



## HOW TO VISIT A POLITICIAN

Visiting a Federal Member of Parliament can be a daunting experience for those who have never done it before. Yet if a few simple steps are followed, the outcome can be very positive for both the visitors and the MP.

### Who should we visit?

If you are visiting MPs 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.aec.gov.au](http://www.aec.gov.au).

### 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 by using the "Who's Who" section of the Australian Parliament website – [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au). The staffer who receives your call may ask you what you want to see the Member about, where you're from and who is coming. Feel free to provide all this information.



### 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.

### 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 the "who's who" section of the Australian Parliament website.

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?

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.

### 2. Making Your Case

Micah Challenge will provide you with a MP briefing sheet (available from the website). This is an excellent tool for making your case. It will allow you to briefly state who you are, what you are concerned about, why you are concerned about it, and what you would like your MP to do. 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 can start with a personal story before moving onto the briefing sheet that could be helpful. For example, if your focus is Australian aid levels you might like to point out that your church supports a community development project in Africa, and that as a church you've had a chance to see poverty and how it can be overcome.





### **3. 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 try to 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.

### **4. 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.

### **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 handy size. 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 and record what the MP agrees to do and what the group agrees to).

### **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 (downloadable from the Micah Challenge website) and send it to Micah Challenge.

