

to be when You first created humankind. to restore the world one act at a time to the way You intended it may be instruments of Your peace, that You might work through us Your hope for the world. And we open our lives to You, that they You, that they might be transformed with a deep understanding of and brothers who need Your love the most. We open our hearts to us. We open our hands to You, that they might serve our sisters like Jesus, to love our enemies and to forgive those who persecute you through our actions. We thank you by doing our best to be words, for words are not enough; we thank



Let us Pray: Lord, we thank you for the gift of Your Son. We thank you not only with

is ever to be built. taught and embraced if a culture of life must not be altered or ignored but teaching of Christ. His message of love and nonviolence The empty tomb is a symbol and confirmation of this others. The antidote to violence is love, not more violence.” brightly when we demand respect for each other and every punishment, “Our witness to respect for life shines most words of the US Catholic Bishops’ statement on capital here today because we believe this. We believe in the when nonviolence meets violence. We are all gathered

The Fifteenth Station The Resurrection

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.
Reader: When the women arrived at dawn on the first day of the week to see the tomb, the stone was rolled away. Scared and reluctant, they entered and were startled when they saw a man dressed in white sitting down. He said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen. Come see the place where he lay. Then quickly go tell the disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead.’” They left the tomb seized with terror and amazement. *(Taken from Mark 16)*
“He is not here. He is risen!” These words represent the most significant words ever said throughout time. These few words remove all hopelessness. Jesus, you have overcome violence, injustice, and even death. Your profound example of nonviolence and acceptance of suffering demonstrates that new life does indeed prevail



The movement through the stations is intended to be an encounter with what it truly means to be loved and should move us to embrace Christ with deeper love and greater gratitude. We are never alone, and the arms of a Loving God are always outstretched for us.

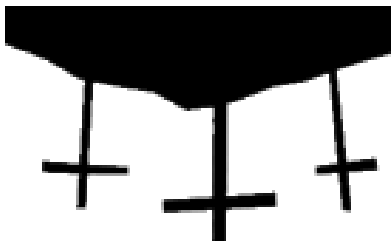
and emotions as well. form is meant to engage not just your head, but your heart The experience is sobering, and personal. This prayer touch with the ultimate horizon of hope- the resurrection. The stations are not meant to depress, but to put us in contemplating the meaning of His life, death, and resurrection. condensed way of walking in the footsteps of Christ while Since we cannot all take a trip to Jerusalem, the stations are a “virtual pilgrimage.”

on the cross means to you *personally*. the mystery of who Jesus is and what His sacrifice praying with your imagination so as to contemplate the stations of the cross provide a powerful way of

Praying the Stations of the Cross

The First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

Leader: We Adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world
Leader: Jesus is condemned to death. Jesus had nothing but love for people, yet He was condemned to die a brutal death. Yet, while they judged, they were compelled to acquit Him. Judas, who betrayed Him, said, " I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood."
Pilate, who sentenced Him, said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person."
And the Centurion, who saw Him crucified said, "Indeed this was a just man."
Let us pray:
Jesus, today we take up the journey with You. We go forth to witness the dignity of all life. We go forth counting on Your grace to help us do the works of justice and mercy with sincere hearts, in Your name, who taught us how to live. Amen



Let us Pray: Lord, today we pray that our efforts may bring our society one step closer to building culture of life. Whether it has a noticeable or immediate impact, we know that this journey has deeply impacted each of us internally, and we thank you for that.

In December of 2005, the US Catholic Bishops renewed their "common conviction that it is time for our nation to abandon the illusion that we can protect life by taking it. Ending the use of the death penalty would be one important step away from a culture of death to building a culture of life."

In a court trial between the death penalty or life without parole, every encounter with taking someone's life as punishment for wrongdoing must weigh its "social and moral dimensions."

The Thirteenth Station Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader: On the dark night of Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea, having asked and received permission from Pontius Pilate, came sadly to the cross to remove Jesus' mutilated and lifeless body. As gently as if Jesus were a child sleeping, he wraps the body in a linen cloth and prepares it for burial.

Any encounter with death is usually accompanied by feelings of sadness, emptiness, helplessness, and many times unanswered questions. When one has a connection with death as penalty, no matter how loose the connection may be, one has to wonder about its fairness and effectiveness.

Whether your connection to death as penalty is reflecting on Jesus' crucifixion, or writing a research paper about capital punishment, or standing outside a prison during a prayer vigil while an execution is taking place, or deciding

The Third Station: Jesus Falls for the First Time

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader: Exhaustion sets in; your muscles can no longer support the weight that you carry. You fight to maintain focus, balance, a steady pace, but the road is uneven and a stumble leads to a fall. In your attempt to regain footing, you lose all power. The pain you experience is blinding, beyond any imaginable threshold. Thorns dig in, wounds scream out, muscles rebel yet you dare to get up; you stay on the path. Love urges you on. Lord, what an example you give me.

Reflection: Lord you know the places where I have not met the challenges before me. You have seen the places where I have stumbled, and the rocky roads that at times I find myself on. Don't let me fall without the strength to draw on your grace to get up again and live my faith to its deepest extent. Help me look for the signs of hope that grasp me by the heart and lift me up again.

"Among the signs of hope we should also count the spread, at many levels of public opinion, of a new sensitivity ever more opposed to war as an instrument for the resolution of conflicts between peoples, and become increasingly oriented to finding effective but "non-violent" means to counter the armed aggressor. In the same perspective there is evidence of a growing public opposition to the death penalty, even when such a penalty is seen as a kind of "legitimate defense" on the part of society. Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform." (#27, *The Gospel of Life*, John Paul II)

Let us Pray: *The path we are on and the obstacles we face on the road of life can sometimes cause us to lose our strength and to stumble. The messages of our culture can be disorienting and misleading. The need to be accepted and to fit in among peers can cause us to do things that don't reflect our deeper choices or values. All of these things can trip us up. Grant me your strength, Lord, to get up when I fall and see myself embraced in your outstretched arms of mercy on the cross.*



immense love. How difficult it is for us to truly grasp this. Through your willing acceptance of the cross, you unmasked the illusion that violence, and any system that employs it, may somehow lead to justice. "The use of the death penalty ought to be abandoned not only because of what it does to those who are executed, but for what it does to all of society... The cycle of violence diminishes all of us." (*Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death, USCCB statement on capital punishment.*)

Let us Pray: Lent is an opportune time to attempt to comprehend your ultimate act of self-sacrifice. We are here right now on this long and challenging journey because we want to walk with you, with those sentenced to death, and with all victims of violence. Like you, we humbly accept whatever suffering may come. We are on this journey out of our love for you.

The Eleventh Station Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader: When you reached Golgotha at the top of the hill, your cross was placed on the ground. Without resistance, you laid upon it, spreading out your arms. The Roman soldiers took large nails and a hammer and nailed you to the cross. They did the same for two criminals, one on your right and one on your left. All three crosses were lifted upright so that everyone could see. The soldiers cast lots to divide your clothes as those watching called out, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Messiah!" In the midst of all this hatred and cruelty, you called out to God, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus, your suffering is indescribable and inconceivable, yet you accept it. So symbolic is your cross. You willingly laid down your life on it, opening up your arms, offering your whole self for the sake of humanity, embracing us out of

Reflection: The cries of the crowd are dull in comparison to the screams of pain that crash upon you with each labored step. Here human frailty mixes with the divine plan, but also overwhelms. How well you know our pain! It accompanied you to your death. From out of nowhere, Simon is pushed through the crowd. His strength and compassion lift your burden for a time. In his eyes you recognize his uneasy faith in You. In Your eyes You meet his question with a steady gaze of love.

Reader: "They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyprian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. (Mark 15: 21)"

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You, All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

The Fifth Station:
 Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

Let us Pray: There are times when we cannot go it alone. Free me, Lord, from the insecurity or arrogance that prevents me from seeking out or tapping into the strength and support of others. You surround me with family and friends who are there for me. Help me to know that when I am weak, You are my strength. Open my hands that I may reach out when someone else needs my support. May the witness of this ride touch the hearts of others and give them strength to make a difference too.



The Ninth Station Jesus Falls for the Third Time

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader: The sweltering heat, the deep aching of your muscles, the immense weight of the cross- it is too much for any human to bear. You collapse face to the ground under this immeasurable and unimaginable burden. Momentarily, you lack the physical strength to continue the last few steps. You close your eyes and in pray without words, you catch your breath, mindful again of the reason you are giving your life: your love for humanity and for your Father. This is enough for you to find the strength to hope again and take your last few steps.

Jesus, the weight of the cross is not made only of wood. You are carrying the sins of the world, past, present, and future. You carry every injustice men and women have created throughout time. Tonight and the next three days, we want to ease your burden. We want to give you hope that we do not all agree with the current laws on the death penalty. We stand with the United States bishops in that "dignity is a gift from God and is not something that is earned or lost through behavior."

Let us Pray: We pray for those whose own crosses seem too much

to bear, for those who have fallen and cannot find the strength to

continue. We pray that Your presence in their lives may be evident

and that in knowing Your love and mercy they will find the strength

to endure.

*Song: "Valley Song" by Jar of Clay

The Seventh Station Jesus Falls the Second Time

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the

world.

Reader: "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever

wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his

cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life

will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find

it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole

world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in

exchange for his life?" (Mt 16: 24-28)

Reflection: One of the great burdens of humanity is its

weakness in times of great struggle. Jesus knew what it

was like not only to stumble due to physical weakness, but

also to fall. He knew what it felt like to give in to the

limits that cannot be overcome by sheer will power. In our

society today, there are so many obstacles to realizing our

true dignity and freedom.

We must be people of deep faith and great courage in order to meet and face the challenges today. Even though not all our efforts will succeed by our sheer will power, like Jesus we must never give in.

"...the Church encourages political leaders, starting with those who are Christians, not to give in, but to make those choices which, taking into account what is realistically attainable, will lead to the re-establishment of a just order in the defense and promotion of the value of life." (#90, *The Gospel of Life, John Paul II*)

Let us Pray: As we feel our own stamina weaken, strengthen our resolve to push on. Help us listen to those who show profound respect for human life and dignity. Motivate us to seek what is just, what is true, and what is beautiful. Preserve us from the temptation to give in, or conform, or go along with the status quo, just because it seems easier and requires less energy. May all that we do reflect the promotion and value of life.



The Second Station: Jesus Carries His Cross

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader: *“So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha.” (John 19: 17)*

By the time Jesus is weighed down with the cross beam he has already been humiliated, beaten, stripped, mocked, and tortured, yet where does He get the strength to take on even the future that awaits Him? Imagine the spectacle and the crowds that have gathered to witness this final journey. Some are jeering; others mocking; some are triumphant at the fact that “justice” will be done and this troublemaker will be eliminated.

And then there are the followers of Jesus, whose hearts are breaking as they witness this horrifying conclusion for one they loved so profoundly. From one point of view, the burden of human failure was carried on those shoulders, but from the point of view of faith what Jesus truly lifted up was the weight of his love for each of us.

Station #1 : Sr. Kathleen Ryan, SND
Booklet design & Stations #2-8: Sr. Katherine Feely, SND
Stations #9-15: Treva Pacetti

Credits:

<http://www.cspj.net/>
Prayer vigil for victims of violence and peaceful protest against the death penalty in Ohio. This event featured 30 students and teachers from six schools (Beaumont, Cleveland Central Catholic, NDCL, Padua Franciscan, Regina, and St. Ignatius) biking from Cleveland to Columbus, Ohio. Arriving the same time

For more information about this group visit:
<http://www.cspj.net/>

Catholic Schools for Peace and Justice is an organization made up of representatives from Catholic High Schools and Colleges in the Diocese of Cleveland. As colleagues in Catholic education, the school representatives meet at least twice per semester along with student representatives to share ideas, plan the events sponsored by the group, and invite each other's schools to participate in other valuable opportunities in the community. There is a long tradition within these academic institutions of educating and taking action for social justice as guided by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

When we examine all the extreme injustices that have existed throughout time and currently exist in our own country and throughout the world, injustices like poverty, the AIDS epidemic, the Holocaust, genocide in Rwanda and Sudan, war, the nuclear arms race, abortion, capital punishment, suicide bombing, child labor, and sweatshops, it is more than difficult to believe that nonviolent love is ever the victor.

Historically speaking, violence has ruled. It has become so much a part of our culture that to a certain degree we are numb to it. We accept it and even expect it. The occupied tomb of Christ is no symbol of hope, no symbol of overcoming injustice or death, and no symbol of the beauty of the culture of life.

Let us Pray: *Lord, at times like these when we experience an overwhelming sense of despair, aloneness, and hopelessness, may you remind us of what is to come on the third day. May we be steadfast in our convictions that the challenge of nonviolence is the way to build a culture of life. May we not choose the historical and cultural paths of overcoming violence, but may we constantly choose the path of nonviolence until nonviolence can no longer be called countercultural.*

Let us Pray: Loving God, sometimes the burdens of my life can seem crushing and overwhelming I am pushed to the point of exhaustion or to the frustration of my limits. Please turn my vision outward to see you present in the midst of my struggles. Grant me the grace to reach out to others so that I may help to lighten their burdens. Help me to be a person who can witness to life even in the face of death. Amen.

“The God of the Covenant has entrusted the life of every individual to his or her fellow human beings, brothers and sisters, according to the law of reciprocity in giving and receiving, of self-giving and of the acceptance of others. In the fullness of time, by taking flesh and giving his life for us, the Son of God showed what heights and depths this law of reciprocity can reach. With the gift of his Spirit, Christ gives new content and meaning to the law of reciprocity, to our being entrusted to one another.” (#76, The Gospel of Life, John Paul II)

Reflection: At times in our life, it may seem that we have terrible burdens that weigh us down. We ask for the vision of faith so that we can see the Lord of Life lifting us up. On this ride we encounter the demands of the up-hill climb and the thrill of effortless valleys. In all of life there are ups and downs, there is a give and take.

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader: “Mary’s consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity. Through her acceptance and loving care for the life of the Incarnate Word, human life has been rescued from condemnation to final and eternal death.” (#102, The Gospel of Life, John Paul II)

Reflection: A mother wants only one thing for a child – a beautiful life. The dreams a mother has for a child’s life are priceless ponderings in her heart. A mother is one who is meant to give life to a child, not to witness it taken away brutally. Perhaps this desire for a beautiful life is the place where the hearts of mothers of victims meet in solidarity with the hearts of mothers of condemned criminals. This intersection of hearts too, is marked by a cross. It is a place of paradox and a place of strength.

At this point in the journey of the early followers of Jesus, all must seem hopeless. All belief in Jesus’ profound examples of nonviolence must seem fruitless. From their perspective, evil prevailed and nonviolent love lost. In fact, oftentimes we may feel that same way today, that evil, injustice, and the immoral side of reality are always the final victors.

Reader: There was a garden near the place where Jesus was crucified, and in the garden there was the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea in which no one had ever been laid. The women from Galilee who came with Joseph followed him and wept with great sorrow as they watched Jesus’ body, covered in linen cloth, being laid in Joseph’s own tomb. One last moment with him, one last touch, one last goodbye, and then Joseph rolls a large stone over the door of the tomb, and Jesus is never to be seen again.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

The Fourteenth Station Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

In Jesus, all human suffering is collected. The broken heart of Jesus is the broken heart of God. The broken heart of God is the broken heart of the world. ~From the works of Henri Nouwen, Catholic Author

Leader: Let us now pause in silence to remember the nearly 3,400 men and women currently on death row in the United States, and the over 1,000 who have been executed since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976. (pause for silent prayer)

*Song: “Remember Me” by Mark Shultz



Let us Pray: We pray for all mothers whose hearts break for the loss of a life taken or one forever changed. We pray for all mothers whose hearts break at the choices their children have made. We pray for the mothers of victims of crime, and we pray for the mothers of condemned criminals. We turn to Mary, our Blessed Mother as one who knew and lived the pain of both, and we ask for her intercession to bring peace and comfort to all mothers' hearts. We thank God for the gift of own mothers and ask God to bless them abundantly for the dreams they have for our lives. May our choices, help their dreams to become realities in our lives.



The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader: Veronica has watched the slow painful procession for what seemed like an eternity. The weight of the death sentence is no comparison for the weight and dread in her heart. She could see this coming too, but hoped the day would never arrive. And now as you approach, she trembles to make the nightmare end but it does not.

Finding it unbearable to merely spectate, she moves forward in order to comfort. Confronted by her own powerlessness to make the suffering end, she attempts to do the only thing in her power, she tries to restore some scrap of dignity, by wiping your face. A small act of tenderness becomes an icon of remembrance.



At this moment of Jesus' death and through all these Stations of the Cross, we are doing much more than reliving the passion, the suffering, of Jesus; we are entering into solidarity with the passion and suffering of all people of our planet, whether in the past, the present, or the future.

Reader: It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon while the sun's light faded. The curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then you cried out with a loud voice and said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," and you breathed your last breath. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Truly this man was God's Son." (adapted from Luke 23: 44-46 and Mark 27: 54b)

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

The Twelfth Station Jesus Dies

How many of these soldiers thought about what they were doing to you? Were there any that were uncomfortable laughing at or tormenting you but continued to do so because they were afraid to face the Truth of your identity and your mission? The culture in which you lived was one of violence. Most people were raised to accept it without question. 2000 years later, we still live in a society that accepts violence, a society that does not want to question it, a society that still does not want to face the truth of your mission: to love, to forgive, and to choose the way of nonviolence. Only when we truly accept this mission, will our culture of death be transformed into a culture of life. And only then can we, as the US bishops say, "transform our prisons from warehouses of human failure and seedbeds of violence to places of responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration."

Let us Pray: We pray that each of us here today is strengthened in the commitment to nonviolence as a means to deal with conflict. We pray that we never accept violence as a means to address a problem, whether it is violence in word or deed. We humbly ask for your guidance as we search for and develop the inner peace required to make this challenging commitment.

Let us Pray: Help me to see your image and likeness in the faces of all I encounter, even those I label, mock and condemn. Teach me to look with the eyes of Christ. Give me the courage to sustain my efforts to remove the burdens of injustice that exist in the form of capital punishment. Guide my life; draw me closer to You. Help us to make this "pilgrimage on wheels" a witness of justice that speaks to the value and dignity of all human life.



Reader: The soldiers of the governor took you into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole group around you. They took your clothes and, laughing at you, gave you a scarlet robe to wear. After twisting some thorns into a crown, they pressed it on your head. They gave you a reed to hold in your right hand, knelt before you, and ridiculed you shouting, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spit on you, took the reed and struck you on the head. Then they removed the robe, put your own clothes on you, and led you away to be crucified.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You. **All:** Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

The Tenth Station Jesus is Stripped of His Clothes

Reflection: "Indeed, "despite its hardships, its hidden mysteries, its suffering and its inevitable frailty, this mortal life is a most beautiful thing, a marvel ever new and moving, an event worthy of being exalted in joy and glory."¹⁰ Moreover, man and his life appear to us not only as one of the greatest marvels of creation: for God has granted to man a dignity which is near to divine (Ps 8:5-6). In every child which is born and in every person who lives or dies we see the image of God's glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being, a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ". (#84, The Gospel of Life, John Paul II)

The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader: The women Jesus meets on His way to Calvary were the women who had been with Him every step of the way. They were not anonymous members of the curious crowd. Jesus knew them through the faith they had in Him. Jesus knew them through their hospitality and the meals they shared. Jesus knew them through the burden of their ordinary routines and the demands of their culture. Jesus knew them through their sins. Jesus knew them through their radical acts of love and worship. Jesus saw *them* as faithful. Now, as Jesus encounters the women of Jerusalem, they see the end in sight. What they don't see yet is the fulfillment of all that He promised. Imagine the pain and the grief because of this imminent separation.

Reflection:

Society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person's life. (#81, The Gospel of Life, John Paul II)

Let us Pray: May we honor the models of peace and the witnesses of strength in our lives. We pray for all those who actively work to abolish the death penalty. May their work bear fruit and bring about restoration and true justice, not retribution. We pray for all those who work in the criminal justice system. As they carry out their responsibilities may they treat each inmate with dignity and respect regardless of the reasons inmates find themselves there. May those incarcerated find a deeper liberation through the light of faith and promise of God's forgiveness.