

PLANNING A PRAYER VIGIL



A prayer vigil can be a communal lament, an act of solidarity, or a time to bring light to brokenness in society. As an act of public witness, it offers the community a space to connect with God so that God's vision for love and justice can be carried out through us.

As United Methodists, we understand prayer vigils to be grounded in the power of the Holy Spirit to change people's hearts and minds and to strengthen us in our work and witness.

Here are some things to consider when you are organizing a prayer vigil as an act of public witness:

- 1. Define your goal and message:** As you begin planning your prayer vigil, have your team define the goals and key message. Speakers should reflect this vision in their prayers, songs, remarks, etc.
- 2. Determine the most effective messengers to influence your decision maker:** Are there speakers who are directly impacted that can share their experience? Are there faith leaders who will capture the attention of your decision maker?
- 3. Host your vigil in a strategic location:** The location of your event is sometimes just as important as the message you share. Think about a place that will offer great visibility to the public and to your decision maker.
- 4. Highlight the diversity of faiths present:** If your event is ecumenical and/or interfaith, encourage leaders to offer prayers or rituals from their faith tradition. It is a meaningful witness when we come together to lift up shared values and messages while recognizing the distinctiveness of each tradition. Including a diverse representation of leaders emphasizes the breadth of commitment to the issue and demonstrates the power of the collective voice.
- 5. Draw on symbolic and creative traditions:** Our faith traditions and rituals offer powerful and creative ways to express our values. During a prayer vigil, consider including religious texts, symbols, and rituals (e.g. clerical vestments, candlelit processions, foot washings, and hymns). If your vigil is ecumenical and/or interfaith, be respectful and welcoming of all faiths present and keep from elevating any one tradition over another.
- 6. Be creative with your communication materials:** Make visuals that succinctly convey your message. Don't be afraid to visually call upon decision makers by including their names in your signage.
- 7. Reach a broader audience:** Livestream your prayer vigil on social media and invite local journalists to attend.

On the next page you will find a planning checklist to help you organize your prayer vigil.

PRAYER VIGIL PLANNING CHECKLIST

Below is a checklist which assumes up to 6 weeks to plan a prayer vigil. If you are planning a prayer vigil on a tighter schedule, you can adapt the timeline as needed.

4 to 6 weeks before the vigil

- ___ Organize your team to plan the event. Include faith leaders, church members, directly impacted individuals, and residents of the community.
- ___ Set a date and time, keeping in mind the length and time of day that best serve your purposes.
- ___ Choose and reserve a location that is accessible to attendees and strategic in getting the attention of your decision makers. If your location is outside, consider a backup venue in case of inclement weather.
- ___ Consider your equipment needs (e.g. sound system, podiums). Check with your location to see what their restrictions are on sound equipment.
- ___ Invite speakers. Consider prominent leaders in your community, including faith leaders to lead prayers.
- ___ Invite your decision makers. Some decision makers use a form on their website while others require an email invitation.

2 to 3 weeks before the vigil

- ___ Create and distribute materials that promote your vigil. Church bulletins, newsletters, and social media can be effective in increasing participation.
- ___ Invite local journalists that cover religion and other topic relevant sections.

One week before the vigil

- ___ Prepare the vigil program and clarify messaging, time allotment, and schedule with your speakers.
- ___ Agree upon responsibilities for your planning team (e.g. set-up, clean-up, media liaison, tech support).
- ___ Test your equipment in case there are problems with technology.

The day of the vigil

- ___ Arrive early to set up.
- ___ Distribute programs to attendees and have a prepared sign-in sheet to collect contact information. Make sure to greet any journalists or decisions makers.

After the event

- ___ Take time to reflect and celebrate with your team.
- ___ Send thank you notes to speakers and key volunteers who helped with the vigil. You might also consider sending a follow up email to attendees.
- ___ Follow up with the journalists who attended and/or covered your vigil. Supply them with quotes or images, and thank them for attending.
- ___ Share images, stories, and prayers from your vigil through social media and other outlets to highlight the event and further increase awareness of the issue.



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