



**Mothers' Union**

**16 Days of Activism**

**A guide to holding a Prayer Vigil**



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## 1. Introduction

The '16 Days' period of campaigning is central to Mothers' Union Vision, Aim and Objects. A key aim is to witness by speaking up in prayer for the voiceless in our world. A Prayer Vigil or a Silent Vigil are very good ways of doing this and are popular in many dioceses. This guide has been produced by members for members in all dioceses. It is based on experience. It is a guide rather than an instruction manual or checklist, so it will need to be adapted to suit local needs, traditions and circumstances.

## 2. Your team

- i. You need people with different skills and experience. Think about who you will need and approach them early.
- ii. Include people who are comfortable talking to others about the subject.
- iii. Involve other people who are not necessarily connected with Mothers' Union and approach them early. Your own and other clergy, from Bishops downwards, are valuable.

### 3. Your purpose and goal

- i. The subject is complex. Which aspects do you want to pray for? To attempt all of them would be unrealistic. Be selective and be guided by popular feeling, experience and priorities in your locality.
- ii. You might, for example have as your chosen topics i) a local Women's refuge, ii) the plight of victims of Modern Slavery and iii) the ongoing impact of the Domestic Abuse Act of 2021.

Your goals for these three might be respectively i) to achieve more widespread support for it, ii) to further raise awareness of it and iii) to campaign further by recruiting volunteers to write letters. Be clear what outcomes you want.

### 4. The venue

- i. Choose a place with a high footfall. Choose the day of your event to exploit this, e.g. the Market Day, or a Saturday, or a day when there is late evening opening for shoppers. Bear in mind the time of year and the weather. Check what other events might be going on that could interfere with or detract from your own event.

- ii. Cathedrals are often thought of as a good venue but many of them do not have much of a footfall. You may be confined to one of the chapels, which could be unacceptable or it could be ideal. Noise and other distractions can often interfere, such as preparations for the big concert the next evening, prayers by Cathedral staff over the PA system or a guided tour of the cathedral. Plenty of cities have a quiet cathedral but a very active and busy parish church a few hundred yards away, which might be preferable.
- iii. Whatever venue you choose it is likely to be a place of worship. Choosing a venue that is not a place of worship is likely to present your public with a group of people circled together, eyes closed, looking preoccupied, with one of them speaking in low tones that cannot be heard. It will not draw people in. Your aim is to attract people to join in the prayers. A circle facing inwards gives out a message - *"closed to outsiders"*.

## 5. Your budget

- i. Compile a budget for your event.
- ii. You will need agreement from your trustees, or at least your diocesan treasurer. It is good to preserve provisional budgets for such events in your annual budget and strategic plan for the whole Mothers' Union diocese, deanery or archdeaconry.
- iii. Research likely costs of key items as you go forward. Make sure the budget is monitored as you go along. Appoint someone on your team to take responsibility for it who will not be afraid to hold the team to account.
- iv. Ensure proper insurance for your event. Check with Mary Sumner House, in writing, what central cover exists. There are such arrangements in force and you need to establish clearly what they are.

## 6. A Prayer Vigil or a Silent Vigil – what do these mean?

- i. A Prayer Vigil is all about prayer. A Silent Vigil will be inspired by and upheld by prayer but it is not in itself all about prayer. It is about advocacy. One way of looking at prayer is that it is advocacy to our Lord. A Silent Vigil is about advocacy to the world. Both are about speaking out for those who cannot speak for themselves. Both are enormously powerful in their own ways. Be clear which you want.
- ii. If your vision is for an outdoor event then a Silent Vigil fits that bill much better than a Prayer Vigil. If your vision is for an indoor event, a Prayer Vigil fits that bill well. They have equal value. It is a matter of what you want to do.
- iii. When running an outdoor Silent Vigil avoid using the word 'Protest' in your display materials, literature or your own words when you talk about it. Call it a 'Silent Vigil', not a 'Silent Protest'. Mothers' Union is not about partisan politics but it would be foolish to overlook the issue because so many people attach prime importance to it. A Silent Vigil is very much about campaigning for gender justice in order to help bring about political change at the social and infrastructural levels for the good of all. You can do that perfectly well without using the word 'Protest'.
- iv. A Silent Vigil, in which no words are spoken, can have an enormous impact on people seeing it.
- v. You do not need a speaker at an outdoor Silent Vigil. The fascination of this type of event is that people will not be familiar with it and will not be expecting it. Therein lies the secret of a great deal of its impact.
- vi. You will though need people at the event to hand out leaflets etc. to the public and engage with them quietly if they want to talk. Professional support workers are good for this role.

- vii. For a Silent Vigil, again choose a place with a very high footfall. Even in the space of an hour or so, it could be seen by literally thousands of people. That said, both events will greatly increase their impact if you can get good media coverage. See Section 14.
- viii. If you hold an outdoor Silent Vigil, you are hostage to the weather. Somewhere like a popular shopping mall overcomes this.
- ix. You are also more likely to encounter isolated adverse reaction at an outdoor event to what you are doing and you need to have in place a policy and procedure for dealing with it and someone well-equipped to step in diplomatically to deal with it. Do not be afraid of this. People who like to bully are usually also cowards and they will not stick around to argue with you once they have made their point. Let them make it.

## 7. Permissions

- i. You will need permissions from certain people, examples being Cathedral staff, including possibly the Dean, local Clergy/Churchwardens, management of shopping malls, Local Authorities, the Police or landowners or trustees of land on which you will be operating. Getting those permissions must be one of your earliest tasks.
- ii. You must get permission from participants if you want to take photographs. Make sure that any member of the public wishing to take photographs during the event gets the permission of the participants before they take the photographs.
- iii. This subject can be dealt with effectively during the planning of the event but you should get their permission in writing. Draw up a short but suitable form. If you plan for and get press and media coverage it is bound to involve photographs and it is best to have permissions in place beforehand.

## 8. Risk Assessments

- i. This vital aspect is easily pushed to one side in the busyness of other aspects of your event. Enlist the help of a parish Safeguarding Officer. Consult people who are responsible for Safeguarding at any venue you are using.

## 9. Materials, technology and operator(s)

- i. Think about what display materials you will want, such as banners, A1 or A2 large posters, placards in A3 size, documents in A4 size or leaflets in A5 size. You must add your diocesan registered charity number to all display materials.
- ii. 'A' frames, stand-up display boards and purpose-designed pull-up banners can be very useful. Think about the wind if using outside and make sure they are well anchored to the ground. This can be done with e.g. sandbags, unopened bags of garden compost or similar, or even breeze blocks. Beware of trip hazards. If anything falls or blows over, where (or worse, on whom) will it land?
- iii. If you use conventional banners made for the purpose, work out what length and depth you need. This will be heavily influenced by what you want on them. Research carefully where you will want to position them and make sure that you are going to be able to mount them so that they are stretched taught. A saggy banner is no advert to your cause. You can get flexible PVC banners made and printed at reasonable cost. Make a banner generic, i.e. not date-specific. That way, you can use it again next year! Get them printed in water-proof ink. Have fitted metal eyelets made at top and bottom, and sides if necessary. This makes them easy to mount.
- iv. Banners, posters, flyers and the like need to focus on messages relevant to your cause, not on how wonderful Mothers' Union is. You are campaigning for a cause. You are not on a recruitment drive.
- v. If you do your job well people will go away reflecting that Mothers' Union might be something they want to get involved with.
- vi. Display materials can be ruined by too many colours, fonts and graphics and by too many words. The more you add, the more difficult it will be for people to take in your message.

The more words you use, the smaller the font has to be and this needs to be clearly visible, from across the road or the other side of the square. Stark is good but it also needs to be 'reader-friendly' and not menacing. Two or three different fonts or sizes and two or three colours is good. Logos are what they are, you cannot change them, but you can deploy their themes elsewhere if appropriate. Too much yellow or purple though will be hard on the eye. Do not put large headings in black; it is stark and menacing.

- vii. Try and enlist the help of someone who has skill and experience in these matters. The professional graphics designer is often not far from you.
  
- viii. Will you want to use technology? Recorded, or even live, music? Bear in mind that whilst live music at a Prayer Vigil can be beautiful and prayer-inspiring, it can also transport people's hearts, minds and spirits and make it hard for you to bring them back to where you might want them. Your event is a Prayer Vigil, not a concert. Recorded music can be much more ambient and easier to manage.
  
- ix. If you use recorded music it needs to be well organised, with decent, reliable equipment, easy to use, loud enough, with a reliable PA system if you use it. Music at such an event needs to be background but it does need to be audible. Try it out before the event. CD's are out of fashion now, they can stick, and CD playing equipment will now, by definition, be old. Digital music, from hard drive or through a memory stick, is the thing now. Make sure a memory stick is compatible with the computer it will get plugged into. Make sure the operator is adroit with it.
  
- x. A digital projector can be a powerful ally at a Prayer Vigil. Have you got access to one? Have you got someone on board who is adroit at using it? For example, some churches have such equipment built in.
  
- xi. An early task for you might be to recruit the commitment of the person whose job it is in the church to operate it, provided they are competent and experienced. Get whatever permission is required.

- xii. Your projector will need to be a powerful one, with a high Lumens rating. If you are using one already installed in a church it is likely to comply with this, but check and ask. If it is not powerful enough then people, no matter how close or far, will not be able to see it properly.
  
- xiii. At what time of day will this projector be in use? Where will the sun be at that hour? Where are the windows? What sunlight will be falling on your screen at precisely the wrong moment? If that happens it will obliterate whatever is on the screen.
  
- xiv. Screen: suitable, appropriate size, how far from the projector, clearly visible from the distances and angles that will be involved, electric lighting, trip hazards, does it obstruct the view in other ways, are you comfortable with putting it up and taking it down? Is it in good condition, with no rips or stains? You won't find that out until you put it up. Try it out first. Don't assume it will be snag-free. They never are.
  
- xv. Have a spare bulb to hand and know how to fit it quickly. If using someone else's projector, even a church's, they may well not have a spare. This is an obvious risk factor and source of stress for you.
  
- xvi. Check connectivity between the projector and any computer being plugged into it. Modern HDMI cables have now replaced traditional 'parallel port' connections (the chunky blue plugs with lots of pins or holes). HDMI is shorthand for 'High Definition Media Interface'. These connections give far superior performance.  
  
Modern computers will have them and not parallel ports. If the projector is at all aged it will only have parallel ports. Check it all out.
  
- xvii. Check clearly whether extension leads will be necessary. See them for yourself and don't rely on vague promises of 'yes, we've got those'. Better still, bring your own. Find the power sockets, check that they are live and will be on the day, and make sure your extension leads are long enough. Beware hazards of trailing electricity leads.

- xviii. If you do use a projector, do one, or preferably two 'dry runs' before you 'go live'. It will help you to sleep at night.

## 10. Theology of '16 Days' and gender-based violence

- i. It is essential that you look at the Mothers' Union website under '16 Days of Activism' because the resource pack there has an excellent and detailed recital of the theology of this subject, containing all that you will need.
- ii. Make sure that you study this and make sure that each member of your team also does, even at the expense of printing copies of it for them. People at the Vigil will no doubt talk to them and they must have very clearly in the forefront of their minds what the whole reason is for doing this at all.
- iii. Do draw upon the wisdom and experience of the clergy - your own and others.
- iv. By all means resort to other sources of theological guidance, such as your own and other people's experiences and insights and from loved books that you each have on your bookshelves.

## 11. Content and format of the Vigil

- i. How long do you want the Vigil to run? People are likely to think that a couple of hours is plenty. You could consider running it all day, with shifts that give changes of personnel, but you need a big team to do that and it greatly increases the organisation and management burden.

A Night Vigil can be very powerful but you need a big team who are up for it and will see it through. Publicity would be vital. In fact a Night Vigil will have the ring of the unusual and good publicity may draw attention to it in a way that a day-time Vigil might not. It is not, though, going to attract crowds. Reading or hearing about it can however be an inspiration in itself, even if the hearer does not actually attend. Not everyone works 9 to 5. People on their way to, or from, their shift might come for a short while.

- ii. Choose a time that suits the rhythm of the community it is serving. If a Market Day, do it while the market is running. A Late Night Shopping evening might work. In other words, avoid a time when the town is known to be quiet.
  
- iii. Here are some examples of what to include in the Vigil:
  - a. quiet, personal prayer
  - b. collective, led prayer
  - c. open prayer
  - d. soft music
  - e. candles
  - f. other forms of soft lighting, skilfully placed or managed
  - g. leaflets with written prayers and helpful graphics
  - h. objects to promote a prayerful atmosphere and aid for prayer, such as vestments, silverware, crosses, bibles, prayer-books, pictures brought by participants, flowers, prayer leaflets, stones, water
  - i. an introduction at the beginning and a summing up / farewell at the end
  - j. A4 or A5 information sheets giving facts and figures to aid prayer
  - k. suitable posters / signs around the building
  
- iv. Think creatively about how you arrange seating. A closed circle is not welcoming and limits numbers. More than one closed circle may look odd and will be difficult to manage. Chairs arranged in different small groups around the building, in e.g. a semi-circle, can though invite others to join in. Some people are intimidated by open prayer in a large group but can be encouraged by a smaller group. Pews may be ideal if people are scattered. Take a *“sit where you like”* approach.
  
- v. Beware of over-directing people. Give them freedom of choice. Help them to feel ‘at home’.
  
- vi. A sign on e.g. an ‘A’ frame at the door, and outside the door, with the message *‘all are welcome’* and perhaps a message *‘come when you can; leave when you must’*. This can be valuable; people need permission to stay only for a short while, and many will do just that.

- vii. Advertising that refreshments will be provided can be valuable and may encourage people to enjoy the event and to stay longer than they had intended. This does though need to be managed well and must not be allowed to become noisy or distracting, other than the enticing chink of a tea cup.

## 12. Speakers and influencers

- i. A speaker at a Prayer Vigil is good. You do not need one at a Silent Vigil.
- ii. More than one speaker may make the Vigil cluttered and over-busy.
- iii. If you have one speaker, that person could repeat their talk, at the interval that they choose, to suit the prevailing attendance but use discretion and don't overdo it.
- iv. Choose that person thoughtfully. Their talk needs to be encouraging, warm, friendly, affirming, informative, building on information that is already there and available. It needs to be rooted in the Theology. Remember that your Vigil is going to be attended by victims and survivors of these crimes and the talk needs to speak to them. It also needs, of course, to speak to support workers and other committed souls. The speaker needs to bear in mind some fundamentals. One of the planks of the work to support victims and survivors is "*it is not your fault*". So much of the harm caused by these crimes centres around a victim's sense of guilt, blame, shame and loss of self-esteem. Your job is to do something to help to rebuild that. As one of the very few voices that attendees will hear, your speaker is a key one. Your speaker needs to be on comfortable ground. He or she is not necessarily of the clergy but there are clergy who have a real heart for this subject, and are already trained speakers and as well-versed in the subject as you are.
- v. It is good to invite key people who have influence in their own communities and can be relied upon to take the message away and spread it wisely, skilfully and effectively. Do not be afraid to invite other faith leaders, of whatever faith. Brief them well, be inviting and encouraging, establish a rapport with them and get their commitment to take action afterwards.

- vi. Get as many support workers and organisations on board as you can. Giving them a role rather than just attend can help them to decide to come.

### **13. Prayer and information sources**

- i. Once again the Mothers' Union '16 Days' resource pack has plenty of prayer suggestions and copious information. You can be confident in it.
- ii. Ask the members of your team to pool their resources and efforts and draw upon other sources of prayer such as the many prayer books that deal with the subject, especially books of prayers for women.
- iii. The issues of domestic abuse and gender-based violence are now high on the public agenda and Mothers' Union can feel proud that we have been a significant participant in the campaign to bring this about. Following radio, TV and press it is now hard to avoid the subject. Woman's Hour on Radio 4 often has features on some aspect of it. All of these sources form a rich background to broaden your knowledge and understanding and will help to build your confidence.
- iv. When inviting speakers and key influencers ask them what they know and add their resources and knowledge to the pool.
- v. Discuss it with clergy and draw on their insights.
- vi. Do the same with any professional support workers that you contact. They will usually be happy to support your event and it is good for all concerned if you display their publications and make them available to attendees.

### **14. Promotion and publicity**

- i. This is vital. If you are to witness in the name of God it is important that people know that you are doing it. A witness needs someone to whom they can tell their story, otherwise it is not an act of witness.
- ii. Gathering support for a Prayer Vigil can be demanding, so persist and be thorough and tenacious.
- iii. Gathering support for an outdoor Silent Vigil is easier; you are highly visible to passers-by and they will take notice.
- iv. For either type of event there is a vast pool of the general public who will not be attending but who will take notice of publications about it and you can vastly increase the reach of your witness.

## **15. Press, social media, local radio & TV, YouTube**

- i. These are the tools and the mechanics of how you get publicity and promote your event.
- ii. In addition there is the power of word of mouth. Each member of the team needs to talk it up constantly, even at the risk of mildly boring friends and relatives. They will see the power of your conviction and they will tell other people about you and what you are doing. Sometimes, they may pass this on with a slight air of frustration but their listener may well see the other side of it, and ponder. Human empathy appears in some unlikely places.
- iii. Gaining the attention of the local press can be difficult, so persist. One can easily reflect cynically that if you try to do something to prevent blood on the pavement the press are not interested but when there is blood on the pavement the press are there in a flash. It is counter-cultural and harsh but those are the facts you are dealing with. Persist in getting the press on your side.

- iv. If there is someone in your team or circle of acquaintances who has a personal contact in the local media then that can be a great help, so research who knows who. There is often someone in local press or radio who is not only a Christian but very much on your side. Use them.
- v. When it is difficult to get editorial content in a printed newspaper the online version can often be much easier, so research all of the major newspapers in your area and establish which ones have a good online coverage. It is likely to reach more people than the printed newspaper will.
- vi. Your diocesan Director of Communications can be an effective ally. Contact and work with that person or department. At the very least they will be able to give you some simple but vital coaching in how to persuade local press to publish you. You will for example need to draft a press release, give background information and tell the press how, where and when you want it published. You must ask the editorial staff how many words they want and you must stick to it. They are likely to say something like 200 words maximum. Use them well. Ask about photos etc and get permission before you send them. Do not ask them to attend in person, you are wasting your time and theirs.
- vii. There is no disputing that social media such as Facebook or Twitter are the most powerful ways of spreading the word today. Remember that Facebook is “all about me” whereas Twitter is “all about outreach”. Social media that have the hash tag capability will be far more powerful a spreader of your message.
- viii. Even if you do not use social media yourself there will be others near you, on your team or in your church or family, who do. Enlist their help. Make sure you vet what they put.
- ix. You can consider whether you want to record your event and upload it to YouTube, or even stream it live. Live streaming can be fraught with

technical issues and although recording and uploading is not free of these it is generally much easier to achieve.

- x. You will need someone on board with the proven skills to do this and you will need the necessary equipment to do it, which needs to be high quality and reliable.
  
- xi. You should though reflect on the value of this. Watching a film in which no-one speaks is not very compelling. It can be okay for a very few minutes but it is likely only to appeal “to the converted” who know what is going on. What might be more watchable would be to use only a period of led prayer and maybe a moment or more either side of it, or use the speaker’s talk. Either way it will need “topping and tailing”.



## Evaluation after the event

- i. Don’t forget to do this!
  
- ii. Have fun.
  
- iii. Enjoy your event. Enable your team to do so.
  
- iv. Celebrate the success, e.g. with a nice meal out or a little party at home (or a big one!)
  
- v. Learn from the experience. Document the learning points, both good and bad.
- vi. Clean up your files to keep the essentials. You, or someone, will need them next year.

- vii. Make sure you tell everyone about your success. Good news spreads like fire.
  - viii. Book yourself a little holiday. Relax, and bask in the sunshine of God's love.
  - ix. Do it again next year.
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