

STATIONS OF THE CROSS  
REFLECTING THE SUFFERING  
OF THE OLEŠNICE REGION

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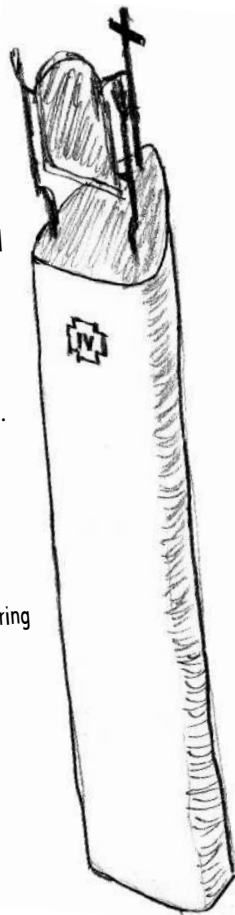
### Contemplation on History

The individual Stations of the Cross are formed by cast concrete columns topped by forged reliefs supplemented with symbols of Jesus' suffering. The reliefs depict the hardships of the local region.

The concept of the work was created by Pavel Lazárek, parish priest of Olešnice. The parishioners of Olešnice participated in the selection of the local historical hardships. The project for the work was developed by Josef Kánský from Olešnice. The concrete columns were made by Jiří Večeřa from Bystré. The author of the designs and models is the artistic blacksmith Petr Cach from Oldřis. The reliefs were cast by the Hajtman family from Nový Hradec Králové.

The foundation stone of the Stations of the Cross was blessed by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to Brno on September 27, 2009. The Stations of the Cross were solemnly consecrated on Friday, August 5, 2016.

The creation of the work was financially supported by the South Moravian Region.



These Stations of the Cross, reflecting the region's suffering, are not only an expression of Christ's pains and wounds, but they also try to convey that His wounds are our wounds, which the people and the land here have encountered throughout history and continue to encounter today. This gave rise to the idea of the Stations of the Cross as a "manifestation of the face of our local history." The journey begins at the cemetery church in Olešnice and gradually ascends through the picturesque landscape. The path itself, along which the stations are placed, winds and twists, symbolizing its similarity to human life, which is often complicated by suffering.

During its early years, the Stations of the Cross symbolically ended at the lookout tower, signifying that overcoming and forgiving pain gives a person the chance to look further in life, and suffering viewed from a higher perspective can help us discover its meaning. However, after a few years, the lookout tower was dismantled for safety reasons. Nevertheless, because the Stations of the Cross end at the top of the hill, the idea of perspective and hope endures. You are thus standing before an open chronicle of the region, embodied in the Stations of the Cross as a work of art. I thank all those who contributed in any way to the creation of these Stations of the Cross.

Pavel Lazárek, Parish Priest

Olešnice is a town with an almost thousand-year history, first mentioned in 1078. It is one of the oldest settlements in the foothills of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands. Throughout its history, this town has not escaped the historical upheavals that have affected our entire country. Nevertheless, various historical events had a significant effect on the lives of people living in Olešnice, whether it was wars, epidemics, regime changes, or natural disasters. The individual Stations of the Cross tell these stories. It is up to us to reflect on the region's history and learn lessons from it.

Zdeněk Peša, Mayor



## PEOPLE ARE LEAVING THE REGION

JESUS CONDEMNED

Olešnice used to be an important regional centre. The foothills of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands did not provide many opportunities for agricultural livelihoods, so many of its inhabitants made their living through crafts and trade. At the time of the Industrial Revolution, however, the peripheral area of Olešnice was no longer able to support all its inhabitants, largely because the newly constructed railways avoided Olešnice, partly as a result of the attitude of the Olešnice landowners. As a result, many people began to leave Olešnice. At the end of the 19th century, they left for America and Vienna in search of work. In addition, after 1945, about 150 people left to settle in the nearby Sudetenland. The region is still struggling with the lack of employment opportunities and the associated exodus of inhabitants. For many, life in the countryside has become a burden and they seek a supposedly simpler life with more opportunities in the city. This can be clearly illustrated by the following numbers: at the beginning of the 20th century, Olešnice had 2,200 inhabitants; today it has 500 fewer. And in the surrounding villages, the population decline is even more obvious.



The symbol of the station is formed by a hint of the crown of thorns - a sign of Christ's condemnation.



## RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

The religious wars of the first half of the 15th century did not avoid Olešnice. According to a legend, Hussite troops burned down the monastery at Majdalenka near Svojanov Castle and also the wooden church in Olešnice. In the 16th century, the teachings of the Bohemian Brothers spread in Olešnice, followed by the Lutheran faith, to which most of the inhabitants subscribed. After the Battle of White Mountain, the subjects were forced to accept the Catholic faith, and some of them secretly fled across the border. In Olešnice and the surrounding area, there were also many who, despite the risk of persecution for generations, met secretly and hid their religious books. In the middle of the 18th century, Olešnice became a center of activity for secret non-Catholics in the

region, and in 1781 one of them - Řehoř Jakubec - even went to Vienna with a petition demanding freedom of religion for Protestants. He handed the petition directly to Emperor Joseph II, who proclaimed a Patent of Toleration the same year. Thus, perhaps thanks to the efforts of the Protestants of Olešnice, the civil equality of non-Catholic believers with Catholics was achieved.



JESUS ACCEPTS THE CROSS



The symbol of the station is the slowly approaching cross.

## EPIDEMICS AND DISEASES

JESUS FALLS UNDER THE CROSS FOR THE FIRST TIME



The symbol of the station is a cross bent once.

Diseases accompany humans throughout their lives. In earlier times, even trivial illnesses were often fatal. Additionally, heavy manual labour was accompanied by injuries. However, the scourge of both urban and rural populations in the past was epidemics, when contagious diseases spread and the ability to stop them was very limited. Local authorities attempted to halt the plague outbreaks of the Middle Ages through bans on relocation and travel, even erecting gallows for those who violated the ban near the road by the nearby border with Bohemia. Despite these measures, diseases continued to spread. From later periods, we have reports that in 1831, cholera ravaged the region, claiming over 70 lives in Olešnice, Crhov, and Křtěnov. Another cholera epidemic spread in Olešnice during the Austro-Prussian War. At that time, local residents contracted the disease from sick Prussian soldiers, resulting in 60 deaths. In modern history, the Spanish flu epidemic in the years following World War I is recorded.



## NATIONAL AND ETHNIC INTOLERANCE

IV

JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER MARY

In 1942, a so-called Romani camp was opened in nearby Hodonín. Moravian Roma were forcibly concentrated there in disastrous conditions. The supervisory staff consisted of Czech Protectorate gendarmes. More than 1300 people passed through the camp. As a result of diseases (especially the typhus epidemic) and poor living conditions in the camp, 194 adults and children died. Other prisoners were transported to Auschwitz between 1942 and 1943, most of them perishing there. An eight-year-old Romani girl escaped the mass transport to Auschwitz in August 1943 in the ensuing confusion. When the administrators of the Hodonín camp found out, they did not know what to do with her. Božena Pochopová, a 17-year-old assistant cook, also worked in the camp. She decided to take

the little girl to her parents in Olešnice, who then hid her and took care of her until the end of the war.

The rescued girl, Božena Jochová, was the only one of her six-member Romani family (who were taken to the camp in August 1942) to survive the war. The mercy and courage of the Olešnice family (Pochopová's family) saved the Romani girl. The Jewish Weissenstein family was taken from Olešnice to a concentration camp during the war and did not survive the war. Several local Germans did not escape the post-war deportation either.



The symbol of the station is the name of Jesus' mother.



The symbol of the station is a cross supported by the letter S representing Simon of Cyrene.

SIMON HELPS JESUS CARRY THE CROSS

## LOSS OF IDENTITY

In the 1950s, the local region was affected by the forced collectivization of agriculture implemented by the communist regime. People were violently and deliberately coerced with excessive quotas to give up farming their own land and join agricultural cooperatives. This meant the disruption of family farming and centuries-old intergenerational coexistence. Twisted neighbourly relations, fuelled by fears of who might say what about whom, drove people into isolation within their households. The present also shows that we do not know how to handle our newfound freedom correctly, suffocating it with consumerism, the pursuit of money, and pleasures. It is good that in Olešnice and its surroundings, there are many people who value freedom, care about public life, and can live not only materially.



## POVERTY AND LONELINESS

VI

The lack of work opportunities in the Olešnice region often led to poverty. Since the 19th century, the municipality has cared for the elderly, poor, and incapacitated citizens through a poor fund. In 1874, the municipal poorhouse was opened in the building of the current health centre. Its establishment was supported not only by the municipality but also by many local citizens and a civic savings bank. Nine rooms on the ground floor were designated for elderly and incapacitated citizens without family. From 1904 to 1918, part of the poorhouse also served as a provincial orphanage for up to 30 orphans from Olešnice and the surrounding area. Accompanying phenomena of poverty and loneliness often include hopelessness, alcoholism, and suicides (since the end of World War II, there have been more than 30 suicides in Olešnice). Many residents of the region still struggle with poverty and loneliness today.

We also encounter youth with disrupted family ties and behavioural problems placed in the local juvenile correction facility. The town of Olešnice, in cooperation with the regional charity, strives to care for its lonely and sick residents in homes with nursing services and sheltered housing.

VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS



The symbol of the station is a cloth reaching upward to Jesus.







The symbol of the station is a twice-bent cross with a double crossbeam – the weight of Jesus' suffering increases.

Fire has always been a great danger, often deadly, especially in times when many houses were made of wood or had wooden roofs. Olešnice was struck by a series of devastating fires in the 19th century. The most extensive one occurred on July 25, 1827. At that time, a large part of the town was reduced to ashes, and 73 houses burned down. When the church caught fire, people reportedly abandoned the firefighting efforts and began to weep. The church ceiling collapsed, the tower crumbled, and the bells melted. The great fire claimed three lives and also destroyed the brewery, the school, and the town hall. It was then necessary to build not only a new church but also all the houses on the square. Other devastating fires struck Olešnice in 1841 and 1842, when more than 35 houses burned down. In response to another large fire in 1873, the local volunteer fire department was established. Generations of Olešnice firefighters have taken turns, and volunteer firefighters still protect Olešnice



## ENVY, GOSSIP, AND MALICIOUS DENUNCIATION

Unfortunately, human nature includes traits we wish we could rid ourselves of. Everyone has encountered someone who takes an unhealthy "interest" in others. If this interest were sincere, it would not be harmful. However, when it is combined with spreading gossip and lies intended to cause harm, it becomes malicious. The pinnacle of human baseness is malicious denunciation. Petty souls thrived as informers in times of oppression, both during the Protectorate and in the early days of the communist regime, when arrests were made in the Olešnice area based on such denunciations. Envy was often the cause. Mill worker Josef Šchoř returned from a concentration camp and became engaged to Lída Prudká in Olešnice. He

soon began receiving anonymous letters slandering his fiancée. During this time, his fiancée became pregnant, and overwhelmed by the psychological strain, he hanged himself. The summoned doctor,

Josef Habanec, tried to revive him, but to no avail. He wept over his death, lamenting that Šchoř had survived the horrors of a concentration camp only to be brought down by the slander of his own people. Five months after his death, a healthy baby girl, Drahomíra, was born.



### THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM WEEP FOR JESUS



The symbol of the station is a tear.

## IX

## FLOODS

## JESUS FALLS FOR THE THIRD TIME



The symbol of the station is a thrice-bent cross with a triple beam—the weight of Jesus' suffering intensifies.

Olešnice lies at the confluence of the Hodonínka River and the smaller Veselský Stream. Both waterways have historically caused floods, a problem that worsened when their meandering channels were straightened, field boundaries were ploughed over, and the surrounding hills were stripped of their forests. Since then, Olešnice has experienced increasingly severe floods. Perhaps the most significant in living memory was the flood of July 15, 2002. On that day, a massive flash flood swept through Olešnice, Chřov, and other villages in the region, leaving immense devastation in its wake. A storm cloud, reportedly 14 kilometers high, stalled over Olešnice and unleashed its rain in a matter of minutes, dropping 170 mm of precipitation. The water took everything in its path and flooded dozens of homes. In addition to substantial material losses, the natural disaster claimed two lives, one in Chřov and another in Hodonín near Kunštát. In 2012, a wayside shrine was erected above Olešnice in memory of this event, featuring reliefs of patron saints who protect against natural disasters.



## LACK OF FREEDOM

The period of unfreedom—the eras of Nazism and Communism—significantly affected the Olešnice region. Colonel Karel Čápek, a native of Olešnice and a leading figure in the resistance group Defence of the Nation, was among the first to be executed in 1941 following Heydrich's rise to power. Other residents from the region were also executed for their resistance activities. During the peak of communist repression in the 1950s, the Olešnice priest Leopold Benáček was interned. In 1953, state security orchestrated a show trial in the Olešnice Sokol hall against the "kulaks"—farmers who resisted rural collectivization—as a warning to others. Eight citizens from Kunice, Křténov, Ústup,

Crhov, and Proseřín were stripped of their civil rights, sentenced to prison terms ranging from 5 to 20 years, had all their property confiscated, and were "banned from residing in the Boskovice district forever." Josef Krejčí from Kunice was executed. The families of the convicted were evicted, forced to leave their homes and property behind.



JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS



The symbol of this station is a piece of cloth being pulled away—Jesus is shamed and left completely naked.

XI

## WARS AND VIOLENCE

JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS



The symbol of this station is nails—Jesus' hands and feet are pierced.

The Thirty Years' War had perhaps the most devastating consequences for the Oleśnice region, as both Swedish and imperial armies swept through the area several times. The war brought looting, epidemics, and famine. The population was decimated, and after the war, more than a third of the houses in Oleśnice were uninhabited. In 1745, the largest battle in the region's history took place near the village of Źstup, resulting in over 100 casualties. During the War of the Austrian Succession, the Austrians defeated part of the Saxon army there. This event is still commemorated by a wayside shrine built between Oleśnice and Źstup. In 1866, during the Austro-Prussian War, Prussian troops occupied the region. Near the elementary school, a monument stands on the site of houses bombed and burned in May 1945. It commemorates the eighty local victims of the First and Second World Wars. However, violence is not limited to military conflict; it still appears in many forms in our communities and relationships.





## ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

God's creation includes not only all people but also all of nature, which is entrusted to humans to use for their benefit. However, we often treat it as our property and forget that we have only borrowed the Earth from our children. In what condition will we pass it on to them? We see the results in water and air pollution, massive waste production, excessive consumption, the disruption of natural processes, and the extensive use of chemicals. The environment in the Oleśnice region has also suffered. Social progress and increasing living standards should lead to the rational use of nature, not to its exploitation, which often comes at the expense of future generations.



XII

JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS



The symbol of this station is Christ on the cross—the suffering is over.



The symbol of this station is an empty, broken cross.

During the period of the Czech National Revival, Olešnice was a place where the Czech language struggled against the official German language among the general population. Two significant local revivalists made their mark on the history of the Moravian countryside: the priest Jan Pleskač and the teacher František Slaviček. Both were instrumental in establishing the Olešnice theatre, for which Pleskač wrote Czech plays and Slaviček composed music. They were also involved in creating a permanent theatre, converted from the former school building below the Church of St. Lawrence. This theatre was the second oldest in Moravia, after the one in Brno. Thanks to Pleskač, who collected the region's fairy tales from his parishioners in 1854, these local stories were preserved. In this way, a sense of national consciousness was awakened in the Olešnice region.



## RECONCILIATION AND HOPE

XIV

JESUS' BODY IS LAID IN THE TOMB

The dove represents hope for a peaceful life. We achieve this through three pillars: faith, hope, and love. Is it possible to live a happy life without suffering? Much pain can be prevented or alleviated, perhaps through these ten points of advice for a happy life

from Pope Francis:

1. Live and let live.
2. Give of yourself to others.
3. Proceed calmly in life.
4. Don't forget to play.
5. Spend Sundays with family.
6. Help young people find jobs.
7. Protect nature.
8. Be quick to let go of negativity.
9. Respect those who think differently.
10. Actively seek peace.



The symbol of this station is a stone taken directly from the field where the Cross stand. After all, Christ's tomb was sealed with a stone.



Fr. Pavel Lazárek at the blessing of the foundation stone

Parishioners during the construction of the Way of the Cross



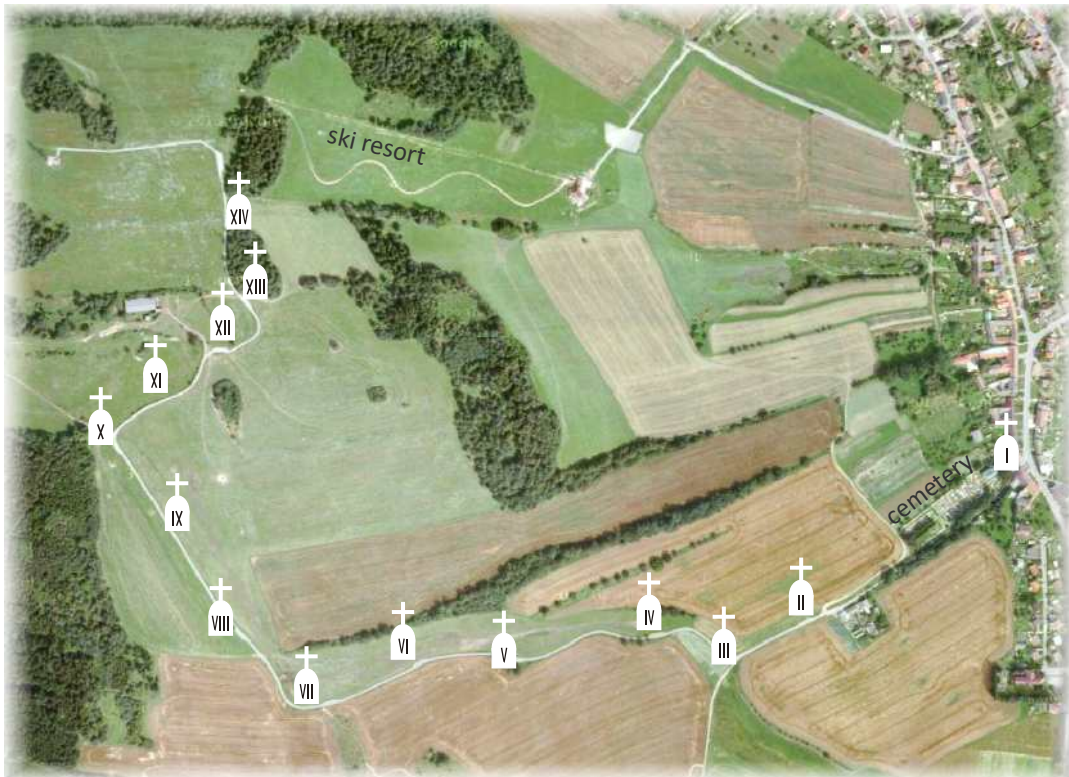


The artistic blacksmith Petr Čech at work

Parishioners during the construction of the Way of the Cross







The Way of the Cross begins next to the cemetery gate and continues along the asphalt road towards the highest peak of Olešnice, Kopaniny, above the ski resort.



The creation of this brochure was financially supported by the Town of Olešnice.  
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