



Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I invite you to join me in a collaborative project to the glory of God and for the blessing of our city. Holy Week 2006 will be an opportunity for a broad collection of churches to partner and create an experience in Cincinnati. *Via Crucis :: Immersion* is an experiential Stations of the Cross. *Via Crucis* is based on the 14 traditional Stations of the Cross ... remixed. Our expression of this ancient Christian practice will be multi-sensory, multi-denominational, multi-layered, and multi-media. *Via Crucis :: Immersion* is a pilgrimage. A journey into the heart of God. It is an immersion in to the suffering of Jesus and a discovery of our own brokenness. It is Christ's passion.

Known by many names throughout history, *Via Dolorosa*, Stations of the Cross, or the Way of the Cross, this act of devotion and worship represents the journey of Christ to the Cross. This is commonly known as the Passion of Christ. Entering into the Stations of the Cross is a way to enter into and identify with the suffering of Christ. Participation in the Stations likewise has the effect of entering into our own suffering and the pain of those around us.

"The most important reason for reviving the practice of making the Stations of the Cross is that it is a powerful way to contemplate, and enter into, the mystery of Jesus' gift of himself to us. It takes the reflection on the passion out of my head, and makes it an imaginative exercise. It involves my senses, my experience and my emotions. To the extent I come to experience the love of Jesus for me, to that extent the gratitude I feel will be deep. Deep gratitude leads to real generosity and a desire to love as I have been loved" (from [Why do the Stations of the Cross?](#)).

The *Via Crucis* is a pilgrimage. As much as it is a journey of remembrance for what Christ has done; it is also a journey into the heart of God and what the Spirit is doing today. We enter the Way of the Cross in many ways - some in arrogance and self-assurance, some with deep wounds and pain, some with malaise and distraction - but hopefully in the midst of it we all discover our brokenness and our blessedness. We identify our pain with the suffering of Christ and we also realize our place as the beloved of God.

There are two key elements for the success of this collaborative, dynamic, multi-sensory experience of worship. The first is **collaboration** and the second is **creativity**.

But first, some history... in 2004, Vineyard Central, a network of house churches based in Norwood, created the first *Via Crucis :: Immersion* event. This was a joint project by our community of artists, graphic designers, musicians, and regular folk who like to be creative. It took a cadre of 50+ people to pull this off and close to 200 came to experience this one time event on Good Friday 2004. We had a great time putting this together and the energy it created was contagious and refreshing. We took last year off and we are eager to do it again in 2006. However, we don't want to do it just the same as two years ago. We enjoyed doing it so much that we would really like to share the experience with the rest of the Body of Christ in Cincinnati. We want to open it up so more people can come experience this amazing interactive event.

This year *Via Crucis :: Immersion* will be created by many churches from a wide array of denominational and ecclesiastical leanings. And instead of a one day occurrence the event will start with a Palm Sunday evening opening (like an Art Show opening) and be open every day, Monday thru Saturday from 11:00 AM till 11:00 PM. We will all share in and contribute to the resources needed to pull off this scale of an event.

Collaboration

Let's do this together! This type of event lends it self well to a collaborative effort. No one person could pull this off. This is a great opportunity for the Body of Christ throughout Cincinnati to share in a common task for the sake of our common mission. This year we will have 14 different churches create the 14 Stations of the Cross. Each church will have vast freedom to explore, dream, and design their station based on the gifts of their people, the call of God on their community, and the work of the Spirit in their midst. Churches will sign up for a station on a first come, first serve basis. Each community of faith will assemble a team of artists, dreamers, innovators, producers, designers, and really anybody with at

least one creative bone in their body. The church team will design the station, set it up in St. Elizabeth's (the former Catholic church building of which Vineyard Central is steward), and tear it down when the event is complete. Others in the church can sign-up to serve for an hour or more as "Curator" during Holy Week to serve as host and greeter.

The requirements, specs, details, and whatnot are as follows:

- A genuine passion for trying something new and different
- A team of people – as few as 2, as many as 20
- A desire to see Christ's Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven
- A representative to attend the two (yes, only two!) planning meetings
 - February 25, 2006, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
 - April 1, 2006, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
- Folks to set-up their station on Saturday, April 8th and tear-down on the 17th
- Financial contributions – cover the cost of creating your station (whoever you choose to do it – many can be created for free) and help offset the cost of heating and maintaining St. Elizabeth's \$200-\$300
- People to sign up for "Curator" time-slots for Monday April 9th to Saturday April 15th
- And probably the most important (beyond actually making the station) – Word of Mouth! Tell your friends, neighbors, co-workers, family, etc....

Creativity

I wanted to give you the details up front so that you know what you are getting into. But if I could make a simple request... don't get stuck on the details. I know that when I'm faced with a new challenge I can at times fixate on the facts and figures, the details and minutia. *Via Crucis :: Immersion* is an experience. It is both wonderfully simple and deeply meaningful. Like a fractal image in which every part of the whole is present in the smallest piece, *Via Crucis* is not only a new way of experiencing the Stations of the Cross it is also a new way of organizing an event. Collaboration and creativity are present at every level. Instead of a central committee that makes all the decisions and then hands them down through a hierarchy of worker bees; the event unfolds from a few folks who seed the conversation and the process to others who germinate and congeal. As each team creates their station they truly have the freedom to explore new ideas, try new things, and respond the Holy Spirit's creative birthing in their midst.

As we enter the 14 Stations of the Cross on Good Friday we will cross a threshold into another realm. As we walk into the sanctuary we will be transported into a space and time where the sufferings of Christ and our own pain co-exist. We become immersed in Christ, in each step he took, each fall, each encounter with a person on the via crucis - the way of the cross. Our prayer is that we would be flooded by the Spirit as sacred space and time are created; and that as we leave we would be drenched in an overwhelming sense of both who Christ is and our cross that we are to bear.

As we commonly enter this event, we will find threads, themes, and learnings that emerge. These are already happening. This kind of worship experience will be de-centered, multi-sensory, and dynamic.

1. De-centered

The Stations experience will not have a stage or unidirectional piece. The design of the event is more like a pilgrimage or journey than a classroom or living room. As such there is direction and by nature of the stations there is a (unforced) linear flow. It's O.K. to get "stuck" at Station 5 (for example). You may need to stay there a long time before moving on and perhaps will need to stop there and leave if the Spirit is working with you in a specific way.

It's kind of like walking through a museum, an interactive one in every sense. We allow the art and the experience to speak for itself - or rather we allow God to speak through it. There won't be any "presenter", we'll all be participants.

2. Multi-sensory

All 6.

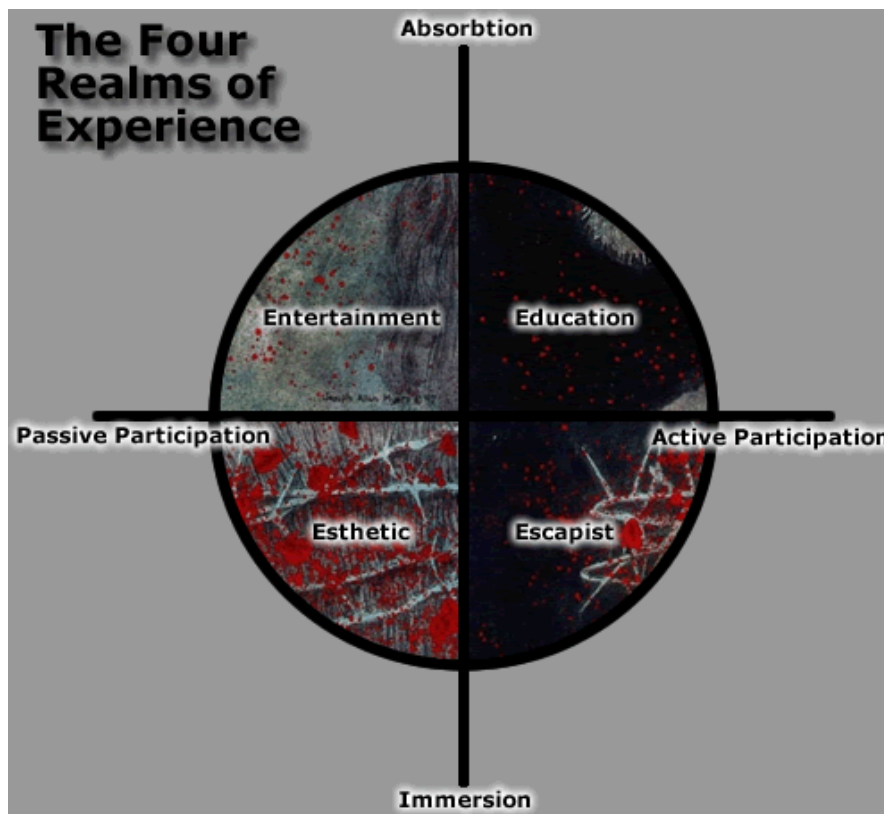
3. Dynamic

The event works on multiple levels. It is an intensely personal experience, allowing for deep, long, and meaningful contemplation on the part of an individual. But it is also for the community as well. There will be opportunities for us to post our thoughts, reflections, and prayers. This way, even as it is very personal, we can as a community of faith embrace and support and share with one another.

Furthermore, dynamic means that there will be tension, the stations are not meant to present answers, but questions. Conclusions are not necessary. Jesus is our reality that we will swim in and as such we don't have any more (nor any less) than him. Or, another way of looking at it, we have nothing to offer besides ourselves, our very lives, and in as much as we are transformed into his likeness and he lives within us and shows himself through us. This means that we are in an inherently relational dynamic. Only as we are relation to Christ can we relate with our fellow human being.

More thoughts on Immersion

Below is a diagram of the four realms of experience, taken from an unlikely source (The Harvard Business Review). Though I am not fond of the term "escapist" this is the quadrant that I perceive our Stations engaging. We (all who go through the stations) should be active participants - not mere observers. There should be some kind of engagement, both physically, emotionally and spiritually. As opposed to Entertainment or Education, we are not attempting to get the worshipper to necessarily "ingest" some bit of information. Rather than reducing the "meaning" of a station or the stations to a few bite-sized morsels the meanings of the experience will be intentionally like taking a drink from a fire hydrant. There will be layers upon layers of meanings and messages, not all of them (or any of them) tied up neatly for "taking home". Certainly, we hope that persons come away from this experienced changed and that that will like mean that they "got something out of it", but this will be a by-product of the experience. In fact, in many ways this experience - the Stations - stand alone as a sacramental event. They have the potential of being an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace (Thank you, John Wesley). The Stations exist not so that we can get something out of them, but so that we can put ourselves into them.



Hopefully, we won't escape from something (our lives, our families, our communities) as much as we will escape into the sufferings of Christ. We will actively engage our own suffering and (even more?) actively engage in the world's suffering. We will be embraced into Christ's reality - a kingdom realm - and in this way we will be transformed. Perhaps we will even be converted. Converted - changed - both to Christ and for the world. We will find life through the death. Resurrection is not merely a future reality; it is a present expectation of the kingdom breaking in. As much of Christ calls us away and unto himself, he likewise calls us into the world - to a solidarity with those on the margins. But these things are not up to us (we who would be so bold as to attempt these Stations), it is the Spirit who moves and who does the changing. We can only be faithful to his work within us - not passively, but with active anticipation of the change that he is doing in us. As we do this we will be privileged to witness his work within one another as well. This is what the Stations are - an opportunity to observe the Spirit's working.

This may also be why the Stations make such a good setting for this kind of work. The muck and the mire of our lives are laid bare as we identify with Jesus' suffering. It is in the compost of our souls, the pain, the hurt, and the wounds that we see the Spirit active. It is in our brokenness that we can become whole.

Next Steps

If you want to participate in Via Crucis :: Immersion please contact Aaron Klinefelter. Here's how:

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The Peace of Christ be with you all,

Aaron Klinefelter

<http://www.aaronklinefelter.com>

PS – Here's a list of what we need churches to sign up for:

Outside (patio) – setting the atmosphere and welcoming

Entry to Sanctuary – greeting, passing out liturgies, and maps

[The First Station:](#) Jesus is Condemned to Die.

[The Second Station:](#) Jesus Carries His Cross.

[The Third Station:](#) Jesus Falls the First Time.

[The Fourth Station:](#) Jesus Meets His Mother.

[The Fifth Station:](#) Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross.

[The Sixth Station:](#) Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face.

[The Seventh Station:](#) Jesus Falls the Second Time.

[The Eighth Station:](#) Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem.

[The Ninth Station:](#) Jesus Falls the Third Time.

[The Tenth Station:](#) Jesus is Stripped.

[The Eleventh Station:](#) Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.

[The Twelfth Station:](#) Jesus Dies on the Cross.

[The Thirteenth Station:](#) Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross.

[The Fourteenth Station:](#) Jesus is Laid in the Tomb.

On the way out – Communion, prayer, etc....