

WRITING TO DECISION MAKERS



Writing is a powerful form of advocacy and can be a more comfortable way to share your story. It allows you to control and craft your message to clearly and succinctly connect your personal experience and faith values with a call to action.

Whether through physical mail, an email, or an online form, you can write directly to most public figures. These addresses can be found on the “Contact Us” or “Staff / Leadership” sections of their website.

As you sit down to write your message, consider the following:

- 1. Timing / Urgency:** Is the decision or issue time-sensitive? While handwritten letters are powerful, sometimes an email is the preferred vehicle to share your views. For example, physical mail addressed to the U.S. Congress goes through security screening that can delay delivery for weeks. And increasingly, offices are giving equal weight to constituent letters regardless of the format.
- 2. Identify Yourself and the Reason for Writing:** In addition to the information included in the online form or return address label, begin your message stating clearly who you are, where you are writing from, any appropriate affiliations connecting you to others in your community, and why you are writing. Whoever is opening the mail should know quickly that you are a constituent and the appropriate issue staff with whom to share your message.
- 3. Focus Your “Ask”:** Your “ask” (what you are asking the decision maker to do) should be clear and concise. While it may be tempting to share a litany of issues with your elected representatives, the more focused your “ask,” the more likely your message will be understood and responded to.
- 4. Make Your Message Personal:** Decision makers are inundated with information in the form of numbers and statistics. Your message will be more powerful if you make it personal and convey why the issue is important to you, your family, and your community. As people of faith, we are engaged in ministries rooted in relationships and helping the decision maker understand the impacts of her or his decision on the community - attaching names and stories to those numbers and statistics - is a unique asset we bring to advocacy.
- 5. Thank You and Follow-Up:** Close your message with a note of appreciation for the decision maker taking the time to consider your views and request a response. And after the decision is made, consider sending a follow-up message either thanking them for doing the right thing, or signaling your disappointment. It is important that officials are accountable to their constituents or stakeholders and that they understand we are following their actions.

In addition to your personal message, you may consider asking others in your community to join you in writing. You can bring the contact information and writing materials to a mission team meeting or supper club and spend ten minutes writing personal messages. You might also consider gathering postcards or petition signatures on a common message. These can powerfully illustrate the breadth of support for your position and can be hand delivered by you or a group of advocates.

You can find a sample letter on the next page that incorporates these suggestions.

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Review the sample message included here. Take note of a few things that the writer did well: used a personal connection for why she cares about the issue, kept it focused on one topic, explained clearly what she is asking her legislator to do, and asked for follow up.

Dear Senator Tester,

I live in Great Falls, Montana and am a lifelong United Methodist. I'm writing you today because my faith calls me to care for immigrants. Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." And my own United Methodist tradition calls me to advocate for laws that uphold the civil and human rights of immigrants.

I am asking you to advocate with the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security - or through the enactment of legislation - to end the United States' practice of separating children and parents who cross into the United States without proper paperwork. The stories of separation at the border are horrifying, and we must be better than that.

I look forward to a response to know what your office is doing to ensure the civil and human rights of immigrants.

Thank you,
Susan Jones
Great Falls, Montana