



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. You can communicate with your elected officials by writing (letters or emails), making phone calls, and visiting them. 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. Most Congressional web sites include “Contact Us” forms. You may also consider sending a FAX, especially if time-sensitive.

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 with just a click of the mouse. Visit the “Issues and Action” section of www.usccb.org to access this web form and for more tips on letter-writing.

Contact your **diocesan social action office, pro-life office**, or **State Catholic Conference** for additional electronic 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.
- 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.
- **Identify yourself**, hometown, and phone number so that the legislator can be sure you are a constituent and can get back to you.
- 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.

^{*}In 2011, the [USCCB](http://www.usccb.org) Administrative Committee reaffirmed *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* and authorized the USCCB president and the nine chairmen to sign and release an Introductory Note to preface the statement.

Making a Visit

Taking the time to visit your elected officials **can send a powerful message** about what you care about as a constituent. Here are some tips for your visit:

Before the Visit

- **Research** your legislator's voting records, committee assignments, and positions.
- 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.
- 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 you 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 the Introductory Note and nos. 89-90 to learn more about issues that affect human life and dignity. For example:

- Abortion and other threats to life and dignity
- Efforts to force Catholic ministries to violate their consciences or stop serving those in need;
- Efforts to redefine marriage and undermine marriage as between one man and one woman and an institution essential to the common good;
- An economic crisis which has devastated lives and livelihoods, and the duty to respond in ways that protect the poor and future generations;
- The failure to repair a broken immigration system in ways that respect the law, human rights, the dignity of immigrants and refugees, families, and the common good.
- Wars, terror, and violence which raise serious moral questions about the human and moral costs of force.



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