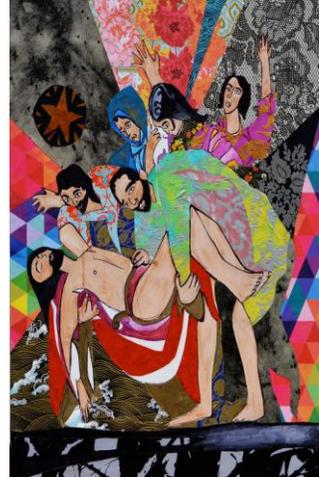
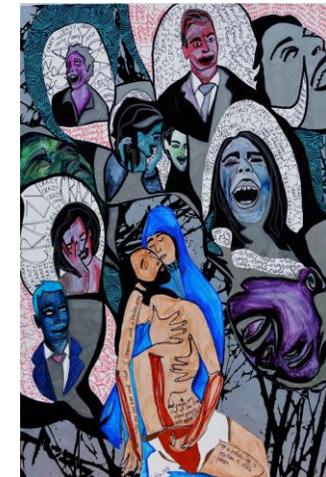




THE WAY OF THE CROSS FOR PEOPLE ON THE JOURNEY OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Adapted from: *Fifteen Steps out of Darkness: The Way of the Cross for People on the Journey of Mental Illness* (Scott Rose, Fred Werner, Al Rose). Artwork by: Mary Button



Opening

LEADER:

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of Jesus coming when he says to the long-suffering Israelites, “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.*” It is noteworthy that the Hebrew word for light is “*or*”, which means order, because the ancient Israelites believed that light brought order to the chaos of darkness and that God brought order to the disorder of misfortune.

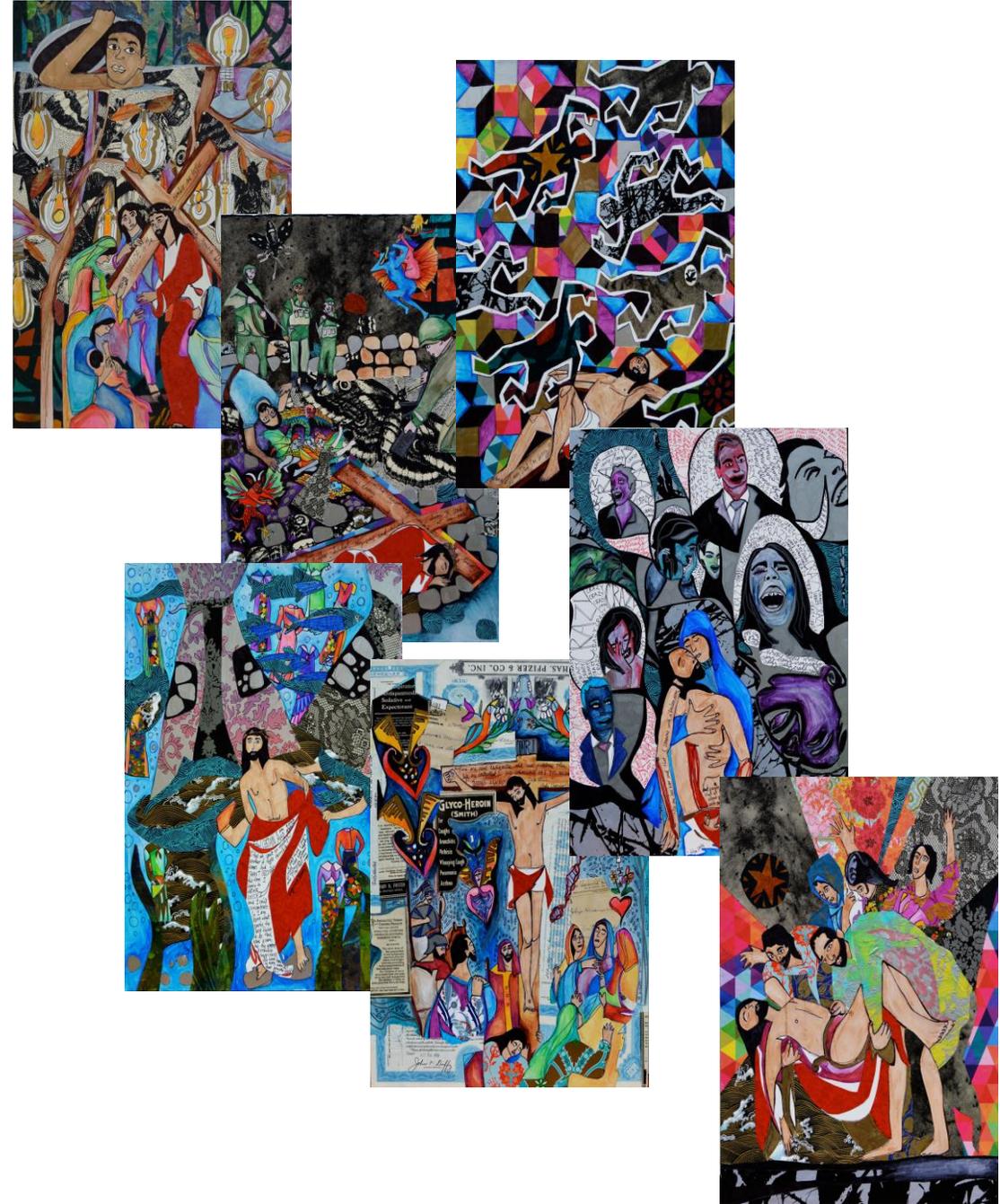


Opening (continued)

LEADER:

So, it is with the physical and spiritual journey of recovery with mental illness: the goal is often to help people *manage* the symptoms instead of eliminating them – in the same way that light can help manage darkness as opposed to dispelling it.

Jesus' walks to Calvary brings order to disorder and healing to disease... and into hope, especially in the life-long journey of recovery with mental illness.



The First Station

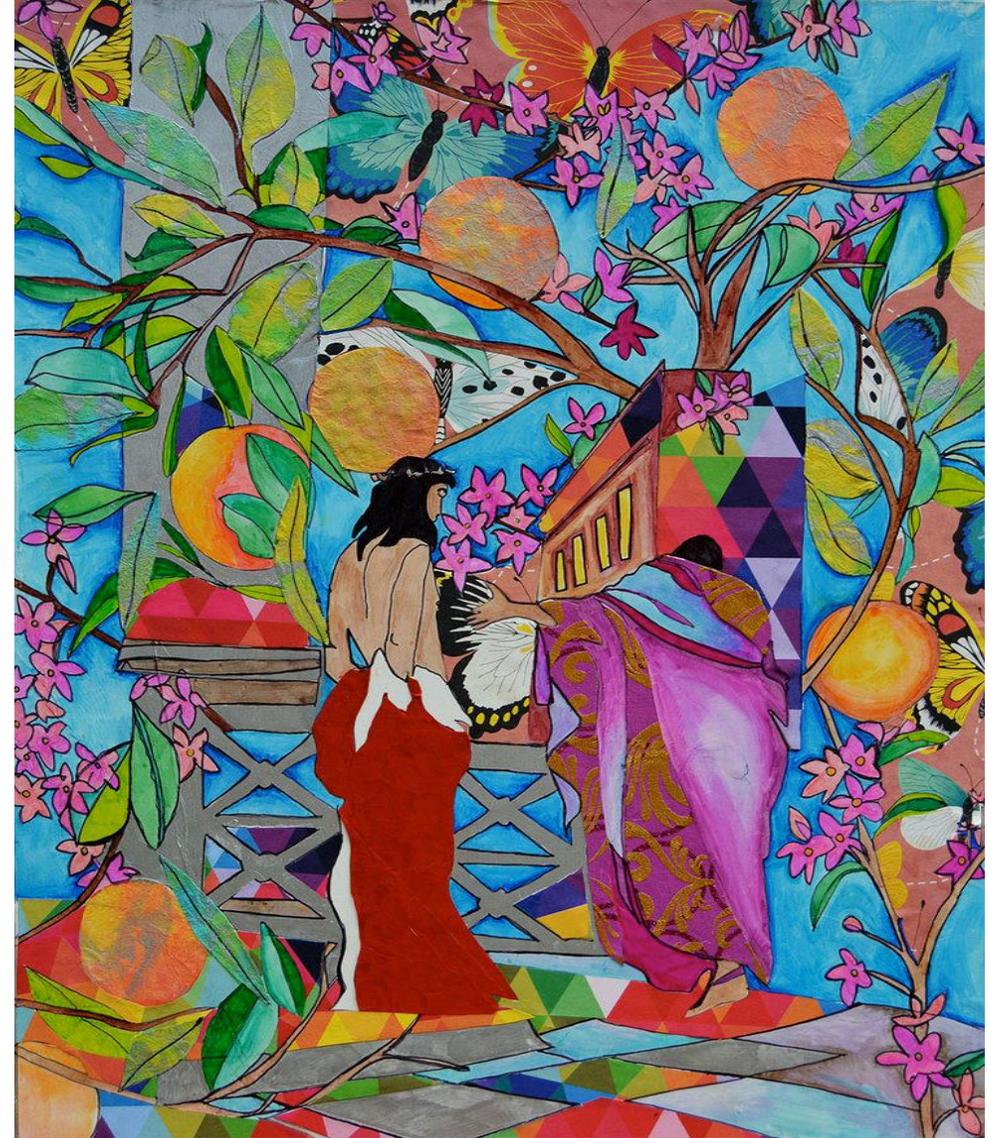
Jesus is Condemned

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER:

What is worst: the pain of mental illness or the injustice of the discrimination toward people who suffer with it?

Tom lived in a group home in a neighborhood that did not want the group home. The neighbors campaigned against the home in their community. Tom was a middle-aged man who weighed about 300 pounds and was about 6 foot tall. One night a woman from the neighborhood banged on the door in the middle of the night, because her husband, an upstanding member of the community was trying to hurt her.



The First Station (continued)

LEADER:

Tom let her into the house and shoved her husband away and locked the door. He saved her life. Because the woman's husband was of influence no mention was ever made that Tom did anything to help her.

Tom was judged because of his disease. The husband of the woman can be judged for being wrong, for trying to hurt her. Tom judged no one, nor took any credit for doing anything special. He saved the woman, offered redemption to the husband. Tom can inspire us!

ALL: Glory Be...

The Second Station

Jesus Carries His Cross

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER:

Cal is a kind gentle hearted small man with wispy blonde hair that was going gray. He carried the pain of being rejected from a high school he wanted to attend with all his friends, because of his mental illness.

Cal was not rejected because he was hated or feared. No one shouting out “Barabbas.” His rejection was more like Jesus’ when he returned to Nazareth, in the sense that it was not violent, but rather a matter of not believing in his power. Cal was barred admission to a school because of an unthreatening lack of ability.



The Second Station (continued)

LEADER:

And yet he has a beautiful spirit; a gentle loving nature; a power that was, unfortunately, not sufficient in school. Many folks with mental illness, like Cal, embody that irony, in lacking a power recognized as necessary in society, and yet they are infused with the great power of a loving soul.

Cal accepted God's will in a humble and loving way, the same as Jesus accepted His cross!

ALL: Glory Be...

The Third Station

Jesus Falls the First Time

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER:

Matthew and his twin brother Wayne were born underweight, underdeveloped preemies to a mother who sought no prenatal care for them. Their biological family was unable/unwilling to care for them and they went to a foster family that ended up adopting them. As they grew, they had serious learning disabilities and into their teen years they struggled with depression and anxiety.



The Third Station (continued)

LEADER:

Wayne has been able to get a job, but Matthew has had more challenges and has made some serious mistakes. He has fallen many times. His family has talked about the struggles they had walking with him on this journey. Not always knowing what to do, sometimes arguing with each other about the right “way” to help Matthew. They look to Joseph, Jesus' foster father, as an example of someone who trusted in God and His “angels” to have hope along the journey.

ALL: Glory Be...

The Fourth Station

Jesus Meets His Mother

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER:

Melissa was a child that came into foster care when she was nine. She either ran away from home or was taken away from her biological parents. She was deeply troubled but there was no name or diagnosis for her mental illness. She was just without the spark in her eye, the evidence of some passion tucked inside to make her tick. As she grew older, she would leave home for weeks and then months and even years, returning home for brief periods. She looked for love in all the wrong places and led a very promiscuous life. She came home one day and unburdened her heart to her foster father.



The Fourth Station (continued)

LEADER:

She was wearing her past like a heavy cumbersome coat that she finally, after years of being constricted and weighed down, was ready to shed. She had a series of pregnancies. Some ending in abortion and some adoptions. She asked her father if he would go with her to a baby cemetery and so that she gives a proper burial to her babies and her past. She named all the babies and allowed them to see the pain and sorrow in her, their mother.

We believe God's love bridges life and death, and in fact, gives life again after death. That's what happened on the road to Calvary and in the cemetery.

ALL: Glory Be...

The Fifth Station

Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER:

Walter was a young, licensed psychologist who taught in a university. In his spare time, he volunteered to do educational testing at a county run orphanage. The people of the area would come on weekends and visit the children, sometimes taking them on outings. There was one boy, named Fred. Fred had some mental health issues and because of that no one visited him. One weekend he asked Walter to take him out, so he did. After that Walter would visit with Fred. Fred began to ask to be adopted. Walter knew it would be a struggle for a single man to care for this boy, but he adopted Fred.



The Fifth Station (continued)

LEADER:

They made a home for each other and Walter was very faithful to Fred. Walter later married a woman, who was more than willing to allow Fred into her heart as well. Fred struggled with many things, but Walter was always there for him, sometimes talking to him 20 times a day. At the age of 68, Fred got cancer and was fighting for his life. Walter, at 85, visited him regularly in the hospital. Fred died shortly after.

Walter was a saint like Simon and helped Jesus carry his cross. He looked for no praise, but simply out of love walked with someone who needed him.

ALL: *Glory Be...*

The Sixth Station

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

All: *We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

LEADER:

Rachel was a young woman who struggled with mental illness, who was also developmentally disabled. She was always looking for a way to belong, to fit in, to make a difference. When she was old enough, she asked her father if she could give blood. He was moved and took her to the bloodmobile site. He went first so she could see how it went. When the time came, for the medical screening, Rachel became confused by the questions and could not answer them.



The Sixth Station (continued)

LEADER:

Her father asked the screener to simplify the questions. It did not work, and Rachel was told she could not give blood. Thinking about their car ride home, the father said, *“Once she got in the car, my daughter began to sob in a way that startled me, with an intensity that must have held years of frustration... I sat there helpless... I saw in Rachel an awesome agony, not unlike the suffering of Jesus, and I wanted to somehow mop up her tears, just as Veronica did for Jesus.”*

ALL: *Glory Be...*

The Seventh Station

Jesus Falls the Second Time

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER:

Brenda was a graying, middle aged woman, carrying too much weight on her arthritic knees. She hobbled around with a cane. Her mental illness manifested itself in bouts of schizophrenia. She carried around rag dolls, whom she spoke to and cuddled. She was very concerned about going to confession and asked for help with finding a place. After days of research and work, a staff member at her day program, found a place for her to go. The staff member expected Brenda to be excited, but Brenda seemed flustered and simply declined.



The Seventh Station (continued)

LEADER:

The staff member walked away frustrated. Later they thought, *“Our clients are dealing with severe mental illness and unpredictability is a predictable part of their condition. That is part of the cross they bear.*

Sometimes their therapy and their medicine work well and they can begin relationships and fulfill responsibilities.

The Seventh Station (continued)

LEADER:

But other times, those therapies and medicines do not work, and then these folks fall under the burden of their cross."

Living and working with someone with mental illness is not so much about solving their problems - as it is helping them know they are precious in our eyes!

ALL: *Glory Be...*



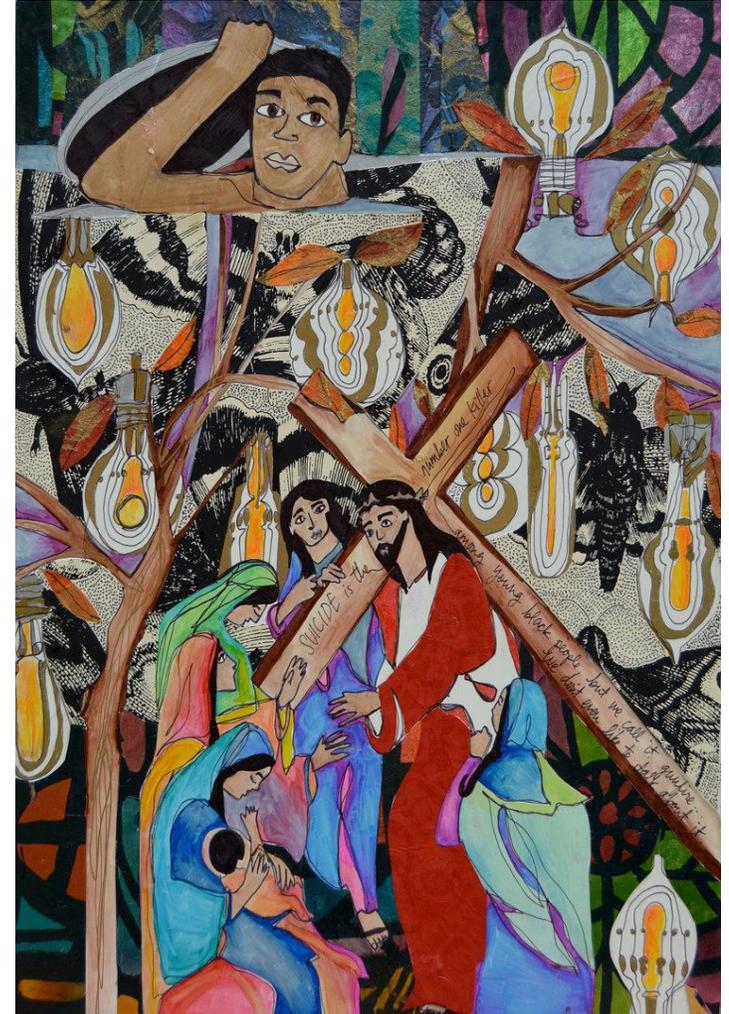
The Eighth Station

Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

LEADER:

Allison suffered from bouts of paranoia that were coupled with her mental illness. Many times, this prevented her from getting the care she needed. She suffered from other medical issues as well, but when you would meet her you would be greeted with a broad, lovely smile that surely hid an enormous pain, but revealed a couple of missing front teeth and an endearing vulnerability. Allison was in and out of programs and institutions. She ended up dying in a county nursing home.



The Eighth Station (continued)

LEADER:

At her small funeral, there were a group of women, weeping in the front of the church. An elderly woman walked slowly up to speak. She introduced herself as an aunt, although it was clear she was not a blood connection. The elderly woman spoke of her own struggles and how Allison helped her and how she helped Allison. The woman shared that she continued to look out for Allison her whole life, even following her to an adjoining room in the same nursing home, continuing to provide chocolate and friendship, until Allison's death.

Allison's life inspired graced moments of redemption, of many including the elderly lady.

The weeping then of these women was both in sorrow and joy.

ALL: Glory Be...

The Ninth Station

Jesus Falls the Third Time

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

LEADER:

Like many low-income people with severe mental illness, John fell multiple times in his life under the triple burden of disease, poverty and discrimination. One of these elements alone has the power to extinguish the flame of hope inside a person with mental illness. John was one of the first residents of a new group home, in a neighborhood that did not want them. The neighbors began passing around fliers that if this house was allowed the residents would rob their homes and harm their children.



The Ninth Station (continued)

LEADER:

To try to address this, the group home invited the neighbors into the house to meet the residents and gave a brief presentation. It was not going well. John, who fought depression, anxiety, and addiction, asked to speak to the neighbors. John got up and spoke eloquently of his journey with mental illness, beginning with his troubled childhood and the emerging terrors of his delusions and painful adulthood.

The Ninth Station (continued)

LEADER:

He concluded by saying,

“If I was part of any other minority, you would not assume that I would abuse your children... Why do you think I would do such a terrible thing just because I suffer from mental illness?”

There was silence and then clapping. This neighborhood became one of the most supportive of the group home.

ALL: *Glory Be...*

The Tenth Station

Jesus is Stripped of his Garments

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

LEADER:

Patrick and Shirley are two very strong people. They reveal a special concept of poverty – a poverty of relationships - which is a startling reminder of the Lord's Passion.

Patrick was a drug addict who lost both of his legs through infection and abuse. He sat in his wheelchair, many days in front of a treatment center and whenever asked how he was always responded, "Great!"



The Tenth Station (continued)

LEADER:

Shirley suffered from paranoia. She was heavily tattooed with purple streaked hair and wearing leather clothes. Not an easy person in whom to find Christ. She looks tough but is quite vulnerable. She is plagued by beliefs in conspiracy theories that are taking place against her. Sometimes, she would just want to chat, ramble really.

Her paranoia isolated her, but she sought some contact, any contact, so long as it was kind. She will present you with McDonald receipts and dry-cleaning tickets all to help support her beliefs.

She will show these things and ask, “You believe me, don’t you?” People might argue about the proper response, but if you tell her, “Yes” her face lights up with joy, and - a beautiful smile. When we listen with our heart, in the moment of the smile, we can experience consolation, the sign of the presence of a loving God.

The Tenth Station (continued)

LEADER:

What a gift from God is the beauty of the poverty in those with mental illness, those who – like Jesus – have so little, yet can teach us so much.

How necessary it is for us to accompany Jesus in His Passion, stopping to recognize Him whenever in our journey we see Him stripped.

ALL: Glory Be...

The Eleventh Station

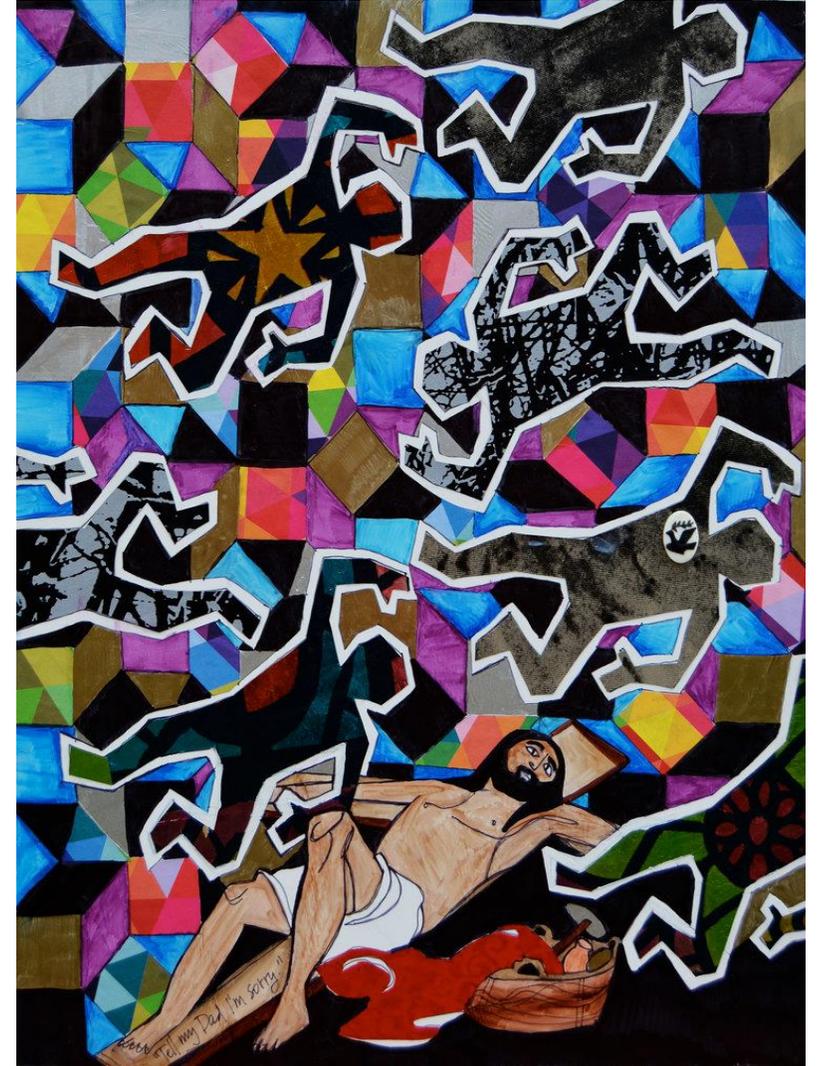
Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER:

Will's hands were nailed to his cross – by a pen. His schizophrenia began to emerge when he was a boy. The symptoms started with the delusion that he was getting smaller. Most troubling of all, he intentionally hurt himself by frequently puncturing his flesh with a pen.

But, Will also heard a positive voice amidst the darkness, a muse, that inspired him to write poetry. Fortunately, he was willing to listen to that voice.



The Eleventh Station (continued)

LEADER:

It helped him find purpose and connection with the self he could not connect with otherwise. This helped him to feel good about himself and to manage the symptoms of his mental illness. Poetry reminded him that he is much more than his illness and sometimes maybe understands he is gifted through his illness.

Like the Cross, a pen for Will represents both suffering and redemption.

ALL: Glory Be...

The Twelfth Station

Jesus Dies on The Cross

All: *We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world*

LEADER:

Kevin came to live with a foster family when he was 16. He had gotten into trouble and the choices were either attending reform school or to live with a foster family. Kevin called his foster father *the warden* and his foster mother *the warden's wife*.

He grudgingly entered into the life of this family. He had his great days of being bright and alive, and other days he went to a dark place by himself. As time passed, he became a vital part of his family. Kevin looked forward to becoming a Marine because it gave him the best hope of doing something truly significant, maybe even sacrificial, during the Vietnam War.



The Twelfth Station (continued)

LEADER:

His foster father strongly disagreed with this choice, but allowed Kevin to make his own decision.

Kevin fought in Vietnam, but when he came home, what he had seen and experienced was too much and he ended up taking his life. His family continues to ask if there was something they could have done? Or should they have forbade him from joining the armed forces? What if?

Did the people surrounding Jesus the day of his crucifixion ask the same questions?

The Twelfth Station (continued)

LEADER:

Did they think if they loved him in a different way, they could have spared him the humiliation and agony of the cross?

Could or should anything have been done to keep Jesus and the two prisoners from meeting their untimely and undeserved deaths?

We need to trust in the power that love can still offer. We pray that the love embodied in Jesus' sacrificial death offers us strength and courage.

ALL: Glory Be...

The Thirteenth Station

Jesus is Taken down from the Cross

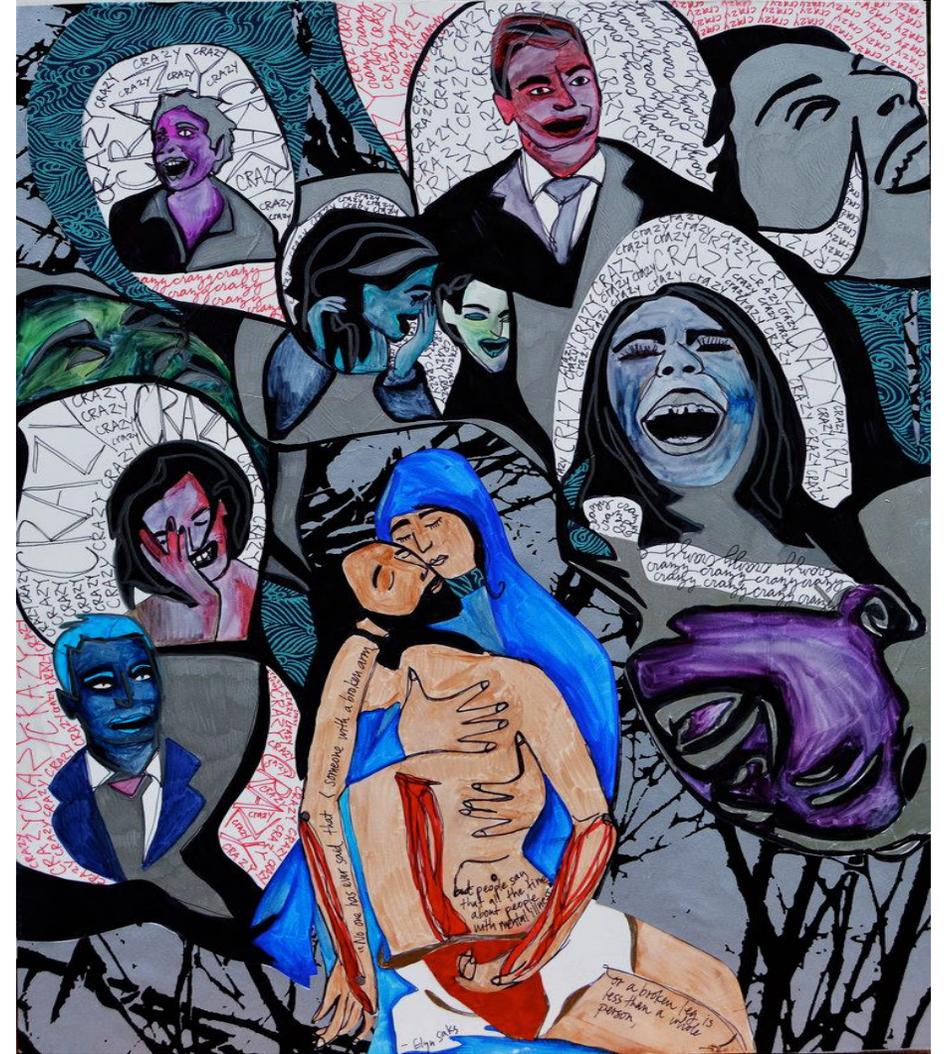
All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

LEADER:

Dave was a Vietnam veteran who lived with mental illness, suffered from alcoholism, and had a strained relationship with his mother. He seemed destined to remain in the back wards of the local veteran's hospital.

Dave fought every step of the way to avoid treatment and his mother badgered the staff to force treatment. His counselor was stuck in the middle and gave up on Dave, wanting him to be taken down from his cross and hidden away, out of sight.

He was making the mistake that some communities do who want to hide those who are disabled, so they do not have to deal with the disruption of their illness and the smell of their poverty.



The Thirteenth Station (continued)

LEADER:

Dave's mother never gave up and she forced the counselor to not give up either.

In a chance meeting with some donors, Dave helped secure a grant and a building that the program needed.

Dave teaches us that none of us are to blame for our various limitations that bring us together.

We are all called to keep our hearts open to God's power – even when we want badly to give up.

ALL: Glory Be...

The Fourteenth Station

Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

All: We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

LEADER:

Vinnie was an attractive and brilliant young man. He had a great memory and could call upon anything he had read or heard. He struggled with depression and his inability to be perfect.

This brought him to a dark place where he did not let others in. He loved to study US Presidents and took great comfort that both Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt struggled with depression.



The Fourteenth Station (continued)

LEADER:

He tried all different means to address his mental illness, anything from getting acupuncture to reading the Bible.

No matter what he read or what he tried, he was never able to be that “perfect version” of himself, that he sought so desperately.

One of his counselors mentioned to him that the “perfect Vinnie” was not real. And that the “real Vinnie”, with all his gifts and faults and even his mental illness, was a pretty good guy.

The Fourteenth Station (continued)

LEADER:

He did not believe this at first, but over the course of years, Vinnie has come to slowly and gradually embrace the real Vinnie, and to let the “perfect Vinnie” pass away, go into the tomb.

It is never a completed process but loving the “me that I am” is the beginning of a great and hope-filled journey!

It is the road to resurrection!

ALL: *Glory Be...*

Closing Prayer

LEADER:

Jesus, your death and resurrection gives us hope that we can get through anything that happens in our life because you always walks with us.

We endure the cross together. We never stand alone.

Your Risen Spirit lives in us and around us. Our bodies are your Risen body here on earth.

Our arms are your arms reaching out to others. Remembering how you went to the cross, gives us the hope we need to get back up after falling. And the realization that we belong together.



Closing Prayer

LEADER:

Jesus, help us to understand that mental illness is never inflicted upon us by you. The hope of recovery is that all of those who are impacted by the illness—those suffering with it, their families, and their caregivers—will achieve net progress and insight over time in spite of the inevitable setbacks and, sometimes, tragedies.

Help us to find the strength and to learn how to manage the symptoms, when we're unable to eliminate them—in the same way that light can help us manage darkness as opposed to dispelling it.



Closing Prayer

LEADER:

Help us accept the fact that after praying these fourteen stations, that most likely our mental health has not changed - that our pain will not be resolved or dramatically reduced when we get to the last station.

Instead, as we have remembered with your suffering, we are not alone in ours. Reassure us that there can be purpose in our pain, and that we will periodically experience redemption and renewal that will be sufficient to keep us going—even if we have to walk through the stations again and again.

ALL: *Amen.*

