



FAITH AND CITIZENSHIP
A Guide to Effective Advocacy
EPISCOPAL CHURCH, USA

Episcopalians are represented on Capitol Hill by a group of professional advocates in the Office of Government Relations. While they represent the Church's official public policy positions adopted by General Convention and Executive Council, all Episcopalians share a baptismal responsibility to *strive for justice and peace*. Civic participation is a tool that we can all use in this important ministry.

Faith and Citizenship outlines the many ways in which your voice can be heard by legislators and policy makers in Washington and gives helpful hints for state and local advocacy.

- **Join the EPPN**
The Episcopal Public Policy Network is a grassroots organization of more than 12,000 Episcopalians across the United States who contact Congress and the administration to advocate for the Church's social policies. When legislation or Administration action is pending, alerts are sent out with analyses of the issue, the Church's position, and easy ways for members to take action. Membership in the EPPN is free of charge.
- **Do your Homework**
Effective advocacy begins with good research. EPPN alerts, libraries, news services, and other advocacy organizations provide a wealth of information.
- **Write your Members of Congress**
Elected officials want to know what you think and feel. A smart, well-written letter is one of the most common and successful ways to convey your message. There are different ways to deliver your letter depending on the urgency of the message: fax, email, postal mail.
- **Call your Members of Congress**
Phone calls are fast and easy. You can ensure that your voice will be heard if you are well prepared and know what to expect.
- **Visit your Members of Congress**
All Senators and Representatives have an office in Washington, D.C. and one or more offices in their state/district. Meetings with legislators and their aides, either in DC or at home, convey your message directly to policymakers.
- **Raise Awareness in your Community**
Amplify your message by joining with other Episcopalians and religious or community groups to take action and bring attention to your issue.
- **Use the Media**
People who relate effectively with news outlets have powerful allies in their advocacy efforts. Find out how to get your issue or story covered.
- **Vote**
Everyone's vote is significant, and every opportunity to vote at the federal, state, or local level is important. Help persuade others to vote as well. Volunteer as a poll monitor or election judge to ensure that every vote does count.

The Office of Government Relations
is available to help all Episcopalians with their public advocacy.

110 Maryland Avenue NE, Suite 309
Washington, D.C. 20002
(800) 228-0515
(202) 547-4457 – FAX
www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

Advocates raise awareness about issues and rally support or opposition for particular initiatives. In either case, research is critical. Complement personal opinions and anecdotes with facts and data. Always be ready to answer questions about your issue and its impact on people like you and others in your community. The best advocates also know what their elected leaders have said and done about similar topics in the past.

Topic Research

- The EPPN has a variety of resources available on many different topics.
- Familiarize yourself with the substance of bills that have been introduced in Congress.
- Study media coverage about your issue including the leaders that have shown interest or been quoted.
- Look for reputable agencies or advocacy groups that support your position; ask them what information is available.
- Official agencies, committees, and national think tanks may have already published research on your issue. Read relevant articles, call or visit their research centers, and read the studies that they reference.

Research Your Member's Position

- Most elected officials have Internet web sites that contain their public statements, press releases, and summaries of the actions they have taken.
- Check local newspapers and magazines for recent articles, quotes, and opportunities to meet officials in town-hall style meetings.
- When “roll call” votes are taken in the House or Senate, each member’s vote is recorded individually and can be found online:

House
clerk.house.gov/legisAct/votes.html
Senate
www.senate.gov (choose *Legislation & Records*)

The Internet has much of the policy information you will need as well as the official positions of the Episcopal Church and other religious and nonprofit organizations. Strengthen your argument by finding out what others have said about the issue. Always be sure to consider the source of Internet information before using it.

Episcopal Church Internet Resources

Episcopal Public Policy Network:
www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn

Episcopal News Service:
www.episcopalchurch.org/ens

Episcopal Archives (Official Resolutions):
www.episcopalarchives.org

Government Internet Resources

House of Representatives: www.house.gov

U.S. Senate: www.senate.gov

The White House: www.whitehouse.gov

Federal Agency Links: www.firstgov.gov

*The Congressional Record and the text of every bill are available online
Library of Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov>*

WRITING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Letters, faxes, and E-mails make a difference. Legislative aides read all correspondence and regularly brief your representatives on what they have read. Your letter will educate the aide who reads it and give information about how you and your neighbors want to be represented and what your views are on important issues. Style and timing are the keys to effective letter writing.

Types of Letters and Timing

- *Raising Issues*: If you want to raise a new issue, advocate early in the legislative session when most bills are being written.
- *Regarding Bills*: If you want to support or oppose a specific bill, send your letter so that it arrives about a week before a vote and be sure to include the bill number.
- *Sign-ons*: Many organizations will give you a form letter to sign and send to your representatives. This is somewhat effective, but it is better to write a personal version.

How to Send your Letter

- *Postal Mail*: New security measures delay mail delivery to government offices. This is the most personal way to send letters, but delivery may take several weeks.
- *Fax*: Letters sent by fax are received immediately and in paper form; they receive the same attention as letters sent by mail.
- *E-mail*: Increasingly, legislative and executive offices record the E-mails that they receive, making it an effective advocacy tool. However, many legislative E-mail boxes reject messages from outside their constituencies; always provide your home mailing address in an E-mail.

Tips for Letter Writing (the “Be” attitudes)

- *Be Brief*: Long letters will not be read completely. Single page letters are best.
- *Be Organized*: Clearly state your issue, your rationale, and what action you desire.
- *Be Thankful*: Legislators mostly hear from disappointed constituents. Letters that include thanks will receive more attention.
- *Be Faithful*: Identifying yourself as an Episcopalian amplifies the voices of many faithful people around the country.
- *Be Yourself*: Personal opinions and brief anecdotes give insight into the constituency.
- *Be Polite*: Hostile and demanding letters receive little attention. Be firm, but polite.

What to Expect

- Most offices reply to all letters, but due to high volume some may use form responses. If you feel that your message was not heard, send another letter, call, or make an appointment with the legislator to further discuss the issue.
- Legislators have to balance the needs of their many constituents as well as their own opinions when making tough legislative decisions. If your representative does not do what you ask, it does not mean that you were an ineffective advocate. Don't give up, keep writing and calling!

*Information on where to send, fax, and E-mail your letters, is available in the
“Contacting the Federal Government”
section of this guidebook*

CALLING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Most officials have staff aides to field telephone calls from constituents. Do not expect to speak directly with your representative or senior members of the staff. Before you make a call, write out your points clearly and concisely so that they can be easily recorded by staff. Aides log all phone messages and pass along their meaning. Leave a phone message and ask for a written reply if you would like one. Consider sending a brief letter to follow-up on the message that you left.

CONTACTING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Postal Mail to Congress

- *To Senators:*
The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
- *Representatives:*
The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Calling and Faxing Congress

The Capitol Switchboard
(800) 270-0309

This toll-free number connects Episcopalians with the Washington offices of their Senators and Representatives. Most offices will give their fax number to anyone who calls and asks for it.

Sending E-mails to Congress

Members of the House and Senate have varied E-mail systems and policies. Link to their individual Internet web sites from the following sites to find more information about E-mail:

- *Senate:* www.senate.gov
- *House:* www.house.gov

Contacting the President

- *Postal Mail:*
The Honorable _____
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500
- *Telephone:* (202) 456-1111
- *Fax:* (202) 456-2461
- *E-mail:* president@whitehouse.gov
- *Internet web site:* www.whitehouse.gov

Contacting Federal Departments

Federal departments have their own buildings and mail processing systems. See the following Internet web site for contact information:

www.firstgov.gov

Requesting Copies of Specific Documents

- *Senate:*
Senate Document Room, SH-B 04
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 224-7860 / (202) 228-2815 [fax]
- *House:*
House Document Room, B-18 Annex 2
Washington, D.C. 20515
(202) 224-7860 / (202) 228-2815 [fax]

VISITING YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Personally visiting your legislators is one of the most effective forms of advocacy. Meetings let you show personal interest in an issue, answer questions directly, personalize your presentation, and establish an ongoing relationship with the member and staff. Members of Congress have frequent “district work periods” which provide opportunities for constituent meetings.

Scheduling an Appointment ***(In DC or At Home)***

- *Fax a Request:* Prepare a professional letter that briefly explains who you are, what you want to discuss, and provides a range of meeting times. Write “ATTN: Scheduler” on the top and fax it to the official’s office in Washington, D.C.
- *Confirm in Writing:* Once your appointment is arranged, send a brief confirmation letter.
- *Confirm by Phone:* One week prior to your meeting, call the office where you will be meeting to reconfirm your appointment.
- *Be Punctual:* Arrive at your meeting about fifteen minutes early.

Types of Meetings

- *Local Office Meetings:* It is easier to meet personally with a legislator in a state or district office. This will be a less formal setting, but is just as effective.
- *Staff Level Meetings:* Often Washington, D.C. appointments are not with officials, but with their aides. Do not be disappointed! Staff aides inform and advise officials on most issues.
- *Public Discussions:* Town hall meetings and discussions allow you to show that others support your views and get your message to officials as they form their opinions. Attending group events is a statement in itself.
- *Talk Radio:* Often members of Congress are guests on local radio shows during which you can call and comment or ask questions of the member.

Preparing for a Visit

- *Know your Stuff:* You may be asked questions about your issue, so be prepared to answer. If you do not know the answer to a question, say that you will find out and get back to them, do not guess or assume. Be sure to follow-up on unanswered questions.
- *Streamline your Presentation:* Prepare a five minute presentation as well as a ninety second version to use if your meeting is cut short. Practice until you can deliver both with confidence
- *Bring Literature:* Have a brief brochure, leaflet, or memo summarizing your points that you can leave after the meeting.

Tricks of the Trade

- *Follow-up:* After your meeting, send a personal thank you note to the person you met. This will accent the points you made and help them remember you positively.
- *Professionalism:* If you take the meeting seriously, you will be taken seriously. Dress appropriately and be aware of your body language.
- *Focus:* Meetings sometimes begin with small talk, but you will only have a few minutes, so be sure to stay on task.
- *Stay Positive:* Hostile advocates are ignored. Keep the conversation positive, point out disagreements, but do not be argumentative or impolite.

RAISING AWARENESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The adage that “All politics is local,” is very true. An important part of any advocacy campaign, local or national, is raising awareness of the issue locally and building support. This can be done creatively in a number of different ways.

Town Hall Meetings – Or other similar local gatherings are great places to make your voice heard. Gather a group of people who support your cause and attend together to visibly demonstrate support for your position.

Host a Forum – This is something that you can do within the context of your church. Host an issue based forum, rector’s conversation hour, or adult Sunday school class. This is a great way to educate people in your parish about an issue and, if well publicized, has the potential to draw others from outside your church to the discussion becoming a form of evangelism through advocacy.

Coalitions – Many hands make light work. Gather others who are interested in your issue to join forces. Finding unusual partners, like x and y working together on z issue, not only helps lighten the load of work, but also often helps draw additional media interest and credibility to your coalition.

Engage the Media – Don’t be afraid – using the media is an important way to spread your message outside your immediate sphere of supporters. You can start small, articles in your church newsletter and diocesan newspaper, then expand to local print, radio, and TV as your coalition and your comfort with the press grows.

Be Persistent . . .

- Organizing takes time. Be persistent and consistent in your message to gain support and credibility in the long run.
- When a public official is on a radio or TV call-in show, call in and make them aware of your issue. Ask informed questions. Be sure to publicly thank people who have helped your cause as well as questioning those who have not. Use your coalition of supporters to stack the call-in with as many people on your side as possible.

Be Creative . . .

- Use your connections. Often there are a broad spectrum of talents and connections represented in your church – for example web skills, organizing skills, and media connections. Recruit those people to help you raise awareness of your issue
- Look for unusual allies that will show broad based support for your issues – for example, hunters and environmentalists working together to save wetlands.
- Think outside the box – for example, if your youth group is doing a Halloween trick-or-treat canned food drive, have them drop off reminders about Election Day at the houses they visit. It’s non-partisan. It raises awareness. It is important.

USING THE MEDIA

Media attention educates members of your community and will help you organize them to take action. In advocacy, there is strength in numbers and the voice of a community organization is louder than the voices of its individual members. There are several ways to get media coverage for your issue, using several of them simultaneously will increase your visibility. Appeal to various media organizations; large outlets have a broad reach, but small outlets are more likely to cover your issue. The media will be more interested when there is a local aspect to your story.

Press Releases

- Let reporters know about events that you have planned. Use a clear and descriptive headline. Give ample lead time.
- Use bullet points to say who will be doing what, where and when they will be doing it, and why it is interesting and important.
- Include a one-paragraph explanation of the event and a contact person who can provide more information.
- Ask friends to read your press release before faxing it to media outlets; make sure it is thorough and clear, but as brief as possible.

Letters to the Editor

- Use the same techniques as if you were writing to a government official: be clear and persuasive; offer insight and anecdotes; use reliable data to support your claims.
- Brevity is a virtue. Short letters are more likely to be printed and less likely to be significantly changed in the editing process.
- Send your letter to the editorial page editor and always include your name, address, and phone numbers at home and work.
- Keep trying if your letter is not accepted. Newspapers usually don't have enough room to print all the good letters that they receive.

Opinion Editorials (Op-Eds)

- Op-Eds can be longer than Letters to the Editor, but should be less than 750 words.
- Use essay format for your piece and include plenty of evidence to support your case.
- Preference is usually given to pieces received from community leaders; look for a recognized and respected co-author.
- Polish your piece to ensure that the language and arguments are flawless, then send it to an editorial page editor with a cover letter explaining its importance.

Radio and Television Call-in Shows

- Know what you will say in advance, be ready for questions, and have supporting materials nearby in case you need them.
- Unless you were invited to speak, do not plan on having more than 30 seconds.
- Call early in a program; you will probably be put on hold for a while.
- Your call may be screened out because of your political views. Do not give more than an overview of your position to screeners.
- Ask how you can become an invited guest on a local radio or television program.

VOTING

One of the most important ways to advocate for your positions is to vote for people who support them, or vote against those who do not. Since many people do not turn out to vote, bringing a large contingent of like-minded people to the polls is a formidable tool for creating change.

Register Yourself

- Most states require voters to register several weeks prior to an election – Know your registration deadline.
- If you have recently moved, your voter registration may not transfer automatically.
- Contact your county, city, or town clerk's office to ensure that you are registered.

Register Others

- Get voter registration forms for your friends and family members who are eligible.
- Host a public registration drive in your community to make sure everyone is exercising their right to vote.
- Remember voter registration is non-partisan and those registered are not obligated to you or any party.

Voting Absentee

- If you are going to be away from home on Election Day, you can vote early or by mail if you request an absentee ballot.
- Some states require special forms to be completed, contact your town or county clerk's office for more details.
- Absentee ballot request and receipt deadlines differ by state. Be sure to know the law in your state so that your ballot is counted.

Volunteer to Help

- Most election officials are volunteers, contact your town or county clerk's office to find out about how you can be a part of the process.

Be a Poll Monitor or Poll Worker

- Poll monitors are unofficial, but critical components of fair elections.
- Receive special training in election laws and procedures, and go to polling places on Election Day to ensure that the proceedings are being conducted fairly and legally.
- Poll workers have an official role on Election Day ensuring that election proceedings are fair and legal
- More information on being a poll worker is available online from *The Election Assistance Commission*, a non-partisan government agency supporting the Helping America Vote Act:

<http://www.eac.gov>

*The Federal Voter Registration form
is available online:
<http://www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm>*