



Lesson Plan

Avenues To Advocacy: Letter Writing

Length:

1 hour - 1.5 hours

Objectives:

Through this activity participants will:

- Gain a greater understanding about the role of letter-writing campaigns in the overall advocacy mission.
- Work through provided guidelines to write letters to their respective senators and/or representatives about a specific issue.

Summary:

This lesson is designed to enable participants to act on their advocacy education from *What Is Advocacy?* by researching, discussing, drafting and sending letters addressing specific issues to their senators and/or to their representatives.

Materials:

- Pens, paper, envelopes and stamps for writing and mailing letters
- *Tips for Advocacy: Letter Writing* handout
- Optional reference: *Advocacy Process* handout
- Contact information for legislators to whom the letters are being written (Option: Use the *Catholics Confront Global Poverty (CCGP) website* to identify your senators and representatives, but also consider engaging with state and local elected officials whose contact information should be easily found online.)

Preparation:

Determine ahead of time how the issues of focus are chosen and assigned. Choose a selection (number dependent upon size of class) of relevant issues either from the community or from the [Catholics Confront Global Poverty \(CCGP\) website](#), or have participants brainstorm ideas for relevant issues from the community or from independent experiences or research. Issues can then be assigned to groups, or participants can select which issues on which they would like to focus.

Option: If you choose to select the issues ahead of time, you may want to provide some relevant information to participants when assigning issues in order to streamline the research process. Visit the CCGP website and click on Action Center to find relevant topics and general contextual and applicable legislative information.



Process:

Advocacy Process Review (optional)

Refer back to the “Advocacy Process” handout (used in the “*How Does Advocacy Work?*” lesson plan) to emphasize the role that letter-writing campaigns play in the advocacy process.

Picking a Group and an Issue

Break class into groups for addressing each topic; adjust the number of issues based on size of the group (the class should be divided into groups of 4-6 people with each group focusing on a different issue). Assign or identify issues for focus of letter-writing campaign.

Research

Instruct participants to research context and any political action currently addressing their chosen issue. (You may want to provide applicable background information to streamline the research portion of the activity.)

Tips for Advocacy Letter-Writing

Before writing letters, review the “*Tips for Advocacy: Letter Writing*” handout.

Writing Letters

Now participants can begin composing their letters. Allow them to discuss the content of their letters, and work together to frame their issues in the most effective way.

Once participants have completed their letters, mail them. Legislators may even write letters back—make sure to include a return address on the envelope or within the letter itself; use either a home address or the school/church address as applicable or appropriate).

Option: Use this activity as a lead-in to the Congressional Visit Workshop; keep same groups and issues in order to streamline the research process.



Handout

Letter Writing Workshop

Step One: Relax

Personal connections are more important than pages of detailed proposals—you don't have to be an expert! Even if you aren't personally impacted by an issue on a day- to-day basis, the fact that you are a constituent and care about the issue is important enough.

Step Two: Identify Yourself

Explain that you are a constituent, and talk about the school, church and/or organization that you are a part of, and how your membership in that community/organization has inspired your passion about this issue and your desire to write about it.

Step Three: Be Yourself

Your elected officials want to hear from you because they represent you! They can't effectively address issues that concern their constituents if they don't know what they are. Explain your personal connection, or why you feel passionately about this issue.

Step Four: Ask

Be specific about what action you are asking your legislator to take. This may involve some additional research if there is current legislation going through Congress, or you can provide some suggestions based on your own research into the issue.

Things to Remember

- Be polite! Everyone responds better to positive communication, so make sure to keep this in mind. This includes using proper formal formatting (see Sample Letter).
- Proofread your letter, and even better, go over it with other members of your group. If you are writing individually, ask a friend or family member to review your letter!
- Make sure to do your research ahead of time: a legislator's website may show you where they already stand on an issue.

ADDRESS

To a Representative

The Honorable (full name)
(Room #) (Name) House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

To a Senator

The Honorable (full name)
(Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear **Representative/Senator (insert last name)**,

PARAGRAPH 1

My name is **(insert your name)**, and I am writing because I am concerned about poverty and violence affecting our brothers and sisters overseas. My family and I were once refugees fleeing violence, and I know that innocent people suffer the most in times of war.

PARAGRAPH 2

I am a parishioner at St. Anthony de Padua Church in San Antonio, Texas, where I participate in various ministries to help local families in need.

PARAGRAPH 3

I ask you to support continued humanitarian assistance to suffering people, by supporting robust funding for international humanitarian accounts.

PARAGRAPH 4

This is an issue that's very important to others in my parish as well. We look forward to hearing back from you on this issue. Please know that Catholic Relief Services and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops can be a resource to you as you work on this issue in Congress.

CLOSING PARAGRAPH

Thank you for your attention to these issues. As a concerned citizen and a committed Catholic, I believe that we have an obligation to assist those who are suffering, whether they are our neighbors here at home, or our neighbors overseas.

Sincerely (or another closing),

Your Name

Your Return Address (this is how the member's office confirms that you're a constituent)