Outline of Staff Prayer Ritual for the feast of the Triumph of the Cross

We Gather

Welcome (and brief explanation of the feastday)
Introduction & Sign of the Cross
Opening Prayer

We Listen

Scripture Reading
Reflection on the Scripture

We Respond

Ritual Action
The Lord’s Prayer

We Go Forth

Blessing & Dismissal
Sign of Peace

You will need:

✓ A Leader; a Reader; a person to organise the music (if used)
✓ Full text for the Leader; Scripture text for the reader; Handout sheet for the group
✓ The Bible will be placed with the candle(s) on the prayer table. The cloth on the prayer table for today will be red. A gold cloth may be entwined tastefully around the red one to suggest that we are celebrating the Cross of Glory.
✓ Small paper (or cardboard) crosses have been prepared for each participant and there would be pencils or biros for everyone. The crosses could be in red and gold. People would be given their cross before the prayer begins.
✓ There needs to be enough space (either on the prayer table or on the floor in front of the prayer table – depending on how the room is arranged) for the laying down of the individual crosses in the form of one large Cross (see later in the Ritual Action). The Leader may even decided to mark out a cross with string or chalk so that people can easily see where to put their crosses during the Ritual Acton.
✓ The candles would be lit before the prayer begins today.
✓ Paper crosses may be made as follows (but enlarged with the photocopier):

![Cross Outline]
Staff Prayer Ritual for the feast of the Triumph of the Cross

Welcome  (In Leader’s own words)

Introduction & Sign of the Cross
Leader: Originally, this day commemorated the dedication of Constantine’s Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in the 4th Century. This particular Church was erected on the site of Christ’s crucifixion. After the celebration, the wood of the cross would be venerated. The feast spread in the West after the recovery of the relics of the cross from Persia in the 7th Century. This feastday celebrates the “lifting up” of the Son of Man on the cross, into glory. The cross is a paradox! It is a symbol of humiliation and death, yet also the source of victory and life.

Let us now bring to mind whatever seems to be a paradox in our own lives: e.g., Some suffering which, if we can be patient, will deepen our capacity to love. (pause here ...)

And now we trace the Sign of the Cross over our body, in silence, believing that it is possible for our pain to transform into something that brings Life ...

All silently make a large Sign of the Cross over themselves.

Opening Prayer
Leader: Let us pray ...

All: Lifted up among us, O God, is Jesus the crucified: sign of your steadfast love and pledge of your will to save. May the whole world know the transforming power of your great love, bringing us through death into life with and in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We Listen
Scripture
Reader: from the letter of Paul to the Philippians (Phil 2: 6 - 11)

Though Christ Jesus was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

... Pause ...
If we look carefully at this poetic description of God’s action in Jesus, we might see that it seems to fall into two definite sections:

The first stanza could describe the humanity of Jesus. He suffered the way we do in our lives today. Yet, he suffered in a way that was productive! He chose to deal with his suffering in a life-giving way rather than getting stuck in negativity and the ‘death-dealing’ side of suffering.

When I suffer in my life, do I gravitate more naturally towards the negative response or do I try hard to see the silver lining? Do I resist or do I surrender? (Pause ...)

Paradoxically, when I resist, the suffering has power over me. But when I surrender to it, my whole attitude changes – and often, the condition changes as well!

The second stanza of this ancient hymn seems to be about the Divine action. God raised Jesus on high in more ways than one! God brought him through the suffering of the cross into a new level of being alive!

There is the paradox again! God can bring Life out of Death!

All we need to do is surrender to the powerful Love that wants to raise us up!

For Christians, the Cross symbolizes this paradox: Life can come out of death! Each of you has a (paper/cardboard) cross in front of you.

I invite you to take a few moments to write a word or phrase that would express something of the pain you might be experiencing at present in your everyday life. (This could be your own personal pain or the pain of someone you know).

Write this on the horizontal bar of the cross .... (Pause for people to reflect and write ... )

Now let’s find another word or phrase to describe the glory or transformation that we hope for when we (or those of whom we are thinking) can surrender to and move through this pain.

Write this word or phrase along the vertical bar of the cross ... (pause for people to reflect and write ... )
Leader: Because of our faith in the Resurrection, we believe that the way of the Cross is a triumphant journey!

Let us place our crosses (with the words facing down, if you prefer) to make the shape of one large Cross on the table (or the floor in front of the prayer focus).

*Allow time for people to place their crosses, one after the other, in the shape of one large Cross. Quiet instrumental music could be played while this is happening.*

*When people have returned to their chairs, and are looking at the large cross made up of many small crosses, the Leader continues:*

We see that our individual crosses, in reality, form part of the Cross of Christ! When Jesus suffered and died, he took all of our sufferings upon himself. In a mysterious way, he has shared our sufferings. In a mysterious way, we have already triumphed through his victory!

Let us sit before this mystery and pray in the words that Jesus taught us: *Our Father* ...

**We Go Forth**

**Blessing & Dismissal**

Leader: May the God, who touches our most painful wounds with love, bless us all in the name of the Father +

All: ... and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Leader: Let us go forth together towards the Cross, certain that in dying with Christ, we will rise to live anew.

**Sign of Peace**

We affirm our hope in the Lord as we offer each other a Sign of Peace ...