

How to Plan a Prayer Vigil

A prayer vigil can give powerful expression to the prophetic voice on issues facing workers. People of faith can stand with workers and lift up the sacred texts of their faith traditions, offer prayer, reflection, meditation and song as a way to stand in solidarity with the struggles of workers.

Prayer vigils also communicate to public officials, the business community and others the concerns of people of faith for worker justice, and can provide a moral perspective on those issues.

This resource is designed to assist you in planning a prayer vigil to support worker justice. The focus can be prayer for workers in a union organizing drive or contract dispute, prayer for employers who have stolen wages or injured workers, prayer for public officials to consider a public policy issue that will have a significant impact on working families, or prayer to bring healing and reconnect to both workers and managers or an entire community.

The key to any successful event is always the planning, and a prayer vigil is no different. As you begin planning your prayer vigil ask the following questions:

What is the purpose of your prayer vigil?

- Are you trying to bring attention to a specific situation to illustrate the impact of a larger policy issue?
- Are you trying to diffuse a hostile employer/union dispute?
- Are you attempting to reach local or national elected officials?
- Are you trying to highlight the local impact of national legislation or public policies?

Who is your audience?

- Are you targeting a specific employer or corporate structure?
- Are you attempting to engage local community leaders and elected officials in a worker justice struggle?
- Are you looking for community support for a specific issue?
- Are you doing this alone and in one geographic location or are you coordinating your activities with groups in other communities?

What do you want to see happen?

- Do you want contract negotiations to resume?
- Do you want health and safety issues addressed?
- Do you want an elected official to publicly support your cause?

Now that you have answered these basic questions, you can start working on the logistics for the prayer vigil.

Location

- Is the location available and appropriate for your event?
- Is there parking and/or public transportation?
- Is it handicapped accessible?
- Do you need permits to use the space (especially common for city and other government spaces)?
- Is there electricity and sound equipment available

(important if you expect large numbers)?

- Is the location an appropriate size for your event?
- If the venue is outdoors, do you have a plan for inclement weather?

Coordination

- Have you identified faith leaders to attend the event?
- Is there someone who can act as the vigil leader?
- Who is responsible for inviting faith and other community leaders to the event?
- Is there a role for non-clergy participation?
- Have you been inclusive in recruiting participants, including age, gender, religious, ethnic and denominational diversity?
- Will there be music? Who will lead it?

Logistics

- Do you have sound and lighting equipment in necessary?
- Do you have banners and signs?
- Do you have candles, flowers or other materials for the event?
- Is there a printed program?
- Do you need songbooks?
- Do you need a podium, chairs or water?
- Have you assigned someone to take photos?
- Do you need translation?

Press

- Who will create a press list?
- Who will write the press release and make follow-up calls?

Promotion and Turnout

- Do you have a flyer?
- Do you have a Facebook event page?
- Have you sent out an e-mail blast?
- Have you sent out text messages to increase turnout?

Vigil Program

The following ideas may help you plan your vigil program.

Welcome and introduction

Have your key speaker or vigil leader present the focus of the prayer vigil. He or she can do the opening prayer (or introduce the person who does) and review the vigil program. The leader can review the purpose of the vigil and explain why people of faith care about this issue. You should make sure to consciously refer to those affected by the issue and why this vigil is important to them.

Scripture and Sacred Texts

You may ask people to read relevant text related to worker justice. See www.iwj.org for suggestions. It is critical to place the issues in a moral framework based on the teachings of our faith traditions. Using scripture and sacred texts illustrates the moral framework of worker justice and builds solidarity with workers and their allies.

Reflection

Participants who share reflections from scripture and sacred texts provide a framework for the real-life situations that are the central focus of the prayer vigil. You can invite religious leaders to offer short reflections on the text or on the situation.

Prayer and Meditation

Many religious traditions have a practice of speaking to the creator, a higher power, to invoke the presence of the sacred to intervene in the pursuit of justice. You may have one person pray or multiple people pray. Those who offer prayer or meditation should do so from their faith perspective. This is an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of those who stand with us in the struggle for justice. Consider having people pray in languages other than English and remember to be inclusive in terms of age, gender and denominational diversity. If there are multiple prayers, people can lead prayers in the way they are most comfortable. If there will be only one person praying you may want to ask the person if he or she could pray in a way that is inclusive as possible.

Music and Song

Music can bring people together and bolster our commitment to justice. In addition, the presence of music makes the event fun and creates a memorable experience. You can request a copy of IWJ's Rally Song Book, which contains a number of songs appropriate for a prayer vigil. Don't hesitate to invite local musicians, church ensembles or soloists to sing at your event! Use music and songs to break up the talking heads.

Speakers

Often, workers facing problems are the principle speakers at events. Union leaders or Central Labor Council leaders may also be primary speakers. Make sure you don't have too many speakers.

The End

The end is the beginning! Make sure to thank everyone who attends and have a way to collect names and e-mails to keep them updated on the issues, including any victories. Distribute any educational materials and let everyone know about follow-up activities that have been scheduled. A closing prayer, song or chant signals that the event has concluded and allows participants to exit feeling uplifted.

If you have questions on prayer vigils contact Renaye Manley, union and congregational outreach director, Interfaith Worker Justice, at rmanley@iwj.org. Interfaith Worker Justice is a national organization that organizes, educates and mobilizes people of faith to support issues of workers, especially workers in low-wage jobs.



Vigil Checklist

Two to three weeks before your event

- Put together a core planning team – invite leaders of other groups whose members share your concerns.
- Secure an appropriate location.
- Find out if you will need permission to use the location.
- Invite speakers, find a photographer if you want photos or video of your event, determine what materials you will need and adapt them for your event.
- Begin inviting people to your event through word of mouth, newsletters, bulletins, websites, blogs and the e-mail lists of every group that is involved in planning your event.
- Make sure you have a translator if needed.

One week before your event

- Begin gathering all the stuff you will need, including copies of all materials. Confirm the availability of sound and electrical equipment such as microphones and extension cords.
- Go over the vigil program and identify appropriate individuals to speak and pray. Generally, it's good to have just one or two speakers to lead, but it may be nice to open up to the broader group to offer short prayers at the end.

The day before your event

- Make sure you have all equipment ready for the next day, your speakers and the vigil leader for your event are prepared, and any other people who are staffing the event know their roles. Others staffing the event might be in charge of the sign-in table, taking pictures, handing out programs, welcoming press and handing out news release.

- Call all speakers to remind them of event location and times.
- Prepare a sign-in sheet for participants, so you can continue to communicate with them after the event is over.
- Make sure that your signs and banners are prepared and ready to go.
- Make sure to e-mail and call all press.
- E-mail your list and post an update or reminder on Facebook.
- Make last minute reminder calls.

The day of your event

- Call and e-mail all press.
- Arrive early to set up – give yourself and your team plenty of time to set-up sound equipment and tables.
- Greet participants, give them a copy of the prayer vigil program and ask them to sign up for future updates.
- Greet reporters, give them a copy of your press release and ask them to sign in on a sheet of paper – ask for their name, media outlet, e-mail address and phone number (you may need their contact information for the next event or to follow up).
- After the vigil is over, make sure to thank everyone and let them know how to stay involved!

The week after your event

- Follow up to thank your speakers and those who attended your event.

