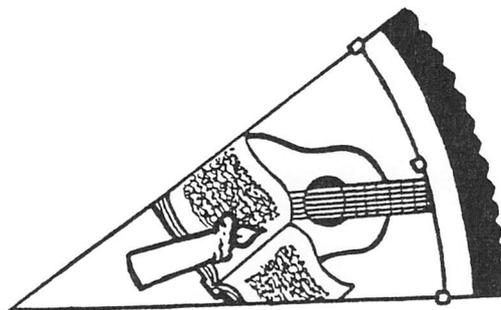


ACTIVITY 12: STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Purpose and Overview: To provide rich opportunities for youth to become involved in parish worship experiences during the Church's liturgical seasons. Special events that offer young adolescents the opportunity to take on leadership roles meet their need for "meaningful participation." These experiences can often be scheduled to highlight the importance of the liturgical year.



The Stations of the Cross, for example, is a Lenten ritual that provides a natural opportunity for youth to study Scripture as well as to prepare and lead a prayer service. Included here is a version of the Stations that was written by a group of early adolescents. To prepare for a parish service during Holy Week, these early adolescents and their parents were each assigned a Station on which to reflect. They were asked to discuss what the Station meant to them and then to write a description, a reflection, and a prayer for that Station.

These Stations of the Cross can be used for class prayer time during Lent. A format has also been included complete with handouts for assisting you in having your early adolescents write their own set.

Materials Needed:

1. If using the Stations included here, you may choose to make copies for each young person (and parents, if invited). For an added touch, ask youth to design a cover of accompanying illustrations to make their own version of a Stations of the Cross booklet. Extra copies could be made available to members of the parish or showcased in the entrance way to the church.
2. If you choose to have youth develop their own stations, each should receive a copy of the Scripture reference sheet handout, a Bible, materials to make visuals or representations of each station.

Time/Length of Activity: The actual celebration of the Stations of the Cross may run from 20-30 minutes, depending on how involved the preparations are. You can enlarge this into four one-hour sessions for both preparation and celebration of the Stations of the Cross. This format provides for learning and discussion. Instructions are included in another section of this activity.

Group Size: As small as 10-15, as large as 45-60. You can use groups of 3-4 to plan each station. With a larger group plans can become more elaborate as groups plan only one of the fifteen. With a small group you may have youth planning 3,4, or 5 Stations per group of 2 to 3 youth. Remember to have adequate adult presence — one per 6-8 youth — to help the process proceed smoothly and keep a pulse on the young peoples' progress and needs.

Another option would be to develop each Station in groups by families, as the sample was developed in conjunction with parents. It could also provide an opportunity for an intergenerational experience, perhaps connecting youth in preparing this with other committees or groups in the parish, particularly older parishioners. This can aid in the worship experience, the learning about older traditions in popular devotions, and development of relationships with adults of the faith community.

Directions:**OPTION ONE: DEVELOPING YOUR OWN STATIONS OF THE CROSS**

If you decide to have youth research and plan the Stations themselves, you may choose to give them traditional Stations of the Cross booklets. If you can distribute a couple of variations, this will provide them with a sense of the possibilities for variety in format and celebration. You can invite the young people to write their own reflections, similar to the sample Stations. They should connect their own everyday experiences as young people with what Jesus experienced.

Included with the activity is a handout with Scripture references for each station. Each individual or group will need Bibles.

Format for Developing Stations of the Cross

1. Description of the Station: Might include reading a Scripture passage with simultaneous acting-out of the event.
2. Reflection on Station: Connection of Jesus' experience to our own life experience.
3. Quiet Reflection: A short but definite moment for reflection.
4. Prayer: Directed to Jesus requesting a grace or ability connected with the Station and the reflection.

You may choose to provide some music, or a song to sing, or a phrase to repeat that is the link from Station to Station. A sample song refrain that would be useable is "I have decided to follow Jesus." Consult your music books in the parish for this song or other suitable songs.

Session Designs for Preparing Stations of the Cross**Session I (1 hour)**

1. Introduce the season of Lent and the Stations of the Cross by surfacing youth stories of journeys taken, the obstacles on the way, and individuals who assisted them.
2. Make the connection to Lent as a time of celebrating the journey of Jesus' life — joys experienced, obstacles encountered, significant people. Make the transition to the Stations of the Cross as the Church's traditional way of remembering, celebrating, and being with Jesus on his most difficult and final journey—the journey to the Cross.
3. Distribute copies of Stations of the Cross booklets and introduce the idea of planning your own Stations of the Cross. Review each station.
4. Distribute planning sheets (Stations of the Cross Service and Scripture Readings for the Stations of the Cross) and assign groups to plan each station. Allow time for planning. Generate energy/creativity with encouragement.

Session II (1 hour)

1. Allow additional time for planning and writing.
2. Invite each group to work on its Stations.
3. Allow youth to brainstorm creative expressions (acting out, visuals, use of song, etc.) for each Station. Give the young people time to create their creative expressions.

Visuals of each Station can be placed by each Station in the church so that they could be visible to the parish community during Lent. They could also be placed out of doors and around the parish property, if appropriate, for the actual celebration of the Stations. This might enhance the sense of being on pilgrimage with Christ, particularly if you are enacting it as well as visualizing it.

4. Discuss who and how they will invite people to the Stations of the Cross.

Youth may celebrate the Stations themselves, or they may choose to invite target groups from the parish to join them. Making whatever they create visible or printing their descriptions of each Station as a parish bulletin insert for use is a great opportunity to provide a quality, youth-created, seasonal worship experience for the parish and a way to highlight early adolescents' participation in this praying community.

Session III (1 hour)

1. Complete the creation of the creative expressions and share them with each other.
2. Rehearse the celebration.

For the actual celebration of the Stations, you may choose to have a young person portray Jesus and your group follow from Station to Station in your parish church. If so, you will need costuming (simple is best) and perhaps a cross and other props, as desired.

Last Gathering: Celebration of the Stations of the Cross (1 hour)

At the end of the celebration, or at a next gathering time, you may ask youth (and any adults who were present with them) to discuss the experience with completions to the following open-ended statements:

About Jesus I learned...
 About our experience I feel...
 One thing I want to remember is...

This activity provides opportunity for effective catechesis in looking at Jesus' life and struggles as connected to the life of the young people, as well as a powerful worship experience. Enjoy it!

OPTION TWO: CELEBRATING THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS USING THE ENCLOSED DESIGN

Using the prepared Stations of the Cross, gather the young people for a rehearsal meeting. Give each of them copies of a the service and the Scripture readings. In your rehearsal review the Scripture readings with the young people as you move from Station to Station.

For the actual celebration of the Stations, you may choose to have a young person portray Jesus and your group follow from Station to Station in your parish church. If so, you will need costuming (simple is best) and perhaps a cross and other props, as desired.

Another option is to have youth create visuals of each Station as part of the preparation. These could be placed by each Station in the church so that they could be visible to the parish community during Lent. They could also be placed out of doors and around the parish property, if appropriate, for the actual celebration of the Stations. This might enhance the sense of being on pilgrimage with Christ, particularly if you are enacting it as well as visualizing it.

Youth may celebrate the Stations themselves or they may choose to invite target groups from the parish to join them. Making whatever they create visible or printing their descriptions of each

Station as a parish bulletin insert is a great opportunity to provide a quality, youth-created, seasonal worship experience for the parish and simply to highlight early adolescents' participation in this praying community.

Variations

1. You might also try Easter Season Stations which could recount Resurrection appearances and messages of Jesus from the end of each Gospel. Examples: Emmaus (Luke 24), Thomas (John 20).
 2. A third set of Stations might be 15 or so events from Acts of the Apostles, perhaps starting with Pentecost (Acts 2) and recounting important moments in the life of the early "followers of the Way" (as followers of Jesus were named before the name Christian came about).
- Either of the above options could complement the Lenten Stations experience or be done independently and celebrated during the Easter Season.

Stations of the Cross Service

First Station: Jesus is unjustly condemned

Jesus is unfairly accused and put on trial for loving and caring for others. Against his better judgment, Pilate convicts Jesus to please the crowd.

Reflection: Sometimes we meet people and pre-judge them because of the way they look or act, or because they have a different way of looking at things than we do. Sometimes, against our better judgment, we are unfair and follow the crowd, forgetting our own convictions.

Prayer: Jesus, help us to be fair and help us not to judge others before we take the time to get to know them. Help us also to stand up for what we believe in. Jesus, help us to take the right path and do the right thing so we can be loving and caring as you are.

Second Station: Jesus takes up his Cross

Jesus takes on the great burden of carrying the Cross for us. Though he is not guilty of any crime, he accepts the heavy Cross and carries it to show how much he loves us.

Reflection: We must accept our own responsibilities as Jesus accepted his. When at times our own cross seems too heavy, we must stop and think of Jesus and how he suffered for us.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, when we carry our crosses, we are, in a way, carrying yours with you. Even though we bear only a sliver of your Cross, you are there to carry all of ours. Help us to remember this always.

Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

The cross is heavy, and Jesus is weak. The road is rough and the soldiers are constantly pushing him along. All of a sudden he stumbles and falls.

Reflection: Many are the times that we make mistakes in life and hurt ourselves and others. Sometimes in school, when we meet a new student, we judge him or her wrongly, or say mean things because of the way that person looks. Often the person turns out to be very nice. Many are the times that we fall because we don't listen to our parents, we don't do our homework, or we cheat on tests.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, we all make mistakes and fall. Please help us to see the good in everyone we meet. Help us to be a friend and help us to try to understand how others feel. Help us to realize that when we don't study and prepare our school work we are hurting ourselves.

Fourth Station: Jesus meets Mary

Somewhere along the road Mary catches a glimpse of her son and for a moment their eyes meet. Imagine the pain in her eyes because she is unable to help her son in his need and pain.

Reflection: A good mother is a loving and forgiving person, one who shares our sorrow and pain as though they were her own. Our joy is her joy. Our sadness is her sadness.

Prayer: Lord, help us to give strength to others who are in need. Help us to share our feelings with others, especially our mothers. And, help us to lessen the burdens they bear.

Fifth Station: Simon helps carry the cross

Simon is just an ordinary person who is selected out of the crowd to help Jesus. Simon's initial unwillingness turns to happiness by the time they reach Calvary.

Reflection: Jesus teaches us to be helpful and charitable to our brothers and sisters. Everyone has bad days, but like Simon's experience, these days can turn out to be the most important days of our lives. Have you helped anyone lately?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, make us ready and willing to help our neighbor. Help us appreciate our obligation to get involved with our brothers and sisters. Let us always seek your will and trust in you to bring good out of even the most difficult situations.

Sixth Station: Veronica consoles Jesus

The crowd is pressing in on all sides. Jesus is hot and sweaty and the blood running into his eyes makes it difficult to see. Out of the crowd comes a woman, Veronica, who, despite the soldiers, makes her way to Jesus and wipes his face.

Reflection: We have to be more daring, like Veronica, and not always give second thoughts to helping someone. We should offer our help willingly without being forced and without always having to be asked.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to do the right thing for all people at all times. Help us to realize that whatever we do for them, we do for you.

Seventh Station: Jesus falls again

Jesus falls yet another time. The cross seems heavier now and the pain more intense. Yet no one there could relieve his suffering. He had to suffer alone.

Reflection: There are times that, like Jesus, we must stand alone and not depend on others. Although we may find that others may not agree with us, we have to be our own person.

Prayer: Lord, give us the strength to please you even when our friends refuse to do what is right. Give us your strength to help us withstand the suffering that comes from peer pressure as a result of trying to do the right thing.

Eighth Station: Jesus consoles the women and children

Despite his own suffering, Jesus takes time to show his concern for the women and children in the crowd.

Reflection: Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our own problems and concerns that we think of nothing else. Nothing could be more important. The good Lord teaches us to concern ourselves with the suffering of other people.

Prayer: Jesus, you love us all forever. May your suffering make us strong and may it make us as compassionate to others as you were.

Ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time

Jesus falls for the third time under the burden of the cross, only to rise again. The falling is the only Station repeated. Perhaps this is to emphasize that Jesus always rises. He does not stay down under his burden; he gets up.

Reflection: Jesus sets an example for all of us by rising again and again. We fall every day and are angry. We sometimes hurt our family members, the ones who care the most. We must try again, even though we may fall.

Prayer: Lord, when we are really down, help us remember that you once were there, but you got up again and again. Rather than find blame, let us help one another to get up and try again.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

Jesus stands atop the hill and is stripped of all that he has left in the world. His garments are divided among the soldiers who cast lots to see who will get what.

Reflection: Jesus teaches us that we should value people more than things. We don't always treat people the way we should. We should make an effort to accept people for who they are. What we value today we often throw away tomorrow.

Prayer: Lord, everything that I possess belongs to you. Everything I do, I try to do in your name. Please help me extend myself to help others.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

Jesus has been stripped of his garments. They place him down on the cross, and nails are driven through his hands and feet by the soldiers.

Reflection: In everyday life, our freedom of movement is often curtailed as we are nailed to and must carry our own private cross.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us each day to carry our own crosses. Help us also forgive those who nail us and others to the cross. Teach us to use the freedom you have given us so that our actions may always give you praise.

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies

Jesus knows that now everything has been completed. He drinks the wine and says, "It is finished." Then he bows his head and gives up his spirit.

Reflection: It was so unnecessary for Jesus to die this way. He was not a criminal. He had done no wrong. So often that seems the way in life, too. Look at the mangled body being cut out of that wreck on the highway — a death perhaps caused by careless speeding or drunk driving. Look at the thousands of times people are killed each day through abortion, war, or acts of violence. Jesus said, as long as you did it to one of these, you did it to me.

Prayer: Christ, our brother, who died that we might have life, help us to be dedicated to the cause of preserving life and of helping our brothers and sisters come to a fuller enjoyment of it.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

The limp, pale, lifeless body of Jesus is taken down from the cross and placed in the arms of Mary. It has no pulse, no breath, no heartbeat. Mary's heart nearly breaks with pain.

Reflection: The suffering is over and the body of Jesus now rests peacefully in the arms of his mother. The body of Jesus teaches me that the love of people, the gift of peace, and the carrying of the cross are all parts of the same Christian life. Looking at Jesus, I know that when the life of carrying the cross ends, the love and peace remain.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in looking at your body we find hope for our lives. Help us to embrace and accept our crosses. Let our arms be open and never let them close to anyone. We know that if we can only keep our arms open, the gift of peace will reign in our hearts.

Fourteenth Station: The burial of Jesus

Jesus is placed in the tomb and remains there for three days. With his resurrection, he comes back to show his never-ending love for us, to help us, and to show us the way to a better Christian life.

Reflection: When Jesus died on the cross and was buried, in a sense all of the people around him died because of their ignorance and closed minds. When Jesus came back to life, all people had a new beginning in life, love, and happiness. Jesus offered us a chance to learn and love more as a result of his example and the promise of the Spirit to help us.

Prayer: Jesus, help us to be alert and open-minded so that we can learn to love and help others the way you have shown us. If we could do this, we could make and live in a better world today.

Fifteenth Station: Jesus goes to his Father

When the women get to the tomb to anoint Jesus with oils, they find the tomb empty. Jesus is gone, and an angel announces the resurrection of the Lord.

Reflection: Jesus has died, but he will always be with us, even when we feel empty. He has given us faith and we believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit even though we cannot see them.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, we praise you and even though we may not be able to see you physically or experience your presence, we know you are always there to fill us with your love.

Scripture Readings for the Stations of the Cross

First Station: Jesus is unjustly condemned

Matthew 26: 57-68	Jesus before the Sanhedrin
Matthew 27: 11-26	Jesus before Pilate
Mark 15: 1-15	Jesus before Pilate
Luke 22: 66-71	Jesus before the Sanhedrin
Luke 23: 1-25	Jesus before Pilate and Herod and sentence of death
John 18: 19-24	Jesus before Annas
John 18: 28-19: 16	Jesus before Pilate

Second Station: Jesus takes up his Cross

Matthew 27: 27-31	Mocked by soldiers, led off to be crucified
Mark 15: 16-20	Mocked by soldiers, led off to be crucified
Luke 23: 25b	Led off to be crucified
John 18: 16-17	Jesus takes up his Cross

Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

This is one (of a few) of the Stations of the Cross without reference in Scripture. However, it is more than logical that Jesus fell under all the weight of the wood he carried especially given that he had been up all night and scourged too. (The same group may plan all three "falls" and connect them by theme or have the three groups consult with each other)

Fourth Station: Jesus meets Mary

There is no scriptural reference for this meeting with his mother as he carried the cross. However John 19:25-27 might be used since Mary is shown here by Jesus' cross. Surely she saw him carry it. If you use John 19, you may want to change the order of the Stations, making this one after what is now the eleventh (Jesus is nailed to the cross) and moving the rest forward. John 19 helps show Mary as someone who would mother/nurture the new church in her care for those who were Jesus' followers.

Fifth Station: Simon helps Jesus carry the cross

Luke 23: 26
Mark 15:21

Sixth Station: Veronica consoles Jesus

No scriptural reference. The best source might be the reflections from other sample Stations of the Cross booklets.

Seventh Station: Jesus falls again

See Third Station

Eighth Station: Jesus consoles the women and children

Luke 23: 27-32