

Host an Interfaith Prayer Vigil

Don't forget to consider inviting your Member of Congress, US Senators' staff, and media!

Hosting interfaith vigils provides the opportunity for faith leaders to express how welcoming asylum seekers in need of protection is part of all faith traditions, reflecting on the deep scriptural and spiritual roots of our work to support refugees and immigrants. Even small events, multiplied across the country, will send a powerful message to the administration and Congress that welcoming asylum seekers is a moral issue that is important to people of faith and conscience.

#Faith4Asylum Vigils: On Wednesday, January 29th, 2020, faith partners around the nation and globe are encouraged to hold #Faith4Asylum prayer vigils to bring to light our nation's cruel policies of Migrant Protection Protocols/"Remain in Mexico" policies and to Launch our Faith 4 Asylum Campaign! Please ask participants to sign the People's Pledge for asylum to get updates on the campaign. January 29th, or a time near this date, is recommended--as this is the 1 year anniversary from the time the first migrants were returned to Mexico.

Steps to a successful prayer vigil:

- Coordinate a public prayer vigil with faith leaders, immigrants' rights groups, refugee resettlement agencies, immigrant leaders, community members, and if possible local elected leaders.
- Identify the core leaders and speakers, make sure there are impacted people, including asylum-seekers and Muslim organizations who are invited to help plan and speak at the event.
- Consider inviting elected officials including Representatives, Senators, City Council Members, or the Mayor.
- Be clear about your goals, what you want to accomplish, and how many people you hope will join the event.
- Identify the best location for the vigil, which is generally somewhere central in a symbolic memorial, state capitol, park or city hall.
- Apply for any permits needed for the location; reserve or order any equipment you'll need such as microphones, cameras, banners, candles, projectors; and make sure you can access electrical outlets.
- Choose a time of day best for attendance and media -- most news reports take place at 5-6 PM and 9-10 PM, so a few hours before those time blocks is best if you are inviting members of the media.

- Promote the event through social media, public service announcements, flyers, websites, and congregation bulletins.
- Agree on messaging and talking points.
- Bring signs that are consistent with your messaging and agreed upon ahead of time.
- Assign specific talking points to each speaker and ensure they have time limits.
- Invite the media by issuing a media advisory and following up with a press release after the event.
- Invite participants at the vigil to be part of further action and advocacy by writing and calling the White House and their Representatives and Senators.
- If you are able to get a wide range of organizations together, you could hold a 24 or 48 hour vigil outside the office of your Senator or Representative. Create a spreadsheet to sign up each organization with 2 hour blocks of time.

The set-up for the vigil should ensure that all faiths are respected and welcomed with awareness and consciousness. Drawing on the faith traditions and rituals can make vigils much more powerful, raising the creative and dramatic tension.

- Ask clergy attending to wear collars, stoles, robes and any other appropriate religious attire.
- Border shelters have requested the vigils lift up the imagery of shoelaces, as laces are removed upon apprehension of all migrants at the border. Then, as migrants are returned, those without laces are easily identified as vulnerable, and are frequently targeted by traffickers and others. Consider tying together 56 laces; one for every thousand of the 56,000 total migrants returned in the first year!
- Consider attaching stories of asylum seekers to your tied laces.
- Hold a procession with candles to a symbolic location.
- Provide a Prayer Wall with handwritten prayers for immigrants and refugees.
- Lift up stories in sacred texts.
- Highlight passages in scripture and present to Members of Congress.
- Collect and deliver laces, stories, and prayers to your Senators and Representatives.
- Make visuals – photos, drawings, art, etc., that show the consequences of the Migrant Protection Protocols upon asylum seekers.
- If you want to do a 24 or 48 hour vigil, make a signup sheet and assign 2 hour time slots to each organization involved.

Sample Vigil Program:

Welcome—a few words about the focus and purpose of your vigil. Why now? What's the concern? Who's affected? How can this vigil convince your members of congress to support refugees and immigrants? What values shape your faith traditions' response to these concerns? This may take the form of brief comments from one of your speakers, or a welcome and an opening prayer.

Music- Invite local musicians who share similar values to join your vigil, you can have them do one or two songs throughout the program. Choose songs that are connected to the cause, or songs that everyone knows and can sing along.

Opening Prayer—Ask clergy or key lay leader to open with a prayer *Song*—A singer, choir or instrumentalist can perform, or a few singers can lead participants in singing. Consider including readings of stories of returned asylum seekers.

Speaker—A personal story from a local community member of how Migrant Protection Protocols, and the degradation of asylum policies, continue to impact families. More than one story can be integrated throughout the program as well. *Creative Ritual*: Integrate creative symbols or rituals from faith traditions that draw more attention to the importance of immigration reform (see above suggestions)

Prayer—One person may lead the prayers, or you might invite several faith leaders to pray according to their traditions. Involve vigil participants in praying a refrain throughout your prayer time, or pray in a circle so everyone has the opportunity to pray. Consider offering prayers in multiple languages.

Song & Closing—reiterate the focus and purpose of your vigil, and send participants off with a call to welcome newcomers and raise their voices in the public sphere to stop the deportations. Consider a procession or march, perhaps with your tied shoelaces and stories, to another symbolic and strategic location.

Sample Invite to Your Member of Congress:

Dear Honorable Senator / Representative,

Thank you for your support of refugees and immigrants over the years.

We would like to invite you to attend [ORGANIZATION/ COALITION]'s prayer vigil on [DATE] at [LOCATION]. January 29th is the one year anniversary of Remain in Mexico or Migration Protection Protocols, a federal initiative that has stranded 56,000 people fleeing violence and harm in Mexico while they await their asylum court dates in the U.S.

Due to this policy, more than 636 asylum-seekers have been attacked in Mexico. Many are living homeless, including children. Organizations are working hard to meet their basic needs, but the situation remains bleak. Only 4% of individuals subjected to Remain Mexico have lawyers, and less than 1% have won their cases.

We would be honored to have your presence at this vigil. Please let us know as soon as you can if you are able to attend by contacting me at [email]. If you are able to be there we will connect about the details.

Sincerely,
NAME
CELL PHONE

Spreading the Word: Media Resources

We encourage you to reach out and invite members of the media as well. Look online at the local publications or outlets you would like in attendance and search for past articles on immigration or refugees, then consider pitching your event to reporters who frequently cover those issues or other community issues if there is not a designated immigration or refugee reporter.

Consider inviting the editorial director at your local newspaper. By inviting members of the press, you will be able to further share our message of welcoming to a larger audience and also inspire local media to cover immigration/asylum issues more frequently in a positive way that highlights broad community support for immigrants and asylum seekers.

To invite multiple members of the press, send a media advisory at least two full business days ahead of the event. Resend the media advisory the day before your event. Follow-up with key reporters over email individually, to confirm their attendance.

Call the news desks of your local TV stations as well to ask them to send a crew to cover it. The news desk phone numbers can typically be found under “Contact Us” on the station’s website.

Please see the draft media advisory and follow-up email for language to use to invite the media. For help, contact media@interfaithimmigration.org).

Draft Advisory

DATE

For Immediate Release

Contact:

NAME, PHONE NUMBER

*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

Date of Event, Time, Location

Local (Faith Groups/Community Groups) to Host Prayer Vigil, Call for an End to Policies that Put Asylum-Seekers at Risk

Your City Name, State Abbreviation – January 29th marks one year since the U.S. government began the Remain in Mexico policy, a federal initiative that has stranded 56,000 asylum-seekers in Mexico, leaving them without access to safety and protection.

Members of the (City/Town Name) community are working to support families who have fled violence and are seeking protection through the legal process known as asylum. On X (DATE), ORGANIZATION NAMES invite all community members to come together in prayer vigil highlighting the interfaith values that drive us to “welcome the stranger” and demand federal policies that reflect this value.

WHAT: Prayer vigil to decry cruel U.S. asylum policies that keep people in harm’s way, including the Remain in Mexico program, one year since it began on Jan. 29

WHERE: Address of event

WHEN: Date and time of event

SPEAKERS: List of all speakers and their titles

Add event details such as security (if applicable), special visuals (religious symbols, art pieces, etc.), or any other important event information.

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Draft Follow-Up Email to Members of the Media

Hello,

I hope you are well! I wanted to let you know of a potential story opportunity regarding U.S. asylum policies and our local community.

January 29th is the one year anniversary of Remain in Mexico or Migration Protection Protocols, a federal initiative that has stranded 56,000 people fleeing violence and harm in Mexico while they await their asylum court dates in the U.S. Due to this policy, more than 636 asylum-seekers have been attacked in Mexico. Many are living homeless, including children. Organizations are working hard to meet their basic needs, but the situation remains bleak. Only 4% of individuals subjected to Remain Mexico have lawyers, and less than 1% have won their cases.

On DATE, ORGANIZATION will host a prayer vigil with DESCRIBE WHO WILL BE THERE and pray for an end to this inhumane policy. Joining together in prayer, we will highlight the faith teachings that call us to “welcome the stranger” and demand federal policies that reflect this value.

More details can be found HERE (link to event announcement/info).

Sincerely,

NAME

CELL PHONE