



A Mental Health Way of the Cross



Deacon Eric Gurash

Acknowledgments

This Mental Health Way of the Cross is the fruit of many voices, experiences, and acts of quiet faith.

I am deeply grateful to my wife, Melissa, whose creative gifts and careful eye are responsible for the clarity, beauty, and reverence of this work.

I also offer heartfelt thanks to our daughter, whose courage in sharing the truth of her lived experience has shaped these reflections with honesty and depth. Her voice has helped ensure that this devotion speaks not in theory, but in reality.

I am thankful as well for the men and women of our Emmaus Spiritual Peer Support Groups, whose openness, faith, and mutual care continue to witness to the power of accompaniment and hope.

Finally, I am grateful to all who serve in mental health ministry working to break stigma, foster understanding, and build communities of safety, healing, and encounter within our churches.

May this devotion honour each of you and the sacred work you do.

— Deacon Eric Gurash

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Introduction

Thank you for hosting this unique and important version of the Way of the Cross. Mental health challenges are a ubiquitous and growing issue in all communities. 1 in 4 families in every community, including our parishes, are currently living with some form of mental health challenge in the home.

In addition:

- Half of Canadians will have faced some level of mental health issues by the time they turn 40.
- Younger people in Canada are the group most likely to have a mental health condition.
- Approximately 1.2 million children and young people in Canada are affected by mental illness.

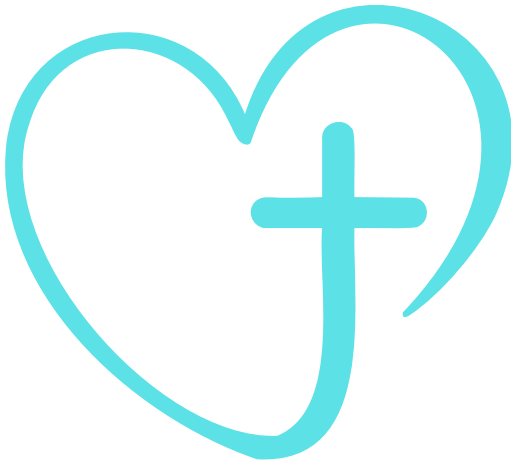
(Taken from: <https://madeinca.ca/mental-health-statistics-canada/>)

Mental health challenges are, indeed, a serious concern. Yet, as people of faith, we believe that Jesus Christ, through his suffering, death, and resurrection, has opened the way to healing, wholeness, and fullness of life to every person, including those who struggle with mental health.

This mental health-focused adaptation of the traditional Stations of the Cross seeks to give voice to the real, lived experiences of individuals who struggle with their mental health in any capacity, as well as those who accompany and support them.

Through the lens of Christ's redemptive love, this devotion emphasizes the inherent dignity of every individual, regardless of their mental health status. Our deep desire is to break the silence, stigma, and misunderstandings that often shroud mental health issues by offering a platform for shared experiences and collective healing.

We believe that Christ, through his Way of the Cross, has demonstrated that there is no physical, spiritual, mental, or emotional suffering that he does not share with us and that his cross cannot redeem.



Running this Way of the Cross

The following points will assist you as you prepare to offer this devotion in your parish.

- Ideally, you will have an MC who will share the welcome and opening remarks, opening prayer, closing prayer, final remarks, and thank you.
- For each station, it would be helpful to have two different voices. The first reader may introduce the station, lead the opening response, and read the associated scripture passage. The second reader may share the associated reflection and prayer.
- It will also be helpful to have printed posters and mental health resource cards available for those seeking additional support. Emmaus Mental Health Ministries can provide these materials upon request.
- You may also wish to have individuals with a processional cross and two candles move from station to station throughout the devotion.

We truly appreciate your work in creating a space within your community to hear the voices of individuals living with mental health challenges and the families and friends who love and support them. We pray that this time of prayer and reflection may be a source of healing and hope for all who participate and another step in making our Catholic communities safe refuges of support for everyone.



Welcome and Opening Remarks

Welcome to the Mental Health Way of the Cross, an adaptation of a traditional devotion that invites us to walk with Jesus as we reflect on the struggles faced by those living with mental health challenges and by those who love and support them. In his Passion and Death, we recognize that Jesus experienced the full spectrum of human suffering, including the particular trials endured by those grappling with mental illness.

Too often, mental health challenges surrounded by silence, stigma, misunderstanding, leaving individuals feeling isolated and alone. Through the lens of Christ's suffering, we seek to give voice to the real, lived experiences of those affected by mental illness, providing validation and understanding amid their struggles.

As we begin this journey, we acknowledge the inherent dignity of every person, regardless of their mental health status.

May this Mental Health Way of the Cross serve as a source of comfort, encouragement, and spiritual nourishment for all who participate. May it deepen our compassion for one another and strengthen our resolve to journey together toward healing and wholeness, guided by the love and mercy of our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Opening Prayer (Begin with the Sign of the Cross)

Lord Jesus,

We gather before you on the way of your Passion at the feet of Golgotha. In the shadow of our various struggles with mental health, we seek your peace and consolation. Grant us the awareness of your companionship in our silent struggles and the grace to speak out when the burden becomes too heavy. Strengthen us, Lord, to take each day one step at a time, leaning on your boundless strength.

Teach us, to be gentle with ourselves and others amidst setbacks and relapses, seeing these moments as opportunities for growth rather than defeat. Remember, too, all whose hearts ache with the pain of their loved ones' challenges; bless them with resilience and a supportive community.

When the world overwhelms us, remind us of your own trials and grant us the courage to trust in your presence and love.

Amen.



Reader 1: First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death (Suffering in Silence)



Reader 1: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you...

Response: For by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

Reader 1: "Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You say so.' But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed." - Matthew 27:11-14

Reader 2: Jesus, you stand, condemned, before Pontius Pilate in silence. This man, with power over life and death, asks about kingship and is frustrated by your refusal to defend yourself and speak a word to save your life. Confused and reluctant, he condemns you to death to appease an angry mob.

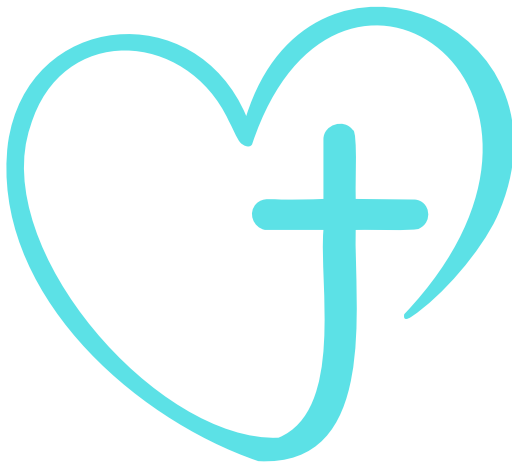
Reader 1: We who suffer from mental health challenges also suffer condemnation. Those of us who live with mental health challenges often carry not only our illness, but condemnation as well. In public, we face labels, fear, and stigma. Even harder is the judgment that grows in the quiet spaces of our own hearts and minds. We question our pain, our exhaustion, our panic, and wonder how much longer others can bear our struggle.

And so I stand in the tumult of this internal 'angry mob,' quietly condemning myself. I stand in silence, knowing that a single word might save my life, and yet I am unable to speak. But even here, Jesus, you are standing at my side whispering words that can bring some small comfort, "You are not alone."

Brief Silence

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to be aware of your companionship, comfort, and understanding in the midst of the silent alienation of mental health challenges. Grant us the grace to speak up, and speak out when the silence weighs too heavy, and consolation in knowing that even here, we are not alone.

All: Amen.



**Reader 1: Second Station: Jesus Carries His Cross
(The Weight of Mental Illness)**



Reader 1: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you...

Response: For by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

Reader 1: Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. - John 19:1-6a, 16-17

Reader 2: Jesus, much like my experiences with mental illness, you did not ask for this cross but had it thrust upon you. You know the weight I bear. The crowds around you mock and jeer while the wood scrapes and the burden threatens to crush you.

Reader 1: Some days, my mental health challenges feel as though a hundred crosses are bearing down upon me, making the simplest tasks - getting out of bed, showering, eating, going to work, having a conversation - seem impossible. I live in a world that values independence, hard work, power, and strength.

Yet this cross is devoid of all of those things. I fear, at times, that it will break me. I fear my strength and energy won't be enough to carry me through the day. At those times, I look to you and the burden you bear. Perhaps if my strength is not sufficient, yours will be. Just for today.

Brief Silence

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in those moments when the burden of mental health challenges seems too great to bear, grant me a portion of your strength to take each of my days, one small step at a time.

All: Amen.

