

Public Display: Religious Symbols in Action

How Are You Living Your Faith?

Every Religion Calls for Non-Violent Relationships!

16 Days of Activism Campaign 2010

In order to prevent violence against women, we need to change individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and social norms about it. We know that large public events can be a powerful strategy to reach many people. They can effectively capture attention, introduce an issue into public consciousness, and trigger community dialogue. Here is an idea for a dynamic public event for this year's 16 Days Campaign theme:

Religious Symbols in Action

Imagine a field of decorated crescents and/or crosses, each one documenting an individual's ideas about how to prevent violence against women displayed in a prominent location in your community.

You can accomplish this public display by holding an event in which community members create the display and put them up immediately. Or, if you are interested in attracting additional attention, you can hold two events: one to create the display and another event such as a march or rally that culminates in a ceremony recognizing the public display.

Why is this an effective strategy?

Collectively, the public event's crescents and crosses accomplish several important goals:

- They engage the community to publicly communicate their commitment to prevent violence against women in a new way that grabs attention.
- They ask participants to think about concrete actions they can take to prevent violence against women.
- Creating them could provide an opportunity for people from different communities of faith to come together and identify the prevention of violence against women as a point of common ground.

Who should be involved in this event?

This public event aims to bring communities of faith together to draw critical attention and action to preventing violence against women. It's advisable to get many people involved - religious leaders who can lead prayer or provide religious guidance, community members who make the symbols, stakeholder organizations who can support and participate, and others. Because of the hands-on nature of the activity, this is a great opportunity for families to participate in preventing violence against women and for children to add their voices to the community's collective statement of prevention.

When should it take place?

Holding the event to decorate the crosses and crescents after Friday prayers for Muslims or after church on Sundays for Christians provides the participants with an easy association between the importance of preventing violence against women and the practice of their faith. If you would like to make this an interfaith event in your community, you can schedule the event for a neutral day. Or, you can still hold the separate decorating events on the respective days of worship and schedule a second, culminating event such as a commemorating ceremony on a neutral day so all faiths can participate.

What is needed to make this event successful?

1. **Advertise it strategically.** Post flyers in your community in places that will attract the range of participants you want - in schools, churches, mosques, police stations, etc. Have well-known religious leaders announce the event in church or the mosque.
2. **Have prominent people in your community deliver a clear message to your participants.** Start your event with a short statement from relevant religious leader(s) and/or organizational stakeholder(s). They should explain how the activity will work, its purpose, and why it is related to the tenets of their faith.

3. **Use a stencil to make multiple cutouts related to the 16 Days theme.** We've included stencils of a crescent and a cross in the Action and Advocacy Kit so that you can use these religious symbols if they reflect your community. If they do not, be creative and develop your own stencil of symbol(s) that are better for you. Use this stencil to draw the shapes on hard paper e.g. cardboard, or manila paper.



4. **Get participants actively involved.** Rather than merely gathering the community together to create and install these cutouts in a prominent place in the community, challenge the participants to make each symbol represent an action that can be taken to prevent violence against women in your community. Ask participants to write a message on the cross or crescent that provides a suggestion for preventing violence against women. Get creative and look for material that will help you to stick these images in the ground e.g. forked sticks.

5. **Have a variety of materials for decoration available to make it fun for participants.** You can use markers, crayons, newspaper or magazine clippings, colored paper, or any other materials that will allow maximum creativity and engagement in participants.
6. **Make some summarizing comments.** Let participants know that their efforts will result in a community action. Challenge them to think and plan for how they can put their ideas for action to prevent violence against women in the community into practice.

If you choose to do one event, have your participants erect their symbols immediately in the public display area you've selected. If you decide to hold two events for this activity, take this additional step:

7. **Consider holding a culminating ceremony preceded by a march or vigil.** This would involve having those who created the symbols march to a prominent spot in your community and erect your display. In order to make this successful, you can first select locations and a route for it to follow, seek permission from the necessary authorities, and publicise the event to the community. Contact religious leaders and community members to help organise and speak at the event. This can establish strategic relationships with those who can further the cause and bring attention to your event. Invite the news media to cover your event so that you can increase the number exposed to it. You can modify and send the press release included in the 16 Days Kit for this purpose.

