News

For a reflection on the Stations of the Cross reflection April 3, 2026, crosses mark each of the

For a reflection on the Stations of the Cross reflection April 3, 2026, crosses mark each of the 14 stations on the side of Highway 90 in north Florida. More than four dozen advocates participated in the reflection an then walked across the street from Deportation Depot, the former Baker Correctional Institution used to house immigrant detainees. (OSV News/Florida Catholic/Jean Gonzalez)



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As some 50 people stood on state land, they could barely see the barbed wire and fencing of Baker Correctional Institution.

So after sharing a prayerful reflection of the Stations of the Cross – how oppression faced by immigrants mirrors Christ's suffering – they walked the three-quarter mile

trek to Deportation Depot, an immigration detention site on the grounds of the temporarily closed state prison.

Immigrants without documentation are housed there until they are returned to their home countries.

The people of many faiths walked in solidarity with the detained. They wanted the immigrants to know they were not forgotten. They were loved. Prayers were lifted for their plights. They hoped their prayers and sojourn might offer hope for the detainees.

They walked on the land across the street from the facility, and there was no way to truly know if the detainees would even know someone was out there. The group could see the armed guards at two different entrances. They had stopped to offer more prayers, but a police officer said they couldn't gather where they were.

"Just keep walking," said one of the organizers.

So, they did, hoping the clouds would keep the afternoon sun away. Along with their voices, music played from a portable amplifier. They hoped their voices might be heard as trucks and cars buzzed by on this lonely stretch of Highway 90.

Then they heard it.

The whistling. A steady stream of loud whistling.

Immigrant advocates, including the Rev. Russell l. Meyer, executive director of the Florida Co

Immigrant advocates, including the Rev. Russell l. Meyer, executive director of the Florida Council of Churches, center front, wave on Good Friday, April 3, 2026, to detainees housed at Deportation Depot in Sanderson, Fla., which formerly served as Baker Correctional Institution. (OSV News/ Florida Catholic/Jean Gonzalez)

The detainees – invisible behind the barrack walls within the prison – were whistling, connecting with those making the slow sojourn across the street.

Even though there was no concrete proof detainees could see them, the whistles were a tangible gift. Many of the faithful – with tears in their eyes – waved and shouted, "We love you." "We are with you." "Don't give up." In English and Spanish, different faith leaders took the megaphone to offer prayers.

Amarilys Sanchez Cardenas, a college student in Austin, Texas, from Jacksonville, sang "Pregón Pascual," an Easter prayer, with tears in her eyes.

In response, the whistling got louder.

Clara Sowers, who helped coordinate the event, tried to compose herself, but it was difficult. The powerful scene left her sobbing. A fellow walker, Nancy O'Byrne, put an arm around Sowers and walked with her. As Sowers waved at the detainees, hoping they could see her, O'Bryne blew kisses and shouted, "We love you."

"They know we are here," said Sowers, a native of Cuba. "Standing here with them on Good Friday is so meaningful, concentrating on the suffering of Christ and the suffering of these people. And they do suffer. But they offered us this connection. They will experience their Easter, I know it."

After hearing detainees in the Deportation Depot facility start to whistle to let advocates kno

After hearing detainees in the Deportation Depot facility start to whistle to let advocates know they could hear their prayers, Amarilys Sanchez Cardenas, a college student in Austin, Texas, from Jacksonville, Fla., sings "Pregón Pascual," an Easter prayer, April 3, 2026. Advocates walked across the street from Deportation Depot, the former Baker Correctional Institution used to house immigrant detainees. (OSV News photo/Jean Gonzalez, Florida Catholic)

It was significant that the gathering occurred Good Friday, April 3. According to John Frank, a member of Pax Christi Florida, it was not a protest, instead it was a prayerful, public witness where participants prayerfully stood in solidarity with "our immigrant brothers and sisters."

"We are here to reflect on the sufferings of Jesus through the lens of the suffering of our immigrant brothers and sisters," Frank told Florida Catholic Media.

To do that, Frank became inspired by Father Frank O'Laughlin, an 83-year-old Irish priest who founded the Guatemalan-Maya Center for immigrants in Lake Worth. In August 2025, Frank and his wife traveled to South Florida to participate in the celebration of O'Laughlin's 60th priestly jubilee. The priest asked the Mass be celebrated outside the grounds of Alligator Alcatraz, a state-run immigration detention facility in the Everglades.

On the long drive back up Interstate 95 to Jacksonville, Frank asked, "What can I do as a white, Caucasian, how do I get connected? How do I have this 'solidaridad'? Then I remember what Pope Francis said, ‘We have to listen to their voices and see their faces.'"

So he reached out to fellow Catholics and faith leaders, which led to the creation of the Micah Project of Northeast Florida. It derives its name from Micah 6:8, which outlines God's requirements for humanity: to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

The project's inaugural event was the April 3 event near Deportation Depot in rural Baker County.

Along with Pax Christi, members of the Florida Immigrant Coalition, Florida Council of Churches, St. John's Lutheran Church of Jacksonville in Riverside and most of the congregation of St. Philip Neri Ecumenical Church attended.

Immigrant advocates from across north Florida held signs as they prayed, sang and walked to

Immigrant advocates from across north Florida held signs as they prayed, sang and walked towards Deportation Depot in Sanderson, Fla, Good Friday April 3, 2026. The institution formerly served as Baker County Correctional and is now used to house immigrant detainees. (OSV News/Florida Catholic/Jean Gonzalez)

Also participating were members of the Hispanic ministry of Christ the King Parish, along with parochial vicar Father Bernie Tan Dang, who joined members of the Vietnamese community, as well as Catholics from St. Augustine Parish in Gainesville and St. Anastasia in St. Augustine.

Retired Bishop William "Chip" Stokes of the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey was also there, saying later in an email to Florida Catholic Media that advocating for detainees in places like Deportation Depot is a "directive that can be traced from the Gospel of Christ."

"Jesus is found in the places of greatest vulnerability and suffering, places where the most marginalized people are to be found," the prelate said. "He calls those who are his followers to join him in those same places, places precisely like Deportation Depot, where in too many instances, people whose most serious crime is wanting a better life for themselves."

Many of those in detention, he said, "have been snatched off of street corners, or from their places of work, even violently kidnapped, separated from their own families...This includes children and youth. It's brutal and it's cruel. It is also antithetical to the teaching and love of Christ."

The plight of immigrants resonates with Pierre Uwimana, himself an immigrant – from Rwanda – and refugee coordinator for the Florida Immigrant Coalition. After coming to the United States 12 years ago, he experienced the complex immigration system that led him to citizenship.

Those who navigate those waters need advocates, he said, adding that his own journey through the immigration system "forces" him "to stand in solidarity with these people."

Immigrants flee to another country for many reasons, including persecution and the desire to secure a better future, Uwimana said. "So the solution is not to detain them, the solution is to create a pathway for them to go through the process and become citizens and continue to build this country that we are all calling our home."

"This detention center right in front of us, this Deportation Depot," he added. "It should close immediately. It's not helping our community. It is not creating safety. It is creating separation. It is creating harm to our community, and we don't want to see that."

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