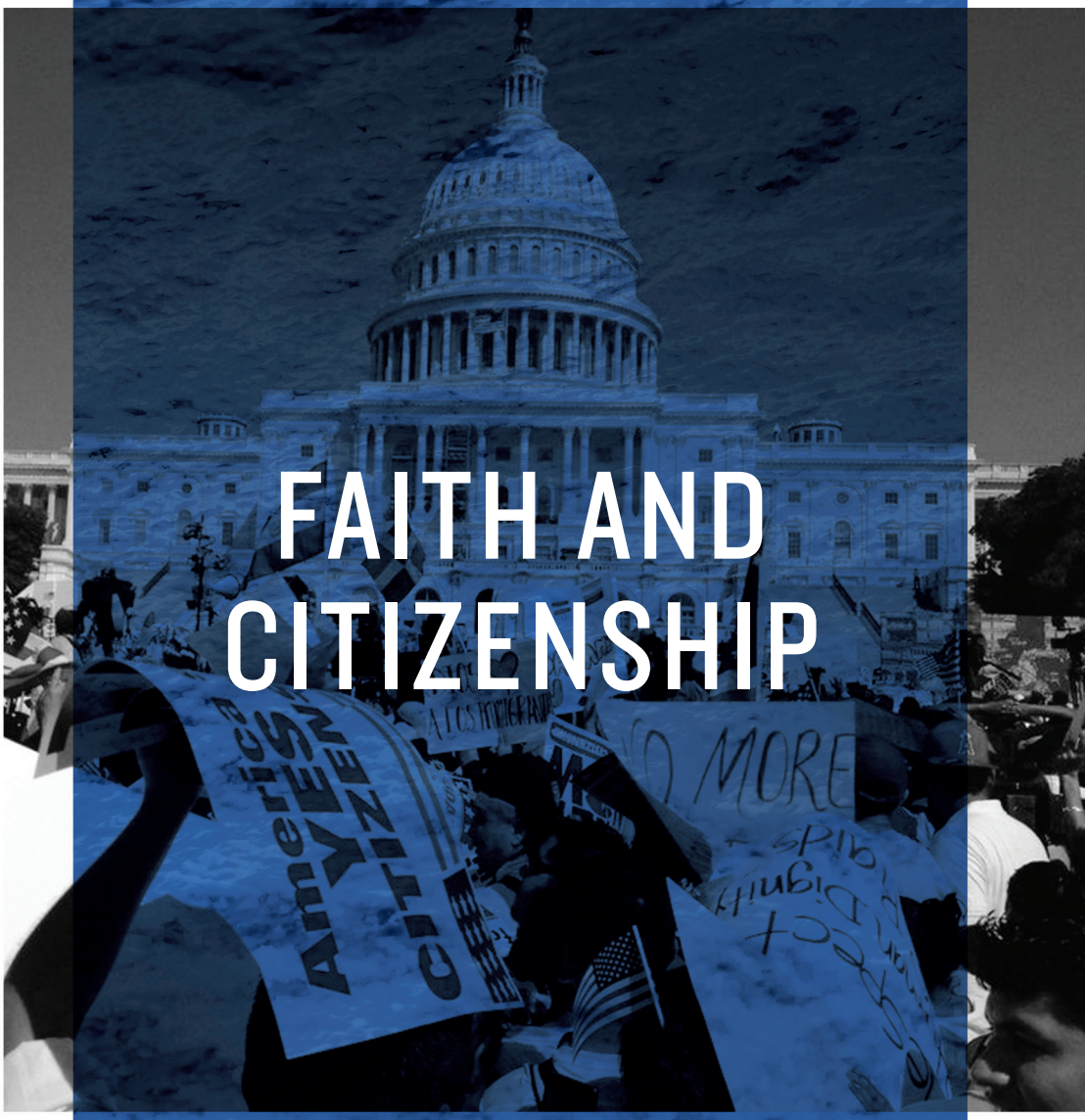


FAITH AND CITIZENSHIP

A GUIDE *to* EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY *for* EPISCOPALIANS

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH

EPISCOPALIANS

are represented on Capitol Hill by a group of professional advocates in the Office of Government Relations.

The Office of Government Relations brings the Church's official public policy positions adopted by General Convention and Executive Council to Congress and the administration and works to equip and engage all Episcopalians in their 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 policymakers and gives helpful hints for state and federal advocacy.

Join the EPPN

The Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN) is a grassroots organization of 25,000 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.

Do your homework

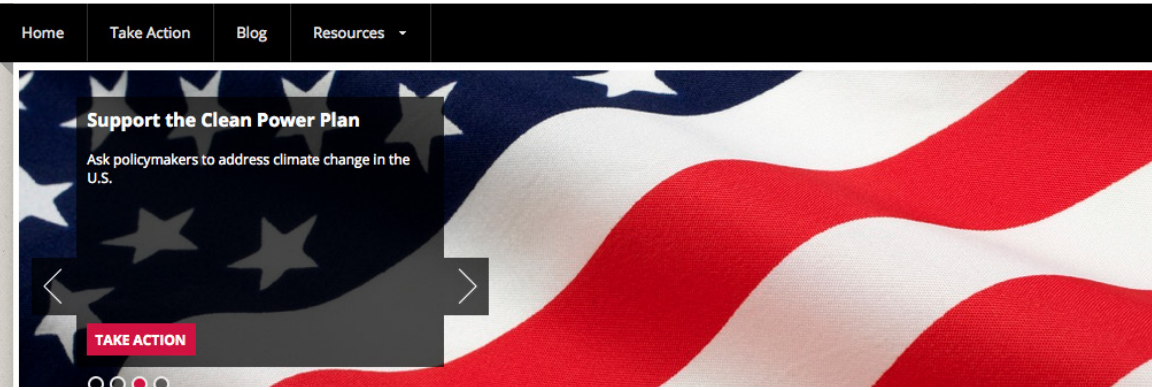
Effective advocacy begins with good research. EPPN alerts, libraries, news services, and other advocacy organizations provide a wealth of information.

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.

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, DC 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. Social media is also a powerful way to make your voice heard.

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 an election judge to ensure that every vote counts.

JOIN THE EPISCOPAL PUBLIC POLICY NETWORK

In our baptismal covenant, we promise to "seek and serve Christ is all persons" and to "strive for justice and peace." The Bible calls us to "speak up for those who cannot" and "defend the right of the poor and needy" (Prov. 31:8-9). As seekers of justice, we answer this call through public policy advocacy. It takes us beyond the traditional avenues of Christian charity to the work of justice – changing the systems that necessitate charity.

WHY JOIN THE EPPN

- Members of Congress want to hear from you – their constituents. That is why the EPPN is such an important part of the Church's work for justice.
- Learn more about current issues and social justice issues, and get detailed information on policy that affects the issues you care about.
- The more voices we have the more clearly our message will be heard on Capitol Hill.

Join here

http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/

The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations
The Episcopal Public Policy Network
110 Maryland Ave. NE
Suite 309
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 547-7300

Website
http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org

Facebook
https://www.facebook.com/TheEPPN

Twitter @TheEPPN

Instagram @theeppn

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 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 websites 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.

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 ONLINE RESOURCES

Episcopal Public Policy Network
http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/

Episcopal News Service
http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/

Episcopal Archives
http://www.episcopalarchives.org/

GOVERNMENT ONLINE RESOURCES

House of Representatives
http://www.house.gov/

U.S. Senate
http://www.senate.gov/

The White House
http://www.whitehouse.gov/

Federal agency links
http://www.usa.gov/

Sunlight Foundation
http://sunlightfoundation.com

WRITING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Letters and emails make a difference. Legislative aides read all correspondence and regularly brief representatives on what they have read. Your correspondence will educate the aides who read it and inform them 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 LETTER AND TIMING

- *Raising issues* If you want to raise a new issue, then 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 you letter so that it arrives about a week before a vote and be sure to include the bill number.

HOW TO SEND YOUR LETTER

- *Through the EPPN* As a member of EPPN, you will receive sample letters on specific issues that you can send to your member of congress through email.
- *Email* Members of the House and Senate have varied email systems and policies. Link to their individual websites to learn how to contact them via email.

- *Postal mail* Security measures delay mail delivery to government offices. This is the most personal way to send letters, but keep in mind that delivery may take several weeks.

TIPS FOR LETTER WRITING

- *Be brief* Long letters will not be read completely. Single page letters are best.
- *Be organized* Clearly state the issue, your rationale, and the 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, then 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 with 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.

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 with senior staff members. 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 content. 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, DC 20510
- *To Representatives*
  The Honorable _____
  U.S. House of Representatives
  Washington, DC 20515

CALLING CONGRESS

- *The Capitol switchboard*
  This toll-free number connects Episcopalians with the Washington offices of their senators and representatives:
  (800) 270-0309

CONTACTING THE PRESIDENT

- *Postal mail*
  The Honorable _____
  The White House
  1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
  Washington, DC 20500
- *Telephone* (202) 426-1111

IN THIS TEMPLE
AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE
FOR WHOM HE SAVED THE UNION
THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
IS ENSHRINED FOREVER

QUIET
RESPECT
PLEASE

VISIT YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Personally visiting your legislators is one of the most effective forms of advocacy. Meetings let you show personal interest in issues, answer questions directly, personalize your presentation, and establish an ongoing relationship with Congress members and staff. Legislators have frequent "district work periods" that provide opportunities for constituent meetings. It's important to remember that you can meet with members of Congress in DC or in their in-district office.

SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT (IN DC OR AT HOME)

- *Email a request* Prepare a professional letter that briefly explains who you are and what you want to discuss and that provides a range of meeting times. Email this to the member's scheduler in Washington, DC.
- *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 15 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 just as effective.
- *Staff-level meetings* Often, Washington, DC appointments are not with officials but rather 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.

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 90-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 people you met. This will accent the points you made and help them remember you positively.
- *Professionalism* If you take the meeting seriously, then 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.
- *Positivity* Hostile advocates are ignored. Keep the conversation positive and 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

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, a rector's conversation hour, or an adult Sunday school class. This is a great way to educate people in your parish about an issue. If well publicized, it 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 to work together on issues not only helps lighten the workload but also often helps draw additional media interest and credibility to your coalition.

ENGAGE THE MEDIA

Don't be afraid to use the media – it 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, and then expand to local print, radio, and TV as your coalition and your comfort with the press grows. Using social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook is a low-cost and effective way to bring attention and support to your group as well.

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 him or her aware of your issue. Ask informed questions. Be sure to publicly thank people who have helped your cause and question those who have not. Use your coalition of supporters to stack the call-in with as many people as possible.

Be creative

- Use your connections. Often there is 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 so that you 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 hosting a Halloween trick-or-treat canned food drive, have them drop off reminders about Election Day at the houses they visit. It's nonpartisan. It raises awareness. It's important.

USING THE MEDIA

Media attention helps you educate members of your community and 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, and using several of them simultaneously increases 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 sending it to media outlets. Make sure it is through and clear but as brief as possible.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- Be clear and persuasive, offer insight and anecdotes, and 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 number.
- Keep trying if your letter is not accepted. Newspapers usually don't have enough room to print all the good letters that they receive.

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 on hold for a while.

OPINION EDITORIALS (OP-EDS)

- Op-eds can be longer than letters to the editor, but they still should be less than 750 words.
- Use an 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 coauthor.
- Polish your piece to ensure that the language and arguments are flawless, and then send it to an editorial page editor with a cover letter explaining its importance.

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Online communication tools such a Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram are free to use and simple ways to showcase your cause.
- Create a page or handle for your organization. Be sure to keep it updated with fresh and relevant material.
- Check out organizations or groups similar to yours. Work with them on social media by using hashtags or tagging them in posts.
- Make it dynamic by uploading pictures and graphics.

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.
- Be aware that when you move, 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 to vote.
- Host a public registration drive in your community to make sure everyone is exercising the right to vote.
- Remember that voter registration is nonpartisan 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.
- The deadlines for absentee ballot requests and returns 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 they proceedings are being conducted fairly and legally.
- Poll workers have an official role on Election Day ensuring that election proceedings are fair and legal.

This toolkit was developed by
The Episcopal Church
Office of Government Relations.

Questions: eppn@episcopalchurch.org