

SAMPLE SPEECH

The sample speech reflects the 2001 NCVRW theme and offers a broad national perspective about the current status of victims' rights and services. It should be personalized to reflect local issues and concerns, as well as to educate the public about victims' rights and services available in the community in which the speech is delivered. Potential audiences for NCVRW speeches include: civic organizations; allied professional groups; schools, colleges and universities (classes, general assemblies, and student/faculty organizations); criminal and juvenile justice and victims' rights conferences; and religious institutions.

For more information about federally-funded victim service programs, you may wish to visit the Office for Victims of Crime homepage on the Internet at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/>.

NOTABLE QUOTABLES

This Resource Guide contains a variety of quotations that address the NCVRW theme and other salient issues relevant to victims' rights and victim justice. The "notable quotations" can be utilized in speeches, brochures, and all public outreach publications and activities sponsored during NCVRW and throughout the year.

SAMPLE SERMON

Supporters from the faith community for NCVRW can greatly enhance public outreach efforts. Many faith leaders are willing to incorporate messages relevant to victims' rights and services in order to commemorate NCVRW. Victim service providers should contact religious leaders at least six weeks prior to NCVRW to determine if they are willing to address crime victims' rights and needs in their sermons on Sunday, April 22, 2001.

APRIL 22-28, 2001

**NATIONAL
CRIME
VICTIMS'
RIGHTS
WEEK**

REACH FOR THE STARS

Sample Speech

It's National Crime Victims' Rights Week, a time for people across America—in communities large and small, urban and rural—to honor those who have been hurt by crime, and to celebrate the many successes of the victims' rights discipline in the United States. It is, indeed, a time for optimism:

- Between 1998 and 1999, violent crime rates declined ten percent (the lowest level ever recorded in the history of the National Crime Victimization Survey).
- During this same period, property crimes experienced a nine percent decline, continuing a 20-year decline.
- And in 1999, the Uniform Crime Index fell for the eighth straight year in a row, resulting in the lowest level since 1979.

It is a time for optimism built upon a solid record of accomplishment for victims of crime and those who serve them. As we reflect on the theme of this year's commemoration—"Victims' Rights: Reach for the Stars"—we reflect, too, on the progress that has been made in the past thirty years. Helen Keller once said, "No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit." Our field has, for years, consisted of eternal optimists—activists who wouldn't take "no" for an answer when victims' rights and dignity were at stake; who believed that victim safety, information, and involvement could provide a strong foundation for our pursuit of justice and offender accountability; who thought, as homicide victim Stephanie Roper said, "One person can make a difference, and every one should try."

It was not too far in the distant past when "victims' rights" were considered by many to be an oxymoron. A quarter century ago, most courtroom doors were shut to victims, their voices unheard, their pleas for information unanswered. There were no victim assistance programs in the juvenile justice system, and community-based victim assistance groups struggled to keep their doors open, operating off of kitchen tables on shoestring budgets. Domestic violence was considered merely a "family matter." Rape victims were often blamed for the violence they endured. Crimes against vulnerable populations—children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities—were seldom discussed. And drunk driving was not even considered to be a crime. What the pioneers of our field did was put a face on individual victims, encourage their voices to be heard, and give reality to the crimes they endured.

The year 2001 marks a special anniversary—25 years since the first victim impact statement was heard in Fresno County, California. In reflecting on the impetus of this core victims’ right, then-Chief Probation Officer James Rowland observed that “victims of crime received no services, were isolated from the justice system, and were seldom provided with any information unless they were needed as a witness. I also learned that except for law enforcement officers, criminal justice practitioners—including judges—seldom had an opportunity to learn about the short- or long-term impact of crime on victims and their families.” Rowland credits the emergence of victim impact statements to a collaborative effort involving not only his agency, but a judge, public defender, and faith community representative—an important partnership that has resulted in “the voice of the victim” being heard in criminal and juvenile courts, by paroling authorities, and by offenders through the use of victim impact panels and victim awareness classes.

In reaching for the stars of safety and justice, crime victims and their advocates have helped *not only* individuals touched by crime, but *entire communities* as a whole. We have provided impetus for greater focus on early interventions and crime prevention that result in fewer victimizations. We have shed light on the considerable needs of victims of juvenile offenders in a system that traditionally excluded them. We have begun to convince communities that they have a critical stake and important role in justice—that their involvement as volunteers for victims, as mentors for at-risk youth and juvenile offenders, and as members of neighborhood safety initiatives can contribute to the safety and well-being of their homes and neighborhoods.

Yes, crime is down, but for the seven-and-a-half million violent crime victims and 21 million property crime victims last year, these optimistic statistics don’t mean much. It is *their* many needs and rights that we must recommit our individual and collective energies to address. It is *their* faces we must, ourselves, face with empathy and understanding. It is *their* voices we must amplify with our own, seeking justice for them, and comprehensive, supportive services to meet their many needs.

Here in [*community/state*], we continue our efforts to reach for the stars of safety and justice for victims and all community members. [*Here, describe innovative victim assistance programs, collaborative community initiatives, or new victims’ rights laws that are relevant to your specific audience*].

The Spanish poet Jose Marti once said, “People are like the stars; some generate their own light, while others reflect the brilliance they receive.” Not a day goes by in [*community*] without that “light” being generated: by the police officer who responds sensitively to a battered woman; by prosecutors who continually object to tactics that “blame the victim;” by the judge who ensures that the victim’s voice is heard before sentencing decisions are made; by probation officers who consider victims to be their “clients” and for whom “offender accountability” is not simply

rhetoric, but reality. This bright light is generated also by victim advocates who dedicate their lives to helping those who are hurt by crime, who themselves endure many sacrifices in order to better serve victims; and by community members and volunteers who make justice and safety their business. The “brilliance” Marti describes is, indeed, reflected in the lives of crime victims, for whom a helping hand can lead to healing of the mind, body, and spirit.

This week, we celebrate our accomplishments, ever mindful of the other fifty-one weeks of the year during which our commitment and resolve remain vital to victims’ rights and services. So as we reach for the stars of safety and justice for all, let us be mindful of the need, as James Rowland once said, to not rest on our laurels “until victims’ rights are *not just celebrated annually, but practiced daily.*”

Notable Quotables

“Victims’ Rights: Reach for the Stars” Theme Quotations

Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars. *Les Brown*

It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves. *William Shakespeare*

No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit. *Helen Keller*

I always have to dream up there against the stars. If I don’t dream I will make it, I won’t even get close. *Henry J. Kaiser*

People are like the stars; some generate their own light, while others reflect the brilliance they receive. *Jose Marti*

Some things are meant to happen, some things are bound to be.

Love has a way of making doubting hearts believe.

Sometimes in spite of difference, sometimes against all odds,

Some things are meant to happen, it’s in the stars. *Amie Comeaux*

We need to learn to set our course by the stars, not by the lights of every passing ship.
Omar Bradley

When you reach for the stars, you may not quite get one, but you won’t come up with a handful of mud either. *Leo Burnett*

Psychologically, “having it all” is not a valid concept. The marvelous thing about human beings is that we are perpetually reaching for the stars. The more we have, the more we want. And for this reason, we never have it all. *Joyce Brothers*

Additional Inspirational Quotations

It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end.

Ursula K. LeGuin

If you find it in your heart to care for somebody else, you will have succeeded. *Maya Angelou*

It is the constant and determined effort that breaks down resistance, sweeps away all obstacles.

Claude M. Bristol

Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do. *Johann von Goethe*

He who does not have the courage to speak up for his rights cannot earn the respect of others.

Rene G. Torres

Adversity is the first path to truth. *George Gordon Byron*

A will finds a way. *Orison Swett Marden*

I learned that it is the weak who are cruel, and that gentleness is to be expected only from the strong. *Leo Rosten*

You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try. *Beverly Sills*

The great end of life is not knowledge, but action. *T. H. Huxley*

Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

The more we do, the more we can do. *William Hazlitt*

Justice cannot be for one side alone, but must be for both. *Eleanor Roosevelt*

I have come to believe that the one thing people cannot bear is a sense of injustice. Poverty, cold, even hunger are more bearable than injustice. *Millicent Fenwick*

It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. *Robert F. Kennedy*

Sample Sermon

Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest. —Psalm 126: 5–6

Today marks the beginning of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, a week when we are asked to remember and honor innocent victims of crime and those who serve them in so many different capacities throughout our communities, states, and country.

Each one of us here today has most likely been touched in one way or another by crime. Some of us have had our own personal experiences; others of us know loved ones, friends, or neighbors who have suffered painful and sometimes tragic losses through no fault of their own. Every time we turn on the television set or pick up a newspaper, we are reminded of the destruction that human beings can wreak upon each other as we are confronted with news stories and statistics about child abuse, homicide, family violence, abuse of the elderly, financial crimes, drunk driving crashes, rape, and victimization of individuals with disabilities. And it often seems that the most vulnerable members of our communities—children, elderly individuals, people with mental and physical disabilities—are the ones that we are least able to protect.

The tragedies that unfold in peoples' lives as a result of crime victimization are excruciatingly painful, and it is very human to want to seek vengeance when a wrong has been committed. When we hear of such atrocities, or even worse, when we experience them ourselves within our own families, our own neighborhoods, our own communities and churches, we are filled with a sense of outrage and disbelief. We feel we must do something to right such a wrong, to somehow return the traumatized victims and their families to what life was like before this terrible incident occurred.

Psalm 126 reminds us that we are not alone in the suffering that is inflicted by the maltreatment and abuse of others. This can be difficult for victims of crime to remember as they confront the grim and forever altered aftermath of their lives after victimization. There is so much to despair and grieve in the broken relationships and connections that are torn asunder by crime. There are some relationships that cannot be repaired, losses that irrevocably change lives, and murdered victims who will never return to us in this life.

Perhaps one of the most important things we can do is be the messengers to victims and their loved ones that they are, indeed, not alone. That they are promised a new day when their tears shall become shouts of joy. This does not mean that we should encourage crime victims to forget

their pain; however, in simply being with our brothers and sisters who are suffering from victimization and in acknowledging the unspeakable tragedies they are enduring, we can offer them a glimmer of hope that is promised beyond this suffering. We can help them put one foot in front of the other, with just the tiniest of steps at first, in slowly making their way out of paralyzing despair and hopelessness and into the first glimmer of life after victimization.

The theme for this year's National Crime Victims' Rights Week is *Victims' Rights: Reach for the Stars*. Reaching for the stars is a fitting comparison to what we ask crime victims to do when recovering from the trauma of victimization. Believing that they can recover, believing that God is there for them throughout their suffering may at first seem as inconceivable as believing they might reach out and touch the stars. Although it is difficult for crime victims to really "recover" from crime in terms of returning to the state of their lives prior to victimization, we can assist them in the very long process of adjustment and acceptance to whatever changes in their lives the victimization has wrought. For many crime victims, this long process is a "dark night of the soul" and filled with despair, anger, and hopelessness at the injustice of random and unexplained violence and violation.

Even though it is extremely difficult to be with people who are experiencing such tragedy, this is exactly where we can be most helpful—in physically being present with victims and reminding them, when the time is right, that God is present in their lives and will assist them in the long journey ahead. We can remind them, again when they are ready to hear, that some day their tears will be harvested with joy and they will return from the harvest singing. We can't explain to them why terrible injustices can occur, any more than we can explain why horrible things happen every day throughout the world. We can only help them in every way we can to do what they need to do to proceed on their journey, and remain steadfast in our faith that God is there guiding us all along the way.

One of the hardest things in life to do is to be present with another individual who is in intolerable pain—physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual. Everything in us cries out to make it better, to do something to take away the pain. But sometimes all we are asked to do is to sit still and listen and simply be there for someone. And again, when the time is right and in many different ways, we can be the voice that reminds one of our brothers or sisters that God is still there, like the everpresent stars in the heavens. In reaching out to our friends and neighbors in need, we are a physical reminder of God's presence, and maybe we can be the one person who is able to bring someone back from the brink of hopelessness and despair and encourage them to make that first tiny effort at "reaching for the stars," at reaching out for new life and new meaning in the midst of tragedy, at reaching out and reclaiming their own lives in a journey of faith.