FAITH AND CITIZENSHIP

A Guide to Effective Advocacy for Episcopalians







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Compelled to Action

We recognize and celebrate all the ways Episcopalians live out their commitments to love their neighbor. Episcopalians answer our call to respond to human need and seek to build a better world in many ways. Volunteers and patrons support **outreach ministries** that fund schools, provide shelter for those experiencing homelessness, establish food pantries to feed the hungry, and much more. Clergy and lay leaders provide **pastoral support** to help our community members and neighbors through life changes, care for those who are grieving, and help families to mark transitions and celebrations.

Many Episcopalians join marches and protests, helping to build a movement for positive change. Some are committed to socially responsible investing, using the power of investments to push for change. Episcopalians vote – and support others in voting – and fill out the U.S. Census. Some run for office or work as civil servants.

Episcopalians also **advocate for better policies and laws** that can help us all live in a more just and compassionate world. This guide is focused on engaging the government, and how the work of advocacy can help to bring about systemic change that will bring us closer to God's kingdom.

Our hope is to help you to gain a better understanding of how to build relationships with government officials and how to make calls for justice more concrete by pushing for particular policies or laws. This guide helps build on public witness and charitable work and connects to promoting informed and specific solutions to fix systemic problems.

For those of you who are already engaged in social justice work, we ask you to include advocacy as one component of that. If you protest, also write a letter to your member of Congress. If you give money to a good cause, also make a phone call to your state representative asking him or her to address the issue. If you volunteer your time, also attend a town hall with a public official and ask a question. For some, advocacy may feel uncomfortable, or not as rewarding as joining with others in a march for your values. But advocacy is one key aspect to making systemic change and a critical part of our public witness as Christians.

Episcopalians are represented in Washington, D.C., by a group of professional advocates in the Office of Government Relations (OGR). This office brings the Church's positions on public policy, adopted by General Convention and Executive Council, to legislators and policymakers in Washington, D.C. We educate and equip Episcopalians to learn more about Episcopal Church policy positions, serve as

translators between the Church and the public policy community, and serve as a resource for the Church.

We rely on your partnership to carry out this work. Your stories, perspectives, and commitment are all part of the way we will make change to encourage our government to enact just policies and laws.

This **Faith and Citizenship** Guide seeks to help you fulfill your baptismal covenant to strive for justice and peace. While we focus on the federal level, the advocacy tips and tactics we recommend throughout this guide are applicable to state and local advocacy as well as federal.



Ranking the Difficulty of Advocacy Actions

Actions are ranked on a 1-5 top hat scale to note how difficult or time-consuming a particular action is likely to be, with actions marked by five top hats being the most difficult.

Table of Contents

Join the Episcopal Public Policy Network Receive calls to action every week, with easy-to-use tools for writing your federal elected officials.	Page 5
Do your homework	Page 6
Effective advocacy begins with good research.	i age o
Write your elected officials	Page 8
Elected officials have a responsibility to represent their constituents. A smart, well-written letter or email is one of the most common and successful ways to convey your message.	. 480 0
Call your elected officials	Page 10
Phone calls are fast and easy. You can ensure that your voice will be heard if you are well-prepared and know what to expect.	
Visit your elected officials	Page 10
Members of Congress have offices in Washington, D.C., and one or more in their state/district. Meetings with legislators and their aides, either in D.C., in district, or by videoconference, is a meaningful way to convey your message to legislators.	Tage To
Raise awareness in your community	Page 14
Amplify your message by joining with other Episcopalians and religious or community groups to take action and bring attention to your issue.	
Use the media	Page 16
The media can be a powerful tool in generating momentum. Find out how to get your issue or story covered. Social media is also a powerful way to make your voice heard and to amplify the voices of others.	
Vote	Page 18
Everyone's vote is significant, and every opportunity to vote at the federal, state, or local level is important. Help persuade others to vote as well. Sign up to serve as a poll worker.	2 200 10
Advocacy Days	Page 18
Organize a small group to visit an elected official's office, or learn about advocacy organizations who sponsor formal advocacy days. There are lots of opportunities to join with others and make your case!	

JOIN THE EPISCOPAL PUBLIC POLICY NETWORK &

The Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN), run by the Office of Government Relations, is a grassroots network of Episcopalians across the U.S. who advocate for the Church's public policy positions. EPPN members receive weekly action alerts as well as advocacy and policy resources, newsletters, and other updates about the Church's engagement in the public sphere. Action alerts highlight particular legislation for EPPN members, offer information about the Church's position, and provide easy ways to take action.



Pro tip: What does the Action Alert process entail?

Joining the EPPN provides weekly opportunities to reach out to your members of Congress. EPPN emails will provide you with background information on the issue, as well as a draft message to send to your member of Congress. To join, please fill out your contact information at bit.ly/EPPNsignup. We ask for your contact information so our system can identify which members represent you in Congress, ensuring the messages are delivered to the correct offices. Before hitting send, we encourage you to edit the message to make it personal and unique to your experiences. You will be much more likely to get a response from your member with a personal message!

Why join the EPPN?

- Members of Congress want to hear from you, their constituents. Using action alerts is a quick and easy way to reach out to them.
- Join your voice with others throughout The Episcopal Church and Anglicans around the world.
- Benefit from the insight of the staff at the OGR, including knowing that alerts are strategically timed and calls to action are coordinated.
- Learn more about current issues, receiving detailed information on relevant policy and legislation developments.
- Learn about new advocacy resources and advocacy events.
- Help to shape and influence policy to align with The Episcopal Church's positions and values.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @TheEPPN

DO YOUR HOMEWORK & & &

While you do not have to be a subject matter expert to be an effective advocate, research can bolster the case you make to your elected officials and their staff. You can learn more about the complexities of policy issues – and the politics behind them – as well as the arguments your legislator may be hearing from the other side. Your experiences or those in your community are also essential to help inform policymakers and guide their decisions. Tailor your remarks, if possible, to align with the legislator's stated goals and values – the most effective advocates know what legislators have said on the issues, as well as how they have voted.

For instance, if you are advocating on health care reform: you can speak about your own experiences with the health care system or share, with permission, the experiences of those in your church and community. You can bolster your argument with data and statistics that support your case, but you can be an effective advocate without needing to understand the full complexities and intricacies of the health care system in the U.S.

Perhaps most importantly, understand who is best placed to affect the change you want to see. There are usually local, state, and federal dimensions of any issue. Ask yourself who is best positioned to make the legislative or policy change you want to see as you design your advocacy strategy. When you are meeting with a government official, know before you meet with them what they can do to affect change on your issue and frame your ask accordingly.

Topic Research

- Familiarize yourself with the substance of legislation and the contours of the policy debate.
- Study media coverage, especially of the elected officials that have shown interest in the issue.
- Look for reputable organizations or advocacy groups that work on the issue you are advocating for. Ask how you might be able to join in, and learn from, their advocacy strategies.
- Official agencies, committees, and think tanks may have already published research on the issue you are advocating for. Keep abreast of the research through policy papers, think tank events, and webinars.
- Verify the sources of your research some sources are more credible than others.

• Learn the opposing arguments. You may be able to respond to some of their critiques and to learn more about the issue yourself.

Research the positions of the officials you're reaching out to

- Elected officials regularly post public statements, press releases, and summaries of the actions they have taken on their website.
- Local newspapers and magazines may have coverage on local officials and the steps they are taking or not on the problems in your community.
- Attend town hall meetings to see how your elected officials respond to questions.
- When "roll call" votes are taken in the <u>House</u> or <u>Senate</u>, each member's vote is recorded individually and can be found online.

Hold your elected officials accountable

Following up with elected officials after votes is one important way to hold them accountable. Let them know you are paying attention to how they vote. Follow up if the member did not vote the way you hoped (although we would advise against being aggressive or angry on the phone). You can express your point of view and ask for any additional information behind the vote. During one of our D.C.-based advocacy trainings, a member of Congress shared that he casts hundreds of votes a year and only hears from constituents and lobbyists about a handful of them. Show that issues are meaningful to you by watching how members vote and following up.

We also frequently hear from members that they rarely receive thank you messages for their votes. Send a note of appreciation if the member voted the way you hoped they would, especially if there was political or partisan pressure to go the other way. Gratitude goes a long way in relationship building.

Pro tip: Sponsor vs. Co-sponsor

A bill is introduced by a primary sponsor and several original co-sponsors who are supporters of the legislation. As the legislation moves forward, additional members of Congress may co-sponsor, signifying additional support and potentially improving the chances of the bill getting a vote in committee or before the full Chamber. A member can only vote on a piece of legislation in committee or when it is brought to the floor, and co-sponsorship signifies support ahead of a vote. See if your member of Congress has sponsored or co-sponsored legislation that you support! Look up the bill on http://www.congress.gov to find information on sponsors and co-sponsors!

Government Resources

- U.S. House of Representatives
- U.S. Senate
- The White House
- Federal Agency Links
- Congress

Episcopal Church Policy Resources

You can look up the official policy positions of The Episcopal Church by going to the Archives' search engines for <u>General Convention</u> and <u>Executive Council</u> resolutions. Be sure to check both search engines in your research.

WRITE YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS &

Writing your elected officials letters and emails can make a real difference without being too time-intensive. Congressional staffers read all correspondence and regularly brief representatives on constituent concerns and priorities. While you may hear that a handwritten letter is more effective than an email, each Congressional office has its own approach to correspondence, and for many, emails are just as meaningful as a letter. All offices are interested in constituent perspectives and will pass that along to the member. Timing is key to effective letter writing: one of the values of getting EPPN Action Alerts is to get notified of action at the right time: we usually send alerts at key moments in the legislative process.

Pro tip: What value does your church have to the federal, state, or local government?

Advocacy and government relations work as a two-way engagement. While we advocate to vote yes/vote no, it is more deeply about working together to improve our communities. Outreach ministries may be able to offer valuable information to legislators and policymakers. Churches can mobilize large groups of faith voices bearing witness to the challenges facing our communities.

How to send your letter

- Through the EPPN: As a member of EPPN, you will receive sample letters on specific issues that you can send to your member of Congress easily from the Office of Government Relations' website.
- Email: Members of the House and Senate have varied email systems and policies. Look to their individual websites to learn how to contact them via email.

• Traditional mail: Security measures mean most physical mail is scanned and uploaded into an electronic system. However, this can still be a personal way to send your message.

Tips for letter writing

- Be brief. Single page letters are best, as long letters may not be fully read.
- Be organized. Clearly state your ask, the rationale, and what you want them to do. If you are advocating on a piece of legislation, include the bill number.
- Be focused. Specific requests are more constructive and harder to deflect.
- Be thankful. Thank them for their time receiving your message, or if you know they have acted in support of what you want to see, mention that too.
- Be faithful. Identifying yourself as an Episcopalian amplifies the voices of many faithful people around the country and helps show the diversity of political thought among religious communities.
- Be yourself. Personal (but brief) anecdotes make your message unique and can tie it more strongly into your community—the community your elected officials represent.
- Be polite. Hostile letters will not help build an ongoing relationship.

Pro tip: Agree? Reach out anyway.

We hear from people discouraged in their advocacy because their members of Congress already agree with them, and so they feel they don't need to reach out. Elected officials have hundreds of issues to address and limited time. By expressing gratitude for their actions, you are also letting them know what you care about most. This helps them prioritize what they focus on in a way that better reflects constituents' concerns.

What to expect

- Due to high volume, some offices may use form responses to your letter. If you feel that your message was not heard, consider expanding your advocacy engagement. Send a follow-up letter or make an appointment with the legislator's office to further discuss the issue. Think of letter writing as just one step in long-term relationship building.
- Legislators balance the needs of many constituents with their own opinions
 when making tough decisions on how to vote. If your representative does not
 do what you ask, it does not mean that you were an ineffective advocate.
 Build a coalition with others to speak out together. Sometimes progress on
 issues can take many years.

CALL YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS &

Most officials have staff to field telephone calls from constituents. Before you make a call, write out your points clearly and concisely so that the person you speak with can easily record notes. If you get voicemail, leave a phone message and ask for a written reply if you would like one, and include your zip code. Consider sending a brief email or letter to follow up on the message that you left.

You may not get any further questions from the person who answers the phone, and they may or may not engage in back and forth conversation. You are calling to deliver a message, and the person will make note of it. For those who are nervous about making phone calls, this fact may help make you feel more comfortable making that call.

Sometimes votes or situations require immediate action, and in those instances making a phone call may be a more effective way to make sure your concern is registered, as it is a faster way to get your voice heard compared to emails and letters.

Contacting the federal government

- The Capitol switchboard can direct you to your members of Congress: (202)
 224-3121
- <u>Senate directory</u>
- House directory

Contacting state and local officials

You can reach out to state legislators, your governor, mayor, city council members, and more. For contact information and guidance, refer to https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials

VISIT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS* & & & &

*While we are still dealing with COVID-19, in-person congressional meetings may not be possible. However, it is still possible to reach out to a congressional office and arrange a meeting over the phone or via videoconference in place of in-person engagement. Please follow local guidance from public health experts and the policies of particular local offices and the offices in Washington regarding in-person meetings.

Visiting your legislators is one of the most influential forms of advocacy (though the logistics and expense of an in-person meeting can be a barrier). Meetings show deep personal investment in the issue and allow for an opportunity to establish an ongoing relationship with members and staff. Legislators also regularly return to their districts and seek out meetings with constituents during those times. While legislators do hold

frequent events for fundraising and meet with people who donate to their campaigns, they are responsible for representing the people in their district and the interests of the nation as a whole. Members usually prioritize opportunities for constituent engagement. While we encourage individual advocacy, it may also be helpful to advocate as a part of an organization or coalition of organizations who are passionate about a particular cause.

Some U.S. citizens do not have voting representatives in Congress, such as those living in U.S. territories and the District of Columbia. Constituents should still feel free to reach out to those who represent them to let them know their priorities and ask them to take action. The Episcopal Church has long advocated for voting rights for all Americans.

Most meetings will take place with a staffer rather than the member themselves. Do not be discouraged by this, as staffers often have deep subject matter expertise. They will brief their boss on all the meetings they have with their constituents and may provide recommendations on how to vote.

Pro tip: Recess!

You can find the Congressional schedule by checking the House and Senate websites to see when they are in session. Members of Congress regularly return to their districts for "district work periods" to meet with constituents and fundraise. Check the calendar for these recesses and get in touch with your representative's local office to set up a meeting or to invite them to a local event. Remember to send any invites or meeting requests in advance as your representative is likely to have a busy schedule during the time they are in your district.

Scheduling an appointment (in D.C. or at home)

- Email a request. Prepare a professional letter that briefly explains who you are, what you want to discuss, and a range of possible meeting times. Be sure to mention if you or anyone you may be with, whether another person or organization, are constituents. Email this to the member's scheduler in Washington, D.C., or the district office. You should be able to find contact information on your members' websites, which often can be an online form rather than an email address of a staff member.
- Confirm the meeting format. If the meeting is virtual, ask the staff what the preferred means of communication is. Some offices will have conference lines that allow multiple people to call in at the same time, allowing you to hold meetings in coalition with others.

- Confirm in writing. Once your appointment is arranged, send a brief confirmation.
- Confirm by phone. A few days prior to your meeting, call the office where you will be meeting to reconfirm your appointment.
- Be punctual. For in-person meetings, arrive about 15 minutes early.
 Congressional offices are sometimes quite small, so be flexible about where
 you're asked to wait and where the meeting will actually take place. This is
 especially true early in a Congressional session when many members are
 moving into or out of office spaces.

Types of meetings

- Local office meetings. It may be easier to meet personally with a legislator in a state or district office, as they may be focused on constituent visits and are less likely to be called away for votes.
- Staff-level meetings. Staff aides inform and advise officials on most issues and are sometimes the best contact to have. It's also possible to build relationships with these staff as you would the member themselves.
- Public events. Town hall meetings and other public appearances provide
 additional opportunities to get your message to officials without the preplanning on your part. Attending group events may also be an opportunity to
 network with others who share similar concerns or interests, or to gain
 exposure to other points of view that your members area also hearing. Find
 information on local events from the <u>Town Hall Project</u>.

Preparing for a visit

- Know your stuff. Meetings, unlike one-off phone calls, are opportunities for conversation. Research your issue and know your stories, and also be prepared to state when you do not know something that you are asked during the meeting. Specificity is critical in advocacy, and specific asks reduce the likelihood of generic responses.
- Prepare your talking points. Prepare a 3-5 minute version of who you are, your key asks, and any additional stories or data. Also prepare a 90-second version to use if your meeting is cut short. Practice until you can deliver both with confidence.
- Bring printed resources. This is an optional but generally helpful addition to your meetings. Consider creating a brief one-page document with resources and statistics about the issue you are discussing and the request you are making of the member. If you are meeting in person, bring several printed

- copies. If you are meeting virtually, provide the document electronically ahead of your meeting. Include your contact information on the document itself for easy reference.
- Bring contact information. For in-person meetings, exchanging business cards is extremely common, even if you've already corresponded with someone virtually.
- Tell a story. People will remember stories, and stories can connect your position to something real within the member's district. Don't make them too long, so pick out important details only.
- Ask questions. Inquire about where the member stands on the issue, ask
 whether many constituents are concerned about it and what would help to
 move the member if they disagree with you.
- Group visits. Before you meet, make sure to pre-assign speaking roles so your meeting will run more organized and on time.
- Be mindful of seniority and relationships. Consider the role of the people you're meeting with, and if you're in a group, the seniority among yourselves. You may want to identify a spokesperson that may be a constituent with a relationship, a very well-known clergy person, or a community leader. Matching up top-level people with top-level people is a good way to enhance your advocacy.

Pro tip: Being an Expert

You may find yourself more knowledgeable on a topic than you think, or you may find yourself unable to answer a question. If you do not know the answer to a question, say that you will find out and get back to them – do not guess or assume. Be sure to follow up on unanswered questions – leverage it as an opportunity to continue the conversation on a later date. Say, for example, you are advocating on education access, and are asked about Episcopal private schools in your hometown. If you do not know much about them, say you can follow up with information in the next few days.

Tricks of the trade

- Follow-up. After your meeting, send a personal thank you note. This will emphasize your points and help them remember you.
- Professionalism. If you take the meeting seriously, then you will be taken seriously. Be aware of formal norms in D.C., and know that your body language and attire can alter how you are heard.

- Focus. Meetings usually begin with small talk, but you may only have a few minutes, so be sure to stay on task. You requested the meeting, so you are in charge with raising the issue you want to raise. Beyond that, the conversation may be driven more by you or by the person you are meeting with. Be open to focused listening as well.
- Positivity. Keep the conversation positive. It's okay to point out disagreements, but do not be overly argumentative or impolite.
- Find something in common. Before the meeting, try to find a connection between yourself and the person you are meeting with that is not necessarily related to the issue you want to discuss. During in-person meetings, you can discreetly observe what is in the member's office when you arrive peanuts produced in their district, or a magazine of a particular hobby you're interested in. The office space usually reflects the member's interest and the area of the country they represent. Use that information to develop relationship during the meeting.
- Offer to help. Relationship building is a two-way process, not just one where
 you ask something of your elected officials. Ask how you can assist the
 elected officials in the work they do in a way that aligns with your priorities
 and values.

RAISE AWARENESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY & & &

We mentioned already that an important part of any advocacy campaign, local or national, is raising awareness of the issue and building support. Education may be the first and most important step to move forward. This can be done creatively in a number of different ways.

Town hall meetings



Town hall meetings are not only a great place to make your voice heard, they're great for learning about other positions and meeting other stakeholders. Gather a group of people who are interested in your cause and attend together. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many members of Congress are hosting virtual meetings rather than inperson ones, meaning this is still an option for engagement.

Host a forum 🎍 🏖 🎎

Host an issue-based forum, a conversation hour with clergy, or an adult Sunday school class. This is a great way to educate people in your congregation. Consider inviting others from outside your church to the discussion, which can be a form of evangelism through advocacy. Be thoughtful about the timing of such an event — Sunday may not

necessarily be the best day to convince folks to join your initiative. These may also be held virtually as is necessary to maintain social distancing and follow official public health guidance.

Prayer breakfast or virtual coffee hour



Inviting elected officials to prayer breakfasts at your church is a great way to engage them in a way that is deeply relational. If you're inviting members of Congress, for example, make sure to invite all House and Senate members that represent your area. If your senators or representative are not Christian, still invite them, but cater your invitation in an inclusive way. You could consider invitations to virtual coffee hours or morning prayer.

Vigils or public witness



Depending on the issue you're focusing on, a public event can lead to an opportunity to educate your community and engage elected officials. Be clear in your invitation what may be expected of any officials you are inviting, even if it is simply to participate. If a member does show, they may expect a brief opportunity to address the audience. Make sure to follow public health official guidance in regard to COVID-19.



Many hands make light work. Gather others who are interested in your issue. Working with partners not only lightens the workload, but it can draw media interest and credibility. Look for Episcopal networks already engaged or create one if needed. Share resources and figure out how to coordinate advocacy. On occasion, certain aspects of an issue may not be agreeable to all members of a coalition. Consider how you may still work together even in that disagreement. Also, be cautious of coalition messaging, which may deviate from what you or your group believes is true to your position. As you seek partners, don't overlook surprising allies in your cause. Show broad support for your issue. Example: hunters and environmentalists working together to save wetlands.

Organizing takes time. Be persistent and consistent in your message to gain support and credibility in the long run. If you're working in a coalition, lean into each other to help keep up momentum.



Congregations often have people with a broad spectrum of talents and assets. Be creative in leveraging people's passions and skills to help raise awareness of an issue.

Think outside the box. Non-traditional methods can be effective as they break from expectations, so do not shy away from ideas that deviate from this script. Example: if your youth group is hosting a Halloween trick-or-treat canned food drive, have them drop off reminders about Election Day at the houses they visit.

Pro tip: Non-traditional Allies

As we mentioned, coalitions are a critical part of many advocacy strategies. Yet not all allies are obvious at first—they may not traditionally do advocacy, or they may disagree with your view more often than not. As you seek allies in your work, keep in mind "non-traditional" pairings. What do local for-profit businesses say about infrastructure investment or immigration policies? As you unite different groups, you can showcase broad support.

USE THE MEDIA & &

Media attention can educate members of your community and mobilize them for action. Do not overlook small outlets, which may be more likely to cover your issue and reach an audience more likely to join your cause. Make local connections to the issue whenever possible. For example: if you're advocating on increased refugee resettlement numbers, focus on stories of local churches and organizations that may have helped refugees resettle in your town.

Start small—articles in your church newsletter and diocesan newspaper—then expand to local print, radio, and TV as your comfort with the press grows. Using social media is a low-cost and effective way to bring attention and support to your group as well, but do not over emphasize their capability. Consider working with high level church leaders on writing local op-eds for newspapers.

Press releases 🚜 🊜



- Let reporters know about events that you have planned. Use a clear and descriptive headline. Give ample lead time.
- Use bullet points to say who will be doing what, where and when they will be doing it, and why it is interesting and important.
- Include a one-paragraph explanation of the event and a contact person who can provide more information.

Ask friends to read your press release before sending it to media outlets. Make sure it is thorough but brief.

Letters to the editor



- Be clear and persuasive, offer insight and anecdotes, and use reliable data to support your claims.
- Be concise. Short letters are more likely to be printed and less likely to be majorly changed in the editing process.
- Send your letter to the editorial page editor and make sure to include your contact information: name, address, and phone number.
- Keep trying if your letter is not accepted. Newspapers usually don't have enough room to print all the good letters that they receive, so be persistent.

Radio and TV call-in shows



- Prepare what you will say in advance, be ready for questions, and have supporting materials nearby in case you need them.
- Unless you were invited to speak, do not plan on having more than 30 seconds.
- Call early in a program; you will probably be on hold for a while.

Opinion editorials (op-eds)



- Op-eds can be longer than letters to the editor, but they still should be less than 750 words.
- Use an essay format for your piece and include evidence to support your case.
- Preference is usually given to pieces received from community leaders, so look for a recognized and respected author or coauthor.
- Polish your piece to ensure that the language and arguments are sound, and then send it to an editorial page editor with a cover letter explaining its importance.
- If you're wanting more experience writing op-eds, consider taking a training like those from The OpEd Project.



- Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are free and easy to use.
- Create a page or handle for your organization. Be sure to keep it updated with fresh and relevant material.

- Check out organizations or groups like yours. Work with them on social media by using hashtags or tagging them in posts.
- Increase your viewership and make it dynamic by uploading pictures and graphics.

VOTE 🏖 - 🚨 🏖 🔉

Voting is the first step in a long line of actions required to hold our government accountable and reform unjust structures in our society. Remember to cast your own vote and encourage others to participate as well. You do not have to be of voting age to help with getting others to vote! Engage youth in your community in this collective civic duty and help them learn from the process too.

Check out the #VoteFaithfully Election Engagement Toolkit on our civic engagement page for more ideas to get out the vote!

ADVOCACY DAYS 2 2-2 2 2 2

Organize a small group to visit an elected official's office, or learn about advocacy organizations who sponsor formal advocacy days. There are lots of opportunities to join with others and make your case! There are even Episcopal diocesan groups in many places that organize advocacy days when state legislatures meet. If your diocese does not have one, reach out to one that does to learn how they got started. Finally, if you're interested in joining federal level advocacy days, you might consider attending Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C., typically held each spring.

Questions or comments? Email us: eppn@episcopalchurch.org.