Stations of the Cross of Nonviolence in a Pandemic

Background Information: Stations of the Cross of Nonviolent Love: Boston’s Statehouse since 1984

For over 30 years representatives of The House of Peace, Sisters of St. Anne, Agape Community and Pax Christi, MA have gathered at Boston’s Statehouse to read Stations of the Cross of Nonviolence which embrace the violence we experience in the world.

In this year of the pandemic, member of the following communities wrote the Stations of the Cross that you will read here as they depict our understanding of the nonviolent Jesus and his rejection of all forms of violence, personal, institutional, ecological, racial, interspecies. We repent these sins of violence, and the disproportionate suffering amid this virus, of the poor, the oppressed and people of color.
We are dedicated to the building of nonviolent community, and those who wrote these stations are participants or members of these nonviolent communities. Since we have had hand-outs in the past as we stood for three hours of reading and silence in front of Boston’s State House, we hope that you will share these stations in this time of suffering and death with all you may feel could benefit from them.

Stations of the Cross of Nonviolent Love:

**Written by members of these communities:**

St. Susanna’s Parish, Dedham, MA

Pax Christi MA

Saints Therese and Francis, Catholic Worker, Worcester, MA

House of Peace, Ipswich, MA

Agape Community, Hardwick, MA

Sisters of St. Anne, Marlborough, MA

Spirit of Life Community, Weston, MA

For more information, please contact: peace@agapecommunity.org
Introduction to the Stations of the Cross During a Time of Pandemic
by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy, Saints Therese and Francis, Catholic Worker
Worcester, MA

A Contemporary Way of the Cross In Roman-occupied Palestine, an execution was often preceded by a parade in which the condemned person was forced to carry the instrument of his own death. Jesus didn’t suffer out of the public eye, but in the streets of Jerusalem, where he was seen by many. For Christians, the suffering of Jesus represents the greatest testimony of His love. For centuries, Roman Catholics have reenacted Christ’s agony on the Friday of Holy Week by carrying a replica of His cross through the streets of their own communities. This “Way of the Cross” has been seen as an aid in understanding Jesus’ experience and as a public
proclamation of His love. For decades, members of peace communities in Massachusetts and elsewhere, have carried on this tradition with a special emphasis on how Jesus’ suffering continues in our city and world today. Jesus preached that He would remain with us in a special way in the poor and the oppressed. The following reflections are written in the time of a global coronavirus pandemic by those who continue to find Jesus’ presence in the unfolding of dire events, in those who are afflicted, and those who selflessly respond to the suffering, with God’s love.

1st Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

Being condemned to death by the cold decree of imperial power would make a human being feel unloved, unwanted and profoundly rejected. No doubt, feelings that Jesus experienced, as would anyone in a similar position: the refugee fleeing war who knows they probably will not make it across the Mediterranean in their rickety boat, or across the waterless desert of the American Southwest. The villagers and towns people unable to escape the hellfire of the faceless drones on silent patrol. The mother, unfathomable grief, separated from her traumatized child on the Mexican border. The offender or the innocent, waiting for interminable years, the needle or electric bolt in the dark hallways of death row; The poverty stricken drowning in the sea of the wealthy. All these and more know what Jesus knew. Jesus knows that place, the reeling mind that faces what they face: “Father, Abba, if it be possible, let this cup pass.” But, apparently, it is not possible. Jesus drains the bitter cup. Stone-hearted cruelty has its way. Jesus takes his stand with all those under the iron decree. Jesus knows the depth of agonia: “you do not deserve to live”.

Mark Korban, Orthodox priest, Vermont, Agape Community
2nd STATION: JESUS CARRIES HIS CROSS

We do not have to go looking for crosses; they usually come into our lives all by themselves. Today our world is carrying the cross of the coronavirus. This cross comes to each of us in different ways. Some are infected with the virus. These are at varying stages: some managing at home, some struggling for breath or on ventilators in hospitals. Health care workers valiantly shoulder the cross of taking care of patients, carrying the risk of personal infection of themselves or their families. All of us who quarantine ourselves carry the cross of physical distancing and all it entails.

Our world is carrying many other crosses. We carry the cross of knowing how climate change is wounding Mother Earth. Some carry the cross of domestic violence or interpersonal violence on our city streets or in war zones. Some carry the cross of addiction, of physical disability or of mental health concerns. Some carry the cross of poverty, of lack of opportunity for education or ongoing employment. Some carry the cross of being marginalized in our society. Some carry the cross of being imprisoned or detained at our borders where their cries for asylum or the chance to make a better life are denied.

Just as there is a law of conservation of energy in the physical realm, so too does this law exist in the spiritual realm. As that cross was put upon Jesus’ shoulders,
there were those helplessly watching, aghast, yet spiritually communicating their love and care to him. So too in our world today, we can spiritually breathe out blessings to others, sending ripples of reassurance and care. Despite our physical distancing, we can breathe out kindness, compassion, peacefulness to ease our own spirit and to help one another regardless of which cross is upon our shoulders.

We each embody God’s abundant love and the promise that we will all get through this together by holding God’s hand and each other’s.

Rev. Dr. Ronald Hindelang and Rev. Dr. Jean Marchant; co-pastors, The Spirit of Life: A Catholic Community of Justice & Joy

3rd Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

Christ falls under the weight of the Cross. Many of us are tempted to fall under the weight of the pandemic. Here at the Saints Francis &Thérèse Catholic Worker, we are challenged to welcome Christ in the poor without unduly risking the lives of those incarnations of the Savior who are already sheltering with us.

Extreme cleaning, airing out the house daily, monitored hand washing social distancing, dinners in three shifts, and everyone with their own room, but no assurance that we will avoid getting sick.

And yet, the Psalm read at Holy Tuesday's Mass said, “Though an army encamp against me, though an army encamp against me, I shall not fear. Though war is waged against me, in spite of this, I will be confident." We are all being tested, but an army is not encamped against us. The cross is heavy, but we, with God's grace, can carry it, always aware that by the Holy Cross, Christ Jesus redeemed the world.

Scott Schaeffer-Duffy, Saints Therese and Francis Catholic Worker, Worcester, MA
4th Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

Mary is a FIRST RESPONDER
She runs toward the angry crowd
She runs toward the fear
She runs toward the terror.
What she sees is evil unleashed, compassion denied
Her Son is hurt so badly that he can hardly walk
Mary is frantic. She risks her own safety just trying to get close to her son. Why is this Happening? Why so much violence against a man so focused on peace?
There is no Love here. That’s it. There is simply no love here.
And there is no going back. Mary elbows her way out and calls forth her women friends.

They are helpers, all
They know the truth. They trust the truth and they get to it.
There is no sitting down at this Cross.
There is no kneeling at this Cross.
There is work to be done here
There is action.

The women dig at the base of the Cross hoping to dislodge it somehow. If there is no cross, they reason, there will be no death.
Their hands are caked in dirt. They do what they can.

Mary knows that Jesus will die.
She asks for a blanket of Mercy.

_Tara Wegener, Agape Community_

_5th Station: Simon Helps Jesus_

Simon of Cyrene is an all too familiar human story. He is an innocent bystander, forced to carry a heavy cross for Jesus. A Passover pilgrim, all Simon wished was to make it safely to the festival. But he was grabbed, “drafted” so reminiscent of the many young, impressionable men who are conscripted into the military for all of these thousands of years.

The image of innocents carrying an involuntary cross, screams of injustice waged against the poor, people of color, the hated, those powerless and afflicted by the powerful. Is this a bitter fruit of our collective indifference to the hopeless plight of the dirt poor?
Are there parallels to Simon in the human tragedy of the coronavirus now ravaging people in over 200 countries? Again, we have a story of innocent spectators going to the festival of Mardi Gras, only to suffer contamination and death while spreading the disease. Were too many Americans deaf to the warning as the virus was galloping through our land?

Were we only too content to ignore the inevitable, lethal spread as our leaders reassured us of our safety and the coming of Easter?

This is Good Friday, the via dolorosa, today takes the shape of overwhelmed hospitals, the desperate line-up in makeshift hospitals throughout the world. This tragic spectacle surrounds all of us as we see health care workers understaffed and short on ventilators, masks and protective gear. They are exhausted and without sleep, having suited up for more twelve hour shifts to bear the unbearable, to treat the sick while stop-gap morgues pile the bodies higher.

Today is truly a Good Friday for the ages to come. Will we be passersby or will we risk the cross?

Brayton Shanley, Agape Community

Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Veronica turned to see Jesus, bearing on his body the weight of empire. He carried a cross of naked trees, stripped of branches and bark, stripped of all life. That horrible cross seemed to gather together the force of domination that had pressed down on her body and the bodies of her family, the animals and plants, her house and the temple, everything she knew and loved. The gravity of that domination had become familiar to her. It was the atmosphere in which she lived.

As Jesus approached Veronica, his body seemed to gather together everyone she knew who lived in terror and pain. Her heart dilated. It suddenly seemed spacious enough to contain the entire world. Veronica extended herself to Jesus, offering her veil as a cloth, providing comfort and care in the midst of chaos.
When Jesus turned to look at her, the weight of empire lifted. She saw and was seen by the living God, the God who held her in existence, the God who loved her. She was flooded with love. The Reign of God had come to replace the reign of earthly emperors.

Veronica ministered to Jesus with her cloth of compassion, and Jesus ministered to her with his total presence.

When Jesus turned back to Golgotha, and continued on his path, Veronica saw his tortured body again. She saw the collision of divinity and domination, God and empire. In Jesus, the Reign of God was fully present, and on him was the weight of all evil.

His luminous face remained imprinted on the veil that she offered him. After the crucifixion, Veronica wore that veil while ministering to Christ in her midst, lifting the weight of empire with her concrete acts of love.

May Veronica, who ministered to Jesus, guide us in the process of ministering to Christ in our midst. Veronica extended comfort and care into chaos, and she saw the face of God. She stands before us with Christ on her veil. As a minister of Christ, she calls on the followers of Jesus to align our energies with the inbreaking Reign of God, which is currently transforming every manifestation of domination in our world. In a special way, may Veronica guide us in the process of transforming the patriarchal systems that weigh on women, and particularly those which block our sisters from embodying their vocations as ministers of Christ.

Jim Robinson, Agape Community

7th Station
Jesus Falls a Second Time
We Adore You O Christ and We Bless You

R: Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world

We are living in a “falling-down” time, a “falling apart” time. In the midst of the national disaster of inept, divisive and cruel governance, the worsening of the coronavirus pandemic is heartbreaking. It is truly the “saddest and hardest” Holy Week we have known, revealing the grievous fault lines in our health care system, and more.

We mourn as we hear the daily toll of victims - # - to date in the U.S., knowing that most of those who succumb to the virus will die alone, bereft of the comfort of loved ones. And, loved ones grieve for the comfort they cannot give. Language wilts in the face of this enormous pain.

Too much has gone badly wrong in the management of the crisis: there is disdain for credible science-based information; “cringe-worthy” claims about medical options are made, testing of only 0.6% of the populace has been done, and there is blatant disregard for hospital equipment needs. All this is fueled by petty, self-aggrandizing politicking at the highest level of government. Emergency room physician, Dr. Calvin Sun, working under intolerable conditions without adequate protection, says, “Everyone goes to work feeling unsafe - like it’s a suicide mission.”

Now, more than ever, we thank God for the intelligent, courageous and compassionate people who dare speak truth to power, and, with quiet dedication, find ways to dismantle the virus. We think of health care workers, knowing that they, too, may soon “all fall down”. One distraught nurse, worried about her own family, spoke of a patient in her 30s whose mother’s poignant words pierced her heart: “She has an 8 year old; she has a 6 year old; she has a 4 year old. You’ve got to save her.”
May we fall into the arms of Jesus, he holding us as we hold those who suffer and serve

Pat Ferrone, Pax Christi, MA regional coordinator; St. Susanna’s Parish

8th Station: JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

A large crowd of people followed him, also many women who wailed and mourned for him, beating themselves in grief. Jesus turned to these and said: Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me But weep for yourselves and for your children.
And now we, traveling in our daily lives a new kind of Via Dolorosa, cherishing the secret of an Easter yet to come while painfully walking our own Way of the Cross, we also meet these women. While our gaze searches the Spring landscape only to encounter a panorama of pandemic, and we huddle for protection only to feel the extremes of vulnerability, we remember these women...their mourning and grief...their laments and cries...their outstretched hands and anguished disbelief as they behold their Lord and King, crowned with the piercing thorns of ignominy.

What does He, this Christ being, see as these women on the road surround Him? Is it possible there is also some kind of crown here in the midst of the grieving daughters of Jerusalem? Only in the darkest times, times of unbearable suffering, is such a crown visible. Only when, as it happened on Golgotha, the light of the sun is totally eclipsed and profound darkness encompasses all can this be seen: a luminous corona, an encircling light, a radiance born of unspeakable pain and sorrow,

He sees this crown, emanating from the weeping women who bravely accompany Him in His agony. We see this crown...this corona of our times, this all-encompassing, inexplicable experience of world pain and we remember the daughters of Jerusalem.

Women in this season of illness! Your sons and daughters are struggling against fear. Their world is overcome with distance and isolation, loneliness and anxiety; they are sheltering in places that hold no peace.
We weep for you and for your children.

Women in this season of death! Your stricken elders are taken away to die alone as you long to hold them as they come to the threshold. They are reaching out for your touch.
We weep for you. Their beloved children.

Women in this season of poverty and pain, loss and insecurity of every kind, your lives are breaking open within the walls of the homes you have created.
We weep for you and all you hold dear.

Women in this season of nuclear madness that daily threatens a surge of mortality that the world has never seen...violence no virus can ever come near...not even now...
We weep for you and all children.
Women in this season of the dry wood, when you cry out to the mountains to fall on us and the hills to cover us, you who know so much of the virulence of war… We weep for you and for the world’s children.

Women in this season of Lenten sacrifice, Passover meditation and Ramadan prayer…
Women longing for the radiance of Easter Light, you who meet the Christ on His way and offer Him your tears and receive His own…
We weep for you, for Him…
But we know the Crown of Light will overcome even this darkness.

Carrie Schuchardt House of Peace

9th Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time
The nonviolent path is a challenging path. It is never lived without setback, without sacrifice, without the cross. Jesus walked this path and it led him to the cross. Every time he lifted up the downtrodden, healed the broken, preached the good news of the Kin-dom of justice and peace, reconciled enemies as friends, and gathered the people together, he became a greater threat to the Roman Imperial System that relied on division, hatred, injustice, and violence for its continuation. Those who benefitted from this system conspired to destroy him.

We, who endeavor to follow Jesus on this nonviolent path, can rest assured that the resurrection comes after the cross and that the Gospel will ultimately prevail. This assurance makes the crosses on this path, the oppression, repression, and opposition easier to bear. Sometimes the harder part is the smaller setbacks, the falls.

Jesus faced his cross resolutely knowing the resurrection lay on the other side of the tomb, but when he fell once, twice, and then a third time did some discouragement begin to seep in? Did he want to get there already? Did he feel like he would never arrive, that his own bodily weakness, his own human exhaustion, his own physical pain would keep him from completing his task?

God, we pray for your support in our falls, our setbacks, and our transitions. We pray that you accompany us during our wrong turns, our delays, and our crossroads. When these discourage us, help us, like Jesus, to still get up and to still continue forward to complete the mission that you have given to each and all of us.

*Brian Askmankas, Pax Christi, MA*
Here we meet Jesus at his imminent crucifixion. What dignity is left of him is purposefully stripped away as the soldiers cast lots for his garments. Jesus is mocked and commanded to save himself. He is publicly shamed and humiliated in his nakedness and exposure. Today Jesus continues to be called upon to save himself in the form of our public health care workers on the frontlines. They are being commanded to save themselves and others yet stripped of the very garments meant to sustain and uphold life. Our healthcare providers find themselves exposed and shamed in their futile waiting for rescue in a system that does not believe in sustaining life. Instead, like Christ, they find themselves to be an offering for what
has always been the ultimate mystery and truth and that is love which supersedes all understanding.

Samantha Leuschner, Agape Community

11th Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

The terror of those nails, of his mutilation, would linger. After he is taken down, anointed with spices, wrapped in linen, laid in a tomb, this is the horror his friends will remember: how the soldiers of empire maimed him. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands,” Thomas insisted, “and put my hand in his side,” where a Roman centurion’s spear had pierced him, “I will not believe.” Hands that had been whole, hands that had healed others, a
heart that had beat—steadily, faithfully, sending hot blood throughout his body—they tore them all to pieces.

This is it: only this, this is all we have—those wounds. Saint Catherine of Siena, who spent her brief life caring for the sick, burying the bodies of those who fell victim to plague, said this over and over. His scars, she told us, will remain forever. “What joy there is in his wounds,” she wrote, strangely, but can you see it? See it: the Italian girl in the fourteenth century, gently washing the body of one more body disfigured by sudden illness, by sudden death. There are too many, far, far too many. No one is left to comfort the mother, the brothers, the friends, this broken and horrible world. The girl thinks: this one, here. This is the body he chose. Only this one: wounded and spent.

Faithful cross, the one noble tree amongst all.
None in the forest bears wood so sweet in leaf, flower or seed.
It carries sweet nails and a sweet weight.

Crux fidelis, hymn for Holy Week

Marjorie Corbman, Fordham University PhD Theology

12th Station: Jesus dies on the cross.

It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the temple was torn right down the middle and when Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” With these words he breathed his last.

In reflecting on the death of Jesus I turn the theme of mercy. John Sabrino writes, “Tragically, Jesus is sentenced to death for practicing mercy consistently into the last... his social theory is guided by the principle that massive and unjust suffering must be pulled up by the roots.”
Jesus offered consoling words of mercy to the convicted men on crosses on either side of him, “Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Let us join with those who need mercy.

The Boston Globe, April 4:
Now with the state plunged into a deep freeze to halt the coronavirus, homeless families are struggling to secure basic necessities. Crowded facilities make social distancing nearly impossible. Food pantries are desperately strained. Mercy.

Boston Health Care for the Homeless, April 7:
35% of those randomly tested for COVID-19 in a crowded homeless shelter in Boston have been found to be positive. Mercy.

The Boston Globe, March 23:
Correctional facilities are filled with aging and infirm inmates, many suffering with medical conditions that could worsen with the coronavirus infection. Mercy.

Jesus dies on the cross.

“Mercy always, in everything, mercy.”
- Thomas Merton

Eileen Reilly, MD, Agape Community, Psychiatrist, Boston Health Care for the Homeless

Station 13: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

Native Americans have been on the cross of genocide, since Columbus slaughtered the Arawak Indians. We must take Jesus, in the form of our Native sisters and brothers, down from the cross of genocide.
As Professor Jeannine Hill Fletcher of Fordham University observes in her book, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, and Religious Diversity in America*: “The theology of Christian supremacy gave birth to the ideology of White supremacy” which cannot be eliminated until we participate in “the transformation of our social structures.”

Will this transformation now needs to include immediate assistance in Indian Country during this pandemic because multigenerational families live in close quarters, struggling with poverty, poor nutrition and underfunded health care programs.

About half of Native Americans live on reservations mainly in the West, Midwest and South, in small homes, where the virus can easily spread through families. Houses often lack electricity and running water so washing hands is more challenging say health experts.

371 treaties were made by the US government with Native Americans. The United States government violated 370 of those treaties, to date. Over 250 years, 160 million Native Americans have been killed by the US government.

According to the US Census Bureau, the current total population of Native Americans in the United States is only 6.79 million, which is about 2.09% of the entire population.

Jesus, we take you down from the cross of genocide, and we repent our complicity in your extermination.

*Suzanne Belote Shanley, Agape Community*
14th Station of the Cross
Jesus is Laid in the Tomb
In the Byzantine tradition, the icon which depicts Jesus being laid in the tomb is called Extreme Humility. Jesus, fully God and fully human, is reduced to a lifeless corpse, laid in a sarcophagus and entombed in the earth. This is the self-emptying of God, the Extreme Humility of God. (Phil 2:5-8) God who is life itself, existence itself, tastes death. But not just physical death; most importantly as Jesus he tastes spiritual death. At the end of his crucifixion he cried out “My God, my God. Why have you abandoned me?” And almost immediately after he screamed in anguish, and then it was over. Jesus died of a broken heart. This is not death as the cycle of nature. This is death as the end of everything. This is the secret terror we all carry in the recesses of our heart, the deep fear behind all our fears, that we will die and be separated from God. Because without God we don’t exist. That is why the apostle Paul called death the final fruit of sin. (Rom 6:23)

God is love. Sin is the wound against love. Our existence is given us by Divine Love and sin is nothing more than the wound that threatens our connection with Divine Love, that mysterious malice outside and inside us that wants us not to exist.
But God is love. And love goes where the hurt is. That, in a nutshell, is the Gospel. That is the life and death of Jesus. “For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin.” (2 Cor 5:21) For love of us, Jesus drank to the dregs the cup of our affliction. He suffered the mortal wound which we are unable to bear.

Beloved, take courage. Love is stronger than death.

Paul del Junco, Orthodox Deacon and long-time friend of Agape
Toronto