

“I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU LIFE AND DEATH. CHOOSE LIFE.”
2020 LENTEN REFLECTION AND PRAYERS ON NON-VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION

“Learn to make peace within your heart in a world where there is much war, disunity, hatred and exploitation. Christians should ask themselves how they are contributing to creating peace in the world by working for peace in their neighborhood, school and workplace” (Pope Francis, 4th December 2018).

The three countries which belong to Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (namely South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland) are struggling with a culture of violence. The governments in the three countries have rightly introduced institutional and policy measures to address the problem. As Church, it is important that we also do something. Our society needs something deeper than institutional and policy measures. Our society needs a program of moral transformation which is grounded on a spirit of repentance and a firm commitment to respect human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

“For I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Ending the culture of violence should begin with me

During the season of Lent, we have an opportunity to begin a journey of moral regeneration in relation to violence. This year, Our Lord offers us an opportunity to rediscover the depth of God’s mercy and our need for repentance, which should become a foundation for the moral regeneration: “Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15).

For the moral regeneration to succeed in the three countries, we should begin to think differently as Christians who are baptized and sent. In particular, we need to embrace the view that ending violence in our society should begin with me.

“This is the proper time to prepare ourselves to receive Christ as the Prince of Peace. We do this by being at peace with ourselves, within our heart, that is often in anxiety, anguish and without hope. For this, one needs to start with oneself... We are so used to focusing on the hearts of others rather than our own hearts” (Pope Francis, 4th December 2018)

We often convince ourselves that violence will end in our society if other people, and not me, do something about it. The contrary is true. The culture of violence in our three countries will end when each one of us make a commitment to change our personal behavior, especially our violent behavior.

Allowing God to heal our hearts

Our Lord reminds us that the source of violence and other social ills in our society is in our hearts. Violent behavior flows from things which are inside our hearts (Mark 7: 21-23; Luke 6:45). “Violence begins with anger, intolerance, impatience, unfair judgements and aggression. It is often reflected in our language, our entertainment, our driving, our competitive behavior, and the way we treat our environment. These acts and attitudes are not the same as abusive behavior or physical attacks, but they create a climate where violence prospers and peace suffers.” (US Catholic bishops, *Confronting the culture of violence*, 1994).

During this season of Lent, we should focus on what is happening inside our hearts. In particular, we should focus on what God is doing inside our hearts. We should allow God’s grace to touch and heal the violence, the pain and the anger inside our hearts which sometimes influence us to commit external acts of violence. During the season of Lent, *“the Lord asks us whether or not there is peace in our hearts. If peace is absent in our hearts, then we should ask Christ, who is the Prince of Peace, to pacify and heal our heart so that we can meet Him.” Pope Francis, 4th December 2018)*

This Lenten booklet offers reflections directed at identifying the elements in our hearts that we should bring before the Lord for redemption and healing. The healing in our hearts will bring us closer to Christ. While preparing to receive the peace of the Risen Christ at Easter, the booklet will assist us in following reflections:

- What are the areas in my life that require repentance so that the Lord heals the relationships in our countries before they escalate into violence?
- As the Lord invites us “to walk in the newness of life” (Romans 6:4), what is the newness of life that the Lord is calling me to receive in my heart so that I contribute effectively in bringing about the culture of life in our three countries?
- What is the healing that I should receive in my heart so that my country experiences healing in its social and economic relationships?

During each week of Lent, we invite you to do an examination of conscience which should culminate into a deeper encounter of God’s healing and mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. “The Lenten period is a favorable time to recognize our weakness and to accept, through a sincere inventory of our life, the renewing Grace of the Sacrament of Penance, and walk resolutely towards Christ” (Pope Benedict, 1st March 2011).

Strengthening family life and family values.

“After discovering the peace within our hearts, it is time to bring peace within our families.” (Pope Francis, 4th December 2018). It is not possible to have a violence-free society when there is a lot of violence in families. It is not possible to end violence in the society if no efforts are made to end violence in families. We should therefore work hard to ensure that relationships in our families are transformed by the peace of Christ.

Violence is a learned behavior. Family is the first place where a child learns violent behavior. Family should be the first place where a child should learn peaceful behavior. Family should be the first place where a child should learn how to solve problems and communicate grievances without using violence. During the season of Lent, we invite you to focus on the family as a foundation of a peaceful society.

Moral regeneration as witness to hope in Christ

The season of Lent prepares us for a deeper experience of the resurrection of Christ. During this Lent, our Lord offers us an opportunity to walk with him towards the cavalry so that we rediscover how God’s mercy manifests itself in the midst of a culture of violence. In turn, we will also be able to discover the culture of life through the resurrection of Christ.

The commitment to end violence in our society is a commitment to a spirituality of hope. Our efforts to end violence should be based on the hope and conviction that the crisis of drug abuse and the crisis of violence will not defeat our countries. “No, in *all* these things *we are conquerors* through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). The victory of the Risen Christ is the reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). Our prayer is that the power of the Risen Christ heals our countries and transforms the culture of death to the culture of life.

FORMAT OF THE LENTEN REFLECTIONS - 2020

1. Opening Hymn (Lenten hymn)
2. Opening Prayer
3. Brief introduction
4. Scripture Reading
5. Silence and share one word or phrase that spoke to you in the scriptures
6. Teaching of the Church
7. Deciding on a relevant action for the week for the group
8. Examination of conscience
9. Spontaneous prayers/ Prayers of the faithful
10. Closing Prayer

THINGS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Lenten reflection booklet
- Hymn book
- For prayer environment: purple cloth or any cloth that has a dominant colour of Lent, cross/ crucifix, candle, theme of the week for reflection (chat or banner).
- This theme can also be used for the whole week in the Parish Church and Mass times in a parish

WEEK 1- LENT 2020: PEACE IN OUR POLITICAL LIFE AND DURING PROTEST MARCHES

OPENING HYMN

Begin with an opening hymn, which can be chosen from one of the Lenten hymns.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, you are the author and sustainer of our lives. You know the anguish of the sorrowful, you are attentive to the prayers of the brokenhearted. Hear your people who cry out to you in their need; strengthen their hope in your lasting goodness.

We pray today for those who have died because of violence. Draw them to yourself; let your face shine upon them. May they be greeted with choirs of angels and experience your eternal peace and joy. Be near to all those who have been touched by violence: those who have been hurt, lost their loved ones or lost their sense of security. Be for them a steady comfort and safe resting place.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

In our countries, protest marches are sometimes accompanied by violence and destruction of property. We have seen this happening in various forms of protests, including protests organized by trade unions, students in universities, and communities demanding service delivery. We should also be concerned when the police use excessive force against protestors.

Another concern is the growing intolerance in our politics. Sometimes, the intolerance is directed at supporters belonging to a different political party. In other cases, it is directed at members of the same party who belong to a different faction. The anger and intolerance often escalates into violence during election period.

Although we do not usually accept it, the spirit of anger and intolerance that drives people to do political violence sometimes find resonance and expression in our hearts and minds.

Although some of us have not been involved in violent protests, we sometimes share in the spirit of anger and intolerance that influence people to do violence during protests. Our Lord is therefore calling each one of us to repentance.

During the season of Lent, I need to ask myself: What is the change of heart and change of mind that God is calling me to make in relation to these issues? In relation to these issues, what changes is God asking me to make in my behavior and in my life so that I become closer to Christ?

PAUSE for silence

READING A STORY

Four freight workers were injured after police fired rubber bullets in a protest that turned violent in the Johannesburg city centre on Monday afternoon.

The trouble started at midday when the protesters, from the SA Transport and Allied Workers Union, smashed the windows of 10 trucks, pulled drivers out of their vehicles and forced them to join the march.

"The protest turned violent on Rissik Street at about 12:20," said Metro spokesperson.

"The protesters smashed the windscreens of trucks. The situation was tense."

"Later in the afternoon the situation had calmed. The metro police and members of the SA Police Service were keeping a close watch on the protesters at the Library Gardens."

The workers are demanding an increase of 20% over the next two years and the banning of labour brokers. The Road Freight Employers' Association (RFEA) has offered 15%.

(Source of the story: <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Strike-violence-in-Johannesburg-CBD-20110214>)

READING THE SCRIPTURES

Genesis 4:1-6

PAUSE for silence

READING THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

(You can read one or two passages from the teaching of the Church)

"Inside our hearts, there is a tendency to destruction, war and [disunity](#). It is the tendency that [the devil](#), the enemy and destroyer of humanity, sows in our hearts. We should open up to Christ who sows in our hearts the gift of peace" (Pope Francis, 26 October 2018).

"We who are used to [insulting](#) and [shouting](#) at those politically different from us need to seek peace and unity with gentleness and patience of Christ. Christians should open their hearts and make peace in the world taking the path of the "three little things" - "[humility](#), [gentleness](#) and [patience](#)". Paul's advice is "bear with one another in love." It is not easy as there is always a judgement, a [condemnation](#) which leads to [separation](#) and [distances](#)... (Pope Francis, 26 October 2018)

"God created us out of love. There is no other explanation because God is love. And God has created us to love and to be loved. If we could remember that all the time, there would be no wars, no political violence, no hatred in politics." (Pope Francis, 2nd May 2017).

PAUSE for silence

GROUP REFLECTION AND GROUP ACTION

1. In the light of the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, what should our attitudes as Christians be towards a culture of political intolerance and a culture of violence during protests?

What are the values that we should aspire to have as Christians so as to counter the culture of political intolerance and the culture of violence during protests?

3. When I am involved in a protest march, what role can I play as a Christian to ensure that the protest does not turn violent?

4. Choose one action that you (as a parish, as a family, as Small Christian Community, or sodality, Youth group, choir, etc.) can do to ensure that the protest marches conducted in your community, school and workplace are peaceful.

4. Choose one action that you (as a parish, as a family, as Small Christian Community, or sodality, Youth group, choir, etc.) can do to address the culture of political intolerance.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Since Christ wants us to “walk in the newness of life” (Romans 6:4), what is the newness of life that our Lord calls me to experience in my life in relation to the following issues:

- My involvement in intolerance during elections;
- My belief that aggression is the only way available to communicate my grievances;
- My belief that aggression is the only way available to solve problems in my life;
- My belief in revenge and vengeance against enemies;
- My belief that those who hold different political views are enemies;
- My lack of tolerance towards those belonging to a different political party;
- My lack of tolerance towards those belonging to a different faction in my political party;
- My support for violence and looting during a protest organized by a community to demand service delivery;
- My support for violence and looting during a protest organized by a trade union;
- My support for violence and looting during a protest organized in a university or a school;
- My support for mob justice against an alleged criminal;

What is the change of heart and change of mind that God is calling me to make in relation to these issues?

In relation to these issues, what changes is God asking me to make in my behavior and in my life so that I become closer to Christ?

What prayer would I like to say to the Lord to ask for God’s healing and mercy?

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As Christians, we should not forget to pray for our country. In relation to the issues that we have discussed today, what prayer would you like to say for the healing and transformation of our country?

CLOSING PRAYER

(After the intercession prayers, the facilitator of the gathering closes with the following prayer:

Rescue us, Lord, from evildoers;

Protect us from the violent ones, who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day.

Keep us safe, Lord, from the hands of the wicked; protect us from the violent, who devise ways to trip our feet.

Soften the hearts and steady of the minds of those who would do violence to others. May hate be replaced with love, violence with peace and darkness with your light. Amen.

WEEK 2- LENT 2020: PEACE AMONG PEOPLE BELONGING TO DIFFERENT RACES AND TRIBES

OPENING HYMN

Begin with an opening hymn, which can be chosen from one of the Lenten hymns

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, you created one human family with different racial groups and ethnic groups. We pray to you, O Lord, that we may envision a way forward to heal the racial divisions that deny human dignity and the bonds between all human beings.

We pray to you, O Lord that we may affirm each person's dignity through fair access for all to economic opportunity, housing, education, and employment.

We pray to you, O Lord, that we may have eyes to see what is possible when we reach out beyond fear, beyond anger, to hold the hand of our sisters and our brothers.

We thank you, O Lord, for your call and challenge to us that we may reveal your teachings and your love through our actions to end racism and to proclaim that we are all your children, heirs to your sacred creation. Amen. (From the US Catholic bishops, prayer to heal racial divisions)

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

In our countries, there is growing intolerance among people belonging to different race and tribes. The spirit of intolerance sometimes escalates into deep divisions and acts of violence. In South Africa, they have sometimes resulted in assault and murder. South Africa is still struggling to recover from its troubled past.

Although we do not usually accept it, the spirit of anger and intolerance that drives other people to be involved in race-related violence are also found inside our hearts and our minds.

Each of us is one way or another part of the tensions and divisions that exists between people belonging to different tribes. Our attitudes contribute to the racial divisions and inter-tribal tensions. Our Lord is therefore calling each one of us to repentance.

During the season of Lent, I need to ask myself: What is the change of heart and change of mind that our Lord is calling me to make in relation to these issues so that I become closer to Him?

PAUSE for silence.

READING A STORY

Thousands of South Africans gathered for what was termed a “solidarity march” in protest against farm murders on Monday.

South Africans were urged to wear black in a show of solidarity to the protesters and to mourn the loss of life which has resulted in 70 farmers killed in farm attacks this year alone.

However, not everyone was convinced of the motive behind the march. Some complained that more than 20,000 black people have been violently murdered this year, but white people march for 71 whites

“South Africans get murdered everyday, all races! Why must murders of one group be prioritized over the rest?”

Others however highlighted the important role of farmers in the society and the economy.

“The farm killings need to stop. We hear our farmers cry, now the world needs to hear as well.”

The sight of old South African flags has caused further divisions.

Some also questioned the softer approach from the SAPS in this particular protest, as opposed to the hardline approach employed during fees must fall marches. “ Why are black Monday protestors not being arrested? Where are the police to shoot them with rubber bullets? Chase them just like they do to us blacks?”

(Source of the story: <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/blackmonday-online-reaction>)

Meanwhile, Nelson Mandela foundation has said that black Monday protests have deepened racial divisions in South Africa.

Black Monday was the name given to a series of countrywide protests against farm killings.

The foundation deplored the murder of farmers but expressed concern over the burning of the national flag and displaying of apartheid flag.

The Nelson Mandela foundation said apartheid was a crime against humanity and displaying the flag, represented support of that crime.

The foundation said the most likely victims of murder in South Africa were poor, young and black.

“If the protesters had been black, then the way in which the police responded would have been completely different.”

The foundation went on to say there was no doubt the #BlackMonday protests had deepened divisions in South Africa.

(Source of the story: <https://rekordcenturion.co.za/131168/blackmonday-deepened-racial-divisions-mandela-foundation>).

READING OF THE SCRIPTURES

You should read Genesis 4:1-14

PAUSE for silence.

READING FROM THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

(You can read one or two passages from the teaching of the Church)

Deliberate hatred is contrary to charity. Hatred of the neighbor is a sin when one deliberately wishes him evil. Hatred of the neighbor is a grave sin when one deliberately desires him grave harm. "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2303)

"After choosing his disciples and proclaiming the Beatitudes, Jesus adds: "But I say to you that listen, love your enemies" (Luke 6:27)...It is not easy to speak of reconciliation while wounds are still open from the years of conflict, or to take a step towards forgiveness, which is not the same as ignoring pain or giving up our memories or ideals (cf. [Evangelii Gaudium](#), 100). Even so, Jesus is calling us to love and to do good. This means much more than simply ignoring the persons who harmed us, or trying to avoid encountering them. Jesus commands us to show an active, impartial and extraordinary benevolence towards those who have hurt us. Nor does Jesus stop there. He also asks us to bless them and to pray for them. In other words, to speak of them with words of blessing, with words of life not death, to speak their names not in insult or revenge, but to establish a new bond which brings peace. It is a high standard that the Master sets before us!" (Pope Francis, 6th September 2019).

"No family, no group of neighbours, no ethnic group, much less a nation, has a future if the force that unites them, brings them together and resolves their differences is vengeance and hatred. We cannot come to terms and unite for the sake of revenge, or treating others with the same violence with which they treated us, or plotting opportunities for retaliation under apparently legal auspices" (Pope Francis, 6th September 2019).

GROUP REFLECTION AND GROUP ACTION

1. In the light of the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, what should be our attitude as Christians towards racial divisions and tribal divisions? What are the values that we should aspire to have as Christians so as to counter the racial divisions and tribal divisions in our country?
2. Choose one action that you (as a parish, as a family, as Small Christian Community, or sodality, Youth group, choir, etc.) can do to promote tolerance among people belonging to different racial groups.
3. Choose one action that you (as a parish, as a family, as Small Christian Community, or sodality, Youth group, choir, etc.) can do to promote tolerance among people belonging to different tribes or ethnic groups.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Since Christ wants us to “walk in the newness of life” (Romans 6:4), what is the newness of life that our Lord calls me to experience in my life in relation to the following issues:

- A spirit of openness, for compassion and respect towards those we see as different,
- The fear of losing my power and my privilege as a white person
- The fear of losing my power and privilege as a black person
- The fear of losing my power and privilege as a member of a particular tribe or ethnic group
- The habit of always thinking in terms of us and them,
- The habit of seeing everything through the lens of race;
- My reluctance to challenge my white friends when they are talking negative things about black people which are not true;
- My reluctance to challenge my black friends when they are talking negative things about white people which are not true;
- Writing messages on the social media that promote intolerance;
- Prejudices and stereotyping directed at people racially different from me;
- Prejudices and stereotyping directed at people belonging to a different tribe or ethnic group;
- Supporting racism and effects of racism in the society;
- My reluctance to recognize the dignity and worthiness of people belonging to a different racial group or ethnic group;
- My reluctance to have a genuine dialogue with people different from me;
- Believing that people from my race or my tribe are superior to others;
- Supporting that statements made by politicians who use racial divisions and ethnic divisions to advance their political interests,
- the sense of entitlement as a racial group or as an ethnic group,
- Using racial divisions or tribal divisions to advance my interests when I am a leader of a group in the Church or in the society;
- making close friendship only with people belonging to the same racial group or ethnic group,
- believing that people belonging to a different racial group or ethnic group are enemies who should not be trusted,
- Rejoicing when people of a particular racial group or ethnic group encounters some misfortune or tragedy,
- Anger when a couple are involved in a mixed relationship or mixed marriage.
- Unwillingness to accept a bishop, a priest or leader of PPC when they are from a particular racial group or tribe;

What is the change of heart and change of mind that God is calling me to make in relation to these issues?

In relation to these issues, what changes is God asking me to make in my behavior and in my life so that I become closer to Christ?

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As Christians, we should not forget to pray for our country. In relation to the issues that we have discussed today, what prayer would you like to say for the healing and transformation of our country?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;

to be understood, as to understand;

to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.

(Prayer of St. Francis)

WEEK 3- LENT 2020: PEACE BETWEEN IMMIGRANTS AND OURSELVES AS CITIZENS OF THIS COUNTRY

OPENING HYMN

Begin with an opening hymn, which can be chosen from one of the Lenten hymns

OPENING PRAYER

God our Creator,

It is with great sadness that we recognize the hatred of one group for another, based on nation and race and tribe.

We ask you to send a spirit of compassionate for each other

And healing upon those whose lives have been shattered by violence.

Jesus, you came to live among us and became one with us.

We ask for the grace to recognize you in all people whom we meet, those whom we know and in the stranger who seeks refuge in our land.

You and your family lived as refugees in Egypt,

Give us the desire to live in love with those who seek refuge in this country

Free from the turmoil and trauma of their own.

BRIEF EXPLANATION

Migration is one of the biggest challenges of our time. In all the three countries, the relationships with immigrants and citizens are in need of God's healing. The tensions, intolerance and misunderstanding have sometimes driven other people to commit acts of violence against immigrants and vice versa.

Although some of us have not been involved in violence against immigrants and vice versa, the spirit of intolerance forms part of our lives. They are sometimes inside our hearts and our minds. God is therefore calling each one of us to repentance.

During the season of Lent, I need to ask myself: What is the change of heart and change of mind that God is calling me to make in relation to these issues? In relation to these issues, what kind of behavioral change is God asking me to make so that I become closer to Christ?

PAUSE for silence.

READING A STORY

South African police have used rubber bullets, tear gas and water cannon to disperse crowds at an anti-immigrant march in the capital, Pretoria.

A low-flying police helicopter was deployed to break up a stand-off between local protesters and foreigners, with both groups armed with sticks, bricks and knives.

Many unemployed South Africans accuse migrants of taking their jobs.

Earlier this week, angry mobs attacked Nigerians and looted shops belonging to Somalis, Pakistani and other migrants in townships around Pretoria and parts of Johannesburg.

"They [foreigners] should know that this they are a guest in my house. I am treating them with respect. They should treat me with respect," one angry protester said.

He added that Nigerians in South Africa were "notorious" for dealing drugs and he called for greater checks on foreigners coming into the country.

The main group behind the Pretoria protests, Mamelodi Concerned Residents, has blamed foreign nationals for taking jobs and accused them of being involved in prostitution rings and drug cartels, accusations denied by immigrant communities.

It also said foreigners were "arrogant and don't know how to talk to people, especially Nigerians".

But the president has said many foreign citizens living in South Africa were law-abiding and contributed to the economy.

"It is wrong to brandish all non-nationals as drug dealers or human traffickers. Let us isolate those who commit such crimes and work with government to have them arrested, without stereotyping and causing harm to innocent people," He said in a statement.

Speaking to media after the protest, the president denied that South Africans were xenophobic and that the event "was anti-crime in the main. It was not an anti-foreigners march."

(Source of the story: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39076751>)

READING OF THE SCRIPTURES

Leviticus 19:33-34

PAUSE for silence.

READING FROM THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

(You can read one or two passages from the teaching of the Church)

"God makes it absolutely clear that He has a special concern for refugees, migrants and strangers. Deuteronomy 10:18 says: "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing." He isn't just concerned about the foreigners. He loves them.

Jesus goes even further. Matthew 25 says: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me". He identifies directly with strangers. By welcoming a refugee or migrant, we are welcoming Jesus Himself.

In his scathing attack on the inactivity of people of good will to do anything against the Nazi tyranny in Germany, Pastor Martin Niemoller said:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.

Let us take heed of this. We are facing a rising tide of hatred and intolerance, no different to the rising tide of hatred in Nazi Germany. If we do not take urgent action to stop it, there will be nothing left.

I appeal to all people of faith, and all people of good will, to speak out and take action. In the words of St Francis: “Make us channels of your peace”.

(+ Archbishop Buti Tlhagale OMI, Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference Office for Migrants and Refugees).

“Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the strangers of every age (Mt 25:35,43).” And for the stranger, the migrant, the refugee, the asylum seeker and the displaced person, every door in a new land is also an opportunity to encounter Jesus.... For immigrants, this means knowing and respecting the laws, the culture and the traditions of the countries that take them in. It even includes understanding the fears of the people in the host nation and their apprehensions for the future. And for the citizens of the country, this means opening themselves without prejudices to the rich diversity of the immigrants, to understand the hopes and the potential of the immigrants as well as their fears and vulnerabilities” (Pope Francis, 14th January 2018).

“It is not easy to enter into another culture, to put oneself in the shoes of people so different from us, to understand their thoughts and their experiences. As a result, fear dictates how we behave. Out of fear, we then refuse to encounter the other and we raise barriers to defend ourselves. The citizens of a country are sometimes afraid that the immigrants will disturb the established order, will ‘steal’ something they have long labored to build up. And the immigrants also have fears: they are afraid of confrontation, judgment, discrimination, failure. These fears are legitimate, based on doubts that are fully comprehensible from a human point of view. Having doubts and fears is not a sin. The sin is to allow these fears to determine our responses, to limit our choices, to compromise respect and generosity, to feed hostility and rejection. The sin is to refuse to encounter the other, the different, the neighbour, when this is in fact a privileged opportunity to encounter the Lord” (Pope Francis, 14th January 2018).

“We need to have a reciprocal prayer: migrants and refugees should pray for citizens of the country, and citizens of the country should pray for the immigrants. To the maternal intercession of Mary Most Holy, we entrust the hopes of all the world’s migrants and refugees and the aspirations of the host countries who welcome them.” (Pope Francis, 14th January 2018).

GROUP REFLECTION AND GROUP ACTION

These are some of views emerging from the issue of migration:

- immigrants are the ones bringing drugs into the country and into our neighborhoods;
- immigrants are the ones bringing prostitution into the country and into our neighborhoods;
- we do not have jobs because immigrants have taken all the jobs;
- there is no xenophobia; what people call xenophobia is actually a genuine concern about the large number of illegal immigrants in the country;
- the government is failing to do a good job in managing the borders;
- there is a concern about illegal immigrants only when it is immigrants from African countries;
- the way immigrants run their small businesses makes it difficult for citizens to succeed in their business,
- immigrants should not receive essential services, especially education for children and medical treatment when they are sick, the failure to distinguish between refugees and economic immigrants.
- problems that our countries are facing with respect to service delivery, crime and unemployment should be blamed on illegal immigrants;

After reading the Word of God and inspirational words from the popes, bishops and saints, what should be our attitude as Christians towards the views expressed above?

When we find myself in the midst of tensions between immigrants and South Africans, what role can we play as a Christian to promote tolerance and healing of relationships?

Choose one action that you (as a parish, as a family, as a small Christian community, Youth group, choir or sodality) can do to promote tolerance in the relationship between immigrants and ourselves.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

“Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of God, even so we also should walk in the newness of life” (Romans 6:4). What is the newness of life that our Lord is calling me to experience in my life in relation to the following:

- respecting the dignity of those different from me in terms of tribe, race and nationality;
- respecting the value of dialogue when there are disagreements between immigrants and citizens of this country;
- the belief that, although we have different nationalities, we are all children of the same God;
- willingness to reach out and make friends with those different from me in terms of nationality;
- the belief in the value of the common good;

- reluctance to welcome immigrants who are members of my parish;
- the writing of messages on the social media that promote intolerance;
- supporting statements made by a politician that incite intolerance against immigrants;
- the prejudices directed at people from another nationality;
- involvement in verbal harassment of people from another nationality;
- involvement in violence against immigrants;
- involvement as an immigrant in drug trafficking and other criminal activities;
- involvement as an immigrant in the sale of drugs;

CLOSING PRAYER:

Gracious God, we know that many of us in South Africa are living in extreme poverty and despair.

We have unhealed wounds from our own violent history.

Grant us the graces of patience and insight to recognize that the pain we live with cannot be erased by scapegoating others who are even more vulnerable than ourselves.

We pray for all those working bringing about peace and a cessation to violence, that they may be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Give them the graces of courage, of perseverance and of deep compassion for all involved in this crisis. Help us to be agents of your love and reconciliation to all we meet.

Gracious God, come fill our hearts with your peace. Amen. (Adapted from the Jesuit Institute- South Africa)

WEEK 4- LENT 2020: MAKING THE SOCIETY AND FAMILIES SAFE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

OPENING HYMN

Begin with an opening hymn, which can be chosen from one of the Lenten hymns

OPENING PRAYER

God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong, always present, always just: You gave your only Son to save us by the blood of his cross.

Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace, join to your own suffering the pain of all who have been hurt In body, mind, and spirit by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.

Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters who have been gravely harmed, and the cries of those who love them. Soothe their restless hearts with hope, steady their shaken spirits with faith. Grant them justice for their cause enlightened by your truth.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts, heal your people's wounds and transform brokenness into wholeness. Grant us the courage and wisdom, humility and grace, to act with justice. Breathe wisdom into our prayers and labors. Grant that all harmed by abuse may find peace in justice. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

BRIEF EXPLANATION

The society is not yet safe for children and women. Women and children continue to be subjected to the following: assault, murder, a life of terror because of violence in families, sexual harassment in workplace, deprivation of equal access to economic opportunities, rape, human trafficking etc.

The culture of violence continues to destroy the lives and dignity of women. It continues to tear our families apart.

Another area of concern is the high levels of abortion. The high levels of abortion are a sign that the society has not yet embraced the respect for human life from the moment of conception to the end of natural life.

During the Lenten season, I need to ask myself: What role should I play as a Christian to make my family a place that is safe for women and children? What role should I play to strengthen families and family life as a basis for addressing violence against women and children?

PAUSE for silence.

READING A STORY

A man in north of Pretoria has been arrested for assaulting his wife.

“Domestic violence – although not often reported – has remained a problem in our area,” said the spokesperson for Sinoville police station.

The problem is that nine out of ten cases would be withdrawn by the victims.

Sinoville police and crisis centre support a number of campaigns yearly to create awareness against abuse.

“It’s something we feel very strongly about,” said the spokesperson.

Whether the abuse was physical, emotional or financial, he said it was important for victims to speak out about it.

He explained that “often victims would keep quiet about their abuse. Perhaps they somehow feel guilty – that they are to blame for their partner’s behaviour, or whether they think they could change their partner,”

Police urged victims to get a protection order against abusive partners. “We are here to protect you.”

(Source of the story: <https://rekordnorth.co.za/145624/north-man-arrested-domestic-violence>)

READING THE SCRIPTURE

2 Samuel 13:1-22.

PAUSE for silence.

READING FROM THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

(You can read one or two passages from the teaching of the Church)

“Despite our impressive constitution that embraces plurality and equality between men and women, gender and power relations are still skewed in favour of men. The prevalence of patriarchal practices in all spheres of human interaction and media discourse shows that women are still not being treated as equals. Male chauvinism, misogynistic tendencies and stereotypes about women are a social pathology that still haunts our country. The collective upshot of these toxic day-to-day practices amplified through public institutions and media discourse offer justification for female subordination and oppression by men” (Bishop Victor Phalana, Chairperson, SACBC Justice and Peace Commission)

“If we want a peaceful world, we should have peaceful families. If we want peaceful families, we should have men and women who have peace in their hearts. We want the peace of Christ to break out in our hearts. Peace is a precious gift from God, which must be promoted and protected” (Pope Francis, 1st September 2017).

“Increasingly, our society looks to violent measures to deal with some of our most difficult social problems -- millions of abortions to address problem pregnancies. We are tragically turning to violence in the search for quick and easy answers to complex human problems. Just as clearly, a nation destroying more than one and a half million unborn children every year contributes to the pervasive culture of violence in our nation” (US Catholic bishops, *Confronting the culture of violence*, 1994).

“The deterioration of family life and the loss of community leave too many without moral direction and personal roots. This too contributes to violence” (US Catholic bishops, *Confronting the culture of violence*, 1994).

“Violence against women cannot be treated as normal’ (Pope Francis, Peru, 19 June 2018)

“Today our families need peace. One can build peace with three little things, humility, gentleness and patience, which are the attitudes of Jesus who is humble, meek and forgives everything. I invite Christians to start putting into practice humility, gentleness and patience saying this is the path to making peace and consolidating unity” (Pope Francis, 26 October 2018).

“The path to the attainment of peace is above all that of respect for human life in all its many aspects, beginning with its conception, through its development and up to its natural end. True peacemakers, then, are those who love, defend and promote human life in all its dimensions, personal, communitarian and transcendent. Life in its fullness is the height of peace. Anyone who loves peace cannot tolerate attacks and crimes against life” (Pope Benedict, 1st January 2013).

GROUP REFLECTION AND GROUP ACTION

1. In the light of the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, what should our attitude as Christians be towards violence against women?
2. What should be our attitude as Christians towards abortion?
3. What should be our attitude as Christians towards corporal punishment of children?
4. Choose one action that you (as a parish, as a family, as Small Christian Community, or sodality, Youth group, choir, etc.) can do to address the problem of violence against women in the families?

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Since Christ wants us to “walk in the newness of life” (Romans 6:4), what is the newness of life that our Lord calls me to experience in my life in relation to the following issues:

- Abortion
- Reluctance to believe in the respect for human life from the moment of conception to the end of natural life;
- Believing that women are inferior to men;
- Believing that women are to blame for incidents of rape;
- Believing that it is alright to be an absent father to one’s children;
- Believing that to be a real man, one has to be aggressive and violent;
- Believing that it is alright when it is a woman who is violent to a man;
- Believing in the use of violence to solve the relationship problems in my family;
- Not doing enough to address deterioration of family life and family values;
- Being a husband or wife who is involved in emotional abuse;
- Being a husband or wife who is involved in economic abuse;

- Being a husband or wife who is involved in verbal abuse;
- Reluctance to use dialogue to address problems in my family;
- Using excessive corporal punishment against my children;
- Being involved in sexual harassment at work;
- Excessive jealousy and deep sense of insecurity which translates into emotional abuse and violence against my husband or my wife
- Being involved in a relationship of a blesser and a blessee;
- Being a child who does not respect his or her parents;
- Pornography and not respecting the dignity of women as subjects created in the image of God.
- Being involved in human trafficking and child trafficking;

What is the change of heart and change of mind that God is calling me to make in relation to these issues?

In relation to these issues, what changes is God asking me to make in my behavior and in my life so that I become closer to Christ?

What prayer would I like to say to the Lord to ask for God's healing and mercy?

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As Christians, we should not forget to pray for our country. In relation to the issues that we have discussed today, what prayer would you like to say for the healing and transformation of our country?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we are so sorry for what some of us did to your children: treated them so cruelly, especially in their hour of need. We have left them with a lifelong suffering. This was not your plan for them or us. Please help us to help them. Guide us, Lord, Amen.

OR

Merciful God, we give you thanks for your gift of strength and life and especially for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have health and salvation. Help us by Your Holy Spirit to witness your power in our lives and to know your eternal love. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

WEEK 5- LENT 2020: DEVELOPING SAFE SCHOOLS

OPENING HYMN

You should begin with an opening hymn.

OPENING PRAYER

We remember those who have witnessed violence in schools and been traumatized by those experiences. May they be strengthened by the knowledge that people of all ages are working to rid our countries of this violence. Let us remember the teachers, first-responders, and other heroes who have sacrificed their lives to protect others in school.

We pray for those who have lost family, friends, or relatives of those killed during school violence in our Conference region. We pray that these broken-hearted can move through their grief, to comfort, to the realization that they will one day be joined with their loved ones in heaven with God. We also pray for all those who take care of victims of school violence in hospitals, in counseling sessions, in homes, with friends and in our churches. Let us also remember those who are create suffering and violence in schools. We pray that they experience God's unfailing love for them and allow Him to change their hearts from evil to love.

INTRODUCTORY STORY

In our countries, some of our schools are not yet safe from following incidents: corporal punishment, sexual abuse of learners, verbal abuse, indiscipline against educators, violence directed at educators, cyber-bullying, shaming, sexual harassment of fellow educators, violent protests, sale of drugs, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and having schools with large number of girls who are pregnant.

We need to bring back God and prayer in our schools. We need to bring back religious education in our schools. We need to reject a curriculum of sexual education that is not based on Christian values.

We also need to be concerned about the problem of drugs among the youth.

During the Lenten season, I need to ask myself: What role should I play as a Christian to make the school in my area safe for educators and learners? What role should I play to bring God and prayer back into schools?

PAUSE for silence.

READING A STORY

The Gauteng education department on Thursday suspended a grade 10 pupil at a west rand school with immediate effect for allegedly assaulting and bullying a grade 9 pupil.

The incident happened on Tuesday at the Hoërskool Jan Viljoen in Randfontein after both pupils had written exams.

In video footage that went viral on social media, the 16-year-old girl is seen assaulting the boy, also 16.

The department said it had sent its psychosocial team to provide necessary support to all affected by the incident.

(Source of the story: <https://www.heraldlive.co.za/news/2019-11-14-girl-suspended-for-bullying-a-boy-at-randfontein-school>)

READING THE SCRIPTURE

Matthew. 5.21-22

PAUSE for silence.

READING FROM THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

(You can read one or two passages from the teaching of the Church)

“The celebration of violence in much of our media, music and even video games is poisoning our children.” (US Catholic bishops, *Confronting a culture of violence*, 1994).

“To be a peacemaker one does not have to be wise and learned and study peace. Peace is an attitude that Jesus speaks about in the Gospel. Jesus glorifies God because he has hidden these things from the wise and learned and has revealed them to the little ones. I urge Christians to make themselves small, humble and be the servant of others. The Lord will give you the ability to understand how to make peace and will provide you the strength to make it. Children too can ask themselves whether at school they bully a companion they dislike because he is a little hateful or weak, or they make peace and forgive everything” (Pope Francis, 4th December 2018).

“Let us ask Mary to help us to respond to violence, to conflict and to war, with the power of dialogue, reconciliation and love. She is our mother: may she help us to find peace in our hearts; all of us are her children! Help us, Mary, to overcome this most difficult moment and to dedicate ourselves each day to building in every situation an authentic culture of encounter and peace. Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for us!” (Pope Francis, 1st September 2013).

“Whenever there is the possibility of a “small war” at home, in the heart, at school or at work, we should stop short and try and make peace. “Never, never wound other people. Never.” I exhort Christians to start by not speaking ill of others or firing the first cannon. This way, we become men and women of peace, carrying peace forward” (Pope Francis, 4th December 2018).

GROUP REFLECTION AND GROUP ACTION

1. In the light of the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, what should our attitude as Christians be towards bullying and other forms of violence in schools?
2. What should be our attitude as Christians towards corporal punishment at school?
3. What should be our attitude as Christians towards the problem of drugs among the youth?
4. What should be our attitude as Christians towards youth unemployment?
5. Choose one action that you (as a parish, as a family, as Small Christian Community, or sodality, Youth group, choir, etc.) can do to address the problem of violence in schools?

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Since Christ is calling us to “the newness of life” (Romans 6:4), what is the newness of life that our Lord is calling me to experience in my life in relation to the following things in schools:

- Believing freedom is about doing anything that you want without a sense of responsibilities;
- Putting too much emphasis on rights and entitlement of children, and less emphasis on their responsibilities;
- Reluctance to respect other learners who are different from me;
- Believing that to make friends in a school, one has to take drugs and drink alcohol;
- Using violence as a way to deal with hardships as a young person;
- Lacking a sense of compassion for those struggling in life
- Using the tragedy of others as entertainment to be posted and shared on social media
- Obsession with image, how I look in the eyes of others, what they think of me.
- Wanting to be accepted by peers at any cost;
- Losing hope in the future and a sense of despair
- Struggling to find meaning in life
- Failure to behave as a positive role model for young people;
- Corporal punishment,
- Sexual harassment,
- Verbal abuse,
- Indiscipline against educators,
- Violence directed at educators,
- Violence directed at fellow learners;
- Cyber-bullying,
- Shaming,
- Sexual abuse of learners
- Selling of drugs in schools,
- Drug abuse among learners,
- Alcohol abuse among learners,
- Having a school with a large number of girls who are pregnant.
- Selling of alcohol to learners.
- Involvement in youth gangs in my neighborhood.

What is the change of heart and change of mind that God is calling me to make in relation to these issues?

In relation to these issues, what changes is God asking me to make in my behavior and in my life so that I become closer to Christ?

What prayer would I like to say to the Lord to ask for God’s healing and mercy?

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As Christians, we should not forget to pray for our country. In relation to the issues that we have discussed today, what prayer would you like to say for the healing and transformation of our country?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord we ask you to guide our school communities in the way of peace. Help each person to have a heart of peace and to understand how to deal with conflict in their lives. Help us to protect our children and teachers from all forms of violence. Lord help each person to know their own, and others, unique worth so that respectful relationships flourish within our communities. May acceptance, order and respect abound and may your peace be ever present. Amen. (from Catholic Institute of Education)

WEEK 6- LENT 2020: REDISCOVERING GOD'S PEACE IN OUR HEARTS

OPENING HYMN

Begin with an opening hymn, which can be chosen from one of the Lenten hymns

OPENING PRAYER

Christ our God, your love is poured out in death for our sakes.
Hold us in your embrace as we wait for Easter's dawn.
Comfort us with the promise that no power on earth, not even death itself,
can separate us from your love; and strengthen us to wait
until you are revealed to us in all your risen glory. Amen.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

We cannot bring about peace in our families and in our countries if we lack the ability to discover the peace in our hearts.

It is difficult to discover the peace that the Lord has planted in our hearts when our hearts are under the influence of the following elements: pain, social trauma, resentment, jealousy, deep anger, deep hatred, desire for revenge and vengeance, deep fear, avarice, lack of respect for human life from the moment of conception to the end of natural life, lack of respect for the common good, lack of respect for the dignity of those different from us, greed, the desire to get rich quick and at any cost, lack of respect for the property of others, excessive obsession with power, deep sense of emptiness.

These negative elements are at the heart of the growing culture of violence.

During the Holy Week, our Lord dies on the Cross to redeem us and remove the negative elements that we carry in our hearts. In this way, we can discover the peace inside our hearts and be able to bring about peace in our families, our neighborhoods and our countries.

READING OF THE SCRIPTURES

John 18:1-19:27

READING FROM THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

(You can read one or two passages from the teaching of the Church)

"Beyond the violence in our streets is the violence in our hearts. Hostility, hatred, despair and indifference are at the heart of a growing culture of violence." (US Catholic bishops, *Confronting the culture of violence*, 1994).

"Not all violence is deadly. It begins with anger, intolerance, impatience, unfair judgments and aggression. It is often reflected in our language, our entertainment, our driving, our competitive behavior, and the way we treat our environment. These acts and attitudes are not the same as abusive behavior or physical attacks, but they create a climate where violence prospers and peace suffers." (US Catholic bishops, *Confronting the culture of violence*, 1994).

The Holy week offers us an opportunity to contemplate the Cross of Christ. “The cross of Christ was considered by others to be a moment of defeat and failure. But Saint Paul was not afraid to show the cross was a sign of victory for us as Christians. The cross of Christ can enlighten our moments of darkness, our moments of defeat.” (Pope Francis, 14 September 2018)

“We all need mercy, we know. Let us draw near to Jesus and touch his wounds in our brothers and sisters who suffer. Jesus ' wounds are a treasure: from there comes mercy. Let us be courageous and touch Jesus ' wounds. With these wounds He stands before the Father, as if to say, "Father, this is the price, these wounds are what I paid for my brothers and sisters". With his wounds Jesus intercedes before the Father. Gives mercy to us and we come near to Him, and He intercedes for us. Don't forget the wounds of Jesus” (28 April 2019).

“We want [peace](#) to reign in our hearts and in the lives of our people. We want a future of peace. We want “the peace of Christ to reign in our hearts” (Col 3.15), as the letter of Saint Paul said so well. Here Paul uses a word taken from the world of sports, which evokes the umpire or referee who settles disputed issues. “May the peace of Christ act as the umpire in your hearts”. If the peace of Christ acts as the umpire in our hearts, whenever our feelings are in conflict or we feel torn between two contrary feelings, “we should play Christ’s game”, and let his decision keep us on the path of love, the path of mercy, in the option for the most poor and the protection of nature. The path of peace. If Jesus were to serve as the umpire for the conflicting emotions in our hearts, in the complex decisions of our country, then Mozambique will be ensured a future of hope. Then your country will “sing with heartfelt gratitude to God in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Col 3:16). (Pope Francis, 6th September 2019).

GROUP REFLECTION AND GROUP ACTION

These are some of the factors which are the underlying causes of violence:

“jealousy, anger, fear, greed, lack of respect for human life, lack of respect for the common good, lack of respect for the dignity of those different from us, avarice, the desire to get rich quick and at any cost, lack of respect for the property of others, desire for revenge and vengeance, deep hatred, excessive obsession with power, alcohol abuse, drug abuse.”

Choose at least five factors that are a big challenge in your family, your parish and your neighborhood.

These factors lead us on the path of sin. True repentance from these factors is a gift from the Lord. It is a gift that flows from the sacred heart of our Lord which is full of mercy. The fullness of God’s mercy is manifested through the death and resurrection of Christ.

If true repentance is a gift that the Lord wants to give us during the celebration of the Holy Triduum, what do you think we need to do as Christians to prepare to receive this gift?

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

“But he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed” (Isaiah 53, v. 5).

Our Lord is the suffering servant who is “pieced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity” so that we receive healing and newness of life. This week, what is the change of heart and change of mind that I need to make as a way of responding positively to the depth of God’s love which the Lord has shown through his suffering and death on the Cross?

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As Christians, we should not forget to pray for our country. In relation to the issues that we have discussed during Lent, what prayer would you like to say for the healing and transformation of our country?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: My Lord, You are all powerful, you are God, and you are Father.

We beg you through the intercession and help of the archangels Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel, for the deliverance of our brothers and sisters who are enslaved by the evil one.

All saints of heaven, come to our aid.

Leader: From anxiety, sadness, and obsessions, we beg you:

ALL: **Free us, O Lord.**

From hatred and envy, we beg you:

All: **Free us, O Lord.**

From thoughts of jealousy, rage, and death, we beg you:

All: **Free us, O Lord.**

From every thought of suicide and abortion, we beg you:

All: **Free us, O Lord.**

From every form of sinful sexuality, we beg you:

All: **Free us, O Lord.**

From every division in our family, and every harmful friendship, we beg you:

All: **Free us, O Lord.**

From every sort of spell, malefic, witchcraft, and every form of the occult, we beg you:

All: **Free us, O Lord.**

All: Lord, You Who said, "I leave you peace, my peace I give you," grant that, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, we may be liberated from every evil spell and enjoy your peace always. In the Name of Christ, our Lord. Amen."

Taken from Manual of Minor Exorcisms, bishops of Sydney, Australia.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX I: STATIONS OF THE CROSS FOR STUDENTS OR ANY ONE

Prayers for an End to Gun Violence

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, as we go through these Stations of the Cross, let us connect with you and your suffering. Let us understand your pain and relate it to our own lives, where we are facing so much of it right now. Let us know that your burial in the tomb only signified a new beginning, as these recent tragedies will hopefully lead us to a safer world. (pause)

The First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Die.

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

Jesus is betrayed by his best friend, arrested, and sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. Though innocent, He accepts the punishment in silence, without saying a word. (pause)

Even today, there are those who endure suffering without being heard, the voiceless are condemned because of the fear and anger of others. Cries for justice, safety, compassion and care for others go unheard.

(pause)

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, help us to speak out, to be a voice for those who cannot speak, to cry out on behalf of those condemned by injustice, anger, and fear.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Second Station: Jesus Takes Up His Cross

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

Jesus is forced to carry the instrument of his own death. The weight of the cross bears down on to him, cutting into his shoulders and sending pain through his body.

(pause)

In the face of violence and tragedy, it can be tempting to think, "I'm just one person with my own problem to deal with. How can I possibly make a difference?" Overcoming these big problems can seem overwhelming or even impossible, but when we face them together, we can make a difference. (pause)

Let us pray: Dear God, help us have the courage to take up our cross and do what is right. Let us have the strength to make a positive change on the world, so that it can be safer for others. Let this country come to together so that we can end these violent acts and have a peaceful world.

(pause....walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Third Station: Jesus Falls For The First Time

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

We often think of Jesus as someone who has not failed. Jesus fell under the weight of his cross.

(pause)

Too many people have fallen to gun violence. The call for justice can often at times feel too heavy of a cross to bear.

(pause)

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, help us be strong enough to call out for justice to end gun violence.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

Mary, the mother of Jesus, has to endure watching her beloved son suffer the pain and humiliation of crucifixion. The sorrow she experiences watching Jesus suffer would be unbearable. Jesus is the son of God but Jesus is also the child Mary helped raise, the child she nurtured, the child she loves like only a mother can. Like any parent she wants to end her child's pain but can only watch helplessly as her child suffers.

(pause)

How many mothers and fathers feel helpless as they watch their children suffer and die needlessly in our world today. Schools, above all other places, should be places where every parent can send their children without fear of pain, suffering or violence. Our schools should be a safe haven from the violence of the world, where every student can enter without fear or worry.

(pause)

Let us pray: Lord God, Mary suffered helplessly as she watched Jesus suffer on the cross. We pray today for an end to the senseless violence that has taken the lives of too many sons and daughters. We pray for the parents who today grieve over a child lost in an act of school violence and, filled with hope, look forward to the day when school violence is no more.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Fifth Station: Simon Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

As soldiers watching Jesus become restless, they begin to think that he won't make it to Golgotha. Eventually they call on Simon from Cyrene, and put the cross on his shoulders. Simon proceeded to help Jesus on his way to Golgotha.

(pause)

Much like Jesus, we all witness acts of people that mirror the actions of Simon of Cyrene in our everyday life. He sacrificed his life in order to save as many other students as possible.

(pause)

Let us pray: Lord, let us have the courage, fortitude, and selflessness that many young people exhibited during the violence and stabbing in our schools. Help us recognize when You call upon us to sacrifice for Your plan and help others.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

A woman, Veronica, emerges from the crowd and approaches Jesus. Taking a cloth, she gently cleans the blood, grime, and sweat from his face. Veronica helped ease Christ's suffering as best she could.

(pause)

As teenagers and adults, we can often tell when our peers are struggling, burdened by their own "crosses." All of us are faced with decisions, pressures, obstacles, and temptations every single day. Unfortunately, many end up bearing their burdens without relief.

(pause)

Let us pray: Lord God, help us to be Veronicas for one another, and to do what we can to ease the struggles of our sisters and brothers. Give us the strength and courage to step in and ease one another's burdens as best we can at every opportunity to do so.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls A Second Time

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

For the second time as he makes his way along the narrow path to Calvary, Jesus falls. We can sense his physical weakness after the long night and the torture he had endured. Perhaps it was not just that ordeal, but his own exhaustion and the heavy cross on his shoulders that made him fall.

(Pause)

As a student, sometimes I think I should know more than I do. I become impatient with myself and find it hard to believe in myself when I fail. It is easy to despair over small things, and sometimes I do. Every time another mass shooting happens, a collective roar cries out for changes that could prevent such violence and tragedy. How many times have we tried to do something, only to give up after lawmakers resist and the memory of a tragedy fades? Like Jesus, we fall down, exhausted by the hopelessness that seems inevitable in the face of these obstacles.

(Pause)

Let us pray: Jesus, help me to be more patient with myself and with others. When I fail or find it hard to believe in myself, remind me that I am strong and can do hard things. In the face of despair, give me hope and courage. (pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Eight Station: Jesus Meets The Women Of Jerusalem

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

Jesus you stopped along your journey with the cross when you saw women in the crowd crying. Even walking to your death, you saw their pain and reached out to them.

(pause)

In my world today, in my school day each day, I see kids who need to be noticed, who need a kind word, who never interact in class, who sit by themselves at the lunch table. I also sometimes see those who are obviously depressed, even crying, and I walk past.

(pause)

Let us pray: God give me the strength to see beyond my own problems in life. Relieve me of my selfishness so I can reach out to kids I see in pain, kids who struggle because they don't have a lot of friends or just seem depressed and in need. Help me to be the one who doesn't walk past them. Help me understand that in giving, I also help myself and your kingdom. (pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls A Third Time

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise you.

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

Jesus is struggling with his journey. He falls for the third time under the weight of his cross. He can't bear the weight of the cross and is forced up to his feet by the soldiers.

(pause)

Jesus' struggle to get up and continue on is like the friends and families of those who have died in these school shootings. To see their loved ones gone is so harsh, and must be too hard to bear, much like Jesus' own cross.

(pause)

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, help those who are suffering the loss of a loved one. Give them the strength to carry their cross and live out the rest of their lives.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped Of His Garments

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

Jesus, the soldiers notice you have something of value. They remove your cloak and throw dice for it. Your wounds are torn open once again. Some of the people in the crowd make fun of you. They tease you and challenge you to perform a miracle for them to see.

(pause)

Though it's easy for me to say, I'm not someone who picks on others, if I'm honest, sometimes I'm in the group laughing. Or maybe I'm just the one who watches someone who is different be ignored or made fun of, without being Jesus for them.

(pause)

Let us pray: Dear God, when I see an injustice, when I see people bullying or making fun of others, taking from them their very dignity, let it be me Lord. Let it be me that finds a way to reach out to stop the meanness – or lend a hand to those being targeted.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Eleventh Station: Jesus Is Nailed To The Cross

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice on the cross to redeem the world of its sins. With nails driven through his hands and feet and blood in his eyes, he prays for those who sentenced him.

(pause)

Even today, people let themselves suffer for the good of others, sacrificing themselves just for the protection and wellbeing of individuals they may have never met. They give every last bit of strength they have to keep those that they love safe, enabling them to be free of the pain.

(pause)

Let us pray: Lord, help us be strong and resilient against the pain and injustice this world brings. Help us to forgive our enemies even when they are the ones who put us on the cross.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies On The Cross

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

ALL: Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Leader:

After Jesus is beaten, whipped, stripped naked, and nailed to His cross, He cries out, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." Even in His most vulnerable state, He continues to be a role model of faith and mercy.

(pause)

Our country is in a very vulnerable state. We must not lose faith in our God and our leaders, but instead take steps to make a change. Even right now, being here together, we are taking steps towards making a positive change in our country.

(pause)

Let us pray: Dear Lord, please give us the strength and courage to get through the hard times our country is currently struggling through and to speak up when it is time for change. Please keep us and our loved ones safe through these scary times and guide our lawmakers to implementing effective laws that end these horrible shootings. (pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the Cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.

ALL: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

Leader:

Now Mary takes the broken body of Jesus: of her Son in her arms. In her grief, she remembers the words of her son, over the bread, 'this is my body, broken, for you,' and over the wine, 'this is my blood poured out for you.'

(pause)

Mary's grief is our grief too. As Mary cradles the lifeless "Crosses of Today" body of her son and offers him back to the Father, she stands with all parents who have held their children close to them in death: those lost through accidents or acts of violence, those who have died by suicide, those who died suddenly or after illness.

(pause)

Let us pray: Help us Lord to accept the partings that must come. Help us to offer our loved ones back to you as Mary offered her son. Faced with the silence of death, let us not despair but find hope.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin next station)

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb

Leader: We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.

ALL: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

Leader:

That night his body lay in the dark Cross of Jesus: earth of the world, a seed dying, in the winter of all spirits. All those who had loved him felt emptied and exhausted. There seemed no longer any sense of purpose in anything. But at least no more harm could come to him. **(pause)**

There are times when we are overcome by the Crosses of Today: darkness of the tomb, by the countless deaths that we experience each day, but the answer to all our grieving and despair lies in this place. The world is now the tabernacle of God. The grain of wheat sown in darkness and in death has indeed yielded a rich harvest. Our presence here gives witness to that **(pause)**

Let us pray: Jesus, each day you put before us life or death. Help us always to choose life. We pray for all those we have known who have died, and for those who have no one to pray for them. We ask for the gift of faith when we are faced with the darkness of the tomb and our own death approaches.

(pause...walk 5-10 steps and begin closing prayer)

CLOSING PRAYER

We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.

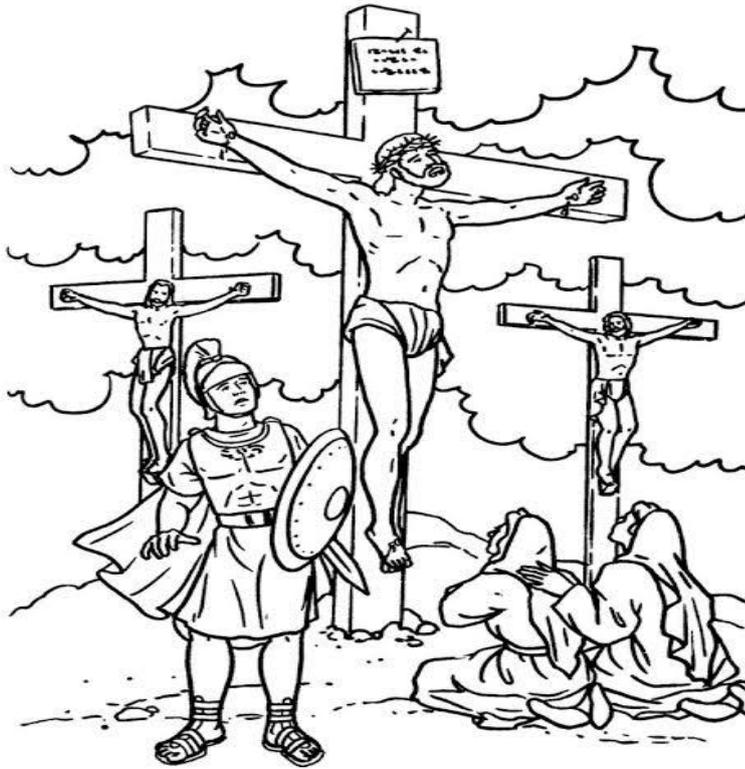
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

Lord Jesus,

In your Cross, we find our hope. In your journey of pain, we encounter your love and mercy. Through your Resurrection, we are called to be the change we want to see in the world. Give us courage to be better versions of ourselves, and in being men of faith and men of character, our actions may transform the wounds of violence into the seeds for change.

(pause)

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you, one God forever and ever. AMEN.



APPENDIX 2: PRAYER FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Lord, we present our country South Africa before you. We exalt and bless your name for all the blessings, the graces, and love that you have given to us as a nation.

Our country is now weighed down by various social, political and economic problems. We ask you to join us in our boat to calm the storms in our nation.

May your grace challenge our nation and its leadership to repent and turn away from the sin of greed and corruption, which is a result of the worship of money (Matthew 6:24).

Protect all those who are speaking out against greed, patronage, and corruption.

Renew our nation and its leadership by the light of the Gospel.

Bless us with the values and the graces of your kingdom. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

(The SACBC Justice & Peace Commission)