



faith
for the
climate



THE
CLIMATE
COALITION

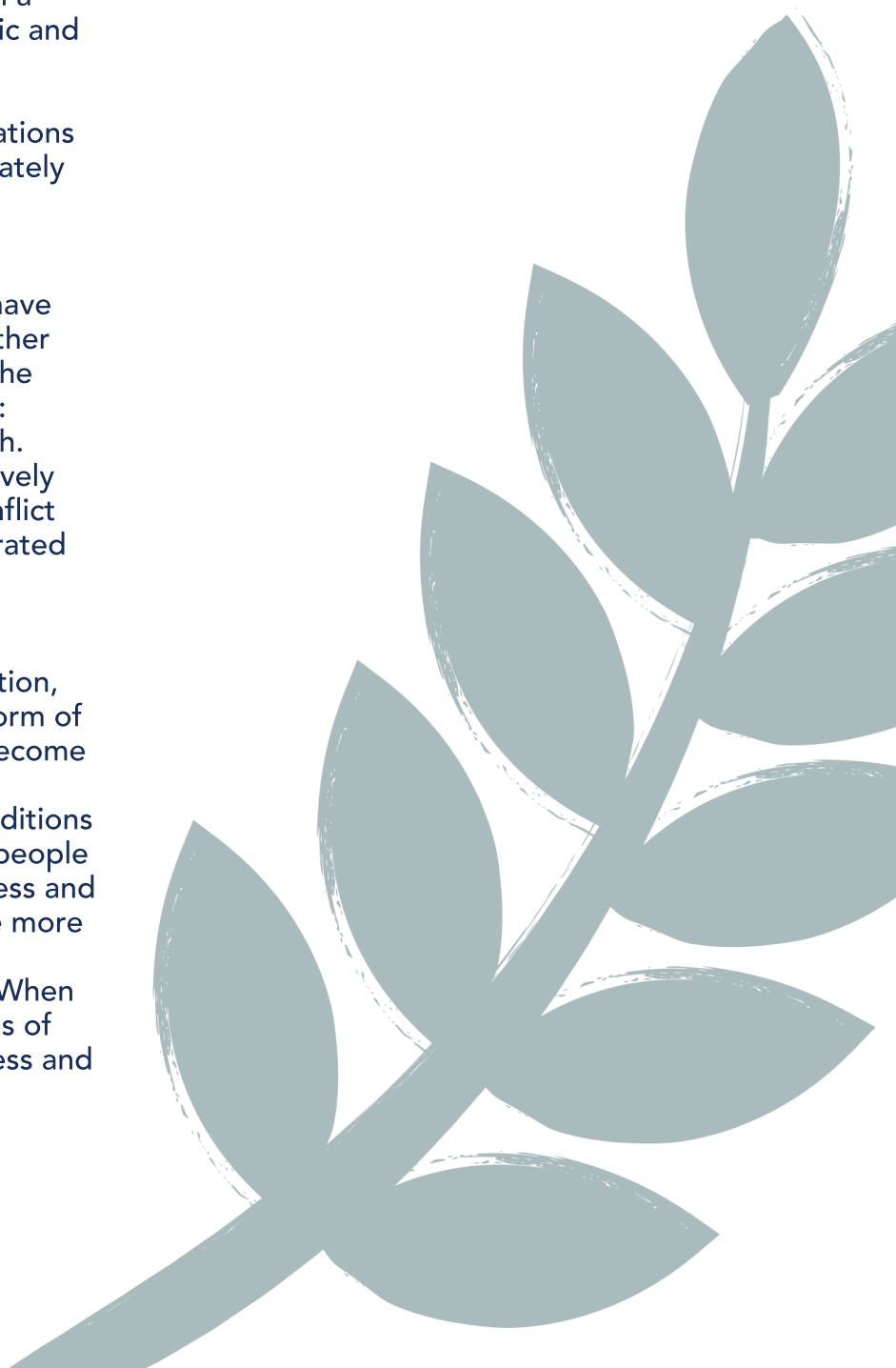
ORGANISING AN INTERFAITH VIGIL

WHY AN INTERFAITH VIGIL?

Faith communities have a unique contribution to make in the climate crisis. They can speak with moral urgency in a conversation that is often technocratic and bogged down in policy detail. Faith communities are also part of a global family, living and working in all the nations of the world and often disproportionately affected by adverse climate effects, especially in the Global South.

People from diverse faith traditions have always lived, loved and worked together for a common purpose that reflects the universal values of their communities: compassion, care and living your truth. Often, this common purpose has actively challenged situations of injustice, conflict and violence, including those perpetrated by or within faith communities.

One powerful way of collectively demonstrating faith is through reflection, meditation or worship, often in the form of a vigil. Vigils that are interfaith can become potent spaces to reflect on the accumulated wisdom of the many traditions that so enrich our world. They allow people to meet in a spirit of humility, openness and vulnerability - values which are all the more crucial to cultivate in our collective response to the climate emergency. When done well, they are exemplary models of working together to achieve wholeness and justice for all.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

If you're thinking of holding an interfaith vigil, or if you are seeking to incorporate a faith dimension to an existing vigil, here are a few basic principles that work well, in the experience at Faith for the Climate: (faithfortheclimate.org.uk)

1. Be plural

There is a rich tapestry of faith communities that call the UK home. Even in small towns there are often synagogues, mosques, mandirs, gurdwaras and other places of worship. Within Christianity as the majority faith tradition, there is a wonderful diversity of denominations and congregations.

Reach and ensure you have voices from the minority faiths that reflect this diversity. It is well worth the effort to go beyond traditional gatekeepers and voices that are often heard in the conversation. This is how we seek out emerging or informal leaders and committed truth tellers.

Also, faith communities are internally diverse. Hearing from a diversity of voices from within traditions can act as a leveller, as everyone has unique insights to offer through engagement with their own faith.

2. Be informed

If you're reaching out to a faith community or an individual you have not worked with before, take the time to do some research. What are the texts and teachings of the tradition? What is their unique story within the social fabric of this country? What other social justice or community-building work might they be known for, and what unique solutions or insights do they offer?

To start with, we would recommend:

1. [Faith for the Climate's resources page*](#)
2. The [Inter Faith Network**](#) for more general resources on faith groups in the UK

If there are faiths that are unfamiliar to you, you can get up-to-date, evidence-based and unbiased information from the [Information Network Focus on Religious Movements \(INFORM\)***](#)

Being seen and validated is vital. Create an atmosphere where people have equal space and standing regardless of their total 'numbers'. After all, 'membership' is very difficult to define or quantify for different religions, or even different wings within the same parent tradition.

* see footnotes at end of document for links

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3. Be open

There are as many ways to be an individual person of faith as there are people of faith. No tradition is a monolith, just as every individual contains multitudes. Help to debunk well-worn and damaging stereotypes or caricatures when approaching and working with those from different faith traditions.

Stereotypes are especially harmful when they disempower certain groupings within particular religious communities or distort their experiences. Make the effort to seek people who have been traditionally marginalised in different faith communities, especially on the basis of race, gender, social class, geographical location, disability, language and age. Everyone has the potential to bring a unique, necessary perspective on the intersections of faith and climate justice.

Having an open-ended discussion with invited speakers on the texts, symbols, and/or reflections they would like to share also helps. A pre-vigil call or email to introduce all the speakers to each other is also a good way to set the tone for the event and to clarify roles and boundaries.

4. Be humble

An interfaith vigil can be a space of new learning, where we can all have our assumptions challenged and horizons expanded. It's a chance to be vulnerable in a safe space. We become a better society when we deeply listen to others with a different cultural lineage and perspective to understand what each of us holds sacred.

Finally, at Faith for the Climate, we avoid making our vigils polemical or politically partisan. They are spaces to cultivate inspiration, community and mutual care so that we can all tackle the climate emergency more meaningfully together.



PRACTICAL TIPS

Planning an interfaith vigil? Following the guiding principles set out above, here are some practical pointers.

1 Start by setting the purpose of your event -

e.g. Making visible local faith-based support for climate action, building relationships and connections between people of faith

2 Draft your theme, and put together initial thinking for venue/date/time/format -

e.g. 'Making COP26 Count', 'Together for Our Planet', 'Counting the cost of climate change', 'Keeping watch', 18th or 20th September, 4pm-5pm, Victoria Park

If you have several options for venues, check their availability for the potential dates you are looking at, and find out any associated costs or restrictions on their use. You may choose to hold your event online, in which case the same applies. Check what sort of account you will need to be able to host, and whether this has an associated cost. Build in an opportunity for a rehearsal to ensure the tech runs smoothly.

3 Write down a list of people to get in touch with -

You may like to write several lists - those people who might form a small planning group with you, others that would be good to invite as participants, others that may attend. You should think about whether the list you write is representative, and whether it covers people with all the skills needed to pull together the event. To get your ideas flowing, you can visit [Faith for the Climate's resources page](#)* and the [Inter Faith Network](#)** for more general resources on faith groups in the UK.

If you don't know who to talk to, make a plan for how to fill the gaps. Who of your existing contacts might be able to make a personal introduction? Can you go and introduce yourself in person? Using people's phone numbers often gets a better response than emailing people cold.

4 Confirm overall purpose, theme, and logistics and agree invitations -

With your planning group, go through the overall vision for the event, and examine any uncertainties. What are you able to confirm? You can't publicise or make invitations without a confirmed shape to your event.

You will need your vigil to be able to accommodate a number of contributions from a variety of perspectives. Use your theme to create coherence, and suggest to participants that contributions each follow a similar format.

E.g. 'Please introduce yourself, tell a story about how you came to realise the importance of climate action, and share something from your faith tradition (like a prayer or reflection, or part of your holy text). We'd like you to end by saying the sentence "My hope for COP26 is that.....". Contributions should last no longer than 5 minutes'.

Decide who you would like to invite to make a contribution, and who in your group will make the invitation to these people.

* see footnotes at end of document for links

RETURN TO YOUR PURPOSE - DO YOUR PLANS SO FAR FIT WITH THIS?

It's easy to get swept along
by logistics! Check that
what you're planning
achieves what you've
decided is your purpose.

E.g. if your purpose is visibility... have you
got photos, local press contacts, and a
draft press release, a social media strategy?
Have you defined who you want to be
visible to? How will you reach this audience
or include and invite them along?

OR, if your purpose is building lasting
relationships... could you start with asking
all attendees to greet one another in some
way, or have an ice-breaker question as
part of your format? Is there something you
want to point attendees to as a follow-up?

PUBLICISE

Don't miss out this step, and plan for it earlier than you think - information takes time to circulate! Think about local groups and networks, and social media. Think about what image and text you want people to share - make it easy and clear and more people will pass on the information.

DETAILS! DETAILS! MORE DETAILS!

If you've not thought about the details, no one else has. Now is the time to think about how everything fits together, and how to best communicate these expectations to everyone participating.

You may want to think through the event in your head. If you can't think about each step of the event, and how you are managing the different variables, you likely have more questions to answer... Have you communicated all of your expectations about how the event will run, or are some of the details only in your head?

E.g. How do you know how many people to expect? Is there a running order? Will people be standing, sitting, and in what formation?

What accessibility considerations need factoring in? Who is going to take photos and how will they be shared after the event, and do you have the relevant permission from participants (same applies for recordings of online events)? Who will be there to welcome on the day, and who should people phone if they are running late? How will you close the event?

FOLLOW-UP AND THANK

It's easy to think your job is done when everyone is home! Not quite... send a follow up email and thank everyone who has contributed. Review with your planning group what went well or didn't and seek the feedback of participants. Celebrate what you've achieved and debrief with others. And then you can truly rest.

The Faith for the Climate Team:
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Footnotes

Faith for the Climate's resources page -
faithfortheclimate.org.uk/Faith-Resources

Inter Faith Network -
<https://interfaith.org.uk>

Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM) -
<https://inform.ac>