Way of the Cross
A Reflection on Social Justice

Written by Audrey Ferrer
Prayers for each station adapted from the “Native Stations of the Cross”

Notes:
The video can be played first. Then the Powerpoint slides can be shown to accompany each station, followed by the virtue slides for the closing prayer. Depending on the number of participants, you can have a Leader and a Reader for each station.

Opening Prayer

Leader: Holy Mother, our Compassionate and Caring Lord,
       We are Your children, brothers and sisters, living
       In this amazing world that You Created
       You inspire us to live together joyfully, peacefully, and in well-being
       But it is a world of beauty punctuated by
       Sadness, poverty, hunger, and violence
       Especially for those who live in the Global South

Reader: It is all too easy to focus only on ourselves
        And to place our needs and desires above others.
        It is common for us to think:
        “I don’t want to know about the people suffering. It only makes me sad.”
        “I’m only one person and I can’t change what is happening there.”
        “I’ve already given enough money or time and I’m tired”
        Please remind us Lord, as we may feel exhausted
        Emotionally, spiritually, and financially,
        That Jesus walked a difficult path in choosing to give hope to others.

All: As we pray the Stations of the Cross, please help us to reflect on
     How we can follow in the footsteps of Jesus,
     In solidarity with those who are suffering,
     And empower us to aid our brothers and sisters
     With whatever privileged means we have
     That we choose the way of love, compassion and generosity
     Over greed, apathy and willful ignorance.
     You gave your only Son to redeem us and
     We humbly pray for your love, mercy, and grace in forgiving our faults
     Please grant us strength and courage to make life-giving choices.
Station One

LEADER: Jesus is condemned… (in solidarity with a monk protesting for a free Tibet)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: Jesus begins his journey to the cross by being betrayed. Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent, but he does not want any trouble that day so he turns away from Jesus and does not help him.

READER 1: This Tibetan monk is only one of many in the world who speak out against injustice and fight for freedom and basic human rights. Some are arrested, beaten, tortured or murdered.

ALL: Lord, how many times have we let something happen to others because we were afraid to speak out or didn’t want to be bothered? How many times have we looked away when someone was being hurt or needed help? We pray for those souls who have died or are being persecuted because they had the courage to stand up for what is right. We pray for the time and energy to respond to any calls for action, whether it is to sign a petition or write letters to support the oppressed. We pray especially for those in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria. May you help grant an end to the turmoil and the peace of liberation. Lord Jesus, let us never turn away from those in need and “sentence” them to die.

Station Two

LEADER: Jesus carries the cross… (of a soldier cradling a wounded child)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: Jesus is taken out to the street and a heavy wooden cross is placed on his shoulders. He is already weak from hunger and beatings, but he carries the cross because he wants to.

READER 2: Many in the Global South have a difficult cross to carry, especially in lands devastated by war and violence. Even when we in the north, try to help, there is only so much that can be done to protect civilians – the greatest casualties are those who are innocent and helpless.

ALL: Each of us has something that is sad and hard to carry. Each of us has something we need courage to face. Jesus challenged us one time when he said: “unless you take up your cross and follow me you cannot be called my disciple.” Lord, give us grace to face hard and difficult things so that our hearts and spirits can grow and be like yours. We pray you grant the same to our brothers and sisters in war-torn areas, and to the peacekeeping forces who risk their lives to help.
Station Three

LEADER: Jesus falls the first time… (as Christians flee persecution in Iraq)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: The road to the place of execution is outside the city. It is long and steep at times. As Jesus carries his cross, he begins to feel weak and dizzy. Finally he falls to the ground and has to be helped up again.

READER 3: Christians in Iraq are only one group of many that are persecuted because of their religious beliefs: The Falun Gong in China, the Shia in Afghanistan; Jews and Muslims face rising anti-semitism and Islamophobia. Each group has experienced violence and hatred that threatens to overwhelm.

ALL: Whenever we see someone who is of a different faith tradition, help us to remember that Jesus welcomed all with love. We pray for greater understanding, respect, and courage to grow in closer community with those of other faiths. Please give peace and comfort to our brothers and sisters who are persecuted because of their beliefs.

Station Four

LEADER: Jesus meets his mother… (as she is overcome by grief trying to feed her homeless son)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: Jesus looks up and sees his mother, Mary, who is standing by the side of the road. They do not speak but they see all they need to know in one another's eyes. Both are filled with pain and love.

READER 4: What mother can stand to see her child suffering? Like this homeless woman, we sometimes feel helpless or a failure to stop those we love from getting hurt. Gandhi once said, “Poverty is the worst form of violence” and it is pervasive throughout the Global South where parents have difficulty feeding their children. There are 925 million (or 1 of every 7 people) in the world who are malnourished, primarily in developing countries. In Canada, the use of food banks has risen to the highest level on record, serving over 867,000 – mainly families with children. Enough food is produced to feed everyone in the world, yet not all can feast at the table.

ALL: How often do we eat, taking food for granted? With the current economic crisis and the many factors that keep families poor and malnourished, Lord, we pray that you provide for those in need. We pray for generous hearts that we may offer some of what we have to help those who are hungry here and abroad – whether it be donating to charities, food
banks, or buying fair trade. Mother grace, we pray for gratitude to appreciate all the blessings we have. Let us remember the words of Jesus, “As long as you did it for one of these least ones, you did it for me!”

Station Five

LEADER: Simon helps Jesus… (bear the burden when children have no time to play or study)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: Jesus seemed to be staggering a lot, and the soldiers were worried that Jesus wasn’t going to make it. So they pulled a man out of the crowd and made him help Jesus carry the cross.

READER 5: Children are precious in our lives and are considered a blessing. How often does a child’s smile or laughter brighten our day? In some countries children have little time to play or study because they are taken from their homes and forced to become soldiers. Or children cannot attend school because they cannot afford an education. Instead they must work long hours labouring in unsafe conditions.

ALL: We can take up the cross like Simon and help children overseas by supporting non-profit organizations like War Child Canada, Free the Children, or Canadian Feed the Children. God our Teacher, we pray for the little ones who eke out a meager existence, that they may have an opportunity to learn and earn a safe and respectable livelihood while growing in the warmth of their loving family.

Station Six

LEADER: Veronica wipes Jesus’ face (when women dare to show compassion for the helpless)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: Sometimes during a game, no one sees the person who brings the towels and water, but they are there helping the players just the same. In the same way, a woman stepped forward from the crowd at just the right moment and wiped the blood and sweat off Jesus’ suffering face. Others saw a criminal but she saw the face of a good man and she gave him kindness and respect.

READER 6: While women perform 66% of the world’s work, they receive only 10% of the world’s income, and own only 1% of the world’s land. They are less likely to receive an education and are often oppressed in diverse ways. Yet despite this, some women find the courage and dare to help others even at risk of their own lives. Some rise above the restrictions placed on them by their society to demand fairness and justice for all.
ALL: Let us pray for the awareness and boldness that Veronica showed that we may look beyond our own concerns and see people in their true light – as sons and daughters of God. We pray for all women who are oppressed, that they may be as courageous as Veronica in fighting for respect and equal rights and in serving those in need.

Station Seven

LEADER: Jesus falls a second time… (crushed by war, famine and disease in Somalia)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: In spite of all the help, Jesus falls to the ground again. He has lost a lot of blood and he struggles hard to get up onto his feet. Finally he gets up and continues down the road. Jesus is determined to get to the top of the hill following his father’s holy plan.

READER 7: We know what it means to fall down and have to pick ourselves up again. Sometimes we feel discouraged, or ashamed. It’s hard to get up and start again and continue on. In countries like Somalia, the Sudan or other parts of Africa, people not only struggle with war and hunger, but with a myriad of diseases. AIDS has devastated communities leaving many orphans. Every 30 seconds, a child dies from malaria. Meanwhile, many North Americans suffer from heart disease, cancer, and other illnesses.

ALL: Compassionate God, we pray for your aid in helping us as we fall and stumble through whatever difficulties we face. We pray especially for those who suffer in health, where each moment is a struggle of pain or despair. We remember Jesus once said to a sick person: “Your faith has made you well”. May the very sick and their families have faith in You to continue a hard journey knowing You love them.

Station Eight

LEADER: Jesus comforts the women… (oppressed in the sex slave trade)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: Jesus looks up and this time sees a group of women crying for him. All they can give him are their tears of anguish and despair. Jesus reminds them that they must care for themselves and their children; that there is hope.

READER 8: Sometimes all we can do for others is to listen to them and cry with them while they go through a period of suffering. Our tears are all we can give to them to show that we care and that they are not alone. Such is the situation of many people who are forced into economic and sexual labour. Of the estimated 2.4 million people that are
trafficked at any given time, approximately 1 in 5 victims are children and two-thirds are women.7

ALL: Jesus expressed: “Blessed are they who are mourning for they shall find comfort.” We pray that all whom need comfort shall also find hope, peace, and serenity. We pray for those who are trafficked that You grant them freedom as well.

Station Nine

LEADER: Jesus falls the third time… (when we ignore the true image of God in one another)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: Jesus falls a third and last time. It seems as though he does not have the strength to go on, but the soldiers force him to his feet. This man must be executed on the cross. Those are their orders. He must be made an example.

READER 9: Sometimes we can be like those soldiers just following orders, never investing anything of ourselves in what we are doing, just going through the motions. We overlook the needs people have because we’re too busy to get involved or because of fear. How many times have we walked by a homeless person trying to avoid making eye contact? Or in the Global South, when we hear about conflict or natural disasters, we often get tired hearing about the long-term situation of the countless refugees who have lost their homes.

ALL: God our Provider, we pray for Your grace in helping the 150,000 or so Canadians that are homeless because of inaffordable housing, low income, mental health and/or substance abuse issues, family conflict, violence, or job loss.8 We also pray for your providence in helping with shelter and food for the 15 million refugees around the world.9 May they find a home and refuge in You.

Station Ten

LEADER: Jesus is stripped… (of dignity, safety and fair wages among those who work in sweatshops)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you bring hope to the world.

LEADER: Exhausted, Jesus arrives at the top of the hill called Golgotha. He is brutally stripped of his clothing and his dignity and yet he stands proudly awaiting his fate. His vision of what he must do has lead him here. He has come to do the will of the Father, and nothing will stop him now. His love for us is too strong. He wants to give himself up for us to show us that we are truly loved by God.
READER 10: God sent Jesus out of love to do something extremely difficult. Sometimes when we think of those we love, we know we would do the same and meet any challenge. Those who are working in sweatshops do so out of desperation and love to care for their family. They may work extremely long hours in conditions with dangerous equipment, unsafe drinking water, unbearable temperatures and poor air circulation. They not only accept these health risks, but can also suffer from verbal, physical and sexual abuse. Those who speak up for their rights publicly, may be fired, beaten, or worse, murdered. But these workers have little choice. In this form of modern slavery, they accept their crucifix for the ones they love.9

ALL: God our Guardian, protect and uphold all workers who suffer in sweatshops. We pray that factories improve the conditions of labourers, treating them with greater dignity and respect. We also pray that we, as consumers, are more proactive in demanding companies to make sweatshop-free products.

Station Eleven

LEADER: Jesus is nailed to the cross... (when the world values some lives less than others)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: The sound of the hammer pounding the nails pierces everyone there and sends a shudder through the crowd. Nailed, he is raised high for all to see and mock. By many he is viewed as just another worthless criminal. By the Jewish leaders he is viewed as a necessary scapegoat to appease the Romans so they won’t come after them. But the faithful present are stunned and sickened by the destruction of this innocent loving man.

READER 11: God takes the cross that evil people have nailed him to and turns it into a tree of life. Jesus shows us the love that God has for us his children. Yet we find it difficult to love as Jesus and God did. We are ready to make choices and act in ways that lead to death, rather than life – whether it is a spiritual, emotional, economic or literal death, we are ready to drive the nails into the cross for lack of love. Such is the case of abortion or in cases where society accepts the murder of innocent citizens (as in the Holocaust).

ALL: God of enlightenment, we pray for your revelation of love to transform our choices and actions into ones that offer Jesus’ tree of life. We pray that you offer support to those who are considering abortion and reveal to them the hope and beauty of a new life.

Station Twelve

LEADER: Jesus dies on the cross... (as we destroy the nature, food, and water of indigenous communities)

ALL SING: JESUS REMEMBER ME, WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM.

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ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: To some, Jesus looks poor and weak on the cross when he dies. He is covered with blood and dirt. He looks like a real loser. But for those who know how to really see, he is brave and victorious for he has captured the prize, the salvation of our lives at the price of his. When the end comes, he cries out in a loud voice: “Father, I place my life in your hands.” It is finished. He has kept his promise.

READER 12: Jesus once said, “Greater love than this no one has, that they lay down their life for their friends.” Are we ready to make sacrifices as Jesus did? Many indigenous communities are suffering because of greed and consumer demands. Nature is being destroyed an overwhelming rate for the sake of development and resources, whether it is through tar sands, clear-cutting tropical rainforests for cattle or monoculture crops, or for destructive mining practices – we have devastated the lives of countless indigenous communities whose land, water, and food, continue to disappear.

ALL: God our Creator, we pray for reverence to see Your presence in all nature so that we may respect and love it as family. Please help us to live a more simple life that we use nature’s resources more wisely – whether it is energy, food, water or land, may we cherish these as gifts and not as entitlements. We also pray for aid in helping indigenous communities (such as the First Nations in Alberta) recover their land, heritage, and traditions and that we may uphold their rights.

Station Thirteen

LEADER: The body of Jesus is taken down… (by those not afraid to support the marginalized)

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER: The night before Jesus died, he took bread into his hands, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said: “Take and eat, this is my body, broken for you.” And he took the cup of wine and said: “This is my blood poured out for you.” There are no words to express how it feels when someone you love dies. So it was for the mother of Jesus and those of his followers who stayed to help remove the body of their dear friend. They were not afraid to show they cared, or were associated with Jesus.

READER 13: Take, eat and drink. Do this in remembrance of me. Sometimes it is difficult to “pour ourselves out” to help those who are marginalized. We may be afraid of associating with peers who don’t meet socially acceptable standards (whether it is based on skin colour, sexual orientation, age, etc.) Especially among GLBT youth (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) who suffer from intolerance, discrimination, rejection, and abuse, the rate of suicide is 2 or 3 times greater than their peers.
ALL: Jesus, Lamb of God, may we take your words to heart so that we too may “be broken and poured out”, making a sacrifice where necessary. May we have the courage to risk shame, harassment, isolation or persecution when showing our support for the marginalized. May You give strength and perseverance to those who are GLBT, differently abled, mentally ill, or any others who feel socially isolated, that they may cope with patience knowing Your love.

**Station Fourteen**

LEADER: Jesus is buried… (in the unmarked mass grave sites of past and ongoing genocides.

ALL: We honor you Jesus and we thank you. For it is by your Cross you bring hope to the world.

LEADER: Jesus was a poor man who owned nothing so his friends have to borrow a grave. Joseph of Arimathea offers a tomb he had made for the day of his death. He is honored to give it for the Master’s burial. And we see once again that Jesus fulfills the words he spoke about himself: “Even the foxes have holes, but I have nowhere to lay my head.”

READER 14: The same can be said of communities who have been murdered in past and ongoing genocides – whether it was in Armenia, Nazi Europe, Bosnia-Serbia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, or Sudan, many were buried in unmarked mass grave sites. In all these genocides there were perpetrators who committed murder, bystanders who allowed it to happen, and the victims who died. Many people in the affected communities or neighbouring nations chose to be bystanders, taking the quiet and easy way out.

ALL: Jesus stood in a wheat field once and said: “Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a seed.” And so it must be with us. We pray that we take a stance and intervene if we witness someone being hurt by another. We pray for all victims of violence, may their souls rest in Your love. Finally, we pray for the families who have lost loved ones. Please grant them peace and comfort despite not being able to visit their loved one at a grave site,

**Closing Prayer** (Slide 15)

LEADER: Jesus’ friends are afraid that this is the end of Jesus. But surely as spring follows winter and daylight follows the dark night, Jesus proves that death has no more power over us. New life always follows after death.

So we witness Jesus resurrects… from the tomb of injustice and gives us the power to follow Him with …

(change each slide for each point below, which is read by a different participant)
• the generous love of Blessed Mother Teresa
• the deep compassion and commitment of Jean Vanier to love
• the conviction of Bishop Oscar Romero inspiring solidarity in El Salvador
• the empathy of 6-yr old Ryan Hreljak in building water wells for the poor
• the courage of St. Maximilian Kolbe as he risked and gave his life to save Jews
• the hospitality of Mary Jo Leddy in welcoming and supporting refugees
• the patience of Cesar Chavez in securing better working conditions for farmers
• the humility of St. Josephine Bakhita who served others with God’s grace
• the hope that Fr. John Tae-Seok Lee gave to lepers in the Sudan
• the perseverance of Dorothy Day, trying to aid the poor working class of America
• the spirit of stewardship shown in Dian Fossey’s conservation work to save gorillas
• the dedication of Fr. Bob Holmes with the Christian Peacemakers Team
• the passion of Marc and Craig Kielburger in supporting children around the world
• the generosity shown for local and international needs (whether it is through Sr. Susan Moran and the “Out of the Cold Program” or through Development & Peace)
• faith as dutifully lived by Pope John Paul II and the multitude of Catholics expressing their faith celebrating World Youth Day

LEADER: “Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies it produces much fruit....If anyone would serve me let him follow me.” (Jn 12: 24, 26)

ALL: Loving Jesus, let us die with you on the cross and resurrect with you in eternal hope… (show last slide) for it is by your cross you have redeemed the world. Amen.
References for “Way of the Cross: A Reflection on Social Justice”


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