

Outdoor Way of the Cross will be a virtual one this Good Friday

With Holy Week fast approaching, organizers of the Edmonton Outdoor Way of the Cross have cancelled the 40-year tradition as a precaution against further spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus.

Instead, the walk will be replaced with an online video that will include the same prayers and reflections planned for this anniversary year.

“It’s completely inappropriate and unsafe to do, bring people together outside,” said Jim Gurnett, who is part of the 15-member committee that plans the event held every year on Good Friday.

“Our theme is ‘Our common home’ this year, and it’s a good reminder that we all have to look out and be supportive of each other ... In a way, not walking reminds me that my small actions – even social distancing – have an impact on other people’s lives and that we can all do something to make sure our common home is better cared for.

“I think it’s ironic, but there are messages in it for us, for sure.”

Modelled after the popular Christian devotional that marks Christ’s last hours, the Outdoor Way of the Cross is an ecumenical prayer walk that raises awareness of social justice issues including housing, the environment and poverty.

Given COVID-19 restrictions worldwide, the Vatican has decreed that [Holy Week and Easter liturgies will continue this year](#), and can be livestreamed in dioceses where public masses have been cancelled. To find a livestreamed Mass in the Archdiocese of Edmonton, visit caemd.ca.

The Outdoor Way of the Cross, organized by the Edmonton and District Council of Churches, usually attracts hundreds of people, from families with kids to students to the homeless.

The cancellation of this year’s event comes as public health officials urge Canadians to practise social distancing, and if they have COVID-19 symptoms, to self-isolate in an effort to contain a global pandemic. As of March 25, there were 358 confirmed cases in Alberta and 1,739 in Canada.

Gurnett is working on a virtual Outdoor Way of the Cross in which the speakers will share their reflections in a YouTube video.

Among those participating in the reflections this year are Rev. Susai Jesu, pastor of Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples, the Salvadoran community of Edmonton, and Bob McKeon, emeritus professor of theology at Newman Theological

College. McKeon helped organize the first Outdoor Way of the Cross in 1981.

“We hope that on Good Friday, at the time the walk would normally happen, that we’ll release on YouTube a variation of the walk that will have the people offering the reflections,” Gurnett said.

“That’s all that will be possible. It’ll just be online. You’ll able to listen and watch and hopefully be encouraged by it in this challenging time.”

The link will be shared on the [Facebook page of the Edmonton Outdoor Way of the Cross](#) and its other social media channels.

Similar events are held across the Edmonton region. However, the downtown Outdoor Way of the Cross remains the biggest and the most ecumenical. Organizers had already planned a separate event, this fall, to mark the 40th anniversary of the Outdoor Way of the Cross. For now, that event is still scheduled to take place.