



What Is It?

This is the one event that will transform your life and the lives of your students! While you can spend every week teaching your students about the ultimate sacrifice Christ made with his life, “enduring the cross, scorning its shame,” how can you help them truly understand and internalize it?

Via Dolorosa is more than a youth event. It’s a mission, a passion, for the cross. Pick a weekend (preferably as close to Easter as possible) and do your own “Way of the Cross.”



Background on Via Dolorosa

The Via Dolorosa (direct Latin translation is “Way of Grief” or “Way of Suffering”) is a street, in two parts, within the Old City of Jerusalem. Since the 18th century, it has been traditionally held to be the path that Jesus walked, carrying his cross, on the way to his crucifixion. Today, Via Dolorosa is more simply known as “The Way of the Cross.”

Every year, thousands of dedicated Christians flock to Jerusalem to walk the paths Jesus walked to his ultimate destination: Golgotha. This simple task of choosing to (quite literally) follow in Christ’s footsteps is life-changing. There is something powerful about stepping out of the church and the normalcy of what we know and putting foot to pavement to glorify our Savior.

Why Is This Important?

This is discipleship at its core. Even though it’s quite unlikely that you can make it to Jerusalem each year, you have the opportunity to hold your own Via Dolorosa in your community. Challenging your students to make a public statement of their faith by following “The Way of the Cross” in your community will stretch their commitment, grow their faith, and empower them in their witness to friends and classmates.

Holding a local Via Dolorosa also provides incredible visibility for your church and youth group. Imagine the lasting impact when students are seen giving of their time, effort, and money in order to glorify Jesus. In the same way, there is a lasting impact in the lives of those who participate as they get a clearer glimpse of the amazing sacrifice that Jesus made for them.

How It’s Been Done Before

Here is an article written by National STL Director Chet Caudill back in 2003 when he was a youth pastor in Raven, VA. His youth group participated in a local Via Dolorosa every year.

It’s Sunday morning. All the people are clothed in their brand new dresses and suits as they listen to a cantata performed by the choir. From the inside it may look like a typical Easter morning in churches all over America. But a view on the outside reveals all is not normal. For just down the road from the church can be heard the sounds of singing, laughter, and



excitement from a mass of students and leaders.

Why all the commotion? They know that in just minutes they will have reached the end of their journey. It is an adventure that has taken them 35 miles on foot over a period of three days. From the beginning, they committed themselves to “Remembering Jesus” as He walked the lonely road to Calvary some 2,000 years ago. For weeks they have been preparing for this MISSION.

Entering the church, carrying two wooden crosses, dressed in sweats and t-shirts, they make their way down two middle aisles to the stage. As they spread across the platform, worship ascends from the lips of many in the building. Tears flow freely as they think about what Jesus did for them.

Jesus finished His mission so many years before. He was beaten, bloodied, and broken. Then He died the death He did not deserve. He was buried in a tomb...but He finished the deal with His resurrection!

The students weep because God has helped them finish their mission as well. Jesus has been made visible to the community, their goal for Speed the Light has been reached, and several souls have been saved!

“Via Dolorosa” takes place annually at our church on Easter weekend and is run like a mini missions trip. For weeks prior to the big weekend, our students raise money for the “Cross Walk.” We hand them a packet of material and send them to businesses and neighborhoods to ask for donations for Speed the Light. There are awards, such as CD players, gift certificates, and STL watches, for the top money-raisers over \$500.

For any business that donates at least \$100, we promote them in the community through various means. We also send thank-you letters and tax receipt letters to every single donor. All money is collected up front so that when Easter day comes, we know how much has been raised.

Typically, we will walk about sixteen miles on Friday, fifteen on Saturday, and four on Sunday. The routes are carefully mapped and scheduled, and include roads which give us the most visibility to our community.

On Friday and Saturday, there are three breaks and a lunch during the 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. walking time. All meals during the three days are provided. We take showers at the REC park and then return to the church in the evenings for dinner, “R & R”, and some impromptu skits, games, and plain ‘ol hanging out. Everyone sleeps at the church.

Of course, an event this big takes a lot of helping hands. Many of our adults participate as well by planning and preparing meals, driving the bus or vans, and being our registered nurse or EMT. Our local sheriff’s department provides a police escort during the walk.



The results each year are phenomenal. Spiritually, our student ministry is taken to a new level. Unity becomes a major theme, as does our focus on missions. The event is covered on radio stations, in newspaper front-page stories and pictures, and even by TV newscasts. The first year we raised over \$6,000. Held in three different locations, the totals in each of the last four years have been higher, with the latest Via Dolorosa bringing in \$13,500!

Maybe you are unsure whether or not you could do this in your area. “We’re too small” or “You don’t know our area,” you might say. But let me encourage you, we’ve done it in populated areas and in small towns. It does not matter where you live. It matters that you go for it. If you were to come to Raven, Virginia, you would think there was no way it could be done. But where there is no way, God becomes the way. So, trust Him and your mission in Speed the Light. We’ve got some serious business to tend to!

The Next Steps

Here are some additional practical steps you can take to help prepare for your own Via Dolorosa (check out the example documents for each of these items on the Via Dolorosa Web_Digi page):

1. Create a complete timeline of key dates and deadlines for your event (start at least three months out!).
2. Write a letter to your city/county police department notifying them of your event.
3. Send letters/announcements to local community business leaders.
4. Mail a press release announcement to local newspapers.
5. Mail a press release announcement to local radio stations.
6. Recruit volunteers! (You will need volunteers to help with meals, serve as a nurse or EMT, serve as drivers, etc.)
7. Create a “supporting businesses” flyer and bulletin insert.
8. Create a Certificate of Achievement for all students and adults who participate in Via Dolorosa.
9. Mail a press release follow-up to local newspapers.
10. Mail a press release follow-up to local radio stations.
11. Prepare and send thank-you letters for police department, community business leaders, newspapers and radio stations, volunteers, etc.

