



THE WAY OF THE CROSS

In The World

**Reflections with the ELCA
Social Statements for
disciples following Jesus.**

Edited and Distributed by Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa)

Beloved of God,

In this time where everything feels chaotic and thrown upside-down, we know that many are longing for something to hold onto; we are struggling to find hope in the face of overwhelming injustice. We are afraid, we are grieving, we are tired. This Lenten season and approaching Holy Week seem to speak into our experience in a new way.

And so, we turn to two sources that at first might seem unrelated – the traditional practice of “Stations of the Cross” and the ELCA Social Statements. The former might feel “un-Lutheran” in certain circles, coming from the Medieval cathedrals and using some images and narratives not found in scripture. The latter might seem *too* Lutheran – your average member of an ELCA congregation rarely reads them in great detail. And yet, there is something Spirit-filled that happens when we pair these age-old images experienced by pilgrims and disciples over the centuries, with the careful, thoughtful work of our church body about how we are called to be disciples in the world today.

When we asked Dr. John Hoffmeyer to participate in this project, he reflected on an experience he had at the Jesuit University in El Salvador shortly after the end of the brutal civil war. Dr. Hoffmeyer wrote,

I had looked for a long time at the art across the front of the church: most centrally, the colorfully illustrated Salvadoran crosses, complexly interweaving symbols of death-dealing destruction with images of new life risen from the dead. When I got up to leave, I saw the back wall of the chapel for the first time, with 14 very large black and white drawings comprising the stations. The drawings, created during the civil war by a Salvadoran artist who was a valiant voice for human rights, are all depictions of persons tortured and assassinated during the terrible repression of those years. My immediate reaction was both to appreciate the works as a shocking and important protest for human rights, and to doubt whether a church was really the appropriate place to display them. I then turned again to the front of the church, saw again the crosses at the altar, and realized that my initial failure to connect the drawings in the back with the crosses at the front showed the extent to which I had come to view crosses in church in a way that cleaned them up from being an instrument of torture.

Our hope is that by placing both the stations and the statements in new proximity to one another, our understanding of the cross might be expanded and deepened. By doing so, we can see that the cross, the suffering of God with us, is not a removed event enshrined in history. The way of the cross reverberates throughout our lives and shapes our understanding of who we are and how we are called to be in the world. The cross enlightens how we stand in solidarity in society, across race, class, gender, sexuality, in search for justice and compassion for all of God’s creation. May these devotions open our eyes and heart to the suffering God at work in the world, and in our lives, today.

In Christ, LAMPa Staff

If you are using this resource for public stations posted around your worship site, neighborhood, or town, you can find PDF versions of the written devotions on our website.

Below are resources for artwork to accompany these devotions. You are invited to pair the artwork that will speak best to your community.

Mary Button

The Rev. Mary Button is an ordained pastor in the ELCA, serving in Upstate New York. She is also a talented artist, with a variety of Stations of the Cross series. You can shop her whole collection [here](#).

- [Stations of the Cross: Indigenous Justice](#)
- [Stations of the Cross: Refugee Journeys](#)
- [Jesus at the Border](#)
- [Stations of the Cross and Resurrection](#)
- [Stations of the Cross: Mental Illness](#)
- [Stations of the Cross: Mass Incarceration](#)
- [Stations of the Cross: Climate Change](#) (coloring posters)

Ministry Matters

[Stations of the Cross: Projectable Art](#) (free for congregational use)

A Sanctified Art

[Stations of the Cross and Companion Guide](#)

Laura James

[The 14 Stations of the Cross](#)

Mary Jane Miller

[Stations of the Cross and Meditations](#) (free upon request)

Other Ideas

You can make the stations a true community event by inviting artists in your own context to contribute to a series.

OR

Call for pictures from congregational or community members that evoke the spirit of each station. These don't have to be professional by any means, but simply images from people's everyday lives that connect to the intersections the stations and devotions highlight.

Station 1: Pilate Condemns Jesus to Die

Mark 15: 12-15

Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So, Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them, and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

From a Social Statement, ["The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries"](#)

"In assessing the current system, the ELCA gives thanks for its principles and orientation toward justice. This church recognizes many in the system who serve their professional vocations with competent and humane performance. Yet, this statement recognizes serious deficiencies. An underlying punitive mindset, budgetary constraints and persistent inequalities based on race and class frequently challenge its basic principles and impose significant costs on all involved in the system, and on society as a whole." (pg. 3)

Reflection by the Rev. Dr. Philip Krey

As we reflect on the passion of Christ and adore the cross that has redeemed us, we are acutely aware that Jesus was caught up in a criminal justice system. He was handed over by leaders who were threatened by him and tried along with an insurrectionist and murderer (Barabbas) whom the leaders and crowd wanted spared instead of Jesus. He was sentenced to death after flogging by the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, and crucified (executed) between two criminals. He finally died in the ultimate punishment that the Roman Empire reserved for terrorists and enemies of the state. St. Paul writes, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us; for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13).

As believers standing at the cross, we are acutely aware of the injustice of the trial, sentencing, and suffering that Jesus endured for us and are often insensitive to the injustices in our own criminal justice system. We are often easily misled by demagogues who want the criminal justice system to be punitive and, like the crowd before Pilate, want those we are led to fear to be caught up in a system that should hold criminals accountable but needs reform. We can be insensitive to the disproportionate number of persons of color who are incarcerated and overly sentenced, often for nonviolent offenses, and the number of youths who are tried as adults who then get caught up in a system and may not recover. Like the crowd, we are often misled by leaders who crassly campaign against crime for their own political interests and not for the rehabilitation of those in the system. We then are complicit in strategies of mass incarceration.

As followers of the crucified Jesus, we can inform ourselves about the criminal justice system and its needed reforms. This can include paying attention to legislative reforms in our state legislature and supporting them. We can visit those in our congregations and neighborhoods whom we know are in jail or prison. We can help to support the families, especially the children,

of those incarcerated through programs dedicated to this cause. We can pray for those who are in prison in our intercessory prayers not necessarily by name for the sake of privacy but that our congregations become more empathetic to those in prison and see them as created in the image of God in Christ. In this holy season we can grow in compassion for those incarcerated as we worship the one who suffered compassionately for us on the cross, even Jesus Christ.

Prayer – from ELCA for Prisons and Correctional Institutions, pg. 80

God of Justice, for our sake your son was condemned as a criminal. Visit our jails and prisons with your judgment and mercy. Remember all prisoners; bring the guilty to repentance and amendment of life according to your will and give hope for the future. When any are held unjustly, raise up for them advocates to bring them release, and give us the wisdom to improve our system of justice. Watch over those who work in these institutions; give them strength and compassion and keep them from becoming brutal or callous. Lead us to do for those in prison what we would do for Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Station 2: Jesus Accepts His Cross

2 Cor. 5:19-20; translation adapted from David Bentley Hart, The New Testament

"God was in Christ reconciling the cosmos to Godself, not accounting their trespasses to them, and placing in us the word of reconciliation. Therefore . . . for the sake of Christ, we implore, be reconciled to God."

From a Social Statement, "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective"

"Christians fulfill their vocation diversely and are rich in the variety of the gifts of the Spirit. Therefore, they often disagree passionately on the kind of responses they make to social questions. United with Christ and all believers in baptism, Christians welcome and celebrate their diversity. Because they share common convictions of faith, they are free, indeed obligated, to deliberate together on the challenges they face in the world." (pg. 5)

Reflection by the Rev. Dr. John Hoffmeyer

It may seem misguided to pair the words "Jesus accepts his cross" with Paul's declaration of God's great work of reconciliation. After all, God's activity of reconciliation in Christ Jesus includes the refusal to accept terror and cruelty. Terror and cruelty were the point of the cross as an instrument of state-sponsored torture in the Roman empire under which Jesus lived. But Jesus is not accepting the cross in itself. He is refusing to abandon his commitment to God's reconciling love. If forces arrayed against that love require Jesus to carry his cross, Jesus does so rather than abandon his commitment to reconciliation.

Paul insists that in Christ, God has reconciled the cosmos to Godself. Given that reality, our task is simply to "be reconciled." Our proper response to God's action of reconciliation is to be what God has already made us to be: reconciled. The ELCA social statement "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective" affirms the fundamental reality of reconciliation that God has accomplished in Christ Jesus. The statement also maps out ways for our words and deeds to bear witness to God's reconciliation.

Consider just this one example from the social statement: The ELCA commits to seeking to be a community that talks together openly, passionately, and respectfully about controversial issues. Reconciliation does not lie in avoiding controversial issues. Nor does it lie in refusing to respect those with whom we disagree. This vision of how to deliberate together about controversial issues is not just for the good of the church. "The Church in Society" notes that talking with each other openly and respectfully, even when we disagree, contributes to the common good. Such constructive communication helps to revitalize public life. The more that the church learns to talk together well about controversial issues, the more we can be like yeast in the dough of the larger society, leavening the whole.

Many years ago, I was in a group of people talking informally about the church. We were all adults, except for one younger person, about 10 years old. When asked his idea of the church, he replied: "It's where you can say whatever you think, and no one will laugh at you." Wouldn't it be great for the church to be known for that! Wouldn't that be a persuasive witness to God's action of reconciliation!

Prayer

God who has reconciled the whole world to yourself in Jesus Christ, teach us to be the reconciled people that you have made us. We pray this in the name of Christ and by the power of your life-giving Spirit. Amen.

Station 3: Jesus Falls for the First Time

Genesis 4:10-12 (emphasis added)

The Lord said to Cain, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me **from the ground!**' And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened her mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, she will no longer yield to you her strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.'

From a Social Statement, ["Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope Justice"](#)

"We live within the covenant God makes with all living things and are in relationship with them. The principle of participation means they are entitled to be heard and to have their interests considered when decisions are made. Creation must be given voice..." (pg. 6)

Reflection by the Rev. Inge Williams

The storms my family in northern Michigan dreads most are jags of heavy, wet snow in the wintertime. "It's like concrete," people complain, and besides the extra muscle required to shovel, the heavy slop wreaks havoc in the woods. After a particularly intense snowfall and coating of ice ten years ago, my dad remembers loud snapping and cracking coming from the woods as tree limbs crashed to the forest floor. Conifer branches especially simply can't hold that much weight. "Ten years later," he recently told me, "I can still see the scars."

Jesus falls because his cross is too heavy to bear. The translation of the Agnus Dei (John 1:29) into German paints a slightly different picture than in English: *Christe du Lamm Gottes, der du trägst die Sünd' der Welt, erbarm dich unser*. Christ, O Lamb of God, you who **bear** the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. To "take away" the sin of the world is not an act of magical disappearance: Jesus carries the sin of the world first on his back and in his arms and then in the scars on his body.

According to Brigitte Kahl, fratricide and ecocide have been deeply intertwined ever since the first son of the first human (*adam*) kills his younger brother, whose blood cries out to God from the soil (*adamah*). This living matrix of soil swallows the consequences of this violent act, then protests to the Creator, then refuses to offer her fertility to Cain and his descendants. From humanity's earliest day, the creation bears witness to human violence and God hears creation's cry.

Paradoxically, we live in an age of climate consequences and in an age of willful ignorance. Those who have ears to hear catch the cries of creation suffering from the more frequent and intense storms, natural disasters, and extreme weather. As God's people, we are not afraid to look at reality, and we see the scars from our corporate greed on the trees in our backyard. We will bear witness, and we will grieve.

Prayer

In his poem "Go to Hell" Padraig O'Tuama rhymes:

He is called to quiet now

He is called to silence

To squat down on the breaking ground
with those who've swallowed violence

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, the earth holds you close when you fall for the first time, absorbs your sweat and blood, and bears witness to human cruelty. Let your people join in the hymn of all creation: telling the truth about the consequences of a destabilized climate, resisting human violence and greed, and proclaiming the healing power of your solidarity and love. Amen.

Station 4: Jesus Meets His Mother

John 19: 25-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

From a [Social Statement on Abortion](#)

"Church members must not only be aware of the moral complexity of the situation but be able and willing to listen and walk with women and men through the process of decision-making, healing, and renewal, a process that may include feelings such as grief, guilt, relief, denial, regret, or anger." (pg. 5)

Reflection by the Rev. Erin Jones

As a mother of two, I can only imagine the deep grief that Mary is experiencing as she watches her child endure this public suffering. Is she hearing in her mind the echoes of Zechariah's prophecy, "a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35)? All of the fears she has carried for this precious one are becoming reality before her eyes. My heart breaks even imagining it. I can feel Mary collapsing in my arms as I join the women standing around her in her weeping and in her grief at watching her child endure the cross.

And in this station, we come to know that Jesus sees her too. He sees the grief, the worry, the despair, and he sees that she is not alone. There is already a community of women around her; these women have been following faithfully, listening and learning and serving. They have walked with Mary and Jesus for a long time and will be the ones who walk to the end of this road. He knows that he is not leaving his mother alone. And in his last act not as God's Son (capital letters), but as Mary's son, he makes sure that that the community around her will continue to expand, even in her most heart-wrenching moment. He turns to the beloved disciple and asks him to join the women as one who comes around Mary to care for her.

At its heart, this is what the Social Statement on Abortion lifts up as the main call for us as church when we encounter one another in our times of grief and difficult discernment. There is a call to deeper community, to expand our care for those who might feel isolated in their grief or anger or shame. We find ourselves in the role of the beloved disciple – in the midst of his own suffering, Jesus points us to others in order to draw us into deeper relationship.

There is an invitation in this Social Statement in particular, to see one another with the eyes of Jesus, even when we might drastically disagree on particular policies. The call of the cross is to enter into a relationship of empathy, to shift our perspective from our own to what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls the "view from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled – in short, from the perspective of those

who suffer” (DBWE 8:52). When we do that, we can find our hearts and community expand in ways we could never anticipate.

May you look at the world with a heart ready to care for those who are suffering, for people of all genders who make decisions about their body with deep discernment, sometimes breaking their hearts. May our hearts break, too, and break open to encompass all others who are suffering and in pain so that we might care for all in an ever-widening community of love.

Prayer

God of community, help us to see the ways in which we are connected to one another. When we disagree, let us lean into connecting with one another in love, rather than division. When we see suffering and heartbreak, help us to embrace those affected and walk with them through dark valleys and high mountains into your promise of new life. Amen.

Station 5: Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross

Mark 15:21

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

From a Social Statement, "[Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture](#)"

"The Church exists to proclaim Jesus the Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection mean freedom for the world. The Church also exists to teach the law of God, announcing that the God who justifies expects all people to do justice. So, the Church must cry out for justice, and thereby resist the cynicism fueled by visions that failed and dreams that died. The Church must insist on justice and thereby assure participation of all people." (pg. 5)

Reflection by the Rev. Stacy Chavis, "Pursue and Insist on Justice"

In the story of the crucifixion, we find a man simply known as Simon of Cyrene, a father of two. The gospel texts tell us that he was either seized or compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. And in imagining that day - all of the fervor in town, the weeping and the wailing - I wonder what it must have felt like to be plucked from relative anonymity and placed into the path of a weary, bloodied Messiah. What stories would Simon tell afterward? Did they echo the trembling in the spiritual, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?"

Simon found himself, as many of us do today, witness to a world dominated by empire, cultural hegemony, and the brutalization of many people. Given the sheer strength and resources of those in power, our ability to make even the slightest difference often seems impossible. But on this fated day, Simon was seized into service, forced to shift from witness to co-laborer. In carrying the cross, Simon's story reveals that the work of justice is heavy and hard; we are sometimes called into action when we least expect it; and in this work, we are also seized or compelled to act in spaces and places that we had never imagined, but where our presence was absolutely necessary.

Like Simon and others with him on that day, we are weary witnesses. But those witnesses didn't know how the story would end. As today's disciples of Christ, we know the salvific redemption of the cross. Unfortunately, because we know the end, we sometimes gloss over the trauma, the burial, and the grief, jumping straight to the resurrection. There is no resurrection without the cross and there is no justice without attention to the trauma. In pursuit of justice, we must sit in the uncomfortable silences and grief as we hear and hold the woes of the marginalized and oppressed. Bearing the cross of justice means prioritizing solutions while also being present and attentive to what came before.

This station of the cross asks us to live into our call to justice work. Do you find that your heart yearns for justice, but weariness has lulled you into complacency? The path to justice is indeed a long road, full of weary travelers. But the good news is that we don't travel alone and there is

strength for the journey. In the body of Christ, fully acknowledging the pain that has come before, we are truly Easter people, reborn into service. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we are transformed and equipped for anti-oppression and justice work. We can and must cry out for all people, in all nations. May those collective, insistent cries for justice bring freedom to the world.

Prayer

God of Grace and Glory,

Plant my feet in spaces and places where I can stand firm in your word, your will, and your way,

Strengthen my legs so that I can walk and not stumble on this journey,

Fortify my resolve so that I can pick up when others are weary,

Open my ears to better hear those in need,

Cause my heart to yearn for justice,

Compel me to cry out.

Thankful for the redemption and salvation of the cross, I bind my faith with those who have come before. Lord of mercy, receive our collective cries.

Amen.

Station 6: Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face

Luke 23:27-29

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'

From a Social Statement, ["Caring for Our Health: A Shared Endeavor"](#)

"Caring for one's own health is a matter of human necessity and good stewardship. Caring for the health of others expresses both love for our neighbor and responsibility for a just society." (pg. 1)

"Our calling to be faithful stewards of our own health and to fulfill our obligations for the health of others comes from the God who heals and redeems the whole creation." (pg. 6)

"Patients and caregivers are more than consumers or providers; they are whole persons working together in healing relationships that depend on and preserve community. Although health care goods and services may be bought and sold, health care is above all an activity of caring that grows out of relationships of mutual responsibility, concern, and trust—and that cannot be reduced to a commodity." (pg. 6)

Reflection by Deacon Holly Hoffman, MD, MAMS

Veronica, like many other women in the Bible, is not mentioned by name. We have to imagine that she was one of the women Jesus addressed in Luke 23. Church tradition has assigned that name to the woman who had menstrual flow for 12 years. She was healed after touching the hem of Jesus' robe. (Mark 5:25–34; Matthew 9:20–22; Luke 8:43–48). Legend has it that she was present at the crucifixion. As Jesus passed by, she removed her head-cloth and gave it to him to wipe the sweat and blood from his face. When Jesus handed the cloth back to her, his image remained imprinted on it. This cloth became known as the Veil of Veronica, and it was said to have miraculous curative properties. The Lutheran Social Statement on Caring for Health reiterates Veronica's both seeking and giving of healing and compassion.

Although I have spent 40 years as a health care provider, it was not my medical skills that touched people's hearts... it was genuine care for their needs and respect for their humanity. It was the things that any of us can do, as followers of Christ. We can all offer care and compassion like Veronica.

Most of us have been there at some point in time: We or a loved one have just received a frightening diagnosis. Or we have developed a condition involving pain, are facing surgery and recovery, or invasive and intimidating tests. Or we are struggling against depression, anxiety, addiction. To be human is to face health problems with fear, anxiety, a feeling of isolation or

being overwhelmed. We all need someone to offer us a hand and hope; just sitting with us as we face these trials, meals when we can't make them ourselves, driving us to that scary test, and being there as we go through painful tests and treatments. Healing takes many forms, and you don't have to have a health care degree to provide it.

Having worked in healthcare for so long, I'm distressed by the significant shifts in how the industry determines what is "quality." These shifts leave me feeling like both patients and caretakers have been reduced to line items in a budget, measured by dollars saved and time efficiency, rather than healing and care needed. That deep level of care and community, of neighbor caring for neighbor, that the healthcare team cherished in the past seems like an evaporating dream. Trust and compassion appear to be less important than profit.

We are all called to love our fellow image-bearers ... no matter what their color, lifestyle or religion ... as ourselves. We must recall Veronica and Jesus, meeting each other in their moments of deep need and vulnerability, healing each other in whatever ways they could. Our lives and communities depend on it.

Prayer – From ELW, "Thanksgiving for caregivers"

Holy and compassionate God, you send to us in our need those who care for us and look out for our lives. Bless them in their love for us. Bless the hands of those who work for our health. Bless the minds of those who search for our healing. Bless the feet of those who come to us in our need. Bless the eyes of those who look after us. Bless the hearts of all who serve; fill them with compassion and patience; and work through all of them for the betterment and well-being of all your children, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Station 7: Jesus Falls a Second Time

Luke 10:25-28

An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

From a Social Statement, ["Our Calling in Education"](#)

"Our particular calling in education is two-fold: to educate people in the Christian faith for their vocation, and to strive with others to ensure that all have access to high quality education that develops personal gifts and abilities and serves the common good." (pg. 1)

Reflection by the Rev. David Byerly

We as Lutheran Christians acknowledge that we in some ways stumble through this life together, for we are simultaneously saints and sinners, according to Martin Luther. We are fallible. When we stumble, we must realize that we are in good company, for Jesus also stumbled as he carried the burden of the cross and the sinfulness of our humanity along with him on that path toward Golgotha.

As we reflect upon all Jesus has done for us, we begin to realize that this life we share in faith is enlivened and enriched through the ways we have been formed from early childhood on. The nurture and love we experience is no less than God's love for us expressed through our parents, our teachers and our pastors. God created us with the ability and the desire to learn about this fascinating world around us, and in turn we are equipped to share this knowledge and fascination with others. One of the most basic realizations of this Christian faith is that the one who saves us is also our teacher. In so many instances through the Gospels we read that Jesus of Nazareth was addressed as "teacher." And Jesus has taught us through his life what it means to be truly human.

Jesus has taught us to love God with our whole being - including with all our mind - and to love our neighbors as ourselves. (Luke 10:27) This love of our neighbors is our call to advocacy in the task of education. Ensuring that all have access to high quality education is one way we move outside of the church doors in order to witness to our faith in the world, and particularly in our local communities. Our work, which we approach with humility because we know that we are fallible (we will stumble!) is to do what we can through our school boards and state legislatures and governors to point out how we can fairly and equitably provide quality education for the children of our communities. Having safe classrooms where all children are offered the chance to develop their particular gifts is the ideal we strive to achieve. This truly equips the members of the next generation to find their callings and develop their God-given vocations for the good of God's world.

Prayer – from LBW Occasional Services

Almighty God, you give wisdom and knowledge. Help us to study diligently and to grow in all that is good. Support all who teach and all who learn, that together we may know and follow your ways; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Station 8: Jesus Speaks to the Women

Luke 23:27-31

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

From a Social Statement, ["Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call To Action"](#)

"God works through shared human endeavor and intends that all people work together to deter evil and seek justice...Social structures and institutions that fail to do justice are not fulfilling the purpose for which God created them. They must be challenged and held accountable; this is a matter of great urgency because human life depends upon them." (pg. 59)

Reflection by the Rev. Traci Marriott

Jesus spoke some of his last words to the women who remained loyal to him, even as he was being led away for execution. They mourned over the cruelty Jesus suffered at the hands of the religious leaders and government authorities, but Jesus told them to mourn for themselves and their children instead. Jesus knew the injustice he experienced was not unique, and violence, especially violence against women, children, and other vulnerable members of society, has harmed humanity in every place and time. Because our world struggles to appreciate, value, and fully include all people, the women to whom Jesus spoke and their children would certainly have been victims of that injustice over the course of their lives.

That Jesus redirects the women to weep for themselves and their loved ones reminds us that what happens to human beings, who are all made in God's image, matters to God—enough for God to become incarnate in Jesus and live in solidarity with us. The women are right to weep for Jesus, but Jesus wants them to know that he sees their suffering and that God cares deeply about what they have to endure in this world.

The church has sometimes been guilty of minimizing Jesus' care and concern for this life, emphasizing instead the importance of resurrected life. Christians have excused injustice, inequity, poverty, violence, and the dehumanization of women and minorities, as well as acted carelessly toward God's other creatures and the environment, all with the excuse that a heavenly reward will one day make up for what our human communities lack. But if Jesus seized the moment—while he was on the way to the cross—to instruct the women to act with empathy for the world around them, what reason could we have for waiting to pursue God's righteousness and justice?

We've had a couple millennia to put Jesus' words into practice, yet our society still fails to care for all people in just and equitable ways. Born into imperfect social systems, it can be difficult

for us to realize how far we really are from God's good intentions for the human community; when we do see the disparity between God's vision and humanity's response, the gulf can seem too wide to span. Jesus encouraged the women of Jerusalem to start building that bridge by turning their compassion for him into compassion for those around them. Similarly, our love of God should inspire us to love God's people, not in theory but in practical ways. We are called to this compassionate work of making more just social systems not primarily for our own spiritual benefit, but because, as our social statements remind us, human life depends upon them.

Prayer - from All Creation Sings, Prayers for Faithful Living in Society

Sovereign God, your Son Jesus lived within the structures of society even as he spoke truth to those in power and challenged systems of oppression. Empower us to be courageous disciples and responsible citizens. Grant that our life in the public realm be grounded in love for our neighbors, care for the most vulnerable in our midst, and respect for the common life we share, following the example of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Station 9: Jesus Falls a Third Time

1 Corinthians 12:22b-26

The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this. God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

From a Social Statement, "[Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust](#)"

"God remains faithful, seeking out and inviting all into intimate relationship. This dignity of the human being reflects God's deep love and stands against all forms of violence, discrimination, and injustice. Scripture reveals to believers that just as God does not abandon that which God loves, neither should we...We are consoled and encouraged because, even in the face of broken trust, God includes all of creation in the unfolding of the human community and the world. As human beings, we participate in creation's work that continues even now in fruitfulness and productivity. For believers, it is hope in God's future, not in an idealized past, that inspires participation in God's changing, open, and inexhaustible creation." (pg. 5)

Reflection by the Rev. Carla Christopher

The poetry of the creation stories are some of my favorite scriptures to illustrate the splendid diversity of God's creation. As God created the land and the water, so God created the swamp and the marsh, the stream-split cliff and the shifting sand dune. Alongside day and night, God brought about the splendid beauty of dusk and dawn and the misty mid-morning. Not only is nature created in endless breadth and possibility - so is humanity made for community and companionship out of that changing earth in forms that are reinvented by God's own hand even after their creation. Psalm 139 illustrates the intentionality of this creative design, uplifting that each one of us is specifically knit together in the womb, fearfully and wonderfully made.

The variety with which we are crafted allows 1 Corinthians 12 to be a practical and personal affirmation of the Hebrew Bible's sacred truths. Our multiple manifestations of being allow the array of complimentary relationships that weave our tapestry of communities, diverse in membership while united in mission to uplift Christ and console Christians. Our varied beings at times call us into connection with the unfamiliar, but the letter to the church in Corinth gives no quarter to judgement, dissention, or even the sacrifice of one part for the preservation or comfort of the many. Celebration of our diversity is extended into a call for uplifting the marginalized or disrespected. It is not enough to allow the presence of certain parts in the body of Christ, or to acknowledge their existence. Those members are to be clothed in honor, given respect, and offered special care - not just for the good of God's child on the margins, but for the healing and wholeness of the entire body.

Jesus falling for the third time, body battered by assault and now also depleted by exhaustion, is not specifically mentioned in the Bible. It is part of the Catholic tradition, inviting us into deeper solidarity and empathy with the striving Jesus. The intimacy of this moment inspires compassion, reminding us that Christ's body is both divine and vulnerable. The literal and contemporary body of Christ suffer when mocked and persecuted. The same way we might imagine our response to a stumbling Jesus, bravely resilient even in the face of overwhelming hardship, is how we should respond to our LGBTQIA+ siblings in Christ, still woefully lacking in legal protections and freedom from attacks against body, mind and spirit for our differences.

Prayer

God who created our beings in diversity and blessed them for equitable relationship and connection, you create and re-form us as human beings and as the body of Christ. May sympathy with Jesus summon us to unyielding accompaniment and advocacy for the dignity and worth of those whose human rights remain debated and partial today, and may we remain unceasing even in weariness, like Jesus on pilgrimage to Golgatha. May we rejoice one day at the restored relationship you have brought to your healed and whole creation, LGBTQIA+ siblings and all those also on society's margins, clothed in dignity and love. Amen.

Station 10: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

1 Cor.12:21-22, 26

As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

From a Social Statement, "[Sufficient, Sustainable, Livelihood for All](#)"

"We should assess economic activities in terms of how they affect "all," especially people living in poverty. We tend to view economic life by how it affects us personally. The cross of Christ challenges Christians to view this arena through the experience of those of us who are impoverished, suffering, broken, betrayed, left out, without hope. Through those who are "despised" and "held of no account" (Isaiah 53:3) we see the crucified Christ (Matthew 25:31-46), through whom God's righteousness and justice are revealed." (pg. 4)

Reflection by the Rev. Violet Little

The Welcome Church in Philadelphia is a "church without walls" whose congregation is primarily made up of unhoused folks living on the street. Though we emphasize the riches and gifts that each person brings to our community, we are a congregation of deep *economic* poverty. This distinction is important to us and is highlighted by the many offerings of self, articulated during our Sunday outdoor worship in the park; still, the majority of folks in our community are living "precariously between subsistence and utter deprivation."

Our congregation began in the women's bathroom of a downtown train station. I would see the women drying their hair under the weakly blowing hand dryers, trying to maintain their dignity as they washed up or changed clothes. I met one woman, Brenda, who was actually living in one of the bathroom stalls. The wheels of her battered suitcase could be seen in the opening beneath, along with an empty plastic cup from a fast food restaurant, and a plastic bag decorated with sunflowers holding most of her possessions. This is where Brenda slept, leaving the stall only periodically, and only trusting the other women in our community who would check on her, eventually convincing Brenda to receive help. It seemed, then, only fitting that The Welcome Church would observe Good Friday by walking the Stations of the Cross in that same train station where we first began as a congregation.

The location of each Station, as well as the reflections and the prayers were chosen and written by folks in The Welcome Church. Even with all our planning, the Spirit would still show up, surprising us in ways that we could not anticipate. Our first year, a woman who randomly joined us "along the way" read the Station, "Jesus is stripped." The location, as she shared, was the space in that train station where she had been sexually assaulted. Our pilgrims surrounded her in prayer and it was the start of a long healing journey that eventually led to her recovery and housing.

In those early years, the Stations would lead us to a dark, open space in the rear of the station, literally known as "the tomb" by the folks who slept there during cold winter nights. This was the spot, where many of our folks would lay their heads, some even dying from the cold, or with a needle in arms too thin, or hearts too shattered; but this was also the spot where together we would sing that old gospel hymn, "Were you there?" heightened by the beautiful acoustics of this not-so-beautiful open space.

The tomb was the spot where we would pray in front of a spray-painted sign that we found on a wall marked with a cross and statement of God's blessing in Jesus. This spot, filled with pain and so much sorrow, was the spot where I most encountered Jesus on my own journey to the cross. This is the God of Compassion, the God who literally "suffers with" humanity in all the tombs of our lives; and this God wants no one--not even those who "cast lots" for Jesus' clothing--to have to live in a bathroom stall.

Prayer

O God, you have made us one body. Help us to live as a conspiracy of love, knowing that how each of us lives affects the lives of all. Amen.

Station 11: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Luke 23:32-34

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesusa there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."] And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

From a Social Statement, ["On The Death Penalty"](#)

"Executions harm society by mirroring and reinforcing existing injustice. The death penalty distracts us from our work toward a just society. It deforms our response to violence at the individual, familial, institutional, and systemic levels. It perpetuates cycles of violence." (pg. 3)

Reflection by the Rev. Justin Lingenfelter

There was always plenty of roughhousing to be had between my siblings and me growing up, but I always knew that we could only go so far. If things ever got out of hand and somehow my brother or sister took a bad elbow that ended up in tears, I knew that we were in dangerous waters. Those waters were made even more dangerous if the tears were accompanied by a threat to go tell on me to Mom and Dad.

Which is why I had a system for remedying such situations: before they could go running off to let my parents know about the physical infraction at hand, I would very strategically extend my arm and say "No, no! Here! Hit me!" I figured that if I just let them retaliate – if I let them do unto me as was done unto them – then the scales of justice would be evened out.

It seems as if my siblings and I weren't the only ones who made for themselves such a punitive code of engagement. In fact, it looks as if those who internalized a similar code made it into legislatures where they could codify it further within the very conduct of government, because half of the states in the U.S. (Pennsylvania included) retain the death penalty in their rule of law. We've deemed it acceptable for our state to operate on our behalf in this manner of codified revenge.

Now, if I'm honest with myself, sometimes I get it. It's not that difficult to imagine that if I ever had to endure the horror of losing someone I loved to the violence of another, there's a deeply seated part of me – an old creature, if you will – that would want nothing more than to see the perpetrator pay with their own life.

But punitive revenge is not justice. It's just more violence. As disciples of Christ, this truth of violence is one we are called to stare directly in the face and name as the horror that it is. Here is no exception. There is no sugar-coating the death-dealing of the cross. Each nail driven with the force of the state into the hands and feet of the Savior reminds us that old creatures make

for poor legislators. Christ's own state-sanctioned execution serves as reminder of those yet carried out by our own state in the name of "we the people."

And so we plead alongside Jesus: Father forgive us, for we do not know what we are doing. We plead that God's vision of redemption and mercy might put a spoke in our cyclical wheels of vengeance and violence. We plead at our Savior's execution for a stay on any further death-dealing means done in our name. We plead that God's kingdom may come and God's will be done, despite our own inclinations.

Then we set our face towards a course away from the death-dealing ways we've come to know. In our discipleship, we commit to building a more just society issuing forth from the one who offers forgiveness and redemption from the cross. We labor that the fertile ground of reconciliation in which Christ plants us might bear good fruit for a world caught up in its patterns of violence. We set ourselves to dismantling and disarming our old creatures in order to more fully live as the new creation God envisions.

We advocate that, for Christ's sake, the penalty of death might stop at last.

Prayer – From All Creation Sings

You calm and quiet us, eternal God, as a mother holds her children close; all people have refuge in the shadow of your wings. Spread over us the shelter of your peace. Hold before us the wisdom of your cross, where we are drawn to you not by might or power, but by your boundless love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Station 12: Jesus Dies on the Cross

John 19:16-22

So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross by himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

From a Social Message on [Government and Civic Engagement in the United States](#)

Fifth, God imparts purpose to the roles of worldly governance. Some government officials and the public they serve see such roles as means primarily for power and gain. It is the proper task of the church, however, to declare that government, citizenship, and public service are gifts to be exercised with integrity and respect for the well-being of human communities. They are not entitlements to be clawed after or obstacles to be avoided or eliminated. (pg. 8)

Reflection by the Rev. Amy Reumann

The texts that anchor the story of Jesus's crucifixion seem, at first glance, to have little connection to social teaching on government and civic life. What does the account of one man, beaten and bloodied and unjustly sentenced to death have to do with our understanding of the relationship between church and state and the role of the Christian in public life?

The central and connecting theme is power, starting with human uses and abuses of power for selfish gain and political expediency that set in motion and seal Jesus's fate. The road to the cross is paved by religious leaders who use their power to elevate a theological dispute with Jesus to a death sentence by turning him over to King Herod and insisting he judge him. It is built by the crowd who clamor loudly for Jesus' death. Jesus' fate is cemented by Pilate, who wields his political power both casually and cruelly to sentence an innocent man to a criminal's death by the torture of crucifixion, mocking him with the inscription "King of the Jews" as he dies.

The political, ecclesial and mob power exercised to target, torture and kill Jesus stand in stark contrast to God's power revealed in the cross. God's power is often hidden from human view. Jesus's surrender to craven authorities is not a moment of weakness or defeat, but a revelation of God's power that upends, subverts and disarms all human displays. The power of God is rooted in love. The power of God is manifest in forgiveness. The power of God is a preference for those who suffer and those who experience oppression. The power of Gods calls us away from self-seeking gain and calls us towards service and sacrifice toward the neighbor.

The forthcoming social statement on Faith and Civic Life affirms a theology of the cross. Although human beings expect domination, God's power appears in weakness (1 Corinthians 1:25). When we are overly confident, God unsettles our presumptions. In the light of faith, we are empowered to see the future of God's fulfillment, and we see that God's purpose and power always move toward the divine promise of the well-being of all people. At the end of the Lord's Prayer, we affirm that "the power, the honor and the glory are yours." Not ours! When Christians forget that all power belongs to God and God's purpose, they risk creating idols. These include wealth, country, race, party, gender, class, and ideology. God's power in Jesus Christ redirects forgiven ones from such idolatry and reshapes the way we use the power entrusted to us, towards the neighbor, towards the common good.

God's love flows from the cross and is an antidote to misused human power. God calls us to service through civic activity, knowing all political acts and power are to be evaluated by how they serve the wellbeing of our neighbors. God intends that humans use, increase, and share such power, with love, so that human structures and systems serve the well-being of all with good order and justice.

Prayer - Great God, Your Love Has Called Us (ELW 358, verses 1, 2, 5)

Great God, your love has called us here, as we, by love, for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear, though marred, dishonored, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind your call to hear, your love to find.

We come with self-inflicted pains or broken trust and chosen wrong,
Half-free, half-bound by inner chains, by social forces swept along,
By pow'rs and systems close confined, yet seeking hope for humankind.

Great God, in Christ you set us free your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty to turn from guilt and dull despair,
And offer all that faith can do while love is making all things new.

Station 13: Jesus' Body is Taken Down

John 19:38-42

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

From a Social Statement, "[Genetics, Faith and Responsibility](#)"

"Responsible people are called to practice the imperative of love for all that God has made, which today can be stated as: Respect and promote the community of life with justice and wisdom... As places of *koinonia*, this church urges its congregations, campus ministries and other ministry sites to live into an identity in which all suffer in common when one suffers and all rejoice when one rejoices; to welcome all, to participation and to appropriate pastoral care; and to give renewed attention to becoming lively places of common reflection, deliberation and discernment." (pg. 31)

Reflection by the Rev. Deborah Byrum

Family members were gathered together in the ICU, around their mother/wife. Just two days earlier she had been joyfully raising her voice with her dear friends in a community choir, in a competition. They did well! Now she was connected to machines that kept her hydrated and breathing and kept her heart beating.

It was almost impossible to process; they kept waiting for her to wake up and recover, as she had from other diabetic episodes, over the years. They knew how this was supposed to go.

The family talked to her, and about her, had everyday conversations or were quiet. They came and went, taking breaks for food and rest, showers, or time alone or as couples. As time moved along but also seemed to stand still, it was hard to imagine that this was "real life." They were family, community, one and all suffering together in mutual witness and support, in painful, sacred space, with tender pastoral care, in *koinania*.

Finally, respectfully, sadly, wisely, still disbelieving in a way, they let her go. Out of care for her struggling body, enduring blood draws and pic lines and forced oxygen. Out of love for her soul/self, which seemed to be no longer there. Out of respect for one another, the staff and equipment. In acceptance of what was; she was gone. With prayer and gentle reverence, they said goodbye, assured that her body would be well cared for.

Like this family, we all at times bear witness, and "suffer in common," or "rejoice," with individuals, family members, or local or global communities. At this Station, we participate in the suffering of the friends and family of our Lord, including those who could not bear the burden of this act. And we feel grateful for the gentle and reverent care Jesus' body received from quiet, secret believers.

Prayer

Oh Lord,

Grant us strength and wisdom, we pray, as we "practice the imperative of Love for all that God has made."

Amen!

Station 14: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

John 19:40-42, ESV

So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

From a Social Statement, ["For Peace in God's World"](#)

"Faith in the crucified and risen Lord strengthens us to persist even when God seems absent in a violent and unjust world, and when weariness and hopelessness threaten to overwhelm us." (pg. 6)

Reflection by the Rev. Erik Young, Navy Captain

Imagine the depth of loss of that particular Sabbath eve. You just watched someone you love – the very best someone – be falsely accused and then wrongly imprisoned, only to be tortured and murdered before your very eyes. And there was nothing you could do about it. The affairs of the past 48 hours don't seem real. The penetrating grief of these events leave you numb; and for that you are meagerly thankful, as it is the only way you can continue functioning. And continue functioning you must, as there are things that need to be done that cannot be ignored. Joseph of Arimathea went to Pontius Pilate and requested his body. We need to lay Jesus to rest where he cannot be disturbed. We won't be able to have his funeral until the third day. We are rushed in doing so: we have to be in our homes before sunset or the same people who killed our Lord will come for us, too.

The tomb is closed and now so is the door to the upper room. The sorrow within the space is palpable. But Martha does what Martha does – she lights the candle to start the Sabbath remembrance and meal, praying the traditional prayer as she does so: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has made us holy through the commandments, and has commanded us to light the Sabbath light." Yet no one is hungry, and soon all go off to sleep, hoping to find some peace and solace. They wake up Saturday morning to what is supposed to be a day of rest, a holy day set apart since the dawn of humanity, hoping that it was all just a terrible nightmare. But it wasn't. And so there they sit on the Sabbath, unable to do anything other than grieve and cry out for peace.

This would be the scene for the next 24 hours. SPOILER ALERT: The story does not end with Jesus being laid in the tomb. Come Sunday morning, the first day of the week, the grave will be empty, and the dead will be alive. The world will be changed. And in that world, the disciples of this Rabbi, too, are changed. Through this very memory and moment, they will go on to change the world. Without weapons. Without force. Without threat. Without coercion.

Here we are 2,000 years later, tasked with carrying on the work of the witnesses to that terrible and wonderful weekend. We will find ourselves in moments such as those: overwhelmed by the situation of the world we see, numbed by grief, but still called to act. We do so without weapons, without force, without threat, without coercion. Our actions are ones of love and peace, modeled after everything our Lord Jesus did and commanded. Being his disciples, we work to be his hands and feet and voice in a world that craves such peace – a peace that only the Prince of Peace can give.

Prayer

We adore You, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world. Grant us your peace so that the world may experience your peace through us. Amen.