



HOW TO PREPARE A FAITH RALLY AND VIGIL TO STAND WITH MIGRANTS

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
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JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS

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Welcome Letter

by Bishop Mark Seitz

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In recent months, we have witnessed a troubling escalation in immigration enforcement across the United States. Increased detentions, swift deportations, and the heightened fear of separation have cast a deep shadow over our immigrant communities. The consequences of these actions ripple through our parishes, schools, and neighborhoods, leaving families fractured and many living in fear. As the bishop of El Paso, I have witnessed the crushing strain that these enforcement practices have had on migrants and their families who live in my diocese. I have seen those whom I care about deported or leave out of fear that they will soon be detained, held in detention, and sent to another country.

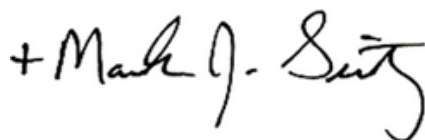
The Catholic Church has long stood with migrants and refugees, affirming their inherent dignity and the sacredness of family unity. Scripture commands that we welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked. We cannot remain silent while members of our communities suffer. Now more than ever, we are called to be a voice of hope, mercy, and solidarity.

On March 24 of this year, my diocese hosted a rally for immigrants and refugees, which concluded with a prayer service at Sacred Heart Church. At the time, I lamented that the denial of asylum and the threat of mass deportations represent a fundamental attack on human community. On the body. On Jesus' vision of a fully reconciled humanity. As a church, we must take a public stand and demonstrate in visible ways our commitment to stand in solidarity with migrants, their families, and the communities in which they live.

I urge each of you to review the attached resource, which offers practical guidance on planning and implementing a vigil, prayer service, or march in support of migrants and refugees. As we prepare for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (October 4–5, 2025), this celebration is a meaningful opportunity to raise our voices publicly on behalf of migrants.

Your vigil or prayer service can be held at a local parish or organized as a diocesan-wide event. It could take the form of an interfaith gathering, reflecting a broad coalition of religious traditions united in support of migrants, or it may be specifically Catholic in nature. Whatever form it takes, let us remember Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." I hope you will take an opportunity to review this guide and strongly consider hosting a vigil or prayer service in your parish or diocese to demonstrate solidarity with migrants.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Mark J. Seitz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz

Diocese of El Paso

Chairman of the Committee on Migration

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Introduction

Ana and Bernardo fled El Salvador after Ana was kidnapped. They have been in the U.S. under Temporary Protected Status for over two decades, working lawfully as healthcare professionals. “There is so much uncertainty. If we keep on looking at that, we’re going to sink in the water just like Peter started to do when he took his eyes off of Jesus,” Bernardo said.

More than ten million undocumented people live in the United States. Many have family members who are US citizens. They are gainfully employed and pay taxes. Many own their businesses and pay rent or hold a mortgage. They are overwhelmingly law-abiding and yet are constantly under the cloud of possible detention and deportation. They are at risk of exploitation and their economic security is tenuous. Family separation is an ever-present threat and is a reality that we have witnessed happen repeatedly in recent months. This is an untenable situation. The Church has long supported a legalization process that would provide an opportunity for many migrants who are here in an irregular status to adjust and become legal residents. For this reason, policy advocacy is an important component in the effort to support migrant populations, but it is not enough. It is also critical that Church leadership and the laity provide a visible and vocal witness to the inherent dignity of all migrants and provide accompaniment and support to them in their daily struggles.

Extending an invitation for people of faith to draw nearer to the realities and walk alongside migrants—not as a one-time act, but as an ongoing journey of compassion, justice, and shared humanity—takes effort. Raising the public profile of the issue and, in particular, the individuals and families affected by it is an important first step.

A march, a vigil, or an interfaith prayer service can draw attention to the topic in a way that brings into focus the demands of our Christian faith to care for the vulnerable and to welcome the stranger. This kind of event can motivate people who might not be tuned into the issue to learn more and animate their faith to take action. And for immigrant members of our community living in fear, such an event offers a concrete expression of the Church’s solidarity with their situation.

This manual offers practical guidance and spiritual grounding for planning and implementing public events, including vigils, marches, and interfaith services that honor the dignity of migrants and call our communities to a compassionate response. Designed for parish leaders, faith communities, and concerned individuals, it draws on Catholic tradition while welcoming collaboration with people of all faiths who share a commitment to human dignity and justice.

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WHY WE DO IT



One out of five Catholics is at risk of deportation in the United States or lives in a household with someone who is, while the same is true for one out of twelve Christians.¹ Thousands of families risk being separated and languishing in detention centers. People from across faiths and geographies – with an emphasis on African and Muslim-majority countries– have been restricted from traveling to the United States. Thousands of refugees remain stranded in danger, while many are denied protection at our southern border.

In the wake of this reality, the Gospel and our teachings compel us to stand with the most vulnerable and walk with them.

2.1. The Call in The Gospel to Walk With Migrants

The Catholic Church’s teaching on migration is informed by both the Bible and Catholic moral teaching. While neither the Bible nor the Church’s moral tradition provide any definitive or technical accounts of how migration policies should be crafted, it does offer a framework that informs our engagement with migrant communities and the political questions and daily policies that affect the lives of migrants. Throughout Scripture, there is an emphasis on acting with love and acting justly toward persons on the margins of society, including newcomers. Throughout its long history, the Church has been a pilgrim people, which has made us intimately familiar with uprooting, persecution, and living outside the law’s protections. This section provides examples of how migration is addressed in the Bible and how various moral principles are derived from both Scripture and Tradition.

¹ Center for the Study of Global Christianity, National Association of Evangelicals, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, World Relief (2025). *One Part of the Body: The Potential Impact of Deportations on American Christian Families*. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/one-part-of-the-body.pdf>

In the Old Testament, the Jewish people were deported, exiled, enslaved, scattered and dispersed. In Genesis, Abraham willingly became a migrant in response to God's command to "Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you" (Gn 12:1).² He and Sarah extended extensive hospitality to three strangers who were a manifestation of the Lord (Gn 18: 1-15). Following their act of hospitality to these strangers the Lord promises Abraham that Sarah would bear a son the following year. Within the Old Testament, the forced migration of the children of Jacob led to redemption: Joseph, sold into slavery, eventually became the savior of his family (Gn 37:45) – Joseph prefigures Jesus, who, betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver, saves the human family.

The key events in the history of the Jewish people, the Chosen People, such as the enslavement by the Egyptians and liberation by God, led to commandments regarding strangers (Ex 23:9; Lv 19:33). Israel's engagement with the stranger reflects God's particular concern for the widow, the orphan, and the marginalized, and embodies the specific Old Testament manifestation of the great commandment to love one's neighbor: "For the Lord, your God, is the . . . Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Dt 10:17-19). For the Israelites, these obligations were not only personal exhortations: the welcome and care of the alien were structured into their gleaning and tithing laws (Lv 19:9-10; Dt 14:28-29).

Recalling the migration of the Jewish people out of Egypt, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph themselves were refugees who fled into Egypt (Mt 2:15). In the Gospels, Jesus enters the world during his family's journey to be enrolled in their ancestral homeland (Lk 2:1-7), where they are denied lodging. The Holy Family flees to Egypt to avoid persecution by King Herod and, even after Herod's death, cannot return to Israel, but must settle in Nazareth for fear of Herod's son, Archelaus (Mt 2: 13-15, 19-23). Reflecting on the situation confronting the Holy Family, in his 1953

² For all references to Scripture, please refer to the Bible posted on the USCCB website: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible>

Apostolic Constitution, Exsul Familia (1952) Pope Pius XII referred to them as the archetype for all refugees.³

St. Matthew also describes the mysterious presence of Jesus in the migrants who frequently lacked food and drink and are detained in prison in his Gospel (Mt 25:35-36). Jesus himself speaks of the "Son of Man" who "comes in his glory" (Mt 25:31) who will judge his followers by the way they respond to those in such need: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40). In his itinerant public ministry, Jesus has nowhere to lay his head (Lk 9:58), his own people refuse to accept Him (Jn 1: 11), and He tends to those who move "like sheep without a Shepherd" (Mk 6:34).

During his ministry, the Nazarenes revolted against Him and drove Him away (Lk 4: 28-30). The Scribes and Pharisees plot against Him and repeatedly accuse Him of breaking the law, while they themselves fail to live according to its spirit (Mt 22: 15-22; 23: 23-27) and fail to grasp that love of neighbor fulfills the law (Rom 13:10; Gal 5:14). Jesus teaches that nations will ultimately be judged by how they treat the dispossessed and needy, including the stranger (Mt 25: 31-46). Migrants fall within every marginal group outlined in the Judgment Day parable: the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, ill, and imprisoned.

The Risen Christ commanded his apostles to go to all nations to preach his message and to draw all people through faith and baptism into the life of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:16-20). The triumph of grace in the Resurrection of Christ plants hope in the hearts of all believers, and the Spirit works in the Church to unite all peoples of all races and cultures into the one family of God (Ep 2:17-20).



³ Pope Pius XII, Exsul Familia (1952), <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius12/mp12exsul.ht>.

2.2. Catholic Principles on Migration

While Scripture functions as the key touchstone for Catholic moral teaching, centuries of reflection and engagement on it have developed a rich tradition of moral thought on a wide variety of issues, including migration. Below you will find some of the key principles that inform the Church's work in this regard.



Key Principles Derived from the Magisterial Teaching of the Catholic Church

- Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland (i.e., the right not to migrate).
- When the conditions necessary for a dignified life are absent, persons have the natural right to migrate to support themselves and their family.
- More prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome those in search of the security and means of livelihood unavailable in their country of origin.
- Countries have the right to maintain their borders and regulate immigration, consistent with the common good and with respect for the sanctity of human life.
- Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.
- The God-given dignity and rights of undocumented immigrants should be respected.
- Immigrants have a responsibility to respect the country that receives them.



Irregular Migration and Immigration Enforcement

- Pope Francis has stated that “safe, orderly, regular, and sustainable migration is in the interest of all countries.” At the same time, Catholic teaching recognizes that it “is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop.” Threats to human life, therefore, may compel irregular migration. Above all, we must reject an oversimplification of the issue that disregards the human lives involved. One of the main differences between immigrating to the United States today and immigrating to the United States 100 years ago is that the process has become much more complicated and limiting, meaning most who immigrated during the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries could not do so today.
- Immigration enforcement should always be targeted, proportionate, and humane. According to its nature (i.e., the crossing of international boundaries) and the U.S. Constitution, it is principally and necessarily the responsibility of the federal government to regulate immigration and provide orderly processes for people seeking to immigrate to the United States. However, national, state, and local governments must work collaboratively with one another and civil society to devise a collective and humane response to migration.



Immigration Reform

As recognized by the Church for decades, the current immigration system is inadequate to address the needs of American families, employers, and communities, as well as immigrants themselves. Reforms and investments are needed to modernize/increase capacity at ports of entry, increase the number of/access to lawful immigration pathways, and establish earned legalization programs for long-time undocumented residents.

- The situation at the U.S.-Mexico border is unsustainable for migrants and communities alike, but it can and should be addressed without sacrificing longstanding, life-saving humanitarian protections, such as asylum. Ultimately, no sustainable reduction in migration can be achieved without a long-term commitment to addressing its root causes. Looking only at the U.S.-Mexico border or the domestic situation ignores the realities people face in their countries of origin. Heavy-handed enforcement measures will not alleviate forced migration. Much more attention should be given to the myriad causes of increased migration, rather than simply responding to its symptoms. As Pope Francis has acknowledged, “Ideally, unnecessary migration ought to be avoided; this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development.”



Additional Resources on Church Teaching and Engagement on Migration

- [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), no. 2241 (USCCB).
- [Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#) (USCCB)
- [Q&A on Catholic Ministries Serving Migrants and Refugees](#) (USCCB)
- [Human Trafficking, U.S. Policy, and the Catholic Church](#) (USCCB)
- [Justice for Immigrants](#) (USCCB). Please subscribe to our [listserv](#).
- [Responding to Migrants and Refugees: Twenty Action Points](#) (Holy See)
- [Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking](#) (Holy See)
- [And They Shall Know Us by Our Love](#) (Catholic Charities USA)
- [Modern Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration: Notable Quotes](#) (CLINIC)
- [A Prophetic Response to the Urgent Challenge of Migration](#) (2025, Hope Border Institute)
- Get weekly border updates by [subscribing to the Hope Border Institute's #FronteraDispatch](#).
- Jesuit Refugee Service USA alerts will update you on the most current ways you can actively stand with displaced people in the US and globally. [Subscribe to the JRS/USA Action Alerts](#).
- [Spiritual Resources for Prayer and Reflection](#) (JRS/USA)
- [U.S. Community Resources](#) (JRS/USA)



Relevant saints and prayers (Prayer cards)

- In this [Collected Book of Prayers for Migrants](#), you will find prayers to Saints who walked with migrants or were migrants themselves that you can print and distribute in your community during your vigil.

3

HOW WE DO IT

María fled Guatemala while pregnant, seeking better opportunities and safety in the United States. She was applying for a CBP One appointment to present at a port of entry at the U.S.-Mexico border when the app was canceled and asylum access was suspended. María now faces violence and insecurity in Mexico, as well as language barriers. Still, María is pursuing the care her baby needs and protection for her new family.*

In this section, we dive deep into the logistics of organizing your rally and vigil. We include steps you can take to prepare for them, a timeline checklist, templates for a rally and a vigil, and information about how to take care of the communication dimension of the event.

3.1. Planning Steps

Organizing a rally, march and vigil (“vigil”) requires work to recruit faith leaders and participants, as well as to prepare all necessary logistics. Inspired by the march and vigil organized by the Diocese of El Paso and the Hope Border Institute in March 2025, we lay out several steps you can take.



You may need to take several steps simultaneously – for this, we recommend reading the planning timeline checklist below.



1. Secure a date and time

First, you may want to establish a date and a time for your vigil celebration. We recommend that you set this date based on:

- ***Your bishop's agenda.*** Bishops may prefer some dates before others, depending on existing commitments they may have. Ensure that your bishop can be present and participate by choosing a date when he is free. You should request a meeting with him and his staff to discuss your intention to organize the vigil and ask for their presence during the process and the vigil. You can bring a couple of members of the community with you, including directly impacted individuals.
- ***The community's traditions.*** In some communities, certain dates hold special significance. Think about doing your vigil on one of these dates. For example, you can choose the date of a saint relevant to the local migrant community.
- ***Holidays.*** Sometimes, vigils may happen during holidays when community members are away traveling. We recommend you avoid dates when most community members may be away.

2. Create an organizing committee and engage your Bishop

Once you have a date, create a vigil organizing committee. The committee should be comprised of Diocesan staff, leaders and members of various local parishes, women religious, community leaders and faith and civic organizations in the community that would like to take action to prepare the vigil (for example, local Pax Christi affiliates and other groups).

We recommend that the organizing committee meet once a week, starting approximately two months before the scheduled date for the vigil celebration.

We highly encourage you to continue engaging with your bishop during this process. You can do so by meeting regularly with him and by including his staff in this committee.

3. Choose venues and obtain appropriate permits

Together with your organizing committee, determine the venues where the rally and vigil will be held. Ensure that they are available on your chosen date.

For example, you can start your rally at a prominent square in your city and march towards your cathedral, where you can celebrate the vigil. You can also march towards a prominent space related to immigration, such as a migrant shelter run by a parish, a community center that welcomes migrants, etc. Given raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other agents and the level of fear immigrants are experiencing, sensitivity to location will be important.

It is likely that you will need permits from local authorities to do your rally and vigil. For example, if you are starting your rally at a local plaza or if you are marching from one street to another, you will need to obtain appropriate permits.

We recommend that you explore which permits you will need and process them as soon as possible. To do so, you can work with a local non-profit organization, or you can write to your local city representative and county members to ask for guidance.

4. Parish and faith-leader engagement

No rally and vigil would be possible without people. To do so, you will need the help of as many faith communities as possible. This is a great opportunity to organize as people of faith. The goal is to get faith leaders involved and, in turn, get them to involve their parish communities or congregations.

Work with who you know, but also aim to bring others into the table, and work with them to plan and promote the event. You can also engage your bishop in this process and ask him to engage people of other faiths. Ask him to send invitations to as many faith leaders as possible and to ask them to be part of this important moment.

5. Elected official engagement

The involvement and support of civic leaders is an important part of any vigil in solidarity with immigrants. These gatherings offer a meaningful opportunity to bring together elected officials and civil society leaders to stand publicly with the immigrant community. Their presence can help build bridges between civil society and communities of faith, strengthening the impact of the event.

That said, depending on your location and who you hope to involve, this may require early outreach and planning. You'll also consider the level of participation that feels appropriate. Civic leaders can be invited to speak during the rally or vigil, or simply to attend as witnesses in a show of solidarity.

If you believe your civic leaders are unlikely to participate in the vigil, we still recommend that you meet with them to share why you are organizing the event, your concerns as a person of faith, and why you would still like them to attend.

6. Volunteer recruitment

Volunteers are crucial for the success of the vigil because they hold the vision of the event with the organizers. They are in charge of guiding participants, distributing water, putting the logistics of the organizing committee into action, distributing flyers and other information, and more. Parishioners, Catholic school students, and other community members could be great volunteers.

Follow these steps to recruit and train your volunteers:

- Recruit or assign a point person to coordinate volunteers.
- Create a form to sign up. You can ask for basic information, such as name, contact number, email address, preferred functions during the vigil (if any), or t-shirt size (for example, if you plan to distribute t-shirts to ensure your volunteers are identifiable on the day of the vigil).
- Work with your Diocese to send the form to all the pastors and encourage parishioners to register. Share it on social media as well.

- Host a training session. Approximately a week before the vigil, prepare and host a training for volunteers.

- We recommend dividing your volunteers into different groups based on the tasks they'll be carrying out. You may need volunteers for: 1. Guiding and ushering people; 2. Logistics setup and cleanup; 3. Water distribution; 4. Flyer and other documents distribution; 5. Sign pick-up and distribution; 6. Other tasks as needed.
- During the training, walk through the program with your volunteers, explaining the goal of each portion as well as the logistics for when and where each group will need to intervene.
- Name a volunteer captain for each of the groups. The captain will be the pointperson between the organizing committee and the volunteers assigned to their group.
- You may want to do the training an hour before the sign-making party (*see below*).

7. Sign-making party

For your rally and vigil, consider creating signs with messages that affirm the dignity and belonging of migrants. For that, prepare a sign-making party with community members and volunteers. The party can be a fun time to deepen relationships among participants, share responsibility for the success of the event with other people, and prepare for the upcoming action.

You will need to:

- **Secure a place.** It can be a community center, the temple of one of the participating interfaith leaders, or the premises of one of your parishes.
- **Prepare flyers** to let your volunteers and community members know about the sign-making party. Post them on the streets, your parishes and social media.



Buy more supplies than you think you will need.

- **Buy supplies.** Ensure you have all the necessary materials to create the signs. Buy markers, paint, brushes, colorful paper, cardboard, glitter and other materials. Be as creative as you want!
- **Prepare messages** that people can use in their signs. Give your participants a list of messages you believe are important to highlight.
- **Cater food and drinks**, or ask participants to bring something for a potluck.
- **Bring a speaker** to play fun music.
- **Distribute any materials** you will hand out to volunteers. For example, if all volunteers will wear the same t-shirt, this is a good time to distribute them.

You can start your sign-making party with a prayer and a blessing of the food. After that, distribute the materials and play background music while people get creative with their signs. Assign one or two volunteers to be in charge of collecting all the signs and distributing them at the rally and vigil.

8. Day-of logistics and security

For the big day, you will need to check several logistical aspects:

- **Sound system.** Make sure that the speakers are powerful enough to reach the entire audience in the space. Check the microphones and test them before the speakers and participants arrive.
- **Visuals.** If you are going to display a video or use some visuals on screens, check that the projector, screen and speakers work well. If you will be using TVs (for example, in parishes), test the system before your vigil.
- **Music.** If you are counting on a choir, work with them to prepare their microphones and run one more time through the schedule.
- **Water.** Bring water for all the participants and the audience. Ensure that a group of volunteers is in charge of water distribution.

- **Security.** While a faith rally and vigil are peaceful forms of expressing our beliefs and praying for our migrant neighbors, you may want to take extra precautions. Coordinate with local groups such as the Knights of Columbus and other Catholic organizations that can help assess the situation and put an emergency plan in place if an emergency or security threat is identified.
- ***Learn about your constitutional rights before the event*** and help people understand their rights before or during the event – ***see more below.***

3.2. Rally's Program Template

Before your vigil, consider hosting a public rally or event where you provide space for community members and faith leaders to share their needs and hopes. After that, you can march toward your vigil venue. Consider locations that are either close to your vigil venue and relevant to your community (for example, a prominent plaza, the entrance of a community center, a significant park in the community, etc.).

For your rally, consider the following elements:

- **Invite interfaith leaders, service providers, and other community members who are walking with migrants or are directly impacted by recent immigration policies to speak.** This is an opportunity for them to express their concerns from their faith perspectives and reaffirm the welcoming character of our communities. Work with them in advance to prepare their interventions and calls to action.
- **Include cultural elements that are relevant to the community, such as chants, songs, and other forms of artistic expression.** Make it lively and welcoming.
- **Have volunteers welcome people, provide water and distribute any booklets, pamphlets or Know Your Right cards.**

Here you can see a draft template for your rally that you can use:

Welcome

Begin with music (for example, a choir singing) and welcome all the participants. Explain why we are here, what is the purpose of our event today, and introduce the speakers.

Speakers' Intervention

Have community leaders from diverse religions, backgrounds and experiences talk about their concerns from their faith perspectives, what changes they would like to see, and how we can achieve that as a community.



***We recommend
keeping it under
20 minutes.***

Commitment Ceremony

*Prepare a set of principles that your community members and leaders can work toward. For example, in El Paso, public leaders and members pledged to work for the values and goals reflected in **Compromiso El Paso**.*

Blessing and March Toward Vigil Site

Have your bishop or any other prominent religious leader provide a blessing for the crowd and begin your march towards your vigil site. Include cultural elements in your march, such as religious symbols representing local parishes and faith communities, or incorporate music and dance elements that reflect the local community.

3.3. Vigil's Program Template

Your vigil program should be tailored to your community.

Therefore, it is important that you:

- ***Bring elements of your community's popular religion, culture and liturgy to the forefront.*** The closer you draw on your people's cultural, religious and liturgical traditions, the more relevant your vigil will be for them. What are the most important popular religious expressions in your community? What are the songs that connect to the cultural roots of the people present in your community? Which are the saints people pray to with fervor in your community? How are they usually honored in your diocese and masses?
- ***Center the experiences of directly impacted individuals and their accompaniers.*** Migrants and their accompaniers have a voice. Consider including their testimonies by pre-recording an audio message, a video (without showing the person's face), or even a live testimony during your vigil, if supported by the person's immigration counsel and if that is the person's will.
- ***Ensure that the Gospel is accessible in multiple languages and that your sermonist has enough time to speak.*** Read the chosen passages of the Gospel in as many languages as relevant in your community. Give enough time for your sermonist, usually your bishop, to develop his message.
- ***Include moments for community bonding, prayer and call to action.*** A vigil is a powerful moment to connect with one another in the image of the love of God. Include moments where participants can come together in symbolic gestures, raise collective prayers, and feel inspired to take action to welcome, protect, integrate and promote our migrant neighbors. Include a moment to hear from concrete actions members can take – from volunteering at shelters to calling their representatives, writing Op-Eds, sharing truthful information and more.

Here you can see a draft template for your vigil that you can use:

Procession of the People of God	<i>All religious leaders and the faithful enter the vigil venue while the choir sings.</i>
Words of Welcome	<i>The vigil presider, speaker or any relevant member of the organizing committee welcomes the faithful and offers an initial prayer.</i>
Homage to the Vigil's Saint or Our Lady	<i>If your vigil is celebrated on a Saint's festivity or in honor of Our Lady, ensure to include a moment to honor that Saint or Our Lady. For example, you can set up an altar and process with offerings that are relevant to the local and migrant community. Explain to the participants the connection between that Saint or Our Lady and the vigil.</i>
Lesson	<i>Choose a reading of the Scriptures that speaks to the moment (see some examples above). Do the same reading in some of the languages relevant to the local community, such as Spanish, Creole, Tagalog, Chinese, Swahili, and others. Choose local faith leaders and community members to do these readings.</i>
Testimony(ies)	<i>Testimonies help uplift migrants' voices and dreams. Consider including the testimony of a community member or their relative during the vigil. To ensure everyone's safety, you can display a pre-recorded testimony. You can also display a couple of testimonials at different parts of the vigil.</i>
Sermon	<i>Usually the longest part in the vigil, it is delivered by a prominent local faith leader like your bishop. Ask your bishop or any other relevant faith leader well in advance so they can prepare. Give them as much information as possible about the vigil's goals, participants, and structure.</i>
The Prayers of the People of God	<i>During this section, the community elevates prayers to God for – among other intentions – the safety of all, respect for the dignity of migrants, justice for the separated families, courage for the local service providers, and laws that promote the common good. This is an ideal opportunity to engage local faith leaders and community members.</i>

Our Father	<i>We all put our trust and hope in God by praying or singing the Our Father.</i>
Call to Action	<i>This is a moment to reflect on what we can do collectively in our parishes, our community, our state and our country. Bring concrete opportunities to engage in actions to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants and advocate for immigration reform.</i>
Final Blessing	<i>Offered by all the present faith leaders, we conclude with a blessing to the community.</i> <i>God of love, from the profound communion of your divine life, pour out upon this people a torrent of love.</i> <i>Heal every wound, overcome every division, calm every anxiety, and grant courage and strength to face every challenge.</i> <i>Come, Holy Spirit, and show us your beauty reflected in all the peoples of the earth, to discover that all are important, that they are all necessary, that they are all different faces of the same humanity that you love. Amen.</i>
Recessional	<i>Participating faith leaders leave in procession while the choir sings.</i>



3.4. Communications Dimension

Messaging guidance

You may wonder how you can communicate to others why you are organizing this rally and vigil, and what outcomes you would like to see from your Catholic values. We offer here some messaging suggestions that you can adapt to your local context.



Scan this QR code to access all the communications materials!

- 1. As people of faith, we stand in solidarity with all those in our community experiencing fear in the face of the shutdown of the border to vulnerable, hateful and criminalizing rhetoric against immigrants, and threats of mass deportations.*
- 2. We march to defend the identity of our community as a place of welcome.*
- 3. We march as an expression of our faith in a God of justice who stands with the poor, the immigrants and the vulnerable.*
- 4. We choose hope and unity over the forces of division and fear.*
- 5. We defend the rights of those forcibly displaced from their homes to seek safety, protection and life at our borders.*
- 6. We denounce policies that deny protection, separate or detain families, indiscriminately target our neighbors in parishes, hospitals, courthouses, or their workplaces, and send them to countries where they may face persecution or death.*
- 7. We recognize and honor the contributions that immigrants and immigrant families make to our community and country.*
- 8. Immigrants have strengthened our communities and made us a vibrant country, enriching our parishes and congregations, contributing to our safety and economic vitality, and fostering a unique culture of hospitality, encounter and service to one another.*
- 9. We pray that we can recognize the God-given dignity in each one of our migrant siblings and act accordingly to pursue justice for them and everyone in our community.*
- 10. We implore our decision-makers to legislate for the common good of our community and our country, pursuing immigration reform.*

a. Outreach to Local Media Outlets	Goal: Amplify the vigil’s message and invite broader community participation. Actions: • Draft a press release with key vigil details (who, what, when, where, why). <u>Press Release Template</u> • Identify and contact local TV, radio, and newspaper outlets, especially those with faith or community interest segments. • Offer interviews with organizers or migrant community members willing to share their stories. • Follow up with media contacts a few days before the event.
b. Diocesan Communications Office	Goal: Leverage the Church’s communication networks to reach parishioners and Catholic institutions. Actions: • Send event details and press materials to the diocesan communications director (if you don’t know who that person is, ask your Bishop’s office or look on your Diocese’s website). • Request that the vigil be included in diocesan newsletters, bulletins, and social media. • Ask for support in connecting with parish communications teams.
c. Social Media Strategy	Goal: Build awareness, engagement, and participation online. Actions: • Use the hashtag #MissionariesofHope • Schedule posts leading up to the event with graphics, quotes, and calls to action using the <u>partner packet</u>. • Share live updates, photos, and reflections during the vigil. • Encourage attendees to post and tag the organizing groups. (Check the tags on the <u>partner packet</u> document)

d. Dissemination Strategy	• <u>Use the templates</u> for printable flyers and posters • <u>Sample social media graphics</u> • Dissemination: - Share via email lists, parish networks, and social media - Upload to the websites and share with the JFI network - Encourage partners to print and distribute in churches, schools, and community centers
e. Publish an Opinion Piece (Op-Ed)	Goal: Share the moral and spiritual call to support migrants with a wider audience. Actions: • Identify a compelling voice (e.g., a faith leader, migrant advocate, or impacted individual). • Draft a 600–800 word piece connecting the vigil to broader themes of justice, dignity, and faith • Submit to local newspapers, diocesan publications, or national Catholic outlets. • Follow up with editors and be ready to provide a photo or bio. <u>Op-Ed Template</u>
f. Send Information to Justice for Immigrants (JFI) 	Goal: Ensure national coordination and visibility. Actions: • You can submit vigil details (date, location, purpose) to the <u>JFI campaign form</u>. • Share photos and a short write-up after the event for national promotion by clicking here.



3.5. Planning Timeline Checklist

This is an estimated timeline that can help you plan your vigil. The timeline highlights elements you should focus on during a week or tasks that should be finalized by a certain week.

Depending on your local reality, you may need more or less time. In either case, you are already thinking about organizing a vigil or planning it, and that's what matters!

8 weeks before the vigil

- Schedule a meeting with your bishop to discuss dates and times
- Informally discuss potential dates for the rally and vigil ("vigil" from now on) with community members and interfaith leaders
- Create a list of members for an organizing committee and send invitations to join the first planning meeting

7 weeks before the vigil

- Hold the first planning meeting
- Talk to potential venues where you can host your vigil based on the given dates
- Talk to potential venues where you can hold your sign-making party
- Start working on promotional language and materials
- Start engaging elected officials on the idea of participating in the vigil

6 weeks before the vigil

- Hold the second planning meeting
- Close the date, time and venue of the vigil
- Request any necessary permits from your city and county, if any.
- Close the date, time and venue for your sign-making party
- Finalize and share promotional materials and the volunteer recruitment form on social media, with your Diocese, with interfaith community members and other community members

5 weeks before the vigil

- Hold the third planning meeting
- Send official invites to elected officials, interfaith leaders, and other community leaders you'd want to invite to participate in the vigil. You can do it with the help of your bishop.
- Develop the vigil program
- Contact the choir that will be singing during the vigil
- Contact any local groups that will be participating in the vigil (for example, groups representing local Indigenous peoples who will lead a section during the vigil, such as the entry ceremony; groups that will help with security, etc.)
- Share printed flyers and promotional language with your Diocese so pastors can do weekly announcements during Masses and encourage signing up to become volunteers

4 weeks before the vigil

- Hold the fourth planning meeting
- Finalize vigil program
- Recruit faith leaders and community members who will be reading or speaking at the vigil
- Send a media advisory
- Send Op-Eds to your local newspapers about the vigil, why you're celebrating it and why everyone should go
- Order all the materials needed for the sign-making party and the vigil, including a medical pack.

3 weeks before the vigil

- Hold the fifth planning meeting
- Share promotional materials on social media again
- Recruit faith leaders and community members who will be reading or speaking at the vigil
- Prepare vigil program booklets

2 weeks before the vigil

- Hold the sixth planning meeting
- Review planning for the sign-making party
- Contact volunteers to remind them of the date and time of the training (preferably the same day of the sign-making party)
- Send a reminder to local leaders about the vigil
- Finalize recruitment of faith leaders and community members who will be reading or speaking at the vigil (and rally, if any)

1 week before the vigil

- Host a sign-making party
- Ensure all volunteers know their functions and that all questions are answered
- Review equipment and materials for the vigil

- Send a second media advisory
- Print vigil program booklets
- If possible, prepare the vigil venue one day before the vigil celebration

The day of the vigil

- Finalize venue preparation
- Arrive with sufficient time to the vigil venue with your volunteers to review equipment, materials and livestream logistics (if applicable)
- Review the program with volunteers one more time and indicate where materials can be found
- Welcome the invited elected officials and faith leaders
- Welcome the invited groups that will be participating in the ceremony (choir and others). Ensure they have all they need to perform their functions
- Share QR codes or physical registration forms where participants can provide their email addresses to obtain follow up information
- Pray and focus on being truly present!

After the vigil

- Ensure that your vigil venue is fully clean and that no materials were left behind
- Send an Op-Ed to your local media to capture the power and message of your vigil and why our Catholic values compel us to stand with immigrants
- Share a press release with your local media and other outlets, highlighting the main aspects of your rally and vigil and key messages that were shared
- Meet with the organizing committee to review positive aspects and what else could have been improved
- Send the next action steps to the vigil participants
- Send thank you notes to all participants, leaders, and members of the community who played a role in organizing the vigil
- Share your insights with the Justice for Immigrants campaign at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

4

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS



As we gather in prayer and solidarity with our migrant siblings, it's important to understand our rights as peaceful participants in public witness:

1. We Have the Right to Be Present

We are free to gather and pray in public spaces like sidewalks, streets, and parks. Permits are not usually required if we stay on sidewalks, follow traffic signals, and don't block pedestrian flow. We can also be present in front of government buildings, as long as we don't block entrances or disrupt their operations.

However, as mentioned before, permits may be needed for:

- Marches or parades that move into the street or block traffic
- Large gatherings using sound amplification
- Events in certain designated parks or plazas

Work closely with your local authorities well in advance of your rally and vigil to determine if you will need to obtain a permit. Permits cannot be denied just because our message is challenging or unpopular.

If no permit has been obtained, we must:

- Stay on sidewalks
- Keep space for others to pass
- Avoid intentionally blocking or delaying pedestrians

2. Respecting Private Property

- If we're on private property, we need the owner's permission to gather or speak.
- On public property, our voices and prayers are protected.

3. Counterpresence

- Others may show up with different views. They have rights too.
- Police should treat all groups fairly and may keep groups separated for safety, but still within sight and sound of each other.

4. Photography and Documentation

- We can take photos or videos in public spaces, including police – without interfering with their operation– or buildings.
- On private property, the owner can set rules about photography.

5. If Something Goes Wrong

- Write down what happened, including badge numbers and names if possible.
- Take photos of any injuries or incidents.
- Get contact info from witnesses.
- You can file a complaint with the police department's internal affairs or civilian review board.

6. And Always Remember: You Have Constitutional Rights!

Every person in the U.S. has constitutional rights. Before participating in the vigil, get familiar with your rights and how to exercise them.

Check CLINIC's Know Your Rights website to find information in your language of preference or scan the QR code below. If you have questions, always consult with an immigration attorney.



If you are a pastor, parish administrator, or parishioner, learn what your constitutional rights at parishes are and how you can be better prepared by checking this guide from the Hope Border Institute (available here in Spanish). You can also scan the QR code below to access the parish guide.



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CONCLUSION

Jean-Marc, an asylum seeker from Cameroon, is facing the reopening of his case, which could lead to separation from his wife and infant son. Returning to Cameroon would mean imprisonment or death, and he cannot obtain a passport. While his legal team works toward an upcoming deadline, his supporters are exploring humanitarian options in countries like France or Canada. Despite the fear and uncertainty, Jean-Marc remains hopeful for safety and a future with his family.*

We hope this resource will prove useful as you explore ways to be a public voice in support of migrants, their families, and the communities in which they live. As we turn our attention to **National Migration Week** (September 22-28, 2025) and the **World Day of Migrants and Refugees** (October 4-5, 2025) these celebrations and the lead up to them provide an opportune time to plan and initiate a vigil, prayer service, and/or march to raise awareness on the migration issue. These kinds of events can inspire people to examine this issue and rethink the ways in which their faith informs this thinking. Should you have any questions as you begin to organize an event, please feel free to reach out to JFI@usccb.org.

