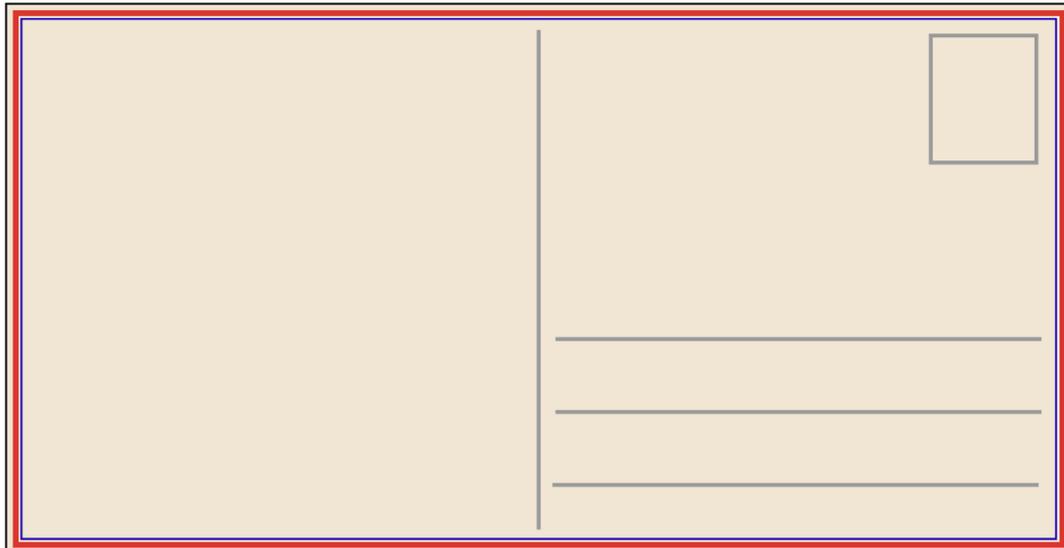




THE POSTCARD PROJECT

ENGAGING IN SLOW ADVOCACY

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INTRODUCTION

The Postcard Project invites Episcopalians to engage in “slow advocacy” to shift the focus from reactionary outreach to long-term, big-picture strategy and relationship building with government officials. As a Church, we are called to care for the poor, yet legislative and policy matters addressing poverty are not typically headlines in the news or viral on social media. Throughout the year, our government is making critical and important decisions that we can positively influence and support through savvy advocacy.

In short, **The Postcard Project** is an opportunity to convene people to write physical postcards to their members of Congress (or other government officials), helping to build relationships among parishioners eager to carry out their faith through action. Congregations can bring parishioners together in virtual sessions to build community through personal interactions even during COVID-19. When it becomes safe to do so, these programs may take place in-person. We encourage you to follow proper health and safety precautions recommended by healthcare experts when conducting an in-person postcard project in your parish or community. This may also be a fun family activity to do at home.

BUILDING A COALITION FOR ACTION

How to get your church community involved

Some folks may be nervous getting involved in public policy advocacy. Even for those who are comfortable with it, determining what specific position or issue to focus on can be a complicated process. The best route to getting this project started in your context is to begin by building a coalition of folks interested in engaging and seeking the right approvals to move forward.

Consider organizing a small group of people already familiar with advocacy to review this project outline and determine what elements are most suitable for your context. This will help you present a clear proposal to your rector, other clergy, communications director, vestry and other parish/leadership committees who may be involved in approving such activity. Consider emphasizing the connections between what you’re wanting to do and the work of the Office of Government Relations and Episcopal Public Policy Network, which align with official Episcopal Church policies.

Once you get approval for the concept of doing a postcard project, you’ll need to pare down what asks you’ll make of elected officials. When trying to determine what your advocacy asks are, remember General Convention and Executive Council policies are accessible online, and you can follow those as the official word of the Church. Narrow your focus by considering issues that impact ministries your congregation is already involved with.

PREPARATION

Gathering Materials

What you'll need

- Postcards: 3 per person for 2 Senators, 1 Representative (in most cases)
- Postcard stamps: 1 per postcard, and you may consider intentionally purchasing U.S. flag stamps
- Pens
- Art supplies (optional; for postcard decoration)
- Addresses of elected officials' offices, printed on small labels
- Brainstorming tools (whiteboard, easel, giant sticky notes, etc.)
- Templates (more on that later)
- Additional resource material
- Snacks

Use art to inspire action: Encourage participants to use their own postcards or postcards provided by the congregation. Consider mailing materials such as postcards, labels, and additional resources to participants in advance (or, if possible, deliver packs in a no-contact fashion to their residence) in accordance with proper public health practices to ensure that there is no spread of COVID-19.

Have any artists in your congregation? Invite them to provide artwork for custom postcards that tells a story about the community and get them produced with the help of a local printer. Custom postcard imagery is also a great way to advertise for the event. Digitizing artwork can be an added expense, but good visuals can be the key to getting people to show up. If that's not an option, you can always provide participants with blank postcards to stoke their creative energy! Sharing photos of cards is encouraged.

Consider the back of the card, too—of course you want ample space to add addresses, a stamp, and your personal message, but you could consider a clever campaign name to use in your return address (i.e. "St. Bart's Speaks Up, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, NY"), and even a small quote or Bible passage printed in the corner. You may consider a suggested donation of \$1 per postcard to defray the costs of digitizing any artwork, printing the postcards, and purchasing stamps.

All of your congregants may not live in the same district, and not everyone will know who their elected officials are. Find your representatives here: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members>. You can even go a step farther and consider writing your school board, city council, county officials, and other elected and career government officials.

Choosing the Venue

The Postcard Project is an all-ages activity that can be incorporated into your congregation however works most naturally—as an adult forum, Sunday school class, mid-week event, or whatever works best given your congregation's social distancing protocol. **The Postcard Project** also presents a great opportunity to create an inter-generational event for congregants to share with, listen to, and learn from one another. Even the Godly Play children can get involved by providing artwork for the postcards!

Church groups could co-host the event, or you could partner with another church or faith group to pool resources and expand your voice in advocacy. You can also use this as a neighborly activity by inviting your immediate community, even those who aren't parishioners, into the conversation early on, asking them what issues are their top concerns and following through with advocacy to government officials together.

Advertising

People will be more inspired to participate if they understand what's in it for them and how their voices matter. Getting more people involved in organizing the event is a form of advertising in and of itself, as folks invite friends to participate too.

Make use of the artwork you have made or acquired for the postcards by placing it in newsletters, on social media, or any other places you advertise church events. Engage the parish in conversation about the goals of advocacy, the goals of any existing outreach ministries, and how they may be connected and complimentary. Create prayers or litanies, sermons or forums on the topics you'll be advocating on, and use those in the weeks leading up to the postcard writing campaign. Use the opportunity to engage in civil discourse across disagreement on how to address the problem you're wanting to address. Many parish outreach ministries are often in place to achieve a certain goal—say a community garden or soup kitchen to address food insecurity. Those same goals can also be pursued through advocacy, work that can go hand in hand with tangible church outreach.

DAY-OF-WALK THROUGH

Logistics

Share necessary information and materials over social media, email, and other channels you use to communicate to your congregants. Consider setting up a display inside the church, inspired by the issue you want to advocate on, that can be seen and discussed on video when broadcasting services. You may also want to send basic letter-writing tips (a template can be found later in this guide), along with example labels for the members you'll be sending letters to.

When you gather on Zoom (or other video calling service), prepare a brief presentation including information on the project, informative videos, and other resources as a part of framing the activity.

People are often excited to get to the writing! Remember most folks will have 3 postcards to write per issue if you're reaching out to Congress. If you have concerns about the length of the event, consider holding an online forum to talk about the topic at hand on a different day than the postcard writing day. Discussion time day-of often diminishes letter writing energy. You could, for example, hold a church forum online before the service broadcast then follow the service with a "coffee hour" Zoom during which people can be with each other virtually while they write their postcards.

Before diving into a conversation about potentially more contentious or divisive subjects, it is important for the facilitator to set guidelines and expectations everyone can agree upon in order to keep the space

brave and sacred for civil discourse. Suggest a few communications norms to get the ball rolling and establish ground rules, but allow the majority of the more personal norms to come from the group.

Sample Online Event Kickoff Outline (immigration)

- Opening prayer
 - O God our heavenly Father, you have blessed us and given us dominion over all the earth: Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insight into your purposes for the human race, and new wisdom and determination in making provision for its future in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*
(‘For the Future of the Human Race,’ Book of Common Prayer)
- Host introduction
 - Sets expectations for the conversation at the event and in the parish over time.
 - Brief review of immigration ministry in the Church, connections to immigrants in the parish. Explanation of the problem and the advocacy “ask.”
 - Share EPPN immigration definitions video.
 - Review EPPN immigration advocacy online as a guide for future engagement on other issues.
 - List potential follow up actions for after the Postcard Project event, and point folks to resources you’re sharing that day.
 - Support Episcopal Migration Ministries, KIND, CARA, RAICES, Human Rights First financially—provide legal help to immigrants
 - Join Partners in Welcome from Episcopal Migration Ministries
 - Follow the EPPN and sign up for their Action Alerts
 - Join local immigration organization
 - Encourage others to write Congress too
 - Explain the process for letter writing.
- Card writing
 - Leave enough time for folks to write their postcards—keeping in mind additional time may need to be added if more than one issue is being addressed

WRITING POSTCARDS

Writing Tips

- **State that you are a constituent and an Episcopalian** – Whoever initially receives your postcard will want to know upfront that you are a constituent. Adding that you’re an Episcopalian unites the voices of Episcopal advocates everywhere and broadcasts that you adhere to Christian beliefs and values. This may help elected officials to understand the range of views of Christians in the U.S.
- **Speak in “I” statements** – Share personal stories if you have them, or focus on values. Ground yourself in the concrete rather than speaking in generalizations.

- **Keep the message rooted in shared values** – You might not agree with a politician’s policies, but chances are there are shared values between you. Check their website for more information and to find something to connect on.
- **Focus on what you see in your community** – This goes back to grounding yourself in the concrete. Avoid abstract or broad strokes. Your officials are most likely more concerned about their own territory and interested in your unique context. Local stories matter.
- **Include your full name and zip code**
- **If you are in agreement with your elected official, make sure to thank them for their work** – Be specific with your thanks too. While this is a nice gesture, it can also raise the profile of the particular issue over the other issues that are competing for your elected official’s attention. Follow up with them to see how they voted, and use that as another reason or opportunity to reach out.

Sample postcards

Postcards don’t leave a lot of room for text, so expressing your message concisely is essential. However, even though the message isn’t lengthy (average is four to five sentences), some people might still struggle with knowing what to say. It might be helpful to generate a few templates to have in case people have trouble getting started.

Dear (name of legislator),

As your constituent and an Episcopalian, I ask **[insert statement asking for action, include a bill number if it is relevant (examples below)]**.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration, and please know that you remain in our prayers.

Thank you,

(Your name)

Your voting zip code: xxxxx

General Statement about Environmental Legislation

As your constituent and an Episcopalian, I believe we are called to protect the Arctic Refuge, work towards climate resiliency, support the Clean Power Plan. I ask that you work on legislation that protects our earth and its inhabitants.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Legislation

As an Episcopalian, I ask you to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil and gas drilling and forbid seismic tests in the Refuge. I ask that you pursue public policies that address the sustainable subsistence rights of indigenous cultures.

Climate Change, Sustainable Practices and Climate Resiliency

As an Episcopalian, I support the Clean Power Plan to reduce CO₂ emissions, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Climate goals. We need to take action to protect the earth, its wildlife and its people.

Environmental Justice

As an Episcopalian, I urge you to consider the impact of environmental legislation on communities of color and to ensure all people are able to breathe clean air and have access to clean water.

WRAPPING UP

Listening Session

You may want to consider having an online activity to wrap up the event after folks are done writing their postcards. A listening session may help people process what they are doing and set them up with positive energy to carry out into the world to continue doing this work.

A key step in understanding one another as a community is listening to each other's stories. Perhaps your group or congregants are already familiar with each other, but making time to have a listening session regarding recent (or not-so-recent but still relevant) political events or the participants' unique experiences with advocacy will give context to why certain beliefs or values are held by individuals. If your group is larger, Zoom, for example, has the capacity for breakout "rooms" where you can separate people for a period of time into smaller groups. This allows people to have more time to speak, and may be a more welcoming space for introverts who prefer speaking to a smaller group instead of a large Zoom gathering.

Give participants a prompt to get things started and pause for an opportunity to collect their thoughts. Then allow each person to share as they feel comfortable. When we take time to hear each other's emotions and experiences associated with politics—positive or negative—we remember their humanity and are then able to continue with, hopefully, a more empathetic understanding.

Additional Resources

All resources mentioned here are available on our website www.episcopalchurch.org/oqr

- **Faith and Citizenship Guide:** This guide to advocacy will help you take your advocacy a step farther, really focusing on the relationship building aspect of the practice. Share it with your parishioners who are wanting to get more involved, or if the whole parish is ready to act as a unit, consider creating more opportunities for advocacy beyond **The Postcard Project**.
- **Vote Faithfully Election Engagement Toolkit:** Get ideas for engaging your church community in local and national elections—even people not yet of voting age or those who do not have the right to vote can be involved.
- **Civil Discourse Curriculum:** Help improve your ability to engage in conversation to enhance understanding. This is about intentional listening and learning from one another across

disagreement. The challenges before us are greater than any one of us is capable of solving, so we need to bring together all of our competing ideas, mix in a bit of humility, and unlock our problem-solving potential by working together.

TROUBLESHOOTING

One Issue or Multiple Issues

You may find folks don't want to engage because they don't know what to say—they may feel uninformed on the topic you've chosen or may simply not care about it as much as another issue. Though it may seem daunting, consider choosing 3-4 issues for each Postcard Project session. You can either spread them out over 3-4 different calls, for example, or plan to complete each one at a single event—and folks can take extra time to write letters on more than one issue. This will help attract a broader crowd to the event and help people be more willing to speak out.

Civil Discourse: Enhanced Understanding

We often refer to civil discourse as a fix to the lack of civility in our politics and culture, but then overlook the more pure definition: conversation to enhance understanding. Folks sometimes do not speak out on an issue for fear of ridicule if they aren't as informed about something. The civil discourse curriculum helps us improve our communication with one another with the goal of learning from one another. Use this to help members of your parish or community share experience and knowledge with those who are seeking it, but in a respectful and uplifting way.

Can't I just donate?

Some people may be more used to supporting efforts financially and be less inclined to speak out or share their opinions. Meanwhile, others may be very active in advocacy and feel it is an easy task to take on. Be aware of these differences, and be patient as people grow more comfortable with this type of civic engagement. Supporting this work with prayer and scripture can help anchor the activity for those in your church community.

I have elected officials in my parish

More presidents of the U.S. have been Episcopalian than any other faith identifier, and there are still dozens of members of Congress who are Episcopalian—and that doesn't count state and local government officials. Politicians are also people, and they are elected from within our communities and often attend our churches. If you have elected officials in your parish, make sure to have a conversation with clergy and parish leadership about the nature of engagement with them. Those elected officials are likely facing particular stress, and rather than hear from constituents at church, they may be seeking support, solace and rejuvenation just like the rest of us.

Social Media

Social media use is more varied than it used to be and can present some challenges to having more enriched conversations and events. It's a great way to get news out about activities in your parish, but a Postcard Project announcement may lead to more commentary than usual. Make sure to work with parish staff/volunteers who assist with online communication, so they are prepared to respond and monitor comments if they become mean, rude, or counterproductive.

Resources for Production

While there are many online resources for creating and printing postcards, we want to point out 2 that may be useful. Canva ([canva.com](https://www.canva.com)) is an easy to use, online design tool you could use to design your postcards. Also, printers like Staples offer [postcard templates](#) where you can upload your image designs and order prints for delivery or pick up fairly easily. Also consider reaching out to local printers to see what they offer as well. Parishes can then distribute postcards to those taking part in the post card campaign through the mail, lessening the chance of the spread of COVID 19.

Postcards from Home

While we are heeding health precautions and practicing social distancing, congregations can still help organize this event with people who want to take it on, or you can organize it in your own home. The basic structure and format would remain the same—replacing education events with educational webinars or videos and online discussions. If you can, print and create your own postcards from home. Congregations may consider creating and ordering postcards in larger quantities and mailing blank ones to parishioners who want to engage.

Reporting to OGR

If you've recently completed a postcard project, let us know how it went! Send us details and pictures via email to eppn@episcopalchurch.org, or tag us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram while it's happening @TheEPPN.