

How to...

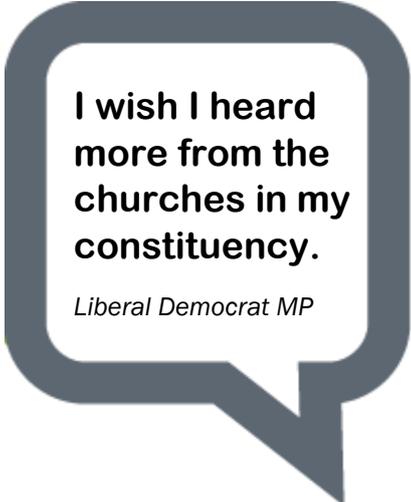


meet
your MP

What's the big idea?

Like it or not, politics matters. Political decisions shape our country, our communities, and our everyday lives. Christians are called to be engaged with the world, as Jesus was, and this includes political engagement.

Meet Your MP is a new initiative to encourage positive links to develop between church congregations and their MPs. It's about going deeper than just sending an occasional letter or email, but really trying to get to know your representative in Westminster, and giving your MP an opportunity to better understand the activities and concerns of local churches. You are far more likely to be able to influence an MP over a particular issue in the future if you already have a relationship with them.



I wish I heard more from the churches in my constituency.

Liberal Democrat MP

The basics

What is an MP?

A Member of Parliament (MP) is the elected representative for an area of the United Kingdom called a constituency. MPs split their time between working in Parliament in Westminster and their constituency. An MP has to balance the demands of representing the people of their constituency, supporting the goals of their political party and following issues that are important to them as an individual. There is no formal 'job description' and each MP finds their own balance of these roles. *Source: House of Commons Information Office*

Who is my MP?

The UK is currently divided into 650 parliamentary constituencies, each of which is represented by one MP in the House of Commons. To find out who your MP is – including details of their Parliamentary career and contact information – visit www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/

To find out more about how your MP has voted in Parliament, visit www.theyworkforyou.com

Remember, once elected, an MP's job is to represent all the people of his or her constituency in Parliament, whether or not they voted for him or her.

Your church may have congregation members living in several constituencies, or its address may be in a different constituency from where you live. In this case, you may want to approach all of your local MPs to come to your event, making the reason clear. Convention requires MPs to inform each other if they are planning to visit another MP's constituency.

What about my other elected representatives?

It is good to build relationships with elected representatives at all levels. If you live in Scotland, Wales, or London, you will have at least one elected representative working on devolved issues. In Scotland, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) represent local or regional constituencies, as do Welsh Assembly Members in Wales and London Assembly Members in London. You will also have local authority councillors for your area, and maybe an elected Mayor.

You may like to consider inviting some of these representatives to your event as well as your MP, particularly if you would like to raise issues for which they are directly responsible.

You can find out about all your elected representatives and their responsibilities, and contact them, at www.writetothem.com

How to Meet Your MP

Plan an event or visit

The aim of Meet Your MP is to encourage positive relationships to develop between MPs and local churches. Organising a special event or visit of some sort, to which you invite your MP, is likely to be more fruitful than simply writing to them or sending a delegation to the MP's regular advice surgery. It should be about helping your MP to be better informed about the activities, relevance and concerns of your church, and also helping you to get to know them too. Think about what kind of event will enable that.

You might want to gather a group together to organise the event. You could do this ecumenically. Ensure you have shared your plans with those responsible for the leadership of your church.

What kind of event or visit should we hold?

Some options include:

- Invite your MP to a fundraising coffee morning or community event that is happening at your church.
- Organise a community meal and invite your MP along to get to know you and find out about what your church, and church groups, do locally.
- Ask your MP to be interviewed about their work and life (and faith, if relevant) as part of a church service or meal.
- Organise a tour for your MP of a church-related project or group, such as a foodbank, advice centre, night shelter or toddler group.
- Invite your MP to join you on a walk of the local area, highlighting issues that church members feel need to be addressed.
- Hold a public meeting to explore a current issue, with a range of speakers including your MP.
- Invite a range of churches and Christian projects and agencies from your area to put on displays and talk with people about what they are doing, and invite your MP along too.

I am absolutely buzzing – thanks so much for creating such a brilliant forum for us to learn about the work being done.

Kirsty Blackman MP, after a local Meet Your MP event

Our local congregations do fantastic work and I want to hear their views and act on their concerns to give them the best representation possible.

Douglas Ross MP

As meetings happen across the country, we be featuring stories on the JPIT blog about what other churches and MPs have done, and hopefully this will inspire you!

Read the latest stories at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/blog or search for **#MeetYourMP** on social media to see what others are doing.

Invite your MP

You can email/telephone/write to your MPs using the contact details found in their parliamentary information. This can be found by looking up their name at www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/

To download a letter template that you can fill in and send, visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/MeetYourMP

Contacting your MP directly over social media channels can be highly effective. Individual Facebook and Twitter information can be found on the MP biography pages on the Parliament website where available. If you use the hashtag **#MeetYourMP** when contacting MPs, we will be able to see who you are meeting!

Here is advice from the House of Commons on inviting your MP to an event:

Give them as much notice as you can. Their diaries are usually very full, so the earlier you invite them, the better. Explain exactly why you would like them to attend, and what their role will be. Make it clear whether you are expecting any media coverage. Parliamentary business may take precedence, so they might have to send apologies at short notice. Have a back-up plan, in case they are unable to attend.

As a general rule, MPs will spend Monday to Thursday in Westminster and Friday to Sunday in their constituencies, although this will vary between MPs and depends on where their constituency is. During recess, they may be in the constituency during the week. You can check recess dates and sitting hours for Parliament at www.parliament.uk, or by calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272.

During the event

Ensure someone is designated to look after and 'host' the MP through the event or visit.

Ask the permission of those present to take some pictures, which you can share and use for publicity afterwards.

It is good if you can arrange for the MP to meet and speak with a range of different people during their visit.

Remember that different people in the church and the community will have different political views, and you shouldn't expect everyone to necessarily agree with the MP, or each other. However, try and avoid getting into confrontational discussions. The purpose of the event should be to get to know the MP, and for them to get to know your church and community better. You will then hopefully be able to build on that relationship over time.

How will we know what to talk about?

You do not need to be an 'expert' to talk to your MP. Simply tell and show them what happens in your church and your community. They should be interested to meet people and to hear about your experiences, as part of getting to know their constituency.



I admit to feeling slightly daunted at meeting our MP, but she made us feel at ease.

Church minister

The purpose of the Meet Your MP initiative is not political lobbying, and you don't need to have an 'agenda' to talk about.

However, sometimes you may want to talk about a specific policy issue that is affecting your community or you are concerned about, such as homelessness, food poverty, or the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. You will find a range of briefings on issues where the churches nationally have been active on the Joint Public Issues Team website at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues

If you would like advice on talking to your MP about a specific campaign or issue, please contact us.

After meeting your MP

After your event or visit, please:

1. Write to thank your MP for coming to your event and follow up on anything you discussed.
2. Share pictures and the story of your meeting on social media, with the hashtag **#MeetYourMP**
3. Tell JPIT about your experience by emailing us or using the quick online form at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/MeetYourMP - and send us your pictures too!
4. Consider writing up a report of the visit for your church magazine or local newspaper.

We would like as many churches as possible to set up meetings over the next few months and to let us know all about it.

Going further

Meeting your MP may have opened up questions in your church or group about why and how Christians should engage in politics. *The Art of the Possible* is a free resource produced to help groups to explore these questions, over six study sessions. A youth version is also available. Download it from www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

For further resources and stories, visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/MeetYourMP

Background and acknowledgements

Meet Your MP was first developed by the ecumenical Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) and launched in Scotland in March 2018. For more information, visit www.scpo.scot/meet-your-mp

It built on the success of the similar 'Meet Your MSP' project, which was designed to foster relationships formed with candidates during the 2016 Scottish elections, in response to research which found that many MSPs did not know how to get involved with or relate to local churches. After 2 years, almost all MSPs have now been to a Meet Your MSP event.

We are very grateful to our colleagues in Scotland who have generously shared their initiative, and encouraged and supported JPIT to develop this version for England and Wales.

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Produced by the Joint Public Issues Team:
the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Church of Scotland, Methodist Church and
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