Planning a Prayer Vigil for Meaningful and Humane Comprehensive Reform

A prayer vigil can give powerful expression to the prophetic voice on immigration reform. It is an opportunity to join together and lift up the sacred texts of our faith traditions, offer prayers, reflections and songs as a way to stand in solidarity with the struggles of immigrant workers and their families.

This resource is designed to assist you in planning a prayer vigil to support meaningful comprehensive immigration reform and the protection of workers, regardless of immigration status.

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: Who do you want to reach? (Ex: members of congress) What do you want to accomplish? (ex: generate media coverage, gather signatures for a letter to decision-makers, educate the community).

Now comes the planning...

**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?

Please email info@iwj.org if you have any questions about the logistics of planning your vigil.
Vigil Program

When planning your vigil program, we ask you to highlight the following areas of concern:

- Humane immigration reform that provides a clear path to citizenship and protects the rights of all workers, regardless of immigration status.
- Countering cruel immigration enforcement by immediately suspending immigration arrests and deportation.
- Empowerment of people of faith to speak out more boldly for immigrants’ rights
- Moral courage for members of Congress to show leadership by voting for real immigration reform.

Please refer to the IWJ Board Statement on Immigration Reform for additional points.

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 immigration reform. 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. (See suggested scriptures.)

Prayer and Meditation
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.

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
Personal stories have the biggest impact. Invite members of your community who are directly impacted by the broken immigration system. You may also invite community advocates and faith leaders. 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 or would like to request materials, email info@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.
Planning Checklist

Four to Six 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.
- Prepare and send out a press release informing local press about the upcoming event.
- Register your event at http://bit.ly/IWJCIRVigil

Three to Four weeks before your event
- Begin gathering materials to be distributed and used at the event, including signs and posters.
- Confirm 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.

One to Two weeks 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.
- Call and e-mail all press. (email info@iwj.org if you need help)
- 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.
- E-mail your list and post an update or reminder on Facebook.
- Make last minute reminder calls.

The day of your event
- 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 your event
- After the vigil is over, make sure to thank everyone and let them know how to stay involved!
- Share photos and consider writing a blog post for Interfaith Worker Justice’s website or Facebook page.

For additional resources and to learn more about IWJ’s campaign to push for comprehensive immigration reform, visit www.iwj.org. For further questions, email info@iwj.org.
Reform Our Immigration System
And Protect All Workers

A statement of the Board of Directors of Interfaith Worker Justice (February, 2013)

Interfaith Worker Justice affirms that all workers must be honored and treated with dignity and justice. When we allow immigrant workers to be exploited, we lower the standards for all workers, native born and immigrant, current and future. As people of faith, we recognize and honor the social and economic contributions made by immigrant workers, regardless of their national origin or immigration status. Our immigration system is broken — workers are exploited and families are being separated — and we all suffer as a result.

We know that people of good will have different views, and that some feel that undocumented immigrants take jobs and resources from those who were born in this country or have become legal residents or citizens. But we decry that the debate has become racialized, and that immigrants are stigmatized and blamed for economic problems that greed, unregulated markets, and the lack of coherent government jobs policies have created. Reforming our immigration laws and their enforcement is morally imperative and fundamental to restoring justice and equity in the workplace and the community.

We must also understand that migration occurs in the context of a global economy, we must understand and address U.S. trade and foreign policies that can weaken the economies of other countries and increase migration. We call on our political, business, religious, and labor leaders to maintain civility and respect in the debates over comprehensive immigration reform and uphold these principles:

- **Comprehensive and humane policies for future migration:** We must provide a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants and their families. Comprehensive Immigration must preserve family unity and ensure the road to citizenship includes all eleven million undocumented immigrants. Reform of the system should remove bars to reentry and adjustment of status for those seeking to reunite with family. Spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents should be reclassified as immediate relatives to ensure that these individuals are reunited as quickly as possible. Family visas should not be placed in competition with employment visas.

- **Labor, civil, and employment laws must be vigorously enforced for all workers:** Immigration policies should coordinate with labor, health and safety laws to ensure that all people can work with dignity. Laws governing wages, hours, health, and safety should be strictly enforced, the ability to organize protected, and remedies to redress workplace grievances made available to all workers, regardless of immigration status. Employers must not be able to use enforcement or employer sanctions to block workers’ rights to organize and enforce workplace standards.

- **Countering cruel immigration enforcement:** Immigration reform must include a complete reform of our country’s cruel, irrational, and dehumanizing immigration enforcement system. Because current U.S. immigration policy and enforcement results in employer manipulation and abuse, leaving immigrants and American-born workers to suffer the consequences, we believe any reform should include access to justice and due process, civil,
labor and employment rights, and public safety. Reform must stop deportations that tear apart families and end dangerous programs that involve local law enforcement with ICE. Our priorities include the immediate suspension of immigration arrests and deportations, ending collaboration between police, ICE, and labor enforcement, terminating the Secure Communities Program, and providing protections for workers who expose civil rights violations related to immigration enforcement.

### Future Flow:
A system to determine the issuance of visas for workers must be based on the needs of the American economy at any given time, without regard to race, ethnicity, or country of origin. Immigration reform must ensure that workers who come in the future have the right to organize, join as members of workers’ centers and unions, and work together with U.S. workers in their sector to ensure dignified workplace standards. Our priorities include allowing temporary workers to change employers, including worker centers in the process of identifying local workforce availability, setting wages and workplace rules for temporary workers in a way that protects both temporary workers and the U.S. labor market, ensuring temporary workers involved in a labor dispute can remain in the U.S., change employers, and continue to work, and include a humane path to citizenship for temporary workers and their families.

The current system sets arbitrary numbers of visas to be issued each year, with quotas based on country of origin. The number of available visas should be increased significantly to address the growing backlog of applications by recapturing immigrant visas lost to bureaucratic delays and rolling them over to the next fiscal year.

*You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

— Exodus 22:21
Immigrants in the Jewish Texts

Hebrew Bible

Exodus 23: 9
You must not oppress the stranger; you know how a stranger feels, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19: 32-34
If a stranger lives with you in your land, do not molest him. You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself—for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.

Psalm 82: 2-4
No more mockery of justice, no more favoring of the wicked! Let the weak and the orphan have justice, be fair to the wretched and destitute; rescue the weak and needy, save them from the clutches of the wicked!

Psalm 103: 6
Yahweh, who does what is right, is always on the side of the oppressed.

Proverbs 31: 8-9
Speak, yourself, on behalf of the dumb, on behalf of all the unwanted; speak, yourself, pronounce a just verdict, uphold the rights of the poor, of the needy.

Ecclesiasticus 4: 8-9
To the poor man lend an ear, and return his greeting courteously. Save the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor, and do not be mean-spirited in your judgments.

Isaiah 10: 1-2
Woe to the legislators of infamous laws, to those who issue tyrannical decrees, who refuse justice to the unfortunate and cheat the poor among my people of their rights, who make widows their prey, and rob the orphan.

Isaiah 61: 1-2
The spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me, for Yahweh has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to the captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favour from Yahweh.

Jeremiah 22: 3-4
Yahweh says this: Practice honesty and integrity; rescue the man who has been wronged from the hands of his oppressor; do not exploit the stranger, the orphan, the widow; do no violence, shed no innocent blood in this place.

Micah 6: 8
What is good has been explained to you; this is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.

Zechariah 7: 8-11
(The word of Yahweh was addressed to Zechariah as follows:) He said: Apply the law fairly, and practice kindness and compassion toward each other. Do not oppress the widow and the orphan, the settler and the poor man, and do not secretly plan evil against one another.
Christian Testament

**Matthew 25: 35-40**
For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me; in prison and you came to see me. . . . I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.

**Mark 12: 30-31**
This is the first [commandment]...you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.

**Luke 4: 18-19**
The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favor.

**Galatians 3: 28**
. . . there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

**Philippians 2: 5-8**
In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus: His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.

**Colossians 3: 12-13**
You are God’s chosen race, his saints; he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience.

**1 John 4: 19-21**
Anyone who says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, is a liar, since a man who does not love the brother that he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen. So this is the commandment that he has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love his brother.
The Qur’an

The verse numbers given in the references below sometimes vary slightly in different editions and translations of the Quran. However, they are rarely off by more than five verses in either direction.

Verse 107
In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful Hast thou observed him who belieth (makes a lie of) religion? This is he who repelleth the orphan, And urgeth not the feeding of the needy. Ah, woe unto worshippers Who are heedless of their prayer; Who would be seen (at worship) Yet refuse small kindnesses.

Verse 4:97
Lo! as for those whom the angels take (in death) while they wrong themselves (by sinning), (the angels) will ask: In what were ye engaged? They will say: We were oppressed in the land. (The angels) will say: Was not God’s earth spacious that ye could have migrated therein?

Verse 5:9
But those who entered the city and the faith before them love those who flee unto them for refuge, and find in their breasts no need for that which has been given to them, but prefer (the refugees) above themselves though poverty become their lot. And who is saved from his own avarice—such are they who are successful.

Verse 16:41
And those who became (refugees) for the cause of God after they had been oppressed. We verily shall give them goodly lodging in the world, and surely the reward of the hereafter is greater, if they but knew.

Verse 24:22
And let not those who possess dignity and ease among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and to refugees for the cause of God. Let them forgive and show indulgence. Yearn ye not that God forgive you? God is Forgiving, Merciful.

Verse 4:135
Be ye staunch in justice, witnesses for God, even though it be against (the worldly interests) of yourselves or (your) parents or (your) kindred, whether (the case be of) a rich man or a poor man.

Verse 5:8
Be steadfast witnesses for God in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to God. Lo! God is Informed of what ye do.