

## Good Friday Possibilities for the Church



**a) i.** There is an ancient tradition of following the walk of Jesus to the cross by creating commemorations of the so-called 'Stations of the Cross'. The value of creating a Stations of the Cross experience relates to encouraging and enabling an inner spiritual journey for individuals. It can become a kind of modest spiritual retreat or pilgrimage for those who wish to develop their prayer life and their spiritual discipline.

Different traditions exist as regards the number of these stations, and what they each depict in that terrible journey to the cross, but there are 14 stations in most traditions. However, because five of those traditional 14 stations are not explicitly biblical, a modern revision was developed, holding to the number 14 for the stations.

Often known as the 'Scriptural Way of the Cross', its 14 stations are as follows:

- 1st station Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-41)
- 2nd station Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested (Mark 14: 43-46)
- 3rd station Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin (Luke 22: 66-71)
- 4th station Jesus is denied by Peter (Matthew 26:69-75)
- 5th station Jesus is judged by Pontius Pilate (Mark 15: 1-5, 15)
- 6th station Jesus is scourged at the pillar and crowned with thorns (John 19:1-3)
- 7th station Jesus bears the cross (John 19: 6, 15-17)
- 8th station Jesus is helped by Simon the Cyrenian to carry the cross (Mark 15:21)
- 9th station Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23: 27-31)
- 10th station Jesus is crucified (Luke 23:33-34)
- 11th station Jesus promises his Kingdom to the repentant thief (Luke 23: 39-43)
- 12th station Jesus speaks to his mother and the Beloved Disciple (John 19: 25-27)
- 13th station Jesus dies on the cross (Luke 23: 44-46)
- 14th station Jesus is placed in the tomb (Matthew 27: 57-60)

There are many website resources which will provide information and further ideas about the use of the traditional Stations of the Cross and the more explicitly biblical Scriptural Way of the Cross.

Churches could, if they have the appropriate kind of space in the sanctuary itself, or in another room, prepare stations around the room for people to walk around in a time of personal prayer and reflection. Perhaps using more than one room would be better, if

possible, providing a stronger sense of being on a journey, and allowing more space between stations.

The stations themselves can be very modest affairs. At each station there could be a few chairs and stools, perhaps a small comfortable rug; a small table or a chair for propping up objects to be displayed (see below). As far as is possible, there should be a sense of each station being discrete, not too close to other stations.

This Stations of the Cross experience could, if possible, be made available for the whole day, allowing people to come for this experience of spiritual retreat at whatever time was good for them.

Could something of this nature be a helpful contribution to the spiritual journeying of your church?



**a) ii.** What would be available at each of the stations?

There must be no sense of clutter. There should be no one talking or greeting people. It may be helpful to have one or two experienced Christians in and around the building, in case a person wishes to pray with someone or talk something through with someone, but they should not be hovering around the stations.

Churches could print and blow up in size the relevant biblical passage for each station. These could be laminated and either stuck to the wall or placed on a chair, for easy visibility.

There are many appropriate prayers, some composed specifically for the Stations of the Cross, available online and in printed collections of seasonal church prayers, and one could be made available, assuming permission is granted, at each station.

o But churches could invite members (and others in the community?) to reflect on the stations beforehand, and to compose their own prayers to be offered at the stations. Perhaps individuals who show an interest could then be invited to focus on a particular station. In this way, all the stations could be included.

The Stations of the Cross have captivated the imagination of countless Christian artists working in a wide range of artistic mediums. There are many websites, including those of Christian artists themselves, which provide access to electronic images of these works of art. Such artistic impressions can be very stimulating for people as they reflect on them. One or more of these could be downloaded and printed, assuming permission is granted, for each station.

o But churches could invite members (and others in the community?) to reflect on the stations beforehand, and to create something themselves that reflects and expresses their response to it. These creations could be poetry,

paintings, sculptures, embroidery, photographs, etc. Perhaps individuals who show an interest could then be invited to focus on a particular station. In this way, all the stations could be included.

Could any of the above be a way of engaging your church members, helping some to express their creativity, and many to deepen their understanding of the significance of Jesus' suffering and death for us?

Could a well-planned and designed 'Scriptural Way of the Cross' be advertised in your local community, inviting people to come to experience this? Members of the church could be on hand to speak and pray with people who were touched by the Holy Spirit.

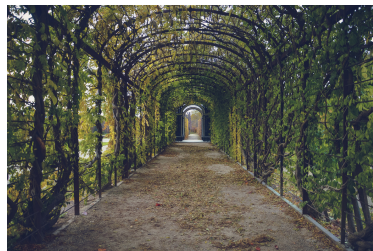
**a) iii.** Further suggestions for the Stations of the Cross

**Objects / Images:** If you decide to have objects or visual images at all or some of the stations, you can be creative when considering what to prepare. Here are ideas for some of the 14 stations.

**Reflection Cards:** You can also consider having laminated cards, or A4 paper, with suggestions for reflection at the respective stations. Here are ideas for some of the 14 stations.

**1st station**

**Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane**



*Objects / Images*

Surround this station with potted plants, to create the feeling of a garden. But this is a subdued garden, so no bright, flowering plants.

There could be rugs and cushions, and people could be encouraged, if possible, to kneel at this station. But seats must be available for those who are unable to kneel.

*Reflection Cards*

'Has there been a time in your life when you believed that God may be calling you to do something significant that you did not want to do? What did you do?'

'Do you think you have that great love that Jesus spoke about (John 15:13) which means that you would be willing to lay down your life for someone else?'

**2nd station Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested**



*Objects / Images*

There could be a small box, or a purse, with 30 silver coins in it, representing the price paid to Judas Iscariot.

*Reflection Cards:*

‘Has there been a time in your life when you betrayed someone in some way? If you have not done this already, is it possible to apologise to that person now? What difference might it make?’

‘Has there been a time in your life when you feel you were betrayed in some way by someone else? If you have not done this already, is it possible to forgive that person now? What difference might it make?’

**4th station Jesus is denied by Peter**



*Objects / Images*

Perhaps a photograph or model of a cockerel, representing the crowing of the cockerel associated with Peter's denial of Jesus?

*Reflection Cards:*

‘Has there been a time in your life when you denied Jesus in some way? If you have not already acknowledged and confessed this, could you do so now?’

‘Ask God to strengthen you for the times to come when you may have difficult choices to make and stands to take for Jesus.’

**5th station Jesus is judged by Pontius Pilate**



*Objects / Images*

Have a large bowl filled with water at this station, symbolising the water with which Pilate washed his hands when he met Jesus.

Have a gavel on a small, bare desk / table, symbolising the judgment that was passed on Jesus.

*Reflection Cards:*

‘Has there been a time in your life when you felt that someone had washed their hands of

you, rather than help or support you? If you have not done this already, is it possible to forgive that person now? What difference might it make?’

‘Has there been a time in your life when you perhaps washed your hands of someone else, rather than help or support them? If you have not really acknowledged and confessed this, could you do so now?’

11th station Jesus promises his Kingdom to the repentant thief



*Objects / Images*

An image of three crosses on Golgotha.

13th station

Jesus dies on the cross



*Objects / Images*

Have a basket of large carpenter nails at this station. Invite people to take away a nail as a physical reminder of the sacrifice that Jesus made on their behalf.

14th station Jesus is placed in the tomb



*Objects / Images*

Create a bag of scented spices, or a piece of cloth sprinkled with fragrant oils for this station. Encourage people to smell the bag / cloth and imagine that they are on their way to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body.

Perhaps have some very small candles there, one of which each person could light as they leave the station, symbolising our hope, even at this darkest time of the death and burial of Jesus. (These may need to be extinguished by someone after the people leave the station, ready for the next people.)

Thinking together about ways to enhance the sense of spiritual engagement and reflection at each of the stations could itself be a positive experience for those involved in planning such a 'Scriptural Way of the Cross'.





**a) iv.** A further idea, though often not practicable for churches and other buildings, is based on Matthew 27:45. The idea is to arrange the stations such that there is gradually diminishing light as you move through the stations. The first station can be natural daylight, or the regular strength of artificial light in the room, symbolising that that day may have started off, to the outside observer, as a day like any other day. But then, at intervals, perhaps at each station, or perhaps at every 2nd, 3rd or 4th station, the light is dimmed.

o If the room is kept as dark as possible, even during the day, closing curtains, for example, then this visual symbolism becomes more feasible. This is especially so if more than one room can be used. The idea would be to begin with relatively bright electric light, perhaps several lamps shining on the station, moving through stages of fewer and fewer lamps, then moving to a few large candles, on through fewer candles, to perhaps just one large candle at the final station.

Could this be practicable for your church?



**a) v.** Another idea would depend on the final station being in a room other than the sanctuary. If this was the case, and if there was just the one large candle for light, or whatever other arrangement had been made for a very low light, then the first Easter Sunday morning service could begin in that room, at that station.

Then, people would walk, quietly and in a subdued manner, into the sanctuary. The sanctuary could be quite well lit as they enter, perhaps only with all the candles from the stations, but the greater light symbolising the new day, and the promise of this day. After a few moments, during which the Minister would begin the service in an appropriate way for the service, all the electric lights could suddenly, without warning, but on a pre-arranged signal, be switched on all at once, flooding the sanctuary with light. Perhaps a couple of floodlights could be brought in to be used in the rest of the service, giving even more light than is usual in the sanctuary? This out of the ordinary, extravagant strength and intensity of light would symbolise the extraordinary, unprecedented glory of the light of the resurrection of Jesus.

Could this be practicable for your church?



**b)** Focusing on Jesus as our great healer, one idea which can be effective involves two things.

First of all, a very large cross, either standing in a box of some kind, or leaning against a wall, in an easily accessible part of the church. This may be present as people enter the church, or it may be brought in during the service.

Secondly, in preparation for the service, a sufficient supply of basic plasters for covering scratches and minor wounds is bought, and one or two plasters are placed on each seat. (It may also be prudent, if possible, to include pens and pencils for each seat.)

At a time of intercession during the service, perhaps also including personal petitions, people are encouraged to reflect on those they know, perhaps including themselves, who are in need of Jesus' healing touch. This can be presented as including physical, mental, emotional, relational and spiritual healing. Then, they are invited to write a name, or another word, on the plasters, each plaster representing a different person, or perhaps a different family. They then walk to the cross and stick the plaster on the cross, symbolising our giving to Jesus, our great healer, the things in our lives that need healing.

At the close of this time, the person leading this part of the service brings all the prayers together in a concluding prayer.

Could this be effective in your church?

Perhaps it may be appropriate for the person leading this part of the service to say that this time of intercession and personal petition for those in need of God's healing touch is open to those who are believers in Jesus *and* to those who are not.

He has open arms for everyone.

### Good Friday Possibilities for Community Outreach



Hot Cross Buns are traditionally eaten on Good Friday. As with so many foods and drinks, these have become horribly commercialised and trivialised in the UK in recent generations,

but the origin of eating hot cross buns is a Christian one. They are an English tradition, and even today, they are only commonly known in the UK and some parts of the Commonwealth.

Although it is possible that they developed out of an older custom, the earliest historical mention of them refers to a medieval English monk who is said to have marked buns with the sign of the cross in honour of Good Friday. Although many superstitious beliefs arose about their protective and other powers, those beliefs can be set aside.

Hot cross buns are sweet, exotic buns that were historically eaten at the close of Lent, and specifically after the Good Friday services. They were eaten after sundown to break the Good Friday fast.

The white cross marking on the bun, either incised on the top of the buns, or painted on with a sweet glaze, symbolises the crucifixion of Jesus.

With respect to the basic dough, its shape represents the tomb of Jesus.

The raisins or currants represent Jesus' body, buried in the tomb.

Because Jesus was entombed after he was taken down from the cross, the spices used in the dough (typically cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves) represent his embalming. These spices were not cheap to buy, and so also represent the giving of one's all in order to take care of Jesus' body.

Eating dough like that of the buns was possible, because the time for eating the buns marked the end of Lent. Christians were able to return to eating dairy products, and also to use luxury ingredients in their cooking, which was all traditionally forbidden during Lent. Therefore, the sweetness of the dough also promises the sweet return of Jesus on Easter Sunday.

(Perhaps hot cross buns could be given out to people as they arrive in church at the start of the Easter Sunday service(s), or after the service(s), with tea / coffee? An explanation of the symbolism could be provided during the service.)

Perhaps you could have a session for making hot cross buns on the Saturday afternoon before Easter Sunday? Invite people in the community to come and take part, making new friends? The buns could be taken and given to people in the community. An explanation of the symbolism could be provided during the service.

Perhaps there could be, on that Saturday afternoon, a hot cross bun competition, inviting people and those with young children in the community to join in for the fun of it?

Perhaps Easter could be a good time to start a food bank at the church, including hot cross buns among the first foods? Or perhaps members could be encouraged to become volunteers at an existing food bank, including taking hot cross buns for their first involvement?