

Ideas for hosting Vigils

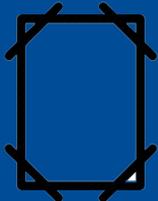
Prayer vigils give people an opportunity to reflect on what has transpired and how they can provide support for people struggling in the aftermath of a traumatic event. Participants themselves may benefit by being in a communal setting with people who share feelings of anguish, sadness, frustration or anger.

Vigils can come in a variety of sizes and settings. Each is attractive for different reasons. And some require more coordination and assistance than others. The following ideas are clearly not comprehensive but, rather, are intended to provide a starting point for planning and execution of a vigil.

Promotion

Regardless of the size of your vigil, it is important to promote what you are doing. Be clear about the time, day and place (include the address; don't assume the public knows where you are located).

Bulletins, Newsletters



and Posters

- Bulletins, especially the calendar, should have the pertinent details.
- If known far enough in advance, a church newsletter - print or digital - should have details of the vigil.
- Posters, with appropriate imagery, should be displayed on the church campus and, with permission, at establishments such as restaurants.



Website and Social Media

- Place key details in a prominent place on your website, usually at the top of your home page.
- On social media, encourage "friends" or "fans" of your page to share on their own timelines or via their personal accounts.
- On Facebook, consider boosting the post or setting up an event invitation to reach more people.



Local Media

- Local newspapers, TV and radio stations publish events in their calendars, so check their guidelines and submit your vigil info.
- Many local newspapers will accept news briefs, so write your own short story inviting the public. Be sure to include accurate background info.
- Invite reporters to cover your event, particularly if it is a communal kind of experience.



Three Vigil Scenarios

Vigils can come in a variety of sizes and settings. Each is attractive for different reasons. Some require vastly more coordination and assistance than others. The following ideas are clearly not comprehensive but, rather, are intended to provide a starting point for planning and execution of a vigil.

Solitary Reflection

In this type of vigil, the church is simply allowing a space for reflection and prayer. Most likely locations are the sanctuary, a small chapel or other holy space that provides a subdued tone. Some details to consider:

- Identify which hours and which rooms will be open for the public.
- Ensure volunteers will be present to unlock and lock the church as needed.
- Determine if monitors must be present or at least on-site throughout the time for Solitary Reflection. Have back-ups for all pre-determined time slots.
- Ensure a pastor or lay person comfortable praying with others to be present to assist people who seek out a prayer partner.
- Determine if candles will be permitted and if they will be displayed. If so, they should be small, with the wick not extending far from the candle, and they should be on a sturdy, immovable base.
- Consider having a small handout for people as they enter with either a scripture for reflection, a starter prayer or both. Include the pastor's email address in case further contact is desired by the guest.

Worship Component

In this type of vigil, the church uses part of its worship experience for a time of reflection and prayer. This may be a good way to address a subject that happens during the week in a Sunday worship setting. Some things to consider:

- Consider making use of worship tools normally used at particular times of year, such as using candles often utilized during Christmas Eve services.
- Provide a liturgy or group prayer. This could be used as a starter for the prayer time, with the pastor, liturgist or other lay person expanding on the starter prayer to include more about the subject that is being considered. The prayer should avoid politics. Instead, focus on victims of catastrophe, calls for assistance as part of our discipleship, love, peace and a call for the Holy Spirit to provide, where appropriate, healing, calm, peace, comfort and strength.
- Consider a handout with short prayers, similar to what one would find in a devotion, that continues that non-political prayer message that people can take home with them. Such a document could fit on a half sheet of paper and can be used as the basis of a daily social media post over the next seven days.
- Offer time for people to pray briefly at the altar.



Community Healing Event

This type of vigil requires more planning and volunteers. This is the kind of event at which members of the community not part of your church likely will attend. It provides a chance to provide a message of hope, foster a sense of community and introduce people to your church, in a small and indirect way. Consider:

Publicity

- Follow the advice found elsewhere in this document. If this is truly a community event, local media may be interested. Assign someone from the congregation to serve as a spokesperson and to assist local media to ensure their needs are met within their deadlines.
- Document the event by having someone in the congregation write their own story for your website, take photos and, if possible, shoot video - all of which may be used at a later date.

Legalities

- While the Constitution guarantees the right to peaceably assemble, local municipalities have the right to regulate how those assemblies take place. Call the local code enforcement office or police department (non-emergency number) to ensure any required permits are obtained in advance.
- If security is a valid concern, contract with a company that specializes in such services. Police can provide insight into these kinds of companies and often can provide recommendations.

The Venue and Logistics

- Ensure you choose a location with adequate parking.
- Is the venue handicap-accessible? If not, what accommodations can you make?
- Ensure you have adequate power for sound equipment and, if necessary, visual equipment. Do not rely on bullhorns and loud voices. Use microphones and speakers.
- If the venue is outdoors, plan for an alternate location in case of inclement weather.
- Is signage adequate to help people unfamiliar with the venue navigate. Maps of the venue are helpful as well.
- If you are using candles, ensure there is enough to accommodate a large crowd.
- Print out unison prayers, scripture that will be used and song lyrics (you must have a CCLI license to do so and can only use songs covered by CCLI).



People

- Consider in advance who will be speaking. Do not allow microphone time to anyone other than your planned partners (community members, other church clergy, etc.) who have agreed to a unified message. In general, keep the number of speakers to two or three, with a mixture of clergy and laity.
- Have volunteers who can help answer questions clearly identified with a uniform or easily seen badge.
- Ensure first-aid is accessible.