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[sōtēr - saviour]

Praying together from our homes

Domestic Church

During these past weeks we have often heard the phrase “domestic church.” The domestic church, that is, the church in the home, is the Christian life we live daily; it is also the prayerful experiences and catechesis that we share in the family and with our friends. These teachings and prayerful moments that are necessary to strengthen our faith, are even more crucial now. But they are also more easily experienced now, since we are spending more time in the home and more hours trying to stay in touch with our friends through social media.

We are starting the most important week in the Christian liturgical calendar. Hence, for these days, we are proposing traditional prayers, but that were reconceived in a fresh way to reflect the reality of life in Malta at this moment. We hope that they help our domestic churches to gather in prayer and to share and pray with friends through new media.

What prayerful experiences are being offered?

The **Via Matris** or **Way of the Mother** is a reflection on the Seven Sorrows of Mary as she accompanied her Son on his way to the Golgotha, and she remembered his childhood and their life together as family. We are proposing this prayer that reminds us of the traditional Our Lady of Sorrows processions in our villages.

The **Via Crucis** or **Way of the Cross** is a reflection on Jesus' Passion, way to Calvary and Crucifixion. It recalls traditional pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

The **Seven Teachings**. This year we cannot do the traditional **Seven Churches Visitations** of the Holy Sepulchre on Maundy Thursday. Instead, we are offering a contemplative experience to reflect on Seven Teachings that Jesus gave to his disciples on his last night after he washed their feet.

A penitential **Veneration of the Cross** that can be both a personal and communal examination of conscience in preparation for Easter. This will help us be open to receive God's merciful grace at this time.

How do we pray together as a family?

1. Find a suitable space in the home, where everyone can be comfortable. Sit in a circle around an icon, crucifix or another holy image. You can decorate with candles or flowers. You can use the images on <https://soter.knisja.mt> that accompany each station or part in the particular prayer .
2. One of the family members can use their mobile phone/tablet/laptop to play music during different parts of the prayer experience. The other members praying should make sure that their mobile phones are turned off or put on silent mode so as not to interrupt prayer.
3. The particular prayer text may be downloaded on a mobile phone or tablet or printed out from the PDF links available.
4. The format of the *Veneration of the Cross*, *Via Matris*, *Via Crucis* and *Seven Teachings* includes a short reading from the Scriptures, a brief reflection, invocations and praying the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be (or the Rosary). Parents can read the text from the Scriptures and the reflection that follows, while children can read the invocations and the other prayers. The Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be can be prayed together and recited by the youngest family members if possible. The litany and the concluding prayers can also be read by different family members.
5. It is important to keep a prayerful pace and not rush too much between one part of the prayer and the other. Silence is important to deepen the prayerful experience.
6. Music can also help the family pray together. It is suggested that the prayer opens and closes with music. Music, even a short hymn or refrain sung by the family, can also be used between the Stations.

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7. After the conclusion of the prayer, the family can also share how the experience touched them and spoke to them personally.
8. Finally, let us not worry too much if this prayerful moment does not go as smoothly as we would hope. We all know that, especially with young children, praying together is not easy. Despite this, let us not lose heart, especially if this is still a new experience for us.

How do we pray together as an extended family, with other families, friends or members of our community?

1. While following the suggestions above, in order to pray with people who do not live in the same household, we need to use video conferencing platforms such as Jitsi (<https://jitsi.org>).
2. There is no limit to how many people can actually share in the same prayerful experience. However, smaller groups help make the experience more intimate and encourage deeper sharing.
3. It is important that before gathering for prayer, all members would have already agreed on who will act as prayer leader, and how the readings are to be shared, so that everyone is prepared.
4. A practical suggestion is that any person who is not reading should turn their microphone off to reduce background noise that might interfere with prayer.