

# Catholic students' Way of Cross turns heads on secular university campus

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (CNS) – Northern Arizona University students walking to class turned their heads the afternoon of April 19 to see a gathering of nearly 100 Catholic students and community members singing solemnly, with two students carrying a large wooden cross.

Stations of the Cross is an annual event sponsored by Holy Trinity Newman Center on Good Friday. The stations take on a nontraditional form with students and community members walking around the central part of the university, led by Newman Center director Father Matt Lowry, stopping at various locations around the campus for each station.

The takeaway for many students was walking and suffering with Jesus in his pain during the passion.

Senior John Bassler said he has been entering into Jesus' suffering since January when he made a 90-day commitment titled "Exodus 90" with 20 other men from the Newman Center. They entered into Jesus' suffering by fasting from the pleasures of the world such as Netflix, desserts, hot showers and secular music. Bassler found that he was entering into Jesus' suffering even more during the stations than he realized was possible.

"The stations allowed me to be a witness to Jesus' sacrifice and to be present in his suffering. It strengthened me in my faith," Bassler told The Catholic Sun, newspaper of the Phoenix Diocese. "The stations aren't a requirement; nobody is forced to be here. To see people commit to over an hour of walking and kneeling and praying shows how faith can involve a community."

Gabby Avila, a junior at Northern Arizona University, helped lead participants in song with her guitar as they walked the road with Jesus. As she used her talent to bring others close to the Lord, she reflected on Jesus' walk to Calvary and allowed herself to walk that journey with him.

"What stuck out to me during the Stations was all the suffering that Jesus endured for us. He knew exactly how the situation would end, and yet, he still continued," said Avila. "I was thinking of how hard it sometimes feels to follow Christ. Going against the flow and the desires of the world today is extremely hard. During the Stations, I was reminded that Jesus has called me to go against the flow so that I can fully experience his goodness made in his sacrifice."

Like Bassler and Avila, Thomas Holland shared that he also had the opportunity to enter into Jesus' suffering. A non-Catholic, Holland has been attending the Newman Center to see what the Catholic faith is all about. He attended the stations and carried the cross with another student for a stretch of time.

"I felt a tiny bit of pain while carrying the cross and pondered on some small level of the pain that Jesus was actually feeling," said Holland.

The Stations weren't only powerful for the participants; it was powerful for the onlookers. Witnessing nearly 100 people kneeling before the cross and processing through campus isn't ordinary. Aaron Marquez, a 2017 Northern Arizona University graduate, who now teaches at San Francisco de Asis Catholic School, explained that witnessing the stations had the power to change the hearts of onlookers.

"The unity of us together on campus and the reactions of everyone around sparks curiosity in a lot of people," Marquez said. "It might be that little spark that can start something like a forest fire."