

The origins of The Way of the Cross



Diocese of Hearst-Moosonee

H. E. Pierre-Olivier Tremblay OMI
Bishop

Sylvie Vallée
Bursar

Established in 1973, the **Inter-Par** now reaches out to people in over 30 communities across Northern Ontario and beyond.

Rev. Sebastien Groleau, editor
Rev. Benedictus Mulenga, Director of Religious and Priestly Vocations

Rev. Hervé Sauvé
Vicar General

Special Mandate to Reconciliation
Fr. Sudhakar Jayabalan HGN
Episcopal Vicar to James Bay


 diocesedehearst@gmail.com

 www.hearstmoosonee.ca

 Diocese Hearst Moosonee

 pierreolivier.tremblay

 Diocese Hearst Moosonee

 Box 1330, Hearst, ON P0L 1N0

 705-362-4903

The Stations of the Cross, as we know them today, are the result of a long historical development. They did not appear all at once; they grew gradually out of Christian memory, pilgrimage, and devotion.

1. Early beginnings: Pilgrimages to Jerusalem (4th century)

After Christianity became legal under Constantine, pilgrims began travelling to Jerusalem in large numbers.

By the late 4th century, pilgrims were already walking the path Jesus took from the praetorium to Calvary.

The pilgrim Egeria (c. 380) describes liturgical celebrations at the holy places of the Passion. There were no fixed “stations” yet, but there was a living memory of the sacred sites.

2. Middle Ages: bringing Jerusalem to Europe

From the 12th century onward, the Holy Land became better known in the West through crusaders and pilgrims.

But most Christians could never travel that far. So communities began to recreate the Jerusalem route locally in their chapels, with crosses, outdoor shrines; basically the “Jerusalem ways” in towns and monasteries.

This allowed the faithful to make a spiritual pilgrimage without leaving home.

3. The Franciscans: the great organizers (14th–15th centuries)

In 1342, the Franciscans were entrusted with the care of the Holy Places. They became the principal promoters of the devotion.

They helped standardize the practice by marking a specific route in Jerusalem,

identifying key moments of the Passion, encouraging meditation on Christ’s suffering while walking.

This is when the devotion truly spread across Europe.

4. Fixing the number of stations: 17th–18th centuries

For centuries, the number and content of the stations varied widely.

Some traditions had 7, others 12, 18, or even 30.

It was only in the 18th century that the now familiar 14 stations became universal in the Latin Church, largely through Franciscan influence and papal approval.

5. The modern form

Today, the Stations of the Cross are a widespread popular devotion, a central part of Good Friday liturgy, a spiritual practice accessible to all.

Since Vatican II, some communities add a 15th station (the Resurrection) to highlight the unity of the Paschal mystery.

In summary

The Stations of the Cross trace their origins to:

- 4th century: pilgrimages in Jerusalem,
- Middle Ages: symbolic reproductions in Europe,
- 14th–18th centuries: Franciscan development and the establishment of 14 stations.

It is a devotion both ancient and deeply rooted in Christian memory.

Reminder - Invitation

The Chrism Mass will be at the Cathedral in Hearst, March 25th at 1:30pm.