

## FIGHTING POVERTY: *Candlelight Vigil Resources*



Holding a candlelight vigil is, for Christians, an exercise of hope. It acknowledges that Christ, the light of the world, will turn the darkness before us into light (Isaiah 42:16). It is also a way in which we as the Church can let our light shine before others (Matthew 5:16), and answer the call to respond to the needs of the world. The reality of the growing poverty rate in the United States calls the church to action. To this end, we invite you and your congregation to host a candle light vigil for poverty at your church this October.

A candlelight vigil is an act of worship. It is a time for prayer and reflection on poverty that can renew and transform the participants. Holding a vigil is also a symbolic act that demonstrates solidarity with those who are suffering from the impacts of poverty. Each congregation that holds a vigil will magnify the voice of Christians reaching out to their legislators in Washington, DC. Please take this opportunity to come together as the body of Christ, and to witness and respond in your church and community to the moral issue of poverty.



The following steps will give you ideas about how to plan and implement a successful candlelight vigil to raise awareness about the effects of poverty on God's people. After the vigil we encourage you to continue to be involved in the effort to continue seeking solutions to poverty through worship, study and personal action.

## Steps for Hosting a Candlelight Vigil for Poverty

### STEP 1: Pick a date and time for your event

- Touch base with your church and church leadership team. Schedule a date and time that works for your congregation, or consider holding it after a regular worship service or time when the congregation is already gathered.
- **Let the NCC know your plans!** Contact [povertyinfo@nccusa.org](mailto:povertyinfo@nccusa.org) to keep us up-to-date.

### Step 2: Plan your vigil.

- Plan on the vigil lasting between 15 and 20 minutes.
- See the sample service (Page 7). Feel free to use this or to mix and match pieces in a way that will meet the needs of your congregation. For instance, you may want to simply stand in silence and conclude with a prayer.
- Ask for volunteers to read scripture, prayer or liturgy, lead hymns, distribute candles, and make sure all the participants sign in.

### STEP 3: Advertise the Vigil: Invite People of faith from throughout the community.

- Make the announcement about the vigil at your church far enough in advance for people to plan to attend— announce it from the pulpit, in the bulletin, on an announcement screen, or in the church newsletter.
- Make it a community event. Invite neighboring churches, or other faith traditions to participate. If you take this step, having the vigil immediately after a Sunday worship service might not work. Consider having after a mid-week fellowship event and invite neighboring congregations into fellowship with you as well.
- Invite neighbors, coworkers, and friends from clubs, organizations or the community around your church — this is a great opportunity for witness and outreach.
- Advertise in your local paper and invite a reporter to cover the event. The NCC end Poverty program can do this for you. We will notify the local media of your upcoming vigil. Just let us know at least 2 weeks in advance and be sure to tell us the name and address of your church, the location of the vigil if different from the church address, and the organizer's contact information.
- Invite your state, local and federal legislators to attend the vigil. Be sure to give them **four to eight weeks notice**. See the sample invitation to send to your Congressional members.
- Try to have a general idea of how many people will be attending so that you have enough materials for everyone.

***If you're a student organizing an event on a college/university campus, you'll also want to do the following things:***

- Send the event announcement out on every campus and community listserv you can think of—organizations, clubs, academic departments, etc. Also post something on your Facebook page or another social networking site.
- Hang flyers around campus
- The day of the event, and a few days before, set up a table outside a high-traffic area like the cafeteria or student lounge and pass out small flyers about the event to increase visibility and momentum
- Consider sending a mass blast of text messages to your friends
- Make sure the event is included in your campus newspaper's calendar

#### **STEP 4: Prepare to Worship**

- Gather all the materials you will need.
- Materials found in this packet: sample hymns, prayers and liturgy and a sign in sheet
- Candles and a holder to collect dripping wax so participants don't get burned.
- Pens (for sign-in sheet)
- Confirm that volunteers are still willing/able to participate and make sure they know what to do.

#### **STEP 5: Time to gather!**

- Arrive early. If the vigil will follow regular worship, have all of your materials ready and available to begin the vigil immediately upon the conclusion of the service.
- During the announcements period of the service ask the congregation to remain after the service and participate in the vigil.
- Make sure to include a table with resources for further study, or a list of [Fighting Poverty With Faith](#) resources which can be found online at <http://www.nccendpoverty.org/index.html>. Set it up so that participants pass it upon entering and leaving the sanctuary or worship space.
- Thank everyone for participating in the vigil.
- Make sure everyone who attends the vigil signs in with legible and complete contact information. If a sign-up sheet is not the best option for you, ask everyone to fill out and turn in fighting poverty post-cards. Let us know how many you need. We'll send them to you.

#### **Step 6: Hold the Vigil**

- Allow your spirit to be renewed, filled with God's hope, and empowered to seek justice for God's people.

#### **STEP 7: Follow Up**

- Announce the success of the vigil. Make an announcement during a worship service, write an article about it for the church newsletter and submit that to you local paper as well.

- Let us know about your success. Help us record how successful your event was by emailing the sign-in sheets to [povertyinfo@nccusa.org](mailto:povertyinfo@nccusa.org).
- If you legislators attended the vigil, be sure to thank them with a hand written note. If they did not attend, let them know how the event went. In any case, send them a list of attendees to the vigil, so they know how many of their constituents were involved.
- Thank everyone who participated, especially those who volunteered to lead the vigil service.

## Event Checklist

### GET STARTED - 8 weeks before the vigil

- Check with your church. See what the buildings availability is, and touch base with the pastor and relevant committees to get them all involved
- Set a date and time for your vigil:  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, 200\_ \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm to \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm

- Make sure you invite the whole church. Come up with an idea about how many people you want to be involved and invite 3 times as many people:

\_\_\_\_\_ x 3 = \_\_\_\_\_

(# of people (# of people  
you want to come) you should invite)

- Build an outreach list: Think about
- Church Members  Family
- Other faith communities/groups  Friends/ Neighbors
- Legislators  Coworkers/Colleague
- Members of local clubs and organizations

### 4 to 6 weeks before the vigil

- Distribute information about the vigil to the congregation.
- Announce the event in church – on Sunday, in the bulletin, in the church newsletter.
- Invite your legislators. Send them a hand written invitation explaining to them the reason for the vigil and you hope that they will attend.
- Touch base with the NCC's website for resources, suggestions and outreach assistance. Email: [povertyinfo@nccusa.org](mailto:povertyinfo@nccusa.org)
- Gather supplies. You can order candles and holders from Concordia Supply online at <http://www.concordiasupply.com/Candleshttp://Browse-Church-Supplies/Candlelight-Service-Sets/365>.

### 2 weeks/10 days before the vigil

- Send a reminder email to your congregation and others who have expressed interest in the vigil.
- Call your legislator if they haven't responded and ask if they are planning to attend.
- Let the NCC know how many guests you're expecting.

### 3 days before the vigil

- Gather together any handouts you need (prayers, flyers, discussion questions).
- Review the agenda for the vigil.
- Make sure your volunteers know their assignments and are ready.

### Day of the vigil

- Arrive early so that you have plenty of time set up, and attend to anything you may have forgotten in the process.
- Set up a welcome table with candles sign-in sheets, a few pens. Have volunteers act as

ushers and pass out candles to people who did not pick them up. Have your participants sign a postcard to their Congressional representatives, available **here**.

- Welcome your guests!
- Follow the service as planned.

**After the vigil**

- Share the success of the vigil with your congregation, your community, your legislators and the NCC End Poverty program.
- Keep in touch with the people who attended the vigil.
- E-mail or mail sign-in sheets and postcards to the National Council of Churches, End Poverty Program, 110 Maryland Ave NE, Suite 108, Washington, DC 20002 and send list of participants to your legislators with details about the vigil. Be sure to include your reasons for hosting it.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES USA

# POVERTY INITIATIVE

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHATEVER YOU  
DID FOR ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE  
BROTHERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME.  
MATTHEW 25:40

## Sample Letter of Invitation to Legislators

Dear Senator / Representative \_\_\_\_\_,

The congregation at [name of church] is hosting a candlelight vigil for poverty after our regular worship service on [date], and we would like to invite you to join us. We believe that poverty is a moral issue, and, as Christians, we are called to work for justice. We are holding the vigil as an act of worship and as an expression of our call to stand up for those living in poverty whose voices often go unnoticed. It is our hope that this vigil and others taking place across the country this month will call attention to the need for the United States to take a leadership role in global efforts against poverty that will protect God's people.

If you are able to attend, please contact [your name] at [your contact info]. Please let us know if you would like to participate in the vigil by reading scripture or liturgy or leading us in prayer.

Blessings,  
[your name or congregation]

## ***Resources for Worship***

### **Prayer:**

God of grace and mercy, we enter Your Sanctuary with wonder in our souls. We look into the night sky and we see the brightness of the Heavens. We stare across the ocean, close our eyes and feel the breeze that reminds us of Your Spirit. We sit at table with food before us and friends among us and we know You are present and that You have provided. And we are grateful. We don't know how vast the stars are. We don't know from where the breeze comes. But we know in Whom we rest. We embrace the mystery that is You and all You have created. We gather tonight to be mindful of those whose troubles are so many that they are unable to experience these blessings. We pray that You keep us mindful, and even as we rest in You, set our hearts on fire with compassion and enable our hearts to act on behalf of all Your children. Amen.

### **Liturgy:**

*Leader:* Grant us a spirit of concern for the future of country; bring an end to the exploitation of the poor; encourage us to be responsible stewards of your Creation.

*Response:* **Creator God, make us mindful.**

*Leader:* Grant us a spirit of respect, recognizing the value and integrity of all people; encourage us to be accepting of ourselves and of others.

*Response:* **Creator God, make us mindful.**

*Leader:* Help us become advocates of peace, bringing an end to conflict and division; renew our commitment to challenging the causes of injustice.

*Response:* **Creator God, make us mindful.**

*Leader:* Grant us a spirit of openness to see God within and around us; help us to rejoice in the good we have experienced as we move forward to the future; never allow us to ignore our brothers and sisters who face poverty every day, even now as we pray.

*Response:* **Creator God, make us mindful.**

*Leader:* Grant us a spirit of truth to recognize our failures; give us the humility to ask forgiveness for our part in any wrongdoing, and the strength to walk into the places where we are uncomfortable and reach out to those in need.

*Response:* **Creator God, make us mindful.**

*Leader:* Grant us a spirit of generosity to reach out in trust to those we encounter; help us to embody God's love in our relationships with one another and with all of Creation.

*Response:* **Creator God, make us mindful.**

## **Sample Vigil Service**

*To begin, light a candle on the altar.*

Welcome: *Give a few brief statements on poverty as a moral issue and the reason for the vigil.*

Invocation: (Prayer above)

Hymn: **Here I am, Lord**

Liturgy: (Above)

Hymn: **Be Thou My Vision**

*Light Candles while singing Be Thou My Vision. Ushers with light their candles from the candle on the altar and light the candles of the first person in each row who will share their light with others.*

Silent Meditation: *Exit in silence.*