

Death of the Messiah

Session Focus

This session on following Jesus explores the meaning and significance of Jesus' death on the cross. It immerses people in Jesus' journey to the cross through an experience and exploration of the Scriptural Stations of the Cross. Through an examination of the Gospels, participants will discover why Jesus was sentenced to death and crucified by the religious and civil authorities of his day. The example of Jesus' commitment to do the will of God, even to the point of sacrificing his own life, serves as a model for all of his followers.

Learning Objectives

The session on Death of the Messiah guides learners of all ages to . . .

- identify the reasons why Jesus was sentenced to death and crucified through an exploration of the Gospels
- discover the meaning and significance of Jesus' death for their lives as Christians
- live a life of commitment to God's will modeled on Jesus' commitment to do God's will no matter what the cost

Session Overview

Part 1. (5-10 minutes) Gathering

Part 2. (40-45 minutes) All Ages Learning Experience: Journey with Jesus to the Cross

Part 3. (60 minutes) In Depth Learning Experience: The Death of Jesus

- Option 1. Whole Group Format - all participants remain in the same room.
- Option 2. Age Groups Format - participants go to separate rooms for parallel learning: families with children, adolescents, adults.

Part 4. (15 minutes) Sharing Learning Experiences

Part 5. (20 minutes) Closing Prayer Service

Design Options for In-Depth Learning

Option 1. Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences. You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group

- a group of leaders who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leaders to have one leader work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

Facilitation Tips for this Format:

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

Option 2. Age Group Format

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic. You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

Facilitation Tips for This Format

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there are a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.
- A facilitator must guide all the of the families through each learning experience, while small group leaders move from table to table assisting.

Materials Needed

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Bible

All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- Opening Prayer Service Handout
- Bible
- Symbols for each table group: rope, strip of leather, rough wood or piece of bark, spikes or nails, stone
- For the prayer service: large plant, piece of rope, judge's gavel, large cross, crucifix, spikes or large nails, crown of thorns, large strip of leather, purple robe, white burial clothe (large white sheet), large stone, large white candle, purple tablecloth, Bible, and icons, paintings, and/or statues of the passion and crucifixion of Jesus, Mary at the foot of the cross

In-Depth Learning Experience

- Handouts
- For family learning plan: large sheets of poster board or several 11x17 sheets of paper, pens and pencils, crayons, and markers
- For the Closing Prayer Service: a large sheet of poster board, pens and pencils, crayons, markers, and water colors and brushes for painting their poster
- Tarp or other material to protect the floor when painting activity happens
- For the adolescent learning plan: large sheets of newsprint, paper, and colored markers

Sharing Learning Reflections

- Handout

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service

Session Plan

Part 1. Gathering (5-10 minutes)

Preparation

Prepare a newsprint sheet or handout that lists the order of the activities or create a PowerPoint presentation that guides people through the session.

Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide name tags or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute the handouts participants will need for the session. (You can also distribute handouts for the In-Depth Learning program at the beginning of the activity.)
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session, using the words below or your own words.

This session on following Jesus explores the meaning and significance of Jesus' death on the cross for us today. We will journey with Jesus to the cross through an experience and exploration of a unique Stations of the Cross which are based completely on Scripture. Through an examination of the Gospels, we will discover why Jesus was sentenced to death and crucified by the religious and civil authorities of his day. We will also reflect on the example of Jesus' commitment to do the will of God, even to the point of sacrificing his own life, as a model for all our lives as followers of Jesus.

Present an overview and the schedule of the program.

1. Group Formation

Organize people into intergenerational small groups of approximately eight people for the All Ages Learning Experience. Ask all members of the same family to sit together in these intergenerational groups. Each group should have as many of the following categories as possible: family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family are intergenerational—children, teens, parents, and grandparents—keep them together in one group.

For the In Depth Learning Experience (Part 3), organize the participants into three types of table groups: family clusters of two or more families, groups of adolescents, and groups of adults.

2. Opening Prayer Service

The opening prayer for this session is incorporated into the All Ages Learning Experience. Proceed to the next page.

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Journey with Jesus to the Cross (40-45 minutes)

Preparation

Prepare a space at the front or center of the room. Set up a prayer table with a purple tablecloth, Bible, and large white candle (lit). Consider displaying icons, paintings, and/or statues of the passion and crucifixion of Jesus. The symbols of Good Friday will be brought forward during the prayer service.

Select one person to lead the prayer service and fourteen people to read the Gospel passages for the Stations of the Cross, one reader for each Gospel passage.

Prepare each table with items from the Passion Narratives that people can touch and feel during the prayer service. This will help everyone relate to the experiences of Jesus through their five senses. Here are several suggestions. Feel free to add your own.

- Rope (Second Station)
- Strip of leather (Sixth Station)
- Thorns or thorny branch (Sixth Station)
- Rough wood or piece of bark (Seventh and Eighth Stations)
- Spikes or large nails (Tenth Station)
- Stone (Fourteenth Station)

Customize the opening prayer handout, "Journey with Jesus to the Cross," for your group.

Materials Needed

- Large plant
- Piece of rope
- Judge's gavel
- Large cross
- Crucifix
- Spikes or large nails
- Crown of thorns
- Large strip of leather
- Purple robe
- White burial cloth (large white sheet)
- Large stone
- Thorns or thorny branch
- Rough wood or piece of bark
- Large candle for the prayer table
- Purple tablecloth for the prayer table
- Bible for the prayer table
- Icons, paintings, and/or statues of the passion and crucifixion of Jesus, Mary at the foot of the cross

Arrange participants in intergenerational small groups.

Introduction

Introduce the prayer service, using the words below or your own words.

Our prayer service focuses on 14 Scriptural Stations of the Cross, following a strictly biblical outline, based on texts drawn mainly from the Gospel of St Mark.

Gather

Jesus, we are beginning a journey with you to the cross.
Help us to understand the meaning of your sacrifice.
Give us the courage to walk with you each day
as we take up our cross and follow you.

Listen and Respond

This part of the prayer service introduces the Scriptural Stations of the Cross using the following process:

1. Reading: A reader announces the station and reads the Scripture passage.
2. Response: The assembly responds to the reading.
3. Procession: One or more people process to the center or front of the room with the symbol representing that station and place the symbol on the floor or on the prayer table.
4. Sensory Experience: People touch and feel an item from the Passion Narrative.
5. Song: A simple refrain is sung during the procession. One suggestion is to sing the line, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" from the famous spiritual.

First Station: The Agony of Jesus in the Garden of Olives

Gospel reading: Mark 14:32-36

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: large plant representing the garden

Sensory Experience: none

Sing the refrain.

Second Station: The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

Gospel reading: Mark 14:43-46

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: rope to tie up Jesus' hands

Sensory experience: touch the piece of rope on each table

Sing the refrain.

Third Station: The Sanhedrin Condemns Jesus

Gospel reading: Mark 14:55, 60-64

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: a judge's gavel

Sensory experience: none

Sing the refrain.

Fourth Station: Peter Denies Jesus

Gospel reading: Mark 14:66-72

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: shaking head to indicate “no”

Sensory experience: none

Sing the refrain.

Fifth Station: Pilate Condemns Jesus to the Cross

Gospel reading: Mark 15:1, 6-15

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol: none

Sensory experience: none

Sing the refrain.

Sixth Station: Jesus Is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns

Gospel reading: Mark 15:17-19

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: crown of thorns and large strip of leather

Sensory experience: thorns or thorny branch and strip of leather

Sing the refrain.

The Seventh Station: Jesus is Mocked by the Soldiers and Given His Cross

Gospel reading: Mark 15:16, 18a, 19-20

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: large cross

Sensory experience: rough wood or piece of bark

Sing the refrain.

The Eighth Station: Simon the Cyrenian Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

Gospel reading: Mark 15:21

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: none

Sensory experience: none

Sing the refrain.

The Ninth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Gospel reading: Luke 23:27-28

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: none

Sensory experience: none

Sing the refrain.

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Crucified

Gospel reading: Mark 15:22-24

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: spikes or large nails

Sensory experience: spike or large nail

Sing the refrain.

The Eleventh Station: Jesus Promises Paradise to the Penitent Criminal

Gospel reading: Luke 22:33, 39-43

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: none

Sensory experience: none

Sing the refrain.

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Speaks to His Mother and Disciple

Gospel reading: John 19:25-27

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol: statue or picture of Mary, picture of Mary and John at the foot of the cross

Sensory experience: none

Sing the refrain.

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Gospel reading: Mark 15:33-37

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: crucifix or picture of crucifixion

Sensory experience: none

Sing the refrain.

The Fourteenth Station: The Burial of Jesus

Gospel reading: Mark 15:42-46

Response: Jesus, give us the strength to follow your way of living and loving.

Symbol suggestion: burial clothe (large white sheet) and large stone

Sensory experience: stone

Sing the refrain.

Go Forth

You are the one who knows the hearts of people,
you are the Light,
you who change hearts,
you who are the Lord.

Here you are, with your arms extended and nailed down,
carrying the sorrows, the suffering and the evil that tear the world apart.

Here you are on the cross,
taking along with you all the unhappy and mistreated
in order to protect them.

Here you are on the dead wood,
sowing the life of God in all the children of the earth.
Here you are exposed on the hill,
whispering to all of us:
"I am staying with you forever."

I bow down,
I humble myself,
I become very small,
I kneel with wonder and with joy
before you, our Lord,
and before your love
that is so great.
(Charles Singer. *Prayers for Feasts.*)

Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience: The Death of Jesus (60 minutes)

Families with Children Learning Experiences: A Family Stations of the Cross

Materials Needed

- Handouts #1, #5, and #7 for parents
- Large sheets of poster board or several 11x17 sheets of paper
- Pens and pencils, crayons, and markers
- Fourteen file cards, numbered from 1 to 14
- Water colors and brushes
- Floor protective covering or tarp

1. Family Scriptural Stations of the Cross

Families will create a Scriptural Stations of the Cross for their home on poster board or on several placemats. Provide families with a sheet of post board or several sheets of 11 x 17 paper. A sample format is provided on Handout #7.

Guide families through the following process. For families with multiple children, children can work on different stations. Parents can assist children by writing prayers or drawing pictures.

Introduce the Stations of the Cross activity, using the words below or your own words.

Each family is going to create your own home version of the Scriptural Stations of the Cross. Before we begin it is important that we remember that Jesus' death was final testimony to his trust in the faithful, loving God he had proclaimed. His death was an act of love, a gift of himself to God and to his fellow human beings—"laying down his life for his friends." *This was the ultimate sacrifice.* Jesus identified with the sufferings of all humanity. He freely allowed himself to suffer and be put to death. Jesus lived the law of love he calls us to live. His death was the price he paid for a life lived in faithfulness to God and to God's will.

Jesus' death opens the possibility of salvation for all people because his death frees us to live in a totally new way—as sons and daughters of God who are forgiven and loved unconditionally. Jesus' death on the cross is a verification of God's love and forgiveness, of God's longing to save us from sin and death. His ultimate sacrifice teaches us the way to God. It teaches us how to live our lives.

Explain the following process, using the words below or your own words.

Decide on a poster format or placemat format.

Create eight boxes or frames for the Stations of the Cross. (See Handout #7.)

Write the name of the Station(s) and Scripture passage in each box.

Review the Gospel passage for each Station. Talk about what this station means to you, individually and as a family. When there are two Stations, select the one you want to read and illustrate.

Illustrate Eight Stations with a picture or symbol that captures the action in the Scripture passage, such as a picture of Jesus in the garden or a picture of a crown of thorns.

Write a one-or-two-sentence prayer that reflects the meaning of the Station for you. For example, for the Fourth Station, a family might write: "Jesus, forgive us for the times that we forget your importance in our life." For the Tenth Station: "Jesus, thank you for giving your life so we know how to live as God's sons and daughters."

Conclude by sharing your Stations of the Cross with another family or table.

The fourteen Scriptural Stations of the Cross are organized into eight groups to make it easier for families read and illustrate the Stations.

Group 1. First Station: The Agony of Jesus in the Garden of Olives (Mark 14:32-36)

Second Station: The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus (Mark 14:43-46)

Group 2. Third Station: The Sanhedrin Condemns Jesus (Mark 14:55, 60-64)

Fifth Station: Pilate Condemns Jesus to the Cross (Mark 15:1, 6-15)

Group 3. Fourth Station: Peter Denies Jesus (Mark 14:66-72)

Group 4. Sixth Station: Jesus Is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns (Mark 15:17-19)

The Seventh Station: Jesus is Mocked by the Soldiers and Given His Cross (Mark 15:16, 18a, 19-20)

Group 5. The Eighth Station: Simon the Cyrenian Helps Jesus Carry His Cross (Mark 15:21)

The Ninth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27-28)

Group 6. The Tenth Station: Jesus is Crucified (Mark 15:22-24)

Group 7. The Eleventh Station: Jesus Promises Paradise to the Penitent Criminal (Luke 22:33, 39-43)

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Speaks to His Mother and Disciple (John 19:25-27)

Group 8. The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross (Mark 15:33-37)

The Fourteenth Station: The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:42-46)

2. Illustrated Stations of the Cross

Each family table group will create a large, poster-size artistic presentation of one Scriptural Station of the Cross. At the Closing Prayer Service each family table group will come forward with their Station of the Cross poster, show their poster to the group, and then display it by holding it or taping it to the wall.

Depending on the number of table groups, one table group may produce posters for several Stations or there may be several table groups working on the same Station.

Assign each family table one Station of the Cross. You can do this by giving each family table a file card with a number from 1-14.

Guide family table groups through the following process, using the words below or your own words.

Write the name of the Station and Scripture passage at the top of the poster.

Review the Gospel passage for the Station and how each family has already depicted the Station.

Talk about what this Station means to everyone at the table and ideas for how to capture the Station in pictures or symbols.

Create the Stations Poster using one or more pictures or symbols. Involve as many of the children in drawing as possible.

Note to Leader: Be sure that each family table has adequate time to prepare their illustrated Station of the Cross. This is essential for the Closing Prayer Service.

3. Concluding Reflections

Ask families to discuss the following questions as a table group:

- What did you learn about Jesus' journey to the cross from this activity?
- How did this activity bring you closer to Jesus?
- When will you take time to pray the Stations of the Cross at home?

Adolescent Learning Experiences: Why Was Jesus Sentenced to Die?

Materials Needed

- Handouts #1, #2, #3, and #6
- Large sheets of newsprint, paper, and colored markers
- Large file cards and pens

Preparation

Write the essential instructions on newsprint or create a PowerPoint presentation with the instructions.

Provide each table with a newsprint that is divided into four columns to record their answers to the questions in the section on Discovering People Who Sacrifice. On the top of the newsprint write: "People Who Sacrifice." Label the first column "People," the second column "Their Sacrifice," the third column "Its Impact," the fourth column "Their Reasons."

Guide adolescents through the learning activities as outlined below and on Handout #2.

1. Investigating the Death of Jesus

Begin with the following words:

Imagine yourselves as CSI investigators who only know that Jesus has been crucified, but don't know why. You need to solve the mystery of why Jesus was crucified. What were his crimes that would justify a death sentence? Why did this happen?

Your mission, as a group, is to figure out why Jesus was put to death. You will only have the clues you find in the Gospels to help you. Here is how you should proceed:

Step 1. Begin by sharing your own ideas about why you think Jesus was put to death. List your ideas on a sheet of paper.

Step 2. Divide the Gospel passages on Handout #3 among the members of your group. Make sure that at least the first thirteen Gospel passages are used, even if several group members have to read more than one passage. Read the Gospel passages and try to discover clues in each passage that will help you understand why Jesus was put to death. What did Jesus do in his life that would lead to a death sentence and crucifixion? Prepare a brief report of what you find.

Step 3. Have all group members share what they discovered in the Gospel passages. Discuss what you heard and develop your final report on the death of Jesus. Why was Jesus put to death? What were the reasons? Create a newsprint report with your reasons. You can use Gospel quotes to support your reasons.

Step 4. Share your report with another group and then post them on the wall for everyone to read.

2 Reflecting on the Death of Jesus

Continue guiding participants through the following process. Share the following:

Jesus followed the will of God faithfully, 100%, and this often brought him into conflict with the Jewish and Roman authorities of his day. Based on your Gospel research, discuss as a group the following two questions:

- What did Jesus think following the will of God meant? How did he do it?
- How did following the will of God bring Jesus into conflict with the Jewish and Roman authorities of his day?

On Handout #2, read the following reasons why Jesus met opposition to his mission and was eventually put to death and crucified by the religious and civil authorities of his day.

Imagine that you were a religious leader or government leader in Jesus' day. You saw Jesus in action; you heard his message. What were you thinking? Through his words and actions Jesus was challenging the established religious and political order of the day. Crowds of people listened to his message and followed him. Consider the following:

- Jesus associated with sinners and outcasts. Jesus’ message was one of compassion and love, a love that extended to everyone. Jesus made the outcasts of society the cornerstone of his message. He preached to those condemned to live on the margins of society: he healed them, he offered them hospitality, and he loved to be with them.
- Jesus treated women as equals with men in a society that considered women as little more than slaves. Jesus ignored the rules and practices of his day, and even made women some of his most trusted followers.
- Jesus believed that people were more important than the Law. He was criticized for curing people on the Sabbath, which was against Jewish law.
- Jesus healed people and claimed that he could forgive sins. Jews believed only God could forgive sins. Whenever Jesus forgave sins, the religious authorities considered this blasphemy, which means they saw Jesus claiming himself as God.
- Jesus’ basic conviction that the God of Israel was a God of love and justice, whose love was offered to all, even the unjust, the sinner, and the poor, was a challenge to many religious people of his day. It challenged many people’s understanding of their faith and confronted values in their life that were not from God. Religious leaders saw this as an attack on their own idea of God and religion and were very threatened.
- Jesus claimed for himself a position of authority above that of both the religious and political powers of his day. Jesus’ authority came from his own personal experience of God. Basic convictions about God as a loving parent and about love as the fundamental bond of human relationships were joined to an unshakable integrity that translated principle into action. Jesus’ words and actions took on an authority that affronted his critics and drew forth their cries of blasphemy.
- Jesus’ intimate relationship with God, whom he called Abba (or “Daddy”), threatened the religious leaders of his day who were supposed to be close to God.

All this and much more brought Jesus to an unavoidable confrontation with the Jewish and Roman authorities. He was a very real threat to religious tradition and political stability. In the end the religious and political authorities of his day chose to kill him— “better that one man die...”

Discuss the following questions in your group:

- How do the Gospel passages you read and the summary reflections above compare with your own understanding of why Jesus was killed?
- What new insights came to you about why Jesus was crucified?
- Why is it so important to understand why Jesus was crucified?

3. Living the Will of God in My Life

Continue guiding participants through the following process.

Jesus’ death was final testimony to his trust in the faithful, loving God he had proclaimed. Jesus, the Son of God, freely suffered death for us in complete and free submission to the will of God. His death was an act of love, a gift of himself to God and to his fellow human beings—“laying down his life for his friends.” *This was the ultimate sacrifice.* Jesus identified with the sufferings of all humanity. He freely allowed himself to suffer and be put to death. Jesus lived the law of love he calls us to live. His death was the price he paid for a life lived in faithfulness to God and to God’s will.

Jesus' death opens the possibility of salvation for all people because his death frees us to live in a totally new way—as sons and daughters of God who are forgiven and loved unconditionally. Jesus' death on the cross is a verification of God's love and forgiveness, of God's longing to save us from sin and death. His ultimate sacrifice teaches us the way to God. It teaches us how to live our lives.

Jesus was willing to sacrifice everything to do the will of God. Think about your own life:

- What does following the will of God mean to you in your life?
- What are you willing to sacrifice to follow Jesus?

Share some of your reflections on the questions above with your group.

4. Writing Prayers for the Scriptural Stations of the Cross

Use Handout #6 to guide the groups in developing prayers for each Station of the Cross in the Closing Prayer Service. Be sure that the adolescent groups have adequate time to prepare their prayers because they are essential for the Closing Prayer Service.

Assign each adolescent group or table one Station of the Cross. You can do this by giving each group a file card with a number from 1-14.

Guide the adolescents through the following process:

- Read the Gospel passage for the Station.
- Talk about what this Station means to everyone at the table.
- Generate thoughts, concerns, and hopes for what people want to include in the prayer for the Station. Write these on newsprint or paper.
- Write a short prayer that reflects the thoughts, concerns, and hopes of the group. Direct the prayer to Jesus, requesting a grace or ability connected with the Station. Write the prayer on a large file card or piece of paper.
- Identify one person who will come forward during the Prayer Service to read the prayer.

Adult Learning Experiences: The Sacrifice of Jesus

The adult learning plan has been created as a self-directed small group activity.

Materials Needed

- Handouts #1, #3, #4, #5, and #6
- Large file cards, numbered 1 through 14

Preparation

Write the essential instructions on newsprint or create a PowerPoint presentation with the instructions.

Guide the adults through the learning activities as outlined below and on Handout #4.

1. The Sacrifice of Jesus

Ask the adults to take a moment to reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus using the following questions:

- What sacrifices do you think Jesus made to live his mission faithfully?
- Think for a moment about Jesus' ultimate sacrifice—his death on the cross. Why do you think Jesus was crucified? Try to think of specific reasons from his life that give us clues into why he was crucified.
- What do you think is the significance or importance of Jesus' death on the cross?

Invite everyone to share responses to the questions. After all group members have shared their responses to the first question discuss what you have heard. Look for common responses. Use the same process for the second and third questions

2. The Death of Jesus

Continue to guide adults through the following process.

Divide up the Gospel passages found in Handout #3 among the members of your group. Make sure that all the Gospel passages are used, even if several group members have to read more than one passage.

Read the Gospel passages and try to discover clues in each passage that will help you understand why Jesus was put to death. What did Jesus do in his life that would lead to a death sentence and crucifixion?

Share what you have discovered in the Gospel passages with your group. Then discuss: Why was Jesus put to death? What were the reasons identified in the Gospel passages?

Read the following summary of reasons why Jesus met opposition to his mission and was eventually put to death and crucified by the religious and civil authorities of his day.

Imagine that you were a religious leader or government leader in Jesus' day. You saw Jesus in action; you heard his message. What are you thinking? Through his words and actions, Jesus challenged the established religious and political order of the day. Crowds of people listened to his message and followed him. Consider the following:

- Jesus associated with sinners and outcasts. Jesus' message was one of compassion and love, a love that extended to everyone. Jesus made the outcasts of society the cornerstone of his message. He preached to those condemned to live on the margins of society: he healed them, he offered them hospitality, and he loved to be with them.
- Jesus treated women as equals with men in a society that considered women as little more than slaves. Jesus ignored the rules and practices of his day, and even made women some of his most trusted followers.
- Jesus believed that people were more important than the Law. He was criticized for curing people on the Sabbath, which was against Jewish law.
- Jesus healed people and claimed that he could forgive sins. Jews believed only God could forgive sins. Whenever Jesus forgave sins, the religious authorities considered this blasphemy, which means they saw Jesus claiming himself as God.

- Jesus' basic conviction that the God of Israel was a God of love and justice, whose love was offered to all, even the unjust, the sinner, and the poor, was a challenge to many religious people of his day. It challenged many people's understanding of their faith and confronted values in their life that were not from God. Religious leaders saw this as an attack on their own idea of God and religion and were very threatened.
- Jesus claimed for himself a position of authority above that of both the religious and political powers of his day. Jesus' authority came from his own personal experience of God. Basic convictions about God as a loving parent and about love as the fundamental bond of human relationships were joined to an unshakable integrity that translated principle into action. Jesus' words and actions took on an authority that affronted his critics and drew forth their cries of blasphemy.
- Jesus' intimate relationship with God, whom he called Abba (or "Daddy"), threatened the religious leaders of his day who were supposed to be close to God.

All this and much more brought Jesus to an unavoidable confrontation with the Jewish and Roman authorities. He was a very real threat to religious tradition and political stability. In the end the religious and political authorities of his day chose to kill him— "better that one man die..."

Invite participants to discuss the following questions:

- How do the Gospel passages you read and the summary reflections above compare with your own understanding of why Jesus was killed?
- What new insights came to you about why Jesus was crucified?
- What do you think is the significance of Jesus' death on the cross for us today? How does his death give new meaning to sacrifice and suffering?

3. Living the Will of God in My Life

Continue guiding adults through the following process.

Jesus' death was final testimony to his trust in the faithful, loving God he had proclaimed. "Jesus, the Son of God, freely suffered death for us in complete and free submission to the will of God, his Father." His death was an act of love, a gift of himself to God and to his fellow human beings— "laying down his life for his friends." *This was the ultimate sacrifice.* Jesus identified with the sufferings of all humanity. He freely allowed himself to suffer and be put to death. Jesus lived the law of love he calls us to live. His death was the price he paid for a life lived in faithfulness to God and to God's will.

Jesus' death opens the possibility of salvation for all people because his death frees us to live in a totally new way—as sons and daughters of God who are forgiven and loved unconditionally. Jesus' death on the cross is a verification of God's love and forgiveness, of God's longing to save us from sin and death. His ultimate sacrifice teaches us the way to God. It teaches us how to live our lives.

Jesus was willing to sacrifice everything to do the will of God. Now think about your own life:

- What does following the will of God mean to you in your life?

- What are you willing to sacrifice to follow Jesus?

Share some of your reflections on the questions with your group.

4. Writing Prayers for the Scriptural Stations of the Cross

Use Handout #6, “Preparing the Closing Prayer Service,” to guide the adult groups in developing a prayer for each Station of the Cross in the Closing Prayer Service. Be sure that the adult groups have adequate time to prepare their reflections for the Stations of the Cross. This is essential for the Closing Prayer Service.

Assign each adult group or table one Station of the Cross. You can do this by giving each group a file card with a number from 1-14.

Guide the adults through the following process:

- Read the Gospel passage for your assigned Station.
- Talk about what this Station means to everyone at the table.
- Generate thoughts on how to connect Jesus' experience in the Station to your own life experience and contemporary life. Write these thoughts on newsprint or paper.
- Write a short reflection on the Station that reflects the thoughts of the group. Write the prayer on a large file card.
- Identify one person who will come forward during the Prayer Service to read the prayer.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (15 minutes)

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group. In this session the whole group sharing will take place in the Closing Prayer Service. Ask the participants to rejoin their intergenerational groups from the All Ages Learning Experience to share their concluding reflections on the session.

Present the following information using the words below or your own words:

“Think of everything we have done in this session to understand the significance of the death of Jesus for our lives today. To help us take our learning from this session and live it in our lives and homes, reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts with your group.”

- What is the most important lesson you have learned about the death of Jesus?
- What new insights came to you about why Jesus was crucified?
- What is the significance or importance of Jesus' death on the cross for us today?
- How can you as an individual and as family grow follow Jesus more faithfully in the coming weeks? Think of practical things that you can start doing now.

Invite participants to take several minutes for small group sharing.

Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (20 minutes)

Preparation

During the Closing Prayer Service, each of the three learning groups—families with children, adolescents, and adults—will be involved. Each group has prepared one element of the Closing Prayer Service as outlined below:

- **Family table groups** have created artistic presentations of the Scriptural Stations of the Cross. Each family table group will come forward with their Station of the Cross poster, show their poster to the group, and then display it by holding it or taping it to the wall. Depending on the number of table groups, one table group may produce posters for several Stations or there may be several table groups working on the same Station.
- **Adolescent table groups** have created prayers for each Station. A representative from each adolescent table group will come forward, stand beside the Station of the Cross, and read their prayer to the group. Depending on the number of table groups, one table group may produce prayers for several Stations or there may be several table groups writing prayers the same Station.
- **Adult groups** have created contemporary connections between each Station of the Cross and life situations today. A representative from each adult group will come forward, stand beside the Station of the Cross, and read their reflection to the group. Depending on the number of table groups, one table group may produce reflections for several Stations or there may be several table groups writing reflections for the same Station.

Explain the following process to the group in your own words or the words below.

During the prayer service we are going to experience the Scriptural Stations of the Cross in art, prayer, and reflection. When I announce your station, representatives from each age group should come forward to display their artwork, share their prayer, and offer a reflection.

Gather

The presider invites participants to gather in silence, reflecting on the profound sacrifice of Jesus on the cross which he offered in total obedience to the Father and with complete love for us.

Listen

Introduce the first station of the cross. A family will present their artwork, followed by a prayer from the adolescent group, and a reflection from the adult group. Proceed in similar fashion through the fourteen stations.

Respond

Let us contemplate Jesus the Lord: instead of the joy meant for him, he endured the cross, disregarding its disgrace.

Response: We worship you, Lord, upon the cross.

O Jesus Christ, born in humility to confound the proud and to raise the humble...

Response: We worship you, Lord, upon the cross.

You lived among us, healing the sick, proclaiming Good News to the poor and freedom to prisoners.

Response: We worship you, Lord, upon the cross.

You came to unbind the chains of every slave, you were friend of the humble and bread for hungry hearts,

Response: We worship you, Lord, upon the cross.

Jesus, full of patience and goodness, you showed forgiveness and kindness to the very end.

Response: We worship you, Lord, upon the cross.

Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, you call to yourself all who are weary and burdened.

Response: We worship you, Lord, upon the cross.

Jesus, you came into the world to serve and give your life; you were betrayed for money, dragged before judges, and nailed to the cross.

Response: We worship you, Lord, upon the cross.

Jesus, Lord of the universe, by your resurrection from the dead you are alive at the Father's side. There you prepare a place for us.

Response: We worship you, Lord, upon the cross.

(Prayer for Each Day. Taize)

Go Forth

What does it mean to have a part in the Cross of Christ?

It means to experience, in the Holy Spirit,
the love hidden within the Cross of Christ.

It means to recognize, in the light of this love, our own cross.

It means to take up that cross once more and,
strengthened by this love, to continue our journey...

To journey through life, in imitation of the one who "endured the cross,
despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (*Heb 12:2*).