



Diocese of Toronto  
Anglican Church of Canada

*Social Justice & Advocacy Board*

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## **Tips for Working with Politicians**

### **Building a Relationship with Your Elected Official**

Politicians are people, just like us. They have the same hopes, fears, dreams and failings as the rest of us. Naturally, politicians are going to tailor their words and their reactions to their audience. If they are on your side, they will be enthusiastic, welcoming, supportive, critical of politicians on the other side, and generous in their promises of assistance.

If they are not on your side, they will listen more than they speak, choose their words carefully and use phrases like “On the other hand”, and “What about...?” They may also tend to remember other urgent appointments they have fairly soon after you enter their office.

Don’t forget that politicians are also your neighbours and fellow citizens. They too are called to reflect God’s image. You are called to treat them humanly even if you strongly disagree or are utterly frustrated. Only use words in your letters and briefs that you would say to their face. Be polite but firm. Relax. Smile. Get comfortable. Mention mutual friends or acquaintances. Ease into your subject. Few people fail to respond to friendliness.

#### **Hints**

- Aim for two or three interactions per year.
- Organize a meeting or two.
- Send a few letters or place phone calls on issues of concern.
- Educate them. Don’t assume knowledge. Your elected official may be responsible for a wide variety of policies, and may not be aware of the issue that concerns you.
- Use their own words. Important statements or commitments in politicians’ statements, party platforms, or speeches can be used to remind them of their commitments and promises.
- Get to know their value framework, understand why they think and act as they do, and be able to speak with them on that level too.
- Follow what your elected official says on issues.
- Know the party’s position.
- Invite your elected official to a special event.
- Get to know your elected official’s assistants
- Get others to make similar contacts as you.

## **Writing Your Elected Official**

This is an important way of making your feelings known.

### **Helpful Hints**

- Be brief! Emphasize one or two major points and try to keep the letter to one page.
- Write in your own words. A form letter is not as effective as a personal letter.
- Keep a copy of your letter. When you get a response, you can compare it to your original letter to see if your questions are answered adequately and follow up accordingly.
- Consider faxing or emailing your letter. By doing so, you can make your concerns known immediately.
- Encourage others to write. Get a group of friends together for a letter-writing party in your home. You can discuss the issues together, help each other with writing and have a social time as well.
- You can find your elected official's contact information in the government section of the phone book or on the web. Note: a letter to your Member of Parliament in Ottawa requires no postage. Just send to: [your MP's name], MP, House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6.
- Make your letter work harder by sending copies to other politicians or by turning it into a letter to the editor.

### **What to Include**

- Identify yourself. Briefly indicate your connection to the issues.
- Include the basic concerns and issues you have.
- Ask your elected official to speak up in Parliament or at their council meeting or their party caucus meetings to ask the government to follow your suggestions.
- Ask for a response to your letter and a commitment to speak up on this issue.

## **Visiting Your Elected Official**

Helpful hints on meeting with your elected official.

### **Preparing for a Meeting**

- You can find your elected official's information in the government section of the phone book or on the Web.
- Call the local riding office and seek an appointment.
- Get informed on the issue of concern and prepare what you want to say and what questions you would like to ask.
- If you wish, meet your elected official as a delegation (no more than 3-4 people). The moral support and combined expertise/experience of a group can make for a very good meeting. Choose a group spokesperson who can direct the meeting.

### **At the Meeting**

- Relax!
- Focus your message on what you are asking of your elected official.
- Ask your elected official to speak up in Parliament or at their council meeting or their party caucus meetings to your issue.
- Give your elected official a chance to respond. Be polite and don't interrupt until s/he is finished. Only then respond with a counter argument or probing question.
- Insist on a straight answer. Does your elected official agree or disagree with you? What will s/he do to see that the issue is dealt with?
- Ask her/him to read the petitions (which you have brought) in the House of Commons, the Provincial Parliament, or the City Council session.
- Even if s/he disagrees with you or will not act, thank him or her for the time and opportunity to meet and leave politely.

### **Follow-up Directly After Your Meeting**

- Write a letter to the politician, expressing your thanks for their time and setting out your understanding of the commitments exchanged.
- Indicate that your letter is being circulated to other interested parties.
- If s/he indicated that they have not made up their mind, feel free to call them. Better yet, try and meet them in person again. It's harder to say no in person.

**Other Follow-up**

- Have the leaders of supporting organizations write follow-up letters, expressing disappointment with, or praise for the politician's position, whichever applies.
- Tell your media contacts about your meeting.