

Planning a Candlelight Vigil for Climate Action



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 global climate crisis calls for the church to be not just reactive in its response to global climate change, but to prescribe to the world a need to reduce carbon emissions in order to prevent the its catastrophic impacts.

To this end, we invite you and your congregation to host a candle light vigil for climate action at your church this March. A candlelight vigil is an act of worship. It is a time for prayer and reflection on the issue of climate change 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 climate change. Since March is climate month for the NCC, and the theme for Ecumenical Advocacy Days this year is climate change, each congregation that holds a vigil during the month of March 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 climate change.

The steps that follow will give you ideas about how to plan and implement a successful candlelight vigil to raise awareness about the effects of climate change on God's people and God's Creation. After the vigil we encourage you to continue to be involved in the effort to find just and sustainable solutions to climate change through worship, study and personal action. You can begin to do this by reducing your own carbon footprint and the carbon foot print of your congregation as well as by engaging your legislators on this issue. Download our resources list from www.ncecojustice.org/resources.html and reduce your carbon footprint through our Carbon Reduction Campaign at www.ncecojustice.org/crc.html



Peace and Blessings,

The National Council of Churches Eco-justice Program



Steps for hosting a Candle light Vigil for Climate Change

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 NCC Eco-Justice staff know your plans.** Contact the NCC Eco-Justice Program at 202-544-2350 or info@ncececojustice.org.

Step 2: Plan your vigil.

- Plan on the service lasting between 15 and 20 minutes.
- See the sample service (Page 12). 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 – from the pulpit, in the bulletin, on an announcement screen, and in the church newsletter.
- Make it Ecumenical. invite neighboring churches 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 Eco–Justice 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 congress members and senators.
- 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 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, “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 NCC resources which can be found online at www.nccecojustice.org/resources.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 climate post-cards. Let us know how many you need. We'll send them to you.

Step 6: Hold the Vigil

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

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. Someone from the NCC Eco-Justice program will call you to see how your event went, or you can contact us directly at 202-481-



6931. Help us record how successful your event was by mailing, emailing or faxing the sign-in sheets to:

National Council of Churches USA
Eco-Justice Programs
110 Maryland Ave NE, Suite 108
Washington, DC 20002
Fax: 202-543-1297

- If you legislators participated, 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.

Tips for success

- 1. Leave Yourself Plenty of Time.** Make sure you have plenty of time for planning, promoting, and putting together the details of your gathering! Get started now.
- 2. Engage.** Make sure participants have access to resources to help them become informed about and engage in the issue. Consider setting a time for fellowship and discussion after the vigil
- 3. Worship!** Remember, you are there to celebrate God and God's Creation. Do that!



Candle Light Vigil Timeline and Checklist * keep this somewhere handy and refer to it often.

Get started- Eight to Ten 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

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church Members | <input type="checkbox"/> Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other faith communities/groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Friends/ Neighbors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legislators | <input type="checkbox"/> Coworkers/Colleague |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Members of local clubs and organizations | |

Four to Eight 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 Council’s Climate and Energy Initiative for resources, suggestions and outreach assistance. Email: tedgar@ncecojustice.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>.

Two weeks or 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 Eco-Justice Program know how many guests you're expecting.

Three 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.
- 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 Eco-Justice Program.
- Keep in touch with the people who attended the vigil.
- Mail sign-in sheets to the National Council of Churches, Eco-Justice Programs, 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.

- Find ways to make caring for Creation and addressing climate change an everyday concern for your congregation. Consider signing up for the Carbon Reduction Campaign www.ncecojustice.org/crc.html



**“You are the Light of the World”
One City’s Success**

Last year, more than 60 people gathered in downtown Atlanta to speak out for climate justice. People from various denominations and faith backgrounds, joined together, holding candles and singing hymns, calling for climate policy that provides justice for all of God’s people while ensuring the protection of God’s Creation for future generations. With the leadership of Rev. Alan Jenkins, the faith community of Atlanta came together, united in their vision of a just and sustainable future. The event was so successful, it was covered by the Atlanta Journal Constitution, the largest paper in the Southeast and engaged more than a dozen congregations from the greater Atlanta area.



Sample Letter of Invitation to Legislators

Dear Senator / Representative _____,

The congregation at [name of church] is hosting a candle light vigil for climate change after our regular worship service on [date], and we would like to invite you to join us. We believe that climate change is a moral issue, and as Christians, we are called to be stewards of Creation and 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 who have contributed least to the problem of climate change yet stand to suffer the most. 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 to implement just and sustainable solutions to climate change that will protect God's people and God's planet.

Please join us for worship at [time] on [date]. The candle light vigil will immediately follow the service. If you are planning 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.

Peace and Blessings,

[your name or congregation]



Resources for Worship

Prayer:

God of grace, God of mercy, God of all, 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 are the stars. We don't know from where the breeze comes. We don't know all that brought food and friends to our table. But we know in Whom we rest. We embrace the mystery that is You and all You have created.
—Amen

Liturgy:

Leader: Grant us a spirit of concern for the future of our environment; Bring an end to the exploitation of the earth's scarce resources; Encourage us to be responsible stewards of your Creation.

Response: Creator God, make us prophets of our time

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

Response: Creator God, make us prophets of our time

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 prophets of our time

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; Help us use our senses to celebrate beauty and creativity in the world.

Response: Creator God, make us prophets of our time

Leader: Grant us a spirit of truth to recognize failings, which have hurt us, others and the world; Give us the humility to ask forgiveness for our part in any wrongdoing;

Response: Creator God, make us prophets of our time.

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 prophets of our time.



Hymns:

How Great Thou Art

Presbyterian Hymnal - # 467

1. O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,
consider all the worlds Thy Hands have
made; I see the stars, I hear the rolling
thunder, Thy power throughout the universe
displayed.

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art. Then
sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee, How
great Thou art, How great Thou art!

2. When through the woods, and forest glades I
wander, And hear the birds sing sweetly in the
trees. When I look down, from lofty mountain
grandeur And see the brook, and feel the
gentle breeze.

Refrain

3. And when I think, that God, His Son not
sparing; Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Refrain

God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale:

United Methodist Hymnal - #122

Evangelical Lutheran Worship - #740

Presbyterian Hymnal - # 272

Tune: Carl F. Schalk, 1983

Lyrics: Jaroslav J. Vajda, 1983

1. God of the sparrow God of the whale
God of the swirling stars
How does the creature say Awe
How does the creature say Praise
2. God of the earthquake God of the storm
God of the trumpet blast
How does the creature cry Woe
How does the creature cry Save
3. God of the rainbow God of the cross
God of the empty grave
How does the creature say Grace
How does the creature say Thanks
4. God of the hungry God of the sick
God of the prodigal
How does the creature say Care
How does the creature say Life
5. God of the neighbor God of the foe
God of the pruning hook
How does the creature say Love
How does the creature say Peace
6. God of the ages God of the hand
God of the loving heart
How do your children say Joy
How do your children say Home



Sample Vigil Service

Light a candle on the alter

Welcome: Give a few brief statements on climate change as a moral issue and the reason for the vigil

Invocation: Page 10

Hymn: *How Great Thou Art* Page 11

Liturgy: Page 10

Hymn: *God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale* Page 11

Light Candles while singing God of the Sparrow. Ushers with light their candle's from the candle on the alter and light the candles of the first person in each row who will share their light with others.

Silent Meditation

Exit in Silence

