

How To: Organize a Public Witness for Immigrant Rights

April 19, 2011

United Methodist Women members have a long history of public witness for social justice. Recently, United Methodist Women members have been mobilizing to speak out publicly for immigrant rights across the country. These include following activities:

- Members of the Ellensburg, Wash., local United Methodist Women joined in a vigil following a raid in January 2011. Members attend a march and rally for immigrant rights at United Methodist Women Assembly in May 2010 in St. Louis, MO., with more than 2,000 participants.

In November 2010, deaconesses and home missionaries held a public witness for immigrant rights at Lake Junaluska as part of their national retreat.

- More than 50 United Methodist Women members joined the national March for America in Washington, D.C., in March 2010.
- United Methodist Women members organized local vigils at detention centers in New York City and at the Willacy Detention Center in Raymondville, Texas.
- United Methodist Women directors have held a vigil advocating for immigrant rights outside their board meeting in Stamford, Conn.
- United Methodist Women from across the nation gathered at the state capitol in Tennessee in 2007 during United Methodist Women National Seminar to protest Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in that state.
- See **response** magazine and unitedmethodistwomen.org for coverage.

You can organize a vigil at any time and any place, based on current local concerns. Here are some things to consider:

- Have a clear message and select the site to connect with your message. What are the pressing issues around immigration in your community? Is there a detention center? A federal building? Is there municipal anti-immigrant legislation? Is there a state anti-immigrant bill or law? Have your local police signed an agreement with ICE to participate in immigration enforcement? Are immigrants in your community targets of racial profiling or hate violence? Are there particular social service needs in the immigrant community?
- Work with allies in The United Methodist Church. Contact United Methodist Women groups at the district and conference level. Contact the conference immigration task force (part of a national UMC Rapid Response Team) or committees on Religion and Race, Church and Society, racial/ethnic caucuses and other United Methodist groups.
- Share your event online! Go to the United Methodist Women social network group on Immigration and the United Methodist Women Facebook page to post news, photos and videos about your event.

Find out what YOU can do!

- Contact the Women's Division to get United Methodist Church and United Methodist Women signs and buttons for your event. Contact Sophony Lamour at slamour@unitedmethodistwomen.org. Make handmade signs and banners as well! For assistance in organizing a public witness, contact Cindy Johnson at cjohnson@unitedmethodistwomen.org.
- Contact the media, and use social media to publicize your event. Be sure to have a designated media-relations person and designate spokespeople. Don't forget to include the Women's Division and United Methodist Communications on your media list!
- Work with allies in your community. Contact the council of churches to explore ecumenical support. Contact community groups engaged in immigrant rights.
- Use a toolkit created by United Methodist Women on "How to Organize a Public Witness for Immigrant Rights" as a guide (PDF, 384 KB).

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