

# *Catholics in the Capitol*

## Living the Gospel at the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
[www.catholicsocialministrygathering.org](http://www.catholicsocialministrygathering.org)

# *Our Tradition Calls Us into Public Life*

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a **moral obligation**. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian **witness** in all we do.

*-Forming Consciences for Faithful  
Citizenship, No. 13*

It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. . . . As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life.

*-Catechism of the Catholic Church,  
No. 1913-1915*

[The Church] cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.

*-Pope Benedict XVI  
Deus Caritas Est, No. 28*

Politics . . . [is] one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good. We need to be convinced that charity 'is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones).' (No. 205)

In her dialogue with the State and with society, the Church does not have solutions for every particular issue. Together with the various sectors of society, she supports those programmes which best respond to the dignity of each person and the common good. (No. 241)

*-Pope Francis  
Evangelii Gaudium, No. 205*

...strong moral pressure is needed, so that the administration of public life will be the result of the shared responsibility of each individual with regard to the common good.

*-Compendium of the Social Doctrine  
of the Church, No. 189*

# *Arranging Your Visit*

## ***December***

State Captains contact CSMG participants from their state to introduce themselves, coordinate scheduling, and share information.

Be sure to collect any relevant local information about work being done by Catholics in your district to bring to DC.

- If you have not heard from your state captain by early-January, contact [ijpintern1@usccb.org](mailto:ijpintern1@usccb.org) to be connected to your captain.

State Captains are responsible for making appointments with the state's two senators as well as his or her representative in the House.

## ***Early January***

All CSMG participants are responsible for making appointments with their representatives.

- Sometimes more than one participant lives in the same district, so always coordinate with your state captain to ensure only one appointment per office is made.

Visit our Action Center ([votervoice.net/USCCB/home](http://votervoice.net/USCCB/home)) to determine your representative and find contact information.

Request meetings Tuesday 10:00-3:30 p.m. Preferably House early, then Senate, as the Reception will be held in one of the Senate office buildings 3:30-5:00 p.m.

It may be that your Member of Congress or key staffer is only available another time. Be flexible as one of the key objectives of the CSMG is to build relationships.

- Clearly state that you are a constituent, the group you represent, and the issue(s) you would like to discuss (issues will be finalized in early January). When an appointment is confirmed, share the details with your state captain.

## ***One Week Before the Gathering***

Call or email a day or two before your Hill visit to confirm each meeting.

# *Arranging Your Visit*

*Meetings should be scheduled to allow enough time to walk between buildings, if necessary. There are three House and three Senate office buildings.*

## **Sample Schedule**

10:30 Rep. Dave Smith, Cannon 123

11:00 Rep. Maria Jones, Cannon 321

11:45 Rep. Steve Simmons, Longworth 1223

12:15 Rep. Barbara Green, Rayburn 2345

12:45 Rep. Luis Lopez, Rayburn 2468

(Allow for time to eat lunch and walk to Senate)

2:00 Senator Joe Williams, Hart 222

3:00 Senator Elizabeth Morris, Dirksen 111

3:30-5:00 Reception in one of the Senate Office Buildings

## *TIPS!*

“Constituent coffees” can be good for connecting with members or staff, but **should not** be considered a substitute for an office meeting, as they do not allow for individual attention. Accept an invitation if your schedule allows, and insist on an in-person meeting as well.

Some offices may require faxing or e-mailing your request. Always ensure your request is going to the proper person and in the right format. Follow-up with a call to be sure your request is received.

The reception is located on the Senate side of the Hill, so attempt to schedule House meetings earlier in the day. Captains should try to make meetings with Senate offices later in the afternoon. This cuts down on confusion and helps the day move smoothly.

# Hill Visits Matter!

Hill Visits build new relationships, strengthen existing relationships, and enhance our ability to be effective advocates.

Local perspectives and stories are impactful and powerful because they reflect reality, not talking points.

We elect Members of Congress. Responding to constituents is a high priority for Members and their staff. An in-person visit from a constituent is likely to have the most influence on a Member of Congress who has not yet made a firm decision on an issue, even more than individualized letters or email messages.

These visits can and should open up a dialogue--the Member of Congress and their staff get to hear the Church's views on how public policy impacts poor and vulnerable people. At the same time, they can use you as a sounding board for ideas, ask for information about the district and the programs you work on, or invite them on a site visit.

You can establish yourself and your organization as resources for Congressional offices through these visits.

*In the past, we've asked Congress to:*

•*Extend Unemployment Insurance...*

*by the end of the week, it was included in a final spending package*

•*Release Palestinian Humanitarian Aid...*

*shortly after the Gathering, Congress began releasing the aid*

*#csmg19*

## According to the Congressional Management Foundation

“The most influential advocacy strategies for swaying an undecided Member of Congress depend on personal communications from constituents.”

Constituents who personally communicate with their members of Congress can be more influential than lobbyists.

The two top Advocacy Methods, according to Congressional staff, are:

- In-Person Issue Visits from Constituents
- Contact from a Constituent Who Represents Other Constituents

*Communicating with Congress, 2011*

# *Preparing for Your Visit*

## *Get to Know Your Representatives*

### *1. Through Their Websites:*

Visit USCCB's [Legislative Action Center](#) to determine your senators and representative. Go to their websites, paying specific attention to:

- Biographies
- Committee Assignments
- Stances on Issues
- Recent Press Releases--tend to highlight the most important issues



### *TIPS!*

Look for opportunities to make a personal connection:

- Alma Mater
- Community Groups
- Parish/Other House of Worship
- Home Town

Don't just focus on what they say--pay attention to what's NOT there. Is the senator or representative largely silent on the issues we'll be advocating?

Don't make assumptions about their faith, politics, history, or experiences.

Follow them! Check out their Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, and YouTube channels.

# *Preparing for Your Visit*

## *Get to Know Your Representatives*

### **2. Through Media:**

Search local media outlets and online for articles and news broadcasts that mention their local initiatives or votes they have taken on issues.

- What projects have they supported?
- Which local issues are most important to them?
- What programs or activities does my organization have that relate to my member's interest?

### *TIPS!*

Ask yourself: Is there a way I/my organization can support the local work of the senator or representative? Try to determine common ground and mutual interest.

Meeting a Member of Congress can seem daunting. It's okay to be excited, but don't let it scare you. The more prepared you feel, the better the meeting will go.

### **3. Through Legislation They've Supported:**

Research the legislation they have introduced and cosponsored at the Library of Congress' legislative database, THOMAS: [congress.gov/](http://congress.gov/)

Read the statements they have made in the Congressional Record:

[congress.gov/congressional-record](http://congress.gov/congressional-record)

#### Other Resources

- [Govtrack.us](http://Govtrack.us)
- [Congress.org](http://Congress.org)
- [Popvox.com/](http://Popvox.com/)
- Wikipedia
- Download the MyCongress APP:  
Apple: <http://bit.ly/114RNF1>  
Droid: <http://bit.ly/1grUeia>

#### Political Media

- The Hill: [thehill.com](http://thehill.com)
- Politico: [politico.com](http://politico.com)
- National Journal: [nationaljournal.com](http://nationaljournal.com)
- Roll Call: [rollcall.com](http://rollcall.com)

# *Preparing for Your Visit*

## *Get to Know Your State and District*

What does your state and Congressional district look like, when viewed through the lens of the issues we care about? Compile information about how these issues impact your local district as well as your diocese and church programs.

Use these sites as resources:

- State and County poverty data from CCHD:  
<https://www.povertyusa.org/data>
- State data on child well-being and quality of life from the Annie E. Casey Foundation: [aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx](http://aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx)
- State and Congressional district data on health, income, and education from the American Human Development Index:  
[measureofamerica.org/maps/](http://measureofamerica.org/maps/)
- American Fact Finder from the Census Bureau:  
[factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml)
- Many State Catholic Conference and Diocesan websites have good information about the Catholic community in your state and district.

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### *TIPS!*

Members of Congress and their staff rely on constituents to inform them about the district. It is absolutely vital that they hear your message.

We are building *relationships*.

Congressional offices need, and we want to be, *resources* on these issues.



# *Preparing for Your Visit*

## *Get to Know the Issues*

Be sure to review the Talking Points (included in the participant registration packet). Backgrounders for all advocacy issues as well as workshop topics will be posted on [CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org](https://CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org).

Don't miss the Legislative Issues briefing on Monday morning. Staff will introduce the issues, discuss current situations in Congress, and answer any questions.

Details on Hill "asks" will be available at the Gathering and will be posted at: [CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org](https://CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org).

### *TIPS!*

Develop a "game plan" with your group. Decide on a succinct agenda and a clear message that your group can agree on for your visit. Decide who will speak about what in advance so that you can advocate as a united front for your issues.

Do your best to learn about the issues, but do not become overwhelmed by this task. **Remember, you don't have to be an expert to raise issues with your member, just a constituent with concerns.**

Practice two sets of remarks: one five minutes long, and another 90 seconds long. This way, you will be able to express your concerns to the member even if they are called out of the room during the middle of the visit.



# *Preparing for Your Visit*

## *Logistics for a Hill Visit*

### ***Travel***

It will take about **50 minutes** to get to the Capitol South Metro station, closest to the House office buildings (Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn). It will take about **35 minutes** to get to the Union Station Metro station, closest to the Senate office buildings (Russell, Dirksen, and Hart). Walking from the House to the Senate side of Capitol Hill will take **15-20 minutes**. Take these travel times into account when setting up your appointments.

Please inquire at the CSMG Registration Desk if you have someone in your group with a disability that requires assistance to travel to Capitol Hill.

### ***Security***

All visitors to Congressional office buildings must pass through security.

Security at the Capitol and in the Capitol Visitor Center is more stringent. Prohibited items in these buildings include:

- Liquid, including water
- Food or beverages of any kind, including fruit and unopened packaged food
- Aerosol containers
- Non-aerosol spray (Prescriptions for medical needs are permitted.)
- Any pointed object, e.g. knitting needles (Pens and pencils are permitted.)
- Any bag larger than 18" wide x 14" high x 8.5" deep
- Electric stun guns, martial arts weapons or devices
- Guns, replica guns, ammunition, and fireworks
- Knives of any size
- Mace and pepper spray
- Razors and box cutters

# *During Your Visit*

## *Conducting the Meeting*

Many meetings may be more of a familiarization exercise – you're telling the Member/staffer about the Catholic presence in your district/state and about the issues that are of concern to Catholics, and they are basically listening but being non-committal. In other meetings, you may be congratulating the Member/staffer for his or her overall support of the Catholic position on these issues. You may also face opposition.

Arrive at your meeting a little early.

Remember to introduce yourself and your group, mention the Catholic presence in your state, and thank them for the chance to meet.

Be positive and friendly, but confident and calm. Remember--they are there to serve you.

Know your agenda and stay on message. Keep your message simple and to the point.

Explain how these issues affect you at a local level.

Take notes during the visit. Ask for the names and cards of staff assigned to work on your issues.

If you are asked a question and do not know how to respond, say that someone from USCCB will follow-up for you and make sure that you alert USCCB staff.

### *TIPS!*

Don't assume the member is familiar with the details of the issue/bill, or Catholic teaching.

Get a quote from your elected official to add to your press release.

Take pictures of your delegation with the your elected official, perhaps in front of his/her office by the state flag. A picture can make your story/press release more attractive when you get in contact with media outlets, including diocesan newspapers.

# *Following Your Visit*

## *Help Us by Leaving Feedback*

Debrief with your group as soon as possible after the meeting to compare notes and discuss your initial reaction to the legislator's/staffer's remarks, questions, and comments. Talk about what you think went right and wrong during the meeting. This will improve your group's follow-up efforts and help you provide meaningful feedback on the process.

The **Hill Visits Report Form** is an important tool for measuring our impact and effectiveness. Although there's only **one** report for each visit made to a Congressional office, all who participated in the visit should chime in with their impressions of the discussion.

If you have a more substantive discussion with the Member or staff, there's room on the back of the Hill Visits Report Form to add more comments or instructions for follow-up.

For example:

- Did the member or staffer express any strong opinions about the issues?
- Did they mention any bills or legislation they have sponsored related to the issues?
- Did they say what issues will absorb most of their attention and energy?
- What questions did they ask?
- What other information does the member or staffer want?

Below are different ways to submit the form, so please don't forget to share this important information:

- Turn in paper forms as you enter the Hill Reception
- Complete an electronic form on one of the hotel's computers or when you return home. The form can be found at [CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org](http://CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org).
- Fax completed forms to (202) 541-3339

### *TIP!*

The Report Form is for the **Hill Visit only**. After the Gathering, we'll send out a brief questionnaire asking what worked and what could have been improved. We always want your input into how the Hill Visits portion of the Gathering could be better so we can factor that into our planning for the future.

# Following Your Visit

## Get Noticed!

## Keep in Touch

Engaging the media is a great way to get your message out. Discuss how to engage traditional and social media channels with your diocesan communications director. They can also help you with placing your story.

When contacting the media, pay attention to how you present your story in order to catch their attention. Identify what is unique about your story and tie this statement to the local experience about domestic and international poverty.

Use prepared media templates, but personalize the story about your meeting so it doesn't sound like boilerplate. Links to media advisory and press release templates can be found at [CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org](http://CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org).

**A number of Congressional offices track social media to gauge public opinion.** Tweet or blog about what's happening during the Gathering and from Capitol Hill. Use local/regional social media channels that may attract your legislator's attention. Include the hashtag **#csmg19**

### *TIPS!*

Possible media channels to consider: diocesan website, local/regional Catholic media, social media channels within the diocese, secular/local media.

Remember to add the photo of your group with your elected official and his or her quote from your meeting to the press release.

Send a thank you note or email from your group to:

- Reinforce your message and the local impact of the issue
- Highlight the main points of the visit
- Conclude with a personal story that surfaced during the meeting
- If the member requested any additional information during the visit, include it in your note or indicate that USCCB will follow up.

Visit your elected official's district office to follow up with him or her.

You can invite your elected official on a site visit to experience the work of your organization.

### *TIP!*

If you met with staff in your legislator's office, still address the note to the legislator with a copy to the staff member as well as other members of your group.

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