

*The idea of visiting a Federal Member of Parliament can seem daunting. Yet with some simple preparation, it can be a powerful experience for the visitors, and one of the most effective ways to motivate, support and hold accountable our elected representatives.*

## Who should we visit?

If you are visiting an MP as members of a church, visit the MP for the electorate in which your church sits. If visiting as an individual (or group of individuals) visit the MP for the electorate in which you live.

If you don't know which Federal electorate you or your church sits in, you can find out at the Australian Electoral Commission website: [www.apps.aec.gov.au/esearch/](http://www.apps.aec.gov.au/esearch/)

## How do we make an appointment?

Simply ring your MP's electorate office and explain that you'd like to meet with your local Member. Electorate Office details can be found in the White Pages or on the Australian Parliament website: [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/)

The staffer who receives your call may ask you what you want to see the Member about, where you're from and who will be attending the meeting.

## What will happen when we visit?

A 15-30 minute time slot will normally be set aside for your meeting. After introductions your MP will invite you to share your concerns. Your group then has the opportunity to tell your MP what you are concerned about, why you're concerned about it and what you'd like your MP to do.

Your politician will expect your group to ask for something and will assume that the 'ask' is the point of your visit. Politicians are elected to Parliament to represent their constituents, so meeting with members of their electorate, listening to their concerns, and taking action on them is a normal part of a politician's life.

## MP visit group size and roles

When visiting your MP there is really no set size that groups should be, but three to five people is a good number. Make sure everyone knows who will lead the conversation and that someone takes notes (it is not necessary to record everything that is said but it is important to note briefly what the group asks for, outline the MP's response and record what the MP agrees to do and any else the group agrees to do).

## Get to know your MP

Before and after you visit your MP, try to find out as much as you can about them. A good place to start is [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/). Some key things to discover are: • Which party do they belong to? • Do they have a safe or marginal seat? • Have they made any statements that suggest support or opposition to your issue?

## What should we say?

At the start of the meeting, you should use the politician's title and surname (Mr/Ms/Mrs/Dr) or "Senator/Minister" and surname if the politician is a Senator or Minister. If invited to, you may subsequently use their first name.

When visiting your MP it is good to think of your time as divided into four slots:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Making your case
3. Discussion
4. Wrapping up

In a half hour visit you could expect welcome and wrapping up slots to take around five minutes each, leaving you ten minutes to make your case and ten minutes for discussion.

## Making Your case

Download the MP briefing sheet (available from the [www.micahchallenge.org.au](http://www.micahchallenge.org.au)) as a guide for the meeting, outlining what you want to talk about, and what actions you want the MP to take. Take the briefing sheet with you, plus a copy for your MP. One person from your group should be given the responsibility to present your case. Give your MP a copy of the briefing sheet then quickly run through it.

If you have personal experience of the issue you are discussing, or any examples which connect the issue to your MP and the local electorate this can be helpful to raise before moving on to the briefing sheet. For example, if your focus is Australian aid levels you might like to point out that your church supports a community development project, and that as a church you've had a chance to see poverty and how it can be overcome. Or you might refer to how many aid supporters there are in the MP's electorate.



## Discussion

After the presenter has made the case, ask your MP if he/she has any questions or comments. During this time of discussion group members should feel free to contribute as appropriate. Avoid contradicting each other, or talking over the top of your MP. If the MP seems to be getting off-topic, gently bring him/her back to the topic at hand.

If there are issues to which you don't know the answer feel free to admit this and promise to find the answer and send it on. You might also like to offer to send on other material you think the MP may find helpful.

## Wrapping Up

When your time has come to a close, thank the MP for meeting with you and confirm what you and your MP have each agreed to do.

## Follow-Up

One person should assume responsibility to follow-up after the visit. This involves writing a letter of thanks to the MP for meeting with the group. As well as saying thank you, the letter should remind the MP of the topic of discussion and what the MP and the group each agreed to do. If the group has promised to track down and send on any material include this with the letter.

Also make sure you fill out an MP visit report <http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/politician-visit-feedback> to let us know how the meeting went.

