



ECO CHURCH
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How to Engage Your Local MP

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think



Whoever and wherever you are, you can engage with your MP. Lobbying is one way to do that, either individually or as part of a group. Lobbying is the act of attempting to influence Government decisions.

Lobbying can be simple but effective. People power filled the streets of London when 9,000 citizens from across the UK came together to speak up for what they loved – to more than 330 MPs.

From beekeepers to surfers, from snowboarders to nuns, the people's message was loud and clear during the Climate Coalition's Speak Up For The Love Of... lobby campaign – act now to protect what we love from climate change.

A Rocha UK, Tearfund and Christian Aid all took part in the campaign. World Wildlife Fund communications chief Colin Butfield described the colourful sight that greeted people at the lobby, as streetside conversations took place between citizens and their elected representatives.

'There were guys walking around with surfboards and there were groups of nuns. There was a uniting factor,' he said. 'We've lit a small fire which has just blazed all over the place.' We can all follow their example and put lobbying on our agenda.

CLIMATE LOBBY

arocha.org.uk/low-carbon-economy-calls-for-vision-of-gods-kingdom

do



Welcome your local elected representative to your church. Why not invite your MP, mayor or local councillor to an event that marks the start of your Eco Church journey? Invite them back for the presentation of your award.

Sometimes engaging with your local MP can be as easy as hosting them at a church tea. A simple yet profound example was reported in A Rocha UK's magazine Root & Branch (spring/summer 2015).

Visiting Trinity Methodist, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, to present them with their second Eco-Congregation Award, local MP Gloria De Piero was particularly impressed by the number of community groups using their premises.

'More than 100 meals are served in the café each week using locally sourced produce,' explained Green Group member Margaret Thorpe. Trinity Methodist hope more churches will engage with Eco Church, 'to help care for God's earth as a vital part of the everyday life of the church, which can also benefit the communities we serve'.



Consider becoming a local lobbyist

Local lobbyists help take messages of justice to the heart of government. It is a powerful way of changing and influencing laws and policies.

Being a local lobbyist for an agency like Christian Aid will involve meeting with your local MP up to four times a year, or if that is not possible, writing to them on different issues.

You don't need to be an expert on the issues. Christian Aid will provide you with all the information and support you require. All you need is a passion for ending poverty.

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LOCAL LOBBYING

www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/find-out-more/local-lobbyist/index.aspx

do more



Visit your MP

If you've never met your MP before, it might feel a little overwhelming. But having a locally based politician who represents you in Parliament is one of the key features of our democratic system.

Your MP can't represent you well if you never talk to them about the things you care about! Going to see your MP can also be more impactful and less scary if you go with other people from your church or community.

Make an appointment during a local surgery. Get a group together from your congregation. It's a great way to engage others with the issues you are tackling as an Eco Church.

A surgery is a block of time set aside by your MP in your local area. You can make an appointment to see them by getting in touch with their constituency office through their website. Here are a few tips to help your meeting with your MP go well. Remember they are normal! And remember their job is to represent you:

- make notes of key points you want to raise so you don't forget anything important;
- read up on your MP's background to check whether they've held any key positions relevant to your issue;
- be punctual, polite and prepared, but don't be offended if they're running late;
- keep your meeting on track and don't let the conversation be taken off at a tangent;
- present a personal case and explain why you care;
- if you can't answer a question, say you'll get back to them;
- help your MP understand the issue and leave them a briefing;
- ask your MP to do something concrete, for example, to get in touch with a Government minister and then get back to you when they have an answer. Later, find out whether they've done what you asked;
- follow up with a phone call, email, letter or social media.

weblink



LOCAL LOBBYIST TOP TIPS

www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/Local-lobbyist-top-tips-december-2014.pdf



Write to those with influence

Christian Aid offers some additional advice in the leaflet Top Tips For An Effective Letter Or Email:

- remember to include your full name and address;
- use your own words and make it personal;
- keep it short and to the point;
- make sure any handwriting is legible;
- keep your message focused and clear;
- include supporting facts to back up your case;
- ask them to respond to you.

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