



**HOW TO
PETITION YOUR
MP ON POVERTY
AND INJUSTICE**

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me;
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
... And they shall rebuild the ruins,
They shall raise up the former desolations,
And they shall repair the ruined cities,
The desolations of many generations

Isaiah 61: 1&4

This passage that we find in Isaiah 61 and quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18, after he had come face to face with the enemy who tried to distract and turn Jesus away from the value system of God. Jesus was empowered by the Spirit when he quoted Isaiah. The Spirit breaks into the life of Jesus and empowers him to address the community and proclaim transformation within the society.

As AICs we are also propelled by the power of the Holy Spirit to challenge the enemy of poverty and injustice that has taken root in our society. Many of us, however fail to imagine a world without poverty, disease, hunger, and injustice - a world of justice and peace.

In truth, we live in a wounded world and are reminded daily of our powerlessness to change it. The Church is often urged to mind its own business and stick to "spiritual matters". We are grateful for such commitment because they serve as a reminder to those of us who have forgotten about our core business, which is the Jesus Spirituality, it serves as a wake up call for AICs to remind ourselves of the value of God and to actively seek justice. To allow the Spirit of God to break through our lives and boldly proclaim and actively work to bring about liberty for those who are bound up in unjust systems

Like Jesus who went into the wilderness to pray and came out empowered by the Holy Spirit to make a change in the lives of people, challenging the injustice in society and actively liberating those that are "bound" poverty and injustice are spiritual matters, that the church should be actively involved in to bring about a just world.

As part of our work for Just Communities, we have undertaken to petition the local representative urging him or her to take specific steps or measures to help end poverty and injustice.

Below is a guide on how to organize the petition.

What is the issue?

This provides an excellent opportunity to work with local leadership to bring an end to poverty and injustice.

It is important to be clear on what the issues are.

At the turn of this century, world leaders assembled at the UN in New York made the commitment to "spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing condition of extreme poverty." The leaders made far reaching commitments to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to achieve universal primary education, to promote gender equality and empower women, to reduce child mortality, to improve maternal health, to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases, to safeguard the environment and to develop a global partnership for development.

This commitment provides an excellent opportunity to work with the local leadership to bring an end to poverty and injustice.



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Poverty: A good way to describe poverty is when one is unable and powerless to secure for oneself or dependents the provisions or things that they need for their wellbeing. Close to one billion people have no assurance of whether they will eat, cannot choose what to eat, can only eat a meal a day, cannot afford to go to hospital - even when it is free, cannot take their children to school even where it is free, cannot access safe water for drinking (have to rely on the goodwill of others for this) etc. This kind of poverty is inhuman and a terrible injustice.

How many people in your community wake up to this condition every day? What can your community do to end it? Kenya is a signatory to the millennium declaration. How can we use the opportunity presented by the millennium goals to end it? How do we take our Member of Parliament and government to account so that it can deliver on this commitment?

One thing the community can do is to organize a petition to the Member of Parliament to take up the issue of abject poverty in his or her constituency and to commit to a plan of action that can eradicate it.

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The Petition

Organizing a petition has three parts...

- 1) Calling the community together to talk about and decide what the issues are for them;
- 2) preparing a petition, in this case a letter listing the issues - what is being or not being done about them and why the community is worried and,
- 3) arranging a meeting with the community and member of parliament to discuss these issues and present a memorandum to the MP;

Initial Committee: To call the first meeting, choose a committee of, say, 15 members to plan the petition. The members should come from a wide selection of community institutions such as school PTAs, other churches, chair of local market, etc.

Make sure to discuss poverty with committee members and so that they know what the issues are.

Meet often to discuss detailed characteristics of the issue.

Assign roles. Choose a chair, vice chair (helper of the chair), record keeper (note taker), spokespersons (three), mobilizers, ushers, press secretary, and others.

First Meeting: For the first meeting, call as many community members as can make it to the discussion on the issues raised by the committee.

Challenge community members to give their own experiences on the issues and what they think needs to be done. Take care to note how many people in the community may be affected by a particular problem.

If there are government officials in the meeting ask them to educate members what the government is doing to solve the problems and what community members can do. Ask them too why government solutions may not be working and what else may need to be done. Challenge community members to say whether in deed the government is doing what the officials says it is supposed to be doing. What do they think is the problem with the services or solutions they are getting from the government?



Be sure to have a programme for this meeting. Ideally the meeting should take half a day, but it can also take an entire day.

Be sure to take notes of all that is said at the meeting and to capture the issues as faithfully as possible.

Community permission: At the end of the meeting. Ask the community to authorize the committee and to propose other members to take up the issue with government representatives and the area member of parliament. Make sure your key officials are part of the resulting committee. Tell members of the community of your intention to take up this issues with the government through a petition and other meetings if need be.

Thank community members for turning up and their participation and commitment to the process.



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The Letter

Once you have their mandate, proceed to plan the petition and actual meeting with the MP. The petition consists of a letter listing the issues as raised by community members and their signatures and the presentation of this to the MP.

There is not one formula to do the letter. As a guide –

Address to the Member of Parliament by their title and name (e.g. Dear Honourable ...)

Purpose: The purpose of the letter is to invite the Member of Parliament to a community gathering to discuss issues relating to poverty and injustice in the community.

State that you write in follow through to a community consultation (meeting) held on and at (list of attendants is attached, where possible with full addresses).

Start with and maintain a positive tone.

Acknowledge progress the community has made since he was elected and before. Look out for the issues/matters the MP is passionate about and mention the difference they are making in community. Thank him/her for these efforts.

Mention also the broad government intentions and programmes- especially as reported to you by government officials.

Note progress made e.g. with the new constitution, with improvement in the economy, with increased social programmes such as free primary education etc. Note concrete differences these are making in community.

Now introduce the fact that the community is concerned that progress is slow in, (name the areas) and have asked that you follow up on them.

Specifically.... (go into the specifics of each issue- what the matter is, how it expresses itself within the community, what the community members say is being done or not being





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done, why this is not sufficient and what the members think should be done.

State categorically what you are asking the member of parliament to do i.e. – meet and discuss with the community on the issues at the meeting; to continue to show leadership by speaking to members about what he has done in the past to address these issues and what progress he has made, thereafter to take up these matters with parliament and government officials

State why you think a solution as you propose is possible and needed e.g. – the resources are available and it will not call for much more money; a reorganization of public service delivery to involve community members in oversight has little cost implications but ensures that public resources are well spent; spending better (not necessarily more) to increase local farm yield, improve supply of clean water, take more children to secondary school, build workspaces for the youth etc will contribute immensely to local human and economic development etc.

Ask the leader to make a personal commitment to tackle the issues raised, expressing the hope that your community continues to place on his/her high office. Invite him/her to personally respond by contacting any of your designated officials- give names, phone numbers and other addresses.

Restate the invitation to the community consultation (meeting) planned for (date and place). Give the MP alternative dates (two days in a week spanning four weeks with the earliest at least six weeks away) and ask him to indicate one which best suits his schedule.

Inform the minister that you are working with the local media and that with his/her permission you would be happy to arrange a joint media briefing/interview with community leaders/ members.

Thank the MP for his/her time and attention and wish him/her well on their endeavours.

Follow up the letter with a telephone to the MP. Thank him for taking his time and ask him that you would be happy to fix the date at once. If you set the date, confirm this with a second short letter thanking him and assuring him of your appreciation.

If you are unable to fix a date with him, thank him anyway and let him know that you will write when the date is fixed by your committee.

Collecting the signatures

Prepare a sign up sheet- preferably photocopy paper – allowing for twenty signatures per page. Do not sign on the back of the sheet. Indicate the names of the community members signing as they appear on the voters card, or failing this the national ID. Indicate the voter card/national ID card number. Wherever possible ask members to indicate phone numbers.

Seek out volunteers from the community to have members sign up. Divide the volunteers according to the voting stations in the community making sure to avoid duplication of signatures. You can motivate members with a gift- say a mobile phone or goat- for one who returns the highest number of signatures.

Once the signatures are in place make and keep enough copies- at least four.



The second meeting

Call this meeting at least four weeks after the first. If the Member of Parliament has responded positively to any of the dates you proposed, use this to fix an actual date. Be sure to allow sufficient time for the collecting of signatures. Plan the meeting for a day and place that is convenient for the majority of members of your community.

Send out invitations to all the leaders.

Get committee members and volunteers to attempt a door to door solicitation to community members to attend the meeting. Again use the voter registry map- per voting station- to do this.

Invite the press and plan the meeting with them. Visit the offices of the nearest radio station and discuss the meeting with them. Ask them to support with interviews with committee members prior to the meeting. You can also have community members call in to ask questions. Ask them to arrange a joint interview or session with committee members and the MP present.

Make sure to have an agenda for the meeting. A sample agenda can include:

Welcome and purpose of the meeting (10 mins)

Opening prayer and song (10 mins)

Community residents speak (30 mins)

Collection (5 mins)

Spokesperson speaks on the issues and what to expect from the MP (20 mins)

Chair invites the MP to speak to issues (30 mins)

Closing statement and thanksgiving (summarise your issues and demands and how the MP has responded) (15 mins)

Adjourn (invite participants to tea etc also a recognition of community members for work well done).

Total time – 2 hours

Make sure to choose the right people as spokespersons. These would be those who have demonstrated familiarity and commitment to the issues you are raising. They should not be community leaders unless such leaders have been attending your issue meetings and have been actively involved in community mobilization.

Be sure to have women and young people on your committee and as spokespersons. Keep a ratio of at least one woman for every two men and 50:50 young/old participation.

Avoid making the chair or deputy chair a spokesperson on the day of the meeting. Doing so risks losing control of the meeting and killing off participation.

Keep a tight list of speakers and limit those not connected with your campaign or issue. Many 'important' people will want to speak when the MP is visiting. Kindly let everyone know that there will always be other opportunities when they can speak.

Make sure to plan well. Secure the grounds or venue of the meeting in good time. Make sure it is clean. Decorate the room with any materials, such as posters, that you may have on the issues. If possible prepare your own 'home made' posters by using flip chart paper, and writing out the demands or slogans in bold and clear handwriting. Select your hymns and songs for the day ahead of time.

Remind the media of the event at least a week prior and then again on the eve of the meeting.

Allocate roles and practise. Do not wait up to the day of the meeting to practice on your the respective roles and the all important presentation. You need;



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A chair of the meeting and an assisting chair- the chair's role is to moderate the meeting and to keep it focused on the key agenda and aims. The chair should be someone with experience to keep speakers- especially the MP- from taking over the meeting. The chair must of course be thoroughly familiar with the effort.

Assistant to the speaker- the chief role of this person is to control the microphone(s) - especially the microphone(s) that is/are accessible to the participants. Remove the microphone from the microphone stand and hold it by hand. This gives you the ability to slowly shift it away. This person also takes over should the chair be 'away'.

Record keeper- be sure to have two people taking notes.

Welcomer- be sure to have someone to usher in the important guests as they arrive. This person's real role when the meeting starts changes to actually keep the guests busy and thus stop them from interfering with the programme.

Spokespersons- have at least three but only one or two speaks.

Pressman or woman- invites, follows up with and confirms the attendance of the press. He or she should set up and run a press table.

Ushers- these should be unmarked and inter-passed with the audience. Real work is to 'direct' the meeting by initiating clapping and if need be asking the MP questions that need asking. They should also be designated to interrupt a participant who is taking the meeting off track.

Mail men/women- these carry the sign up sheets and are active throughout the meeting asking members to sign up.

Have all the gadgets that you need in place- such as a three microphones.
Hold the meeting and make it enjoyable.

Follow up the meeting by thanking the MP and remind him/her of the commitment he/she has made. Hold a media event/conference at the grounds of the meeting immediately it is done. If you have been invited to their studios oblige and prepare. If the MP agrees, hold the press briefings jointly.

Thank everybody who was involved. Hold a small celebration after the meeting with community and people who were involved.

Call a meeting of the committee to evaluate the whole process for success and failures. Plan a way forward but take a break.





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