

Campaigning with your local politician

Campaigning with your local politician is a great way to transform the systems and structures that keep people poor.

Decisions that your local politician makes can impact communities near and far. By building a relationship with them, you can help shape their decisions.

Why campaign with your local politician

Governments make decisions, pursue policies and pass laws all the time which impact on people and communities around the world. Local politicians are part of these decisions. What they decide can either negatively or positively impact our sisters and brothers living in poverty.

As Christians, we seek to follow Jesus' teaching to love our neighbours and put our faith into action by speaking up and standing with the world's poorest people. And as constituents, we have a unique relationship with our local politicians through which we can pursue justice.

That's because local politicians have a responsibility to members of their constituency. Part of their job is representing your interests and understanding what you want them to bring to government. You have the power to raise issues as a citizen, church or local community, and hold your politician to account – whether those are local issues or ones which impact people all over the world. The UK Government is a key power holder in the global sphere, making a relationship with your local politician all the more important.

Your local politician may also be a member of a devolved or national parliament or local government; or they may have a special

role in government such as a minister with responsibility for a global issue like climate change policy.

Building a relationship with your local politician can be a powerful way to make change happen. In fact, the Climate Change Act and UK legislation to tackle tax dodging were put in place partly because constituents championed the plight of the world's poorest and raised these issues with their local politicians.

How to campaign with your local politician

- Get to know them.
- Write to them.
- Meet with them.
- Pray with and for them.

'Meeting my MP has always been a positive experience. From my point of view, it's the church's duty to speak out for the oppressed and marginalised, and this is one way we can put our faith into action.'

Sean, campaigner in Sheffield

1 Get to know them

Build a relationship

Politicians are people – they have conversations and build relationships just like you and me. Because of their job, they're used to getting out in their constituency, attending events and meeting people. This means there are lots of great opportunities to interact with them and start to build up a relationship.

Ultimately, we want politicians to take action that will have a positive impact on the people we care about living in poverty around the world. Sending your politician letters and attending meetings are vital ways to interact with them – but it needn't be limited to these. If you can establish a relationship with them first, it will help when it comes to making political asks of them.



Constituents invite their MP to meet them at an event to discuss climate change.

'I went to parliament and talked to my MP about climate change as part of a Christian Aid event. I had a really good conversation with him about development issues. I was proud of myself for speaking to him. I had done my homework and it helped as he asked me a lot of questions and I was able to give answers.'

Siân, campaigner in Hampshire

So get to know them. By doing so, you'll be able to shape what they do and how you ask them to do it, and they'll be more receptive to your request. You'll also be able to demonstrate the things that you care about as a church community, and share the mutual importance of your roles within the community. If things do get tricky when you're campaigning, it will then be easier to approach them with compassion and understanding.

Ideas for building a relationship:

- Invite your local politician to special events you're organising, such as a carol concert, Easter service, Christian Aid Week service or Big Brekkie.
- Send your politician friendly correspondence at important times for them or your church such as Christmas, Easter and birthdays.
- If you have a church school, think about how they can link in with your local politician and celebrate the work they are doing.
- Consider how your church can also be a space for the community – perhaps by offering space for local meetings, hustings and events, or by linking community groups who already use your space with your local politician.
- Find out if your politician is holding any open meetings you can go along to and get to know them.

Find out more about them

Knowing details about your local politician's values, interests and views can be a really useful way to help build a relationship with them and think about how and when to approach them.

Tailoring your requests to them using this information can increase the likelihood of them saying 'yes'!

For example, say you've found that your politician hasn't supported action on climate change, but has been supportive of a local environmental project. Can you draw links between this and the wider environmental concern of climate change to connect with their interests?

Ideas for finding out more:

- Formal information, such as your local politician's speeches and additional responsibilities, will help you understand their

political persuasion and key areas of work. Search **theyworkforyou.com**, your politician's website, or speak to their staff. Your politician may also write a regular column in your local paper.

- Informal information, such as hobbies, interests and ideas, will help you understand your politician as a member of your community. Try looking at their social media accounts (eg, Twitter), biography page on their website, or talking to other community groups they work with.
- Information on your local area will also help you understand your local politician's choices. Are there any local characteristics which might impact on your local politician's interests or ability to support your campaign? For example, they might be reluctant to support a climate campaign if the oil and gas industry is the main employer in your area.



2 Write to them

Draft a letter

Writing to your local politician is one of the easiest ways to begin a relationship, introduce the topic you are campaigning on with Christian Aid, or ask them to get involved with a specific action.

Politicians receive many letters each week, so make sure your letter is engaging, concise and clear about what you would like them to do.

Top tips for writing your letter:

- Make your letter personal. Why you care as a constituent is important – especially when the issues we are talking about are global. Aim to link together your story, your local area and your campaign topic.

- Shape your campaign ask or invitation to fit your local politician's interests and personality. Think back to your research.
- Approach the relationship with your local politician in a spirit of partnership and mutual benefit. What can your local politician achieve by working with you?

Await a response

You should expect a response to your letter. Make sure you give your politician time to respond as they may receive many letters. If your request is complex, they may also need some time to put it into action. However, make sure you hold them to account.

When you receive a reply, you can use this to shape your next engagement.

If your local politician responds positively to your letter:

- Think about how you can continue to engage with your local politician – perhaps through a face-to-face meeting or inviting them to an event.
- If you invited them to a specific event, plan ways to make them feel welcome and identify opportunities for them to get involved on the day.
- Share your success with the local community and in local media – getting your politician's actions in the public eye is a great way to hold them to account for things they have said they will do.
- Think about how you can thank your local politician for taking action on your behalf.

If your local politician doesn't respond positively to your letter, reflect on what you have asked of them:

- Did you ask them something that doesn't interest them or is against their party line?
- Is there something else you can ask them which they might be more likely to take action on?

This might be passing on your letter to a crucial minister, or a face-to-face meeting to share the issue and its relevance in more detail.

- If you invited them to a specific event, was it the most appropriate? Is it during a very busy time of year or did you ask them well enough in advance?
- Can you tailor your ask even more closely to their interests? Are there any other local groups who might want to help you?

Encourage others

When you engage initially with your local politician, you may choose to write as an individual. This is useful for your local politician to get to know who you are. However, when you have a campaign ask, it may be appropriate to ask your whole church community to write to your politician to show them that this issue is important to many of their constituents. This demonstrates that you're not just a lone voice.

One way to do this is to hold a letter-writing session at your church. There are various ways to approach a letter-writing session, depending on what kind of engagement you need from your community. On the next page is a plan you can follow to think through how you might arrange a letter-writing session.



Scottish campaigner meets with her local politician to discuss global poverty and climate change.

Planning a letter-writing session

	Questions to think about	Options
When to hold the session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of space does your church have for letter writing? • How much time will you have? • Is it more important for lots of people to write the same letter, or for a few people to write detailed, personal letters? 	<p>During a church service: best for signing a pre-written letter.</p> <p>On a stall at a church event: make sure those involved can understand the issue quickly, clearly and simply.</p> <p>At a dedicated session or service: use to explain the issue in more depth.</p>
How to explain the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you explain what your letter will be about in one sentence? • Would it be better to speak to people about the issue or have information for them to read? • Will you have the opportunity to pray about the issue? 	<p>During a church service: make what you say inspiring and have more information available afterwards.</p> <p>On a stall at a church event: have a one minute 'pitch' for those who visit your stall – what the issue is, what action you are taking, and what to include in their letter.</p> <p>At a dedicated session: you will be able to go into depth about the issue in a dedicated session. Be creative with your ideas – could your group pray over or bless the letters once written?</p>
How to write your letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have all the resources you need – pens, paper and envelopes? • Will you have a template letter? • What can you provide for inspiration, and how will you help those struggling to know what to write? • Will you include guidance for letter length or style? 	<p>During a church service: use a template letter and include a copy with pens on every seat.</p> <p>On a stall at a church event: offer stickers or other resources to make letters interesting.</p> <p>At a dedicated session: ensure letters have the same core message.</p>
How to send your letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will you ask each person to send their own letters or will you collect letters and arrange delivery? • If participants send their own letters will you provide stamps? • Will you have the opportunity to pray for your local politician? • How can you share publicly that your church is taking action? Can you take a photo of people writing letters and put it on social media? 	<p>Arrange to collect the letters and deliver them by hand.</p> <p>You could set up a postbox for those who miss out.</p> <p>Include your local politician in prayers at your letter-writing session, and in the normal church service on the week you deliver your letters.</p>
How to follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you help people understand the importance of the action they have taken? • How will you share the response of your local politician? • What opportunities can you offer for your church community to get more involved? 	<p>Get creative with how you share your action with your church!</p> <p>When you think about your next invitation to action, reflect on how your church responded to letter writing and to the issue – was there anything that stood out?</p>

3

Meet with them

In addition to inviting your local politician to events and activities at your church, you can visit them to talk about your specific campaign at an arranged meeting or during their regular surgery.

Meeting your local politician will allow you to have more of an in-depth conversation, help build a stronger relationship, and encourage them to act. Your local politician should advertise when and where their surgery takes place on their website. If you want to set up a specific meeting, contact your politician's office to find a convenient time.

When you meet, you should expect:

- A meeting of about 20 minutes.
- To be asked for some background information on your campaign issue.
- To be asked your particular request or campaign ask.
- To have a conversation and answer their questions, as best as you can.

Take some time to prepare before you meet your local politician. Think about what you are asking them to do, and the best way to ask them

to do this. Take a look at our **Inviting others to campaign** resource to think about how to shape your request. Make sure you have any briefing papers or extra information to hand in case your politician asks questions. But don't worry if you don't have all the answers! It's fine to say that you're unsure but can find out more and follow up with them.

Will you meet your local politician by yourself or with a group? If you are planning a group meeting, think about how you will introduce yourselves, and what everyone will say.

Following up your meeting

- Send a thank you to your local politician and include any extra information they have requested.
- Remind them of anything they agreed to do.
- Keep the conversation going.
- Hold them to account! Make sure they do what you have asked them to, but give them reasonable time to do it.
- Let us know that you have met with your local politician and what you have achieved.

'Our MP has quite different views from some of the local constituents. Even so, we have tried to build a relationship with her, including inviting her to events and services at church.'

Rodney, campaigner in London

4

Pray with them

When campaigning gets tricky, praying for local politicians can help remind us that they too are beloved children of God, and help us approach issues with compassion and understanding.

Even when your local politician agrees with your campaign, prayer can give them the strength to stick to their convictions and reminds us of our connection in building the kingdom of God.

Ways to bring prayer into your campaign:

- Pray for the issue: those who are directly impacted, your involvement and your politician's involvement in it.
- Pray goodwill for your politician: for them to be successful in their endeavours and for the courage, wisdom and integrity they need to perform their duties as a local politician.
- Pray as a response to anger, disheartenment, or hostility towards those in power: when things are difficult in your campaigning it is natural to respond with sorrow, and the Bible encourages us to do so. Lamenting can be a powerful force for recognising positive aspects of a situation and a space to refocus our hearts on compassion.

Opportunities for prayer:

- Before meeting your local politician.
- Before writing a letter to your politician, and afterwards as a blessing to the written messages.
- At a prayer service about a particular issue.
- If appropriate, you may wish to invite your local politician to join in with prayer at a meeting, event, or service.
- In your everyday prayer life!

Suggestions for prayer:

- Name your local politician rather than praying for generic 'leaders'.
- Look at 1 Timothy 2:1-2.
- Use the simple prayer below.

Loving God,

We pray for (name your local politician).

Thank you for their willingness to serve our community, nation, and the world.

When they need to make difficult decisions,

let your wisdom guide them;

when they speak out for justice,

let your courage strengthen them;

when they feel overwhelmed,

let your presence comfort them.

May you bless (name your local politician) **in all they do**

so they in turn may be a blessing

and all may know fullness of life.

Amen.