

***Prayer for Immigration Reform in 2010***  
**February 10-21, 2010**  
**Prayer Vigil Organizing Memo**

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**I. Introduction**

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition, a partnership of faith-based organizations committed to enacting fair and humane immigration reform, would like to invite you to participate in **Prayer for Immigration Reform** as we push to win immigration reform in 2010. Some of you may have been part of the wave of vigils that swept across the country in February of 2009. Your action helped keep immigration reform on the agenda of Congress and the Obama Administration in 2009; your faithful, continued action in 2010 is vital to the movement to push immigration reform forward and win legislation that will keep families together, create pathways to citizenship, and protect all workers' rights.

**Timing: Why now?**

**This a crucial time for faith communities to send Congress a strong message of support for immigrant families and immigration reform.** After Rep. Luis Gutierrez (IL) introduced CIR-ASAP in December, the Obama administration reiterated its commitment to take up this issue early this year. Senator Schumer of NY is working with Senator Graham of SC on immigration legislation and has pledged to release their bill in mid-February. We know that immigration reform legislation will have to pass through the Senate first, and the challenge to consolidate support in the Senate will be greater than in the House. **Lobbying your Senators and pressing for their support will be especially important during these first months of 2010.**

You can raise your voice in support of immigration reform by hosting a prayer vigil in your community.

On February 10, the IIC will partner with the *Justice for Immigrants* and *We Were Strangers, Too* campaigns to deliver hundreds of thousands of postcards from faith advocates from all over the country to their Members of Congress. You can help keep the action going by holding your vigils in the period **between February 10 and February 21**, which includes the first recess of this session of Congress, February 15-21, when members will be home in their districts.

## **What: Prayer Vigils**

We're inviting you to gather your faith community to pray and hear stories from local immigrants as a powerful way to remind Members of Congress that immigration reform is a matter of moral concern, and that faith communities are determined to see legislation passed in 2010.

**It is important at this stage to engage your Members of Congress and communicate your message of support for comprehensive immigration reform *directly* to them.**

To sum up, here's a simple outline of the elements for prayer vigils we're encouraging for February:

### ***Prayer Vigil***

- Invite faith leaders from your community to speak and lead prayers, and invite immigrant and non-immigrant members of your congregation to share why immigration reform is important to them as people of faith.
- Engage your Members of Congress. Invite them to attend, arrange a meeting with them, and send any press clips of your event to their offices after the event.
- Invite media to cover your event. **Don't forget that we can help with this!**
- Anytime between Feb 10-21 (Congressional recess is February 15-21)

**EVERYONE can be a part of this nation-wide effort**—from the smallest community of faith to large suburban congregations or city-wide coalitions! If coordinating a large, public vigil is not possible for February, please consider one of the following options for lifting up the need for immigration reform during the week of action:

1. Add a focus on immigration reform to an existing/ongoing community event or activity—religious education activities, community meal, ESL classes, and/or discussion for your worshipping community. Contact local press to let them know you're doing it!
2. Encourage your clergy or lay leaders to offer a sermon, litany or other major focus on immigration in worship.
3. Include a prayer petition concerning immigration reform within worship.

### **Register Your Event Now**

PLEASE go to <http://interfaithimmigration.org> to **register your event** on our Interfaith Immigration Event Calendar. You can also use the calendar to find out who else is planning events in your area. **Registering your event is IMPORTANT—it helps us track and connect people to you, and also helps us show the breadth and depth of support for immigration reform in the faith community.**

## **Getting Started**

Check out the **Organizing Checklist**, **Sample Vigil Program**, and **Sample Invitation for Members of Congress** below to help you plan and publicize your event. All of these resources will be available to download from the [Interfaith Immigration Coalition website](#).

## **Media Attention – We’re here to help!**

**As we’ve learned through past events, media attention to the issue is critical.** The media can be a powerful tool to amplify the voices of people of faith in support of immigration reform. Members of Congress rely heavily on the opinions of constituents, specifically how vocal they are, and base many of their decisions on how issues are being discussed in their local and regional newspapers and television stations. These Members and their staff read a diary of press clippings every morning. You and your community’s ability to generate media on your issue can show the reach of your issue in the community and can generate added pressure and influence on your issue. Your voice and perspective is crucial to this debate, and inviting the press to your event can help spread this message.

**We can provide media support for your event**—in the coming days, we’ll be sending you a sample press advisory and press release to advertise your event. Once you have adapted the press advisory and release to fit your event, we will send them out to media in your area and make phone calls to pitch the event.

## **Thank you!**

Momentum in support for immigration reform is building, in part thanks to your good work. The voice of the faith community is a vital part of the movement for immigration reform, and we’re excited to know that you will be raising your voice February 10-21 and in the months ahead.

**For more information, please contact Yvette Schock, National Grassroots Coordinator for Immigration Reform:**

**Yvette Schock**

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**Interfaith Immigration Coalition**

**[www.interfaithimmigration.org](http://www.interfaithimmigration.org)**

## II. Organizing Checklist

### A quick how-to on planning your prayer event

**Before planning any event, it's helpful to first define your goals:**

1. **Purpose:** What is the purpose of this event? How will your event reach and seek to influence your Member of Congress?
2. **Audience:** Who will you seek to mobilize for your event? Your community? Your local, state, or federal officials? What age group? What demographic?
3. **Desired Outcome:** What do you want to happen because of this event? BE SPECIFIC. While an event may fall into a larger goal of passing comprehensive immigration reform, for instance, the more specific you can be, e.g. "We want 30 people to join a prayer vigil and invite their Congressperson," the more prepared and effective you can be in your organizing.

**Keeping in mind these three goals, consider the following elements when planning your event:**

#### **1. Type of event, length and location**

- a. Keep both the length of the vigil and the expected attendance realistic, an hour can be a large time commitment for people especially Congress members. Shoot for something shorter – 20 to 30 minutes. Consider what time of day will best serve your purpose.
- b. Location—Does it fit the tone and purpose of your event?
  1. Is it easily accessible?
  2. Does it have the proper sound equipment and electrical outlet access?
  3. Be realistic about your attendance, and choose a location that is appropriate to the size of your event—you don't want to be in a room for 80 if your attendance is 10.
- d. Make sure you have all the appropriate permissions to be in the area where your event is planned.
- e. If you have equipment like microphones, is there access to electrical outlets? Is there an echo?

#### **2. Materials/equipment**

- a. What type of equipment do you need? Cameras, banners, candles, microphone, projectors?
- b. Will you be outside long enough that people might need water? For a February event when it might be cold, should you have hot tea/cider/coffee if you are outside?
- c. Do you need chairs if elder people will participate?

### 3. Leadership

- a. Are there prominent faith leaders in your community who could attend and offer a prayer? Which leaders best represent the faith communities you are aiming to engage?
- b. Will there be a leader/emcee to get the vigil/event started? Who?
- c. Depending on the size crowd you expect, do you need a megaphone? Microphone?
- d. Will you have a sign-in or an information booth? Who will work it?

### 4. Engaging your Members of Congress

- a. **To invite your member of Congress to attend and/or offer words at your prayer vigil, send an invitation letter ASAP to their local office and call the scheduler to follow up!** (See Sample Letter of Invitation below).
- b. It is common practice to issue an invitation to all of your representatives, even if they don't agree with you on the issue (and therefore it's likely they will not attend). You will want to communicate with your elected officials' scheduler well in advance, especially if you want her or him to share in part of the program.
- c. **On the day of the event**, be watching closely for the arrival of any elected officials. They may come in the middle of the event and stay only for a short period of time. It is appropriate to publicly acknowledge the member and thank him or her for attending. You do not have to allow them time to speak- it's up to your discretion.
- d. How will you reach your Member if he/she cannot/does not come to your event? Will you schedule an in-district visit? Make sure they receive any **press releases and/or press coverage from the event as a follow-up.**

### 5. Recruitment—a successful event needs people!

- a. Who do you want to attend this event and how can you make sure they do?
  1. What could prevent them from coming (think weather, time of day etc.) and can any of those obstacles be avoided?
  2. What natural networks in your community or place of worship can you tap into? Who leads those networks? Invite them join you in planning your event to more easily recruit members of their networks to your event.

### 6. Publicity

- a. Distribute event information to other organizations and have their leaders contact their members
- b. Flyers/Newspapers/Radio announcements—What best reaches your audience? Consider placing an op-ed or writing a letter to the editor of your local paper to promote your vigil.
- d. We'll help you contact your local press— Stay tuned for sample press materials, including: a press advisory to go out before the event (who you are, what the event is and who it is for), a press release for afterward (what happened, your demands, turn out, etc.) and a sample op-ed.

## **7. Follow-up**

- a. Send pictures/video/audio recordings of your event to local/national offices
- b. Get blog posts, pictures, articles about the event everywhere you can.

**Interfaith Immigration Coalition**  
[www.interfaithimmigration.org](http://www.interfaithimmigration.org)

### III. Sample Vigil Program

*The purpose of a vigil is to engage participants in communal prayer and action around specific concerns. A vigil can be as simple as a circle of ten people gathered to hold candles and pray for 20 minutes, or may be a more formal program with speakers and music. Below is one example of how a vigil might be ordered, but your program may look very different—consider the resources within your community or core planning group (an exceptional church choir or cantor, local poet, sign language translator, artist, etc.), and use them to plan your vigil program.*

1. **Welcome**—a few words about the focus and purpose of your vigil. Why now? What’s the concern? Who’s affected? What values shape your faith traditions’ response to these concerns?
  - a. This may take the form of brief comments from one of your speakers or the “emcee” of your vigil, or may consist of a few words of welcome, then an opening prayer that lifts up the central concerns of your vigil.
  - b. Three possible areas of focus for prayers and messages are:
    - i. **protection for immigrants,**
    - ii. **empowerment of people of faith** to speak out more boldly for immigrants, and
    - iii. **moral courage for Members of Congress** to show leadership in enacting humane immigration reform.
2. **Song**—You might invite a church choir or an instrumentalist to provide appropriate music, or simply recruit a few strong singers to lead participants in singing.
3. **Reading**
4. **Speaker**
5. **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. Consider offering prayers in multiple languages.
6. **Song**
7. **Speaker**
8. **Closing**—reiterate the focus and purpose of your vigil. At this time you might also invite vigil participants to join your group at a future event.

#### **IV. Sample Letter of Invitation to a Member of Congress**

[DATE]

Dear Honored Member of Congress,

We would like to invite you to attend [NAME OF CONGREGATION or ORGANIZATION]'s immigration prayer vigil on [DATE] at [LOCATION]. The event is part of a national movement of people of faith in support for comprehensive immigration reform in 2010, with prayer vigils and other events taking place in nearly one hundred cities around the country.

We in the faith community can no longer sit by as our broken immigration system continues to tear families apart, erode meaningful worker protections and keep millions of our neighbors in the shadows. We hope you will join us at this vigil to pray for the protection of immigrants and their families, the empowerment of our faith communities to work for change and the moral courage of our leaders, including President Obama and Congress to pass just and humane immigration reform.

While we recognize that our country faces a number of challenges at this time, we believe fixing our broken immigration system is a matter of urgent, moral concern, and it cannot wait. We must create solutions that restore humanity and equality back to our immigration policies. Immigrant families and workers are living in a state of fear, constantly worrying about the next raid that would rip parents and children apart, or how the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment will impact their families. If we do not make an immediate commitment to a compassionate and respectful public dialogue on immigration, we risk further destruction in our communities.

With strong leadership in Congress and your support, we are confident we can reform our immigration system to be the humane, workable and fair system our country needs and deserves.

We encourage you to join faith and community leaders in [DISTRICT] to stand up for urgently needed immigration reform in 2010.

[TITLE OF VIGIL]

[DATE]

[LOCATION]

[ORGANIZING SPONSORS]

We look forward to hearing from you as we work to ensure an immigration dialogue of respect and dignity. Please contact [CONTACT NAME] at [NUMBER] to R.S.V.P. for our event.

Thank you,