

WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Reach fellow constituents
and elected officials



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

By writing a Letter to the Editor, you can voice your opinion to policymakers and educate people in your community. These letters can be used to correct or interpret facts in response to an inaccurate or biased article, explain the connection between a news item and a deeper issue, or to praise or criticize a recent article or editorial. Without exception, the letters section is one of the most highly read segments of newspapers and magazines.

In your Letter to the Editor, mention your elected official by name—by doing this, your efforts double as a letter to readers in your community and a letter to your officials. Members of Congress have press staffers who read local newspapers and take note of when the member is mentioned.

Know the Letters Policy

- Find out the publication's policy for printing letters. Some have length limitations, some have stringent deadlines, and almost all require that you include your name and contact information. (Your address and phone number will not be printed; most publications call you to confirm that you really did write the letter and you want to have it published.)

Be Timely

- Responding to a recent article, editorial, or op-ed piece is one of the best ways to increase your chances of getting published. Mention the name of the article and date it was published.
- You can also capitalize on recent news events or anniversaries. For examples, you might use Earth Day as an opportunity to write about the importance of environmental regulations.
- You can write to inform citizens how their legislators recently voted on an important issue.

Keep it Simple

- Letters should always state the specific issue and what action should be taken.
- Keep your points clear and concise. Make sure the first sentence is short and catchy.

Make it Local and Personal

- Whenever possible, use local statistics to make your letter relevant to the newspaper's audience.

- Elected officials subscribe to local newspapers in both their District and Washington Office, so remember to tie the issue to the local community (their constituency).
- Use personal stories and use your own credentials—if you have expertise in the area, don't be afraid to state this. Share how your vocation or ministry is impacted by this issue.

Ensure Accuracy

- If you use a statistic, cite your source.
- If you are referring to a piece of legislation, check the number of a House or Senate Bill and its status through the legislator's office. This helps your readers become credible and confident advocates.

Don't Forget the Follow Up

- Don't be discouraged if your letter is not printed. Keep trying. You can submit a revised letter with a different angle on the issue at a later date.
- If your letter is published, you may want to send it to your member of Congress with a personal note attached.
- Share your letter with the staff in the ELCA Washington Office (washingtonoffice@elca.org). The staff may be able to connect you to others passionate about this issue.

Think Strategically

- Think of a letter-to-the-editor as a regular strategic tool—target several different papers in your district at the same time.
- Encourage others to explore different angles on the same issue.