



FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

Contacting Your Elected Officials

In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops urge all Catholics to make their voices heard in the public square. Part of making our voices heard is through direct communication to our elected officials, and asking them to stand with people who are vulnerable, poor, or who face injustice. You can communicate with your elected officials by writing (letters or emails), making phone calls, and visiting them in person. Visit house.gov and senate.gov to find your elected officials and then follow the tips below.

Writing

A **thoughtful, personal** letter that provides a clear and forceful argument can be a powerful form of communication with your elected officials. Follow these tips when writing letters:

- Include a **clear title** that summarizes the exact action you are requesting. For example: “Protect Victims of Trafficking: Support S. 1301!”
- In the first paragraph, **state your request** and **summarize the reasons** in 2-3 sentences.
- In the second and third paragraphs:
 - **Provide support** for your arguments.
 - State **why you personally care** about this issue. For example, are you involved in your parish’s pro-life or anti-poverty ministries?
- Conclude your letter by **re-stating** what you want your elected officials to do and **thanking** them for their time.

Mailed letters may take several weeks to arrive to Congress, so you may consider using e-mail when the issue is time sensitive. With e-mails, however, it is suggested that you personalize your communication in a similar manner as a personal letter. Most Congressional web sites include

“Contact Us” forms which you can also use in time sensitive situations.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops makes it easy for Catholics to make their voices heard by providing a [web form with suggestions](#) that Catholics can send to their elected officials. Visit the “Issues and Action” section of www.usccb.org to take action and for more tips on letter-writing.

Contact your diocesan social action office, pro-life office, or State Catholic Conference for additional letter writing or online advocacy opportunities.

Making Phone Calls

Another important way to make your voice heard is to **call your elected officials**.

Normally the best time to telephone members of Congress or state legislators is when you want them to take immediate action—for example, when there is an upcoming vote and there isn't enough time for an e-mail or a visit. **Here are some tips on what to say on the phone.**

- Ask to **speak to the legislative aide** who handles your particular issue. Write down his/her name.
- **Identify yourself**, your zip code, and phone number so that the legislator can be sure you are a constituent and can get back to you.
- Discuss how this particular issue is connected to your community
- Mention the **number and/or name of the bill** (if applicable) and how you want your legislator to act.
- **Be concise**—don't expect to get into an in-depth discussion. Address the key issue with a few brief supporting points.
- At the end of the call, ask for a commitment to a course of action, and ask the legislative aid to **repeat your request** back to you.

Making a Visit

Taking the time to visit your elected officials **can send a powerful message** about what you care about as a constituent. Your legislator has offices in both your district/state and in D.C. Both are good places to visit your representative. Here are some tips for your visit:

Before the Visit

- **Research** your legislator's voting records, committee assignments, and positions. You can access the legislation they have introduced and cosponsored at the Library of Congress' legislative database, at [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov). You can also read the statements they have made in the Congressional Record at [congress.gov/congressional-record](https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record)
- Consider searching local media outlets and online for articles and news reports that mention their local initiatives or votes they have taken on issues.
- Visit your elected official's website for information about how to **schedule** your visit. The scheduler will likely want to know what issue(s) you want to talk about so you can meet with the appropriate staff member. If the senator or representative is unavailable, ask for the Legislative Director or the Legislative Assistant who focuses on your issue(s).
- Prepare **background information** about the issue(s) on which you are advocating. Plan to talk about no more than three issues per visit.

During the Visit

- First **introduce** yourself and your role in the community, then give an **overview** of what you want to discuss.
- Next, **present the issues**, discussing each one separately. Provide background information and human interest stories to give a face to the issues.
- If you are asked questions for which you do not know the answers, tell the member or aide that you will get back to him or her—and then do it.
- Conclude by asking the member or aide to **take some concrete action**: cosponsor specific legislation; talk to legislators on the

relevant committee(s); etc. Ask for his or her commitment to your specific request.

After the Visit

- Write a **thank you letter or email** in which you summarize the discussion.
- Finally, don't forget to **follow-up on any commitments** you made during the visit.



Contact your diocesan social action office or State Catholic Conference to see if a Catholic lobby day is being organized where you live!

Issues for Advocacy

In *Forming Consciences for Faithful*

Citizenship, the U.S. bishops lift up various issues of different moral weight and urgency.

Read nos. 64-92 to learn more about issues that affect human life and dignity. For example:

- Address abortion and other threats to life and dignity, such as euthanasia, the use of the death penalty, and imprudent resort to war;
- Protect marriage as the basic cell of human society, and children's right to a family with a mother and a father;
- Advocate for unaccompanied immigrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, and those unnecessarily detained;
- Care for our common home;
- Help families and children overcome poverty;
- Provide healthcare while respecting human life, human dignity and religious freedom; and
- Establish and comply with moral limits on the use of military force.

