates with the Franciscan Latin parish (St Catherine's) in Bethlehem to promote services and assistance for Christian families.

We express our gratitude to all the families and to all the persons who graciously participated in this project of sharing and prayer.

