

Churches: Meet your MP

The Church is called to speak out on behalf of those who have no voice. It's not that poor communities around the world can't speak; it's more that their voices simply aren't heard – or worse, are ignored. As Christians we have a biblical mandate to speak out against poverty and injustice. 'Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy' (Proverbs 31:9).

WHY NOW?

In 2013, decision-makers in the UK have a unique opportunity to tackle global hunger, and we can make sure they do by adding our voices to the **IF** campaign. Not only will the UK be hosting the G8 in June, but the Budget in March will be a crucial moment when the UK government can show its commitment to ending hunger.



Ginny Lattul / Tearfund

We want it to:

- be the first UK government ever to deliver on the 40-year-old promise to spend 0.7% of national income on aid
- support tax reform that will prevent billions of pounds in revenue being lost from developing countries each year due to tax dodging.

WHY MY CHURCH?

Mobilising your church to meet your local MP can have a powerful, long-lasting impact. MPs will want to meet any group that represents widespread concern within their constituency. But churches are especially important because they are often so well networked into the rest of the community. In fact, churches have a proven track record of influencing MPs' decisions. Following the 2005 Make Poverty History campaign, Gordon Brown commended the work of churches in bringing debt relief and aid to the forefront of the political agenda, saying, 'I think you've seen that ministers around the world have been affected by the strength of public opinion, churches, faith groups, and it does have an impact.'

It also offers a great opportunity to witness to your MP and community that God is passionate about issues of justice and that the Church is at the forefront of efforts to build a better world.

A face-to-face meeting is easy to organise and can be the beginning of an important, influential relationship between your church and your MP.

WHEN?

The Chancellor will announce the Budget on 20 March 2013, so please arrange for your meeting to take place before 15 March if at all possible. That way you can be sure that the issues you raise can be considered by decision-makers as the Budget is being agreed.

(If you want to meet with your MP but absolutely can't do it before the Budget please contact campaigns@tearfund.org for advice on what things you might talk about and what briefing you can give your MP in a meeting after the Budget).



Peter Caton / Tearfund

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit will equip you and your church as you prepare to meet your MP ahead of the Budget. It gives you step-by-step instructions on two ways for you to lobby your MP. These are:

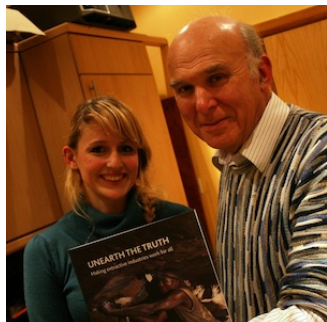
1. Inviting your MP to an event at your church
2. Going to visit your MP with a small group on behalf of your church

We've provided some additional resources in the appendices that will make planning and preparing for your meeting really simple.

If you're planning to meet your MP or have any questions, please let Tearfund know. We love to hear what you're up to, plus we've got a dedicated team who can offer support as you prepare to meet your politicians. Please do get in touch with us at churches@tearfund.org or phone 0845 521 0021.

Invite your MP to a church event

Inviting your MP to a church event is a great opportunity to introduce your MP to the congregation and to talk about the IF campaign in a relaxed and friendly environment.



Andy Wilson / Tearfund

Organising a church event with your MP is not as daunting as it sounds. It can be as simple as asking your MP to attend a normal Sunday service with space for a brief Q&A with the congregation over tea and cake after the service.

If you are not the church leader, please book in a time with your church leader to talk about the campaign and to pass on this set of guidelines. It will make sure they are equipped to be involved and organise a successful meeting with your local MP.

ARRANGE A MEETING

Find your MP: Go to www.theyworkforyou.com and enter the postcode of your church.

Get in touch: It's best to approach your MP first by letter or email. This is a chance to introduce yourself and your church, and to let them know that you are supporting the IF campaign. Give them some details about your event so they know whether they can commit to it or not.

- Try to do this as early as possible; the more notice your MP has, the more likely it is they will be able to attend your event.
- Look at Tearfund's sample invite (Appendix 1). You will need to adapt it for your church and event, but it gives you all the information you need to include.
- Think about what your MP is looking to gain from the meeting. MPs are there to represent constituents. Who from your local community will be present? Will there be an appearance in the local press? Make sure these things are covered in your invite.
- Send a copy of the IF executive summary with your letter, which will make sure the MP knows a bit about the IF campaign before they come to your meeting. This can be downloaded from www.tearfund.org/mp. This is also a helpful document for anyone in your church who wants to know about the campaign in detail.

Book a time: Your MP may reply personally to your invite, but you will still need to call their office to book a date and time for your meeting. Make sure you mention how long the meeting will be.

GET READY FOR YOUR EVENT

Tell your church about IF: If you haven't told your congregation about IF already, set aside some time in a Sunday service to share the campaign and pray about your event. Tearfund's church pack, 'A Recipe for Change', contains resources including a film and a short presentation on the IF campaign, along with some prayer points and action cards to sign. You can order or download the pack at www.tearfund.org/IF



Jay Butcher / Tearfund

Promote the visit: Let your church know about the visit so they can prepare and pray for it. Make sure it is advertised on your church website and has been mentioned in a few Sunday services in the run-up to the event.

- Decide if the event is mainly for your congregation or something for the wider community to attend. If it's a community event, think of ways to advertise the event outside of your church. See <http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk/> to find out about placing an advert in your local paper. Think of particular groups it would be good to invite and also encourage your congregation to invite friends and neighbours.
- Involve others: You may want particular groups in your church to show your MP what they have been doing around IF.
- Speak to the children's and youth leaders about creative ideas for the meeting. The children's church could make and decorate a large IF sign or present paper plates that they have painted with their favourite meal. You can find more ideas and resources at http://www.tearfund.org/en/resources/for_churches/pack_library/if_resource/downloads.
- Your church may have a group committed to praying and campaigning around issues of global injustice. If this is the case, speak to its coordinator; they may want to share what they've already been doing or plan something to contribute to the meeting.

Research your MP: It's good to know a bit about your MP before they come to your event, as this will make the visit more personal and conversations more relevant. For example, they may already have spoken about IF or have travelled to a country affected by hunger. See your MP's website or Wikipedia page for

biographical information and www.theyworkforyou.com for details of their activity in Parliament.

Include your MP in the service: If your MP is attending your church service, think about how you can involve them. If it's appropriate, ask your MP to do a reading or pray for them in the service. Make sure you agree this with your MP in advance.

Collect questions: Before your event, ask the congregation to submit any questions, comments or stories they want to share with your MP. This will ensure you are ready to guide the discussion and keep the conversation relevant on the day.

- Make sure everyone has access to the **IF** briefing (Appendix 2) to find out more about **IF** and what you as a congregation are asking your MP to do.

Set up a space for your meeting: Have a room available for your meeting and arrange it to facilitate the discussion. You may want to put seats out for the audience and let the MP speak from the front.

- Have plenty of refreshments available. Ask members of the congregation to bring homemade cake, and recruit a few volunteers to serve tea and coffee.

Tell local media: Sharing your event with your local press (see <http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk/>) is a great way to get publicity for your church and the **IF** campaign. Local radio is another way to spread the word. Could someone from the church do a slot on a local radio programme the morning before the event?

Have a social media plan: Tweet your MP (@TwitterName) ahead of the meeting to tell them you're looking forward to the meeting, and have someone ready to tweet during the event.

AT THE MEETING

Be polite and friendly: A good relationship with your MP is important. This will encourage their support for the campaign and make future meetings, perhaps on local issues the church is passionate about, more likely. Be clear that you are asking them to take action, but seek to engage in a friendly discussion.

Tell your story: Explain why you as a church care. You may have been following



Ginny Lattul / Tearfund

similar campaigns, or there may be people with personal stories they want to share. This is a great way to show your MP that supporting IF is in the interest of their constituents.

Ask your questions: Use people's pre-submitted questions to have a Q&A session. You may want to ask people to stand up and ask their own questions, or ask their questions from the front.

- In order to build a rapport with your MP, start with a more general interview and let them share a bit about themselves. You could ask them why they decided to enter politics, what they have been working on recently or if they have attended any similar events.

Keep to time: Plan questions and comments in advance and don't go over the allocated time you have available. An hour-long slot after the service allows 40 minutes for a group discussion and 20 minutes for people to approach the MP individually.

Be specific: Don't just ask your MP for their 'support', but ask them to use their power to take a specific action.

- Ask your MP to write to the Chancellor, George Osborne, asking him to commit to spending 0.7% of national income on overseas aid in the Budget, and to amend the Finance Bill to clamp down on tax dodging.
- Make sure your MP leaves with a copy of the MP briefing, available at www.tearfund.org/mp.

Take a photo: Capture the event by getting a photo of your church with your MP.

AFTER THE MEETING

Thank your MP: MPs rarely get thanked for their work, so make sure you follow up with a thank you letter or email. Or maybe your whole church could sign a thank you card! Also use this as an opportunity to remind them of what you asked them to do and that you are looking to see that action.

Make sure your MP takes action before 20 March. This is when the Budget is announced and the government will confirm whether it will spend 0.7% of national income on overseas aid or not.

Make the event public: Share pictures from your event on Twitter (#TFcampaigns, #IF and #Budget) and Facebook. If your MP is on Twitter, you can tweet them to thank them publicly. Use Tearfund's press release template (Appendix 3) to get in touch with local papers. You can send the editor additional feedback on the issues raised or commend your MP if they were supportive.

Meet your MP at their constituency office



Ginny Lattul / Tearfund

Although MPs are there to represent their constituents, not all will be able to commit to attending a church service. They may prefer not to work on Sundays, or only have time for a short meeting. If this is the case, you can still show your MP that your church cares about the IF campaign.

Visiting your MP at their constituency office is the easiest way to meet your MP face to face and gives space for a detailed

conversation about the campaign. You may decide to go as an individual or as a small group, but make sure you are clear that you are there to represent your church. You could take a petition, action cards, or a giant IF signed by church members to show their support for IF.

ARRANGE A MEETING

Find your MP: Go to www.theyworkforyou.com and enter the postcode of your church.

Get in touch: Approach your MP first by letter or email. This is a chance to introduce yourself and your church, and will let them know that you are supporting the IF campaign.

- Send a copy of the executive summary with your letter, which will make sure the MP knows a bit about the IF campaign before they come to your meeting. This can be downloaded from www.tearfund.org/mp.

Book a meeting: Once you have got in touch with your MP, booking an appointment is easy. All MPs hold regular surgeries for meeting constituents. Just look at their websites to find out dates, times and how to book an appointment.

PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

Speak to your church leader: Make sure your church knows about the campaign so they can show support and pray for the meeting. Speak to your church leader about mentioning the campaign in a church service. See the Tearfund church pack, 'A Recipe for Change', for ways to engage your church. The pack is available to order or download at www.tearfund.org/if

Involve your church: Think of a way to demonstrate to your MP that the rest of the church is behind the campaign. You could take a creative prop such as a giant cardboard loaf of bread or a 'Budget box' signed by members of the congregation. A petition with people's names and addresses means your MP can keep people updated with what action they are taking.

Brief the group: Make sure everyone going to the meeting knows what they are going to say and what you are going to ask the MP to do. Have a look at the executive summary at www.tearfund.org/mp to find out more about the campaign.

AT THE MEETING

Look smart and arrive on time – but be aware that MPs can often get delayed.

Introduce yourselves: Tell the MP who you are and a little bit about yourselves. Remember you are there to represent your church. Explain what your church is doing about the campaign and why it matters to them.

Stay on track: Ask how much time they have at the start. If the MP tries to move the subject onto something else, you can respond by saying, 'I know your time is limited – what I really came to talk about is...'

- Your MP won't expect you to be an expert, so don't worry if they ask a question you can't answer. You can promise to follow it up after you have done some research or have got in touch with us at Tearfund.

Be specific: It is crucial that you don't just ask your MP for their 'support', but ask them to use their power to take a specific action.

- Ask your MP to write to the Chancellor, George Osborne, asking him to commit to spending 0.7% of national income on overseas aid in the Budget, and to amend the Finance Bill to clamp down on tax dodging.
- Make sure your MP leaves with a copy of the MP briefing, available at www.tearfund.org/mp

Take a photo: Get a photo of your group with your MP, including any props you've brought with you.

AFTER THE MEETING

Thank your MP: MPs rarely get thanked for their work, so make sure you follow up the meeting with a thank you letter or email on behalf of your church. Also use this as an opportunity to remind them of what you asked them to do.

Make sure your MP takes action before 20 March. This is when the Budget is announced and the government will confirm whether it will spend 0.7% of national income on overseas aid.



Clive Mear / Tearfund

Use social media: Tell us about your meeting on Twitter ([#TFcampaigns](#), [#IF](#) and [#Budget](#)) and Facebook. If your MP is on Twitter, you can tweet them to thank them publicly.

Appendix 1


Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss [Name of MP],

I am the church leader/a member of (church name).


Include information about your church:

- Where is it located?
- How big is the congregation?

As a church, we care about poverty and injustice, and we believe that it is unfair and unjust that 1 in 8 people go to bed hungry each night despite the fact that there is enough food in the world to feed everyone.

We are supporting the  campaign, which aims to tackle the root causes of hunger. We understand that the Budget on 20 March presents a crucial opportunity for the UK government to demonstrate its commitment to tackling some of the issues that result in 900 million people in the world not having enough food. In particular, the Treasury has the chance to deliver on its promise to spend 0.7% of national income on aid, and to support tax reform that will prevent billions of pounds in revenue being lost from developing countries each year due to tax dodging.

Ahead of the Budget, as a congregation (and members of the local community) we would like to meet with you to tell you why we are supporting the campaign and to discuss the important role you can play in helping us tackle the issue of global hunger.

We would like to invite you to one of our Sunday services [if you have a tentative date, include it] followed by an informal discussion over tea and cake for an hour after the service. We will have a 40 minute meeting including a short presentation from our children's church and an  Q&A session between yourself and the congregants. There will then be 20 minutes for congregants to chat to you individually.

We hope that you will be able to attend and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

[Name]

On behalf of [church name]

Appendix 2

What is IF?

There is enough food for everyone, but almost 900 million people go to bed hungry each night. That is 1 in 8 of the world's population.

This is an injustice that as Christians we are called to speak out against: 'Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy' (Proverbs 31:9).

In 2013, the UK will host the G8 summit. This presents a unique opportunity for the UK to lead the way in tackling hunger worldwide. We want to send the message that 'there is enough food for everyone IF' – IF our politicians listen to us and seize the chance to tackle some of the root causes of hunger.

Ahead of the summit, the Budget offers a chance for the UK to show its commitment to creating a world that is free from hunger. The government will be able to make financial promises that will provide revenue and investment to ensure that, in a world of plenty, no one needs to go hungry.

What do we want from the Budget?

The Budget is decided each year by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and is the UK's single most important economic and financial statement. The Chancellor can review and change tax rates, and can make announcements on how taxpayers' money will be spent in the coming years. The Budget in March 2013 is an opportunity for the government to demonstrate that it is serious about ending hunger.

You have the chance to influence the content of the Budget. In the run-up to the Budget, we want you to call on your own MPs to take action and encourage the Treasury to take two major steps to tackle hunger:

1. To be the first UK government ever to deliver on the 40-year-old promise to spend 0.7% of national income on aid – and also to push politicians to ensure 0.7% becomes the new minimum from 2013 onwards. Keeping this promise on aid will save and transform millions of lives.
2. To support tax reform that will prevent billions of pounds in revenue being lost from developing countries each year due to tax dodging. The UK is also losing billions of pounds a year from tax dodging, and therefore reforming the tax system benefits ordinary people, both at home and abroad.

For further details on the IF campaign, see the executive summary at www.tearfund.org/mp .<http://www.tearfund.org/if>

Appendix 3

PRESS RELEASE

[centre, upper case, Arial 12 point]

Date

[day/date in number form/month/year, lower case, align right]

e.g. Friday 7 January 2011 or

Embargoed until: 00:01hours Monday 10 January 2011

or For Immediate Release

HEADLINE

Make it brief and attention-grabbing

[upper case, bold, centre]

[Copy in Arial 12 point, 1.5 line spacing, justified text]

The first sentence should be a summary of the story, eg Local church X met with X MP on (date) to lobby him/her to X, Local X will be travelling to X with X

Get your key points across to catch the journalist's attention or they may not read any further. Answer all the important questions such as who, what, where, when, why and how. Write as if you are speaking to the publication's readers – check out your target publication for an appropriate style. Use strong statistics if appropriate.

'Add a quote from someone involved as they explain what they are doing and why it is important to them and/or their community.'

Expand on the details in the next paragraph. Remember that the journalist will want to know what is unique or new about your story and why it will appeal to their readers.

'Add another quote if possible from someone involved or in a position of authority.'

Finish off with details such as dates, times and locations – these only need to be brief, and should be the details you'd like to see in print. Fuller details can go in 'Notes to editors', below.

- Ends -

Notes to editors

1. Tell the editor who to contact for more information – include mobile, landline and email.
2. If you have a spokesperson available, mention this here (eg X is available for interview; please call X for more information).
3. Attach two or three great photos/videos to illustrate your story, and give the descriptions of each (including photo credits) in this section so the journalist knows what they are looking at.

Send the press release in the body of the email – feedback from some journalists has been that they often read on the go and cannot open attachments.