

Strangers No Longer

Call to Action: Meeting with your Legislator

Now, with the possibility of new elected officials joining the State Legislature, SNL wants to get involved. Any campaign for change is like entering a jungle. It's dark in the jungle, a lot happens in the nighttime, and you cannot always see clearly what is really happening. You want to make sure you go with others – with your Circle. You want to have a plan and a path. You need a good flashlight.

Our intention as we go well prepared into the Jungle of Social Change. We'll go with a team, and we'll have a plan of action and good questions. We want our Circle – and our Parish – to come out smarter, stronger and better known and better connected with other groups around us.

And that is why we FIRST do a Power Analysis. We want to understand the jungle of politics, of negotiation, of friends and allies, of special interests. We want to know who agrees with our values – and who might agree sometimes but not others.

So, what is a Power Analysis? The key element of a Power Analysis is a conversation with somebody in power. Of course, we could sit in a library, we could do on-line research. But the most important element of Power Analysis is the conversation with people in power.

In this case, we are asking each Circle to organize a conversation with their State Representative sometime before the Nov. 3 Election.

The conversation will be by Zoom. It may look like an informal conversation with the State Representative, but it is actually a very disciplined and open-ended conversation. The more people you have with you in the conversation, the better. Why? Because it shows the State Representative that you are not alone, you are not unprotected, you have other eyes and ears with you.

Officially, it will be a meeting between the Circle of Support and the State Representative. But you should feel free to invite other parishioners, the pastor, your friends – anybody who would like to be part of the Circle's meeting with your State Representative.

So, for starters, think of it as a 30-45 min. Zoom Conversation with 10-15-30 parishioners and friends.

What do you want to accomplish in this Conversation?

- You want the State Representative to know who you are, what the Circle is about, who the parish is. You want to invite him or her to come to church anytime...!
- You want to assure him or her that you are seeking to get to know the State Rep, what she stands for, what she likes about the job, what she hopes to accomplish in the next session of the Legislature.
- You want to find out how the State Rep feels about the bill to allow Drivers' Licenses for Immigrants. If the State Rep is unaware, you can briefly describe the bill and give him/her the Bill # and the Bill's sponsors.
- Your job is not to argue the point. You can say why the Circle supports the bill – or why some of the members of the Circle support the bill – but you are interested in his or her opinion as well.
- Very important: you want to build the relationship between your Circle, your leaders, your parish and the State Rep. How? By showing interest in him/her...why she ran for office? What she did before becoming an elected official. Where she grew up, where she went to High School, University. What are the issues that she thinks are the most important looking into the next 2 years.

Also very important: you want to build your Circle. How?

By encouraging the people on the call to raise other questions with the State Rep. What do they care about, besides Immigration? Streets? Health Care? Jobs? Women's rights? Education? Abortion?

You want to give time to the new people in your Circle. You want to give your pastor some time to share his concerns as well. Let the pastor invite the State Rep to visit the parish.

Okay, so let's get started. Here are the steps:

1. Call and ask for the meeting.
2. Get the meeting date/time scheduled.
3. Schedule the ZOOM conference info.
4. Get commitments from your Circle to be on the call.
5. Ask the Circle members to personally invite others to join – they can bring up their own questions and issues. Circle Leader invites the pastor.
6. Set the Agenda for the meeting.
7. Confirm with everybody 2x before the actual date.
8. Have fun.
9. After the meeting, immediately, debrief with everybody – how did they feel, what worked and what did not, did they feel tense, what did we learn about power-public-arena-ourselves-our-parish.

How to start: First, you have to contact his/her office, call the local Chief of Staff or Scheduler. “I am calling from Christ the Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Lincoln Park, and our Circle of Support would like to have a 30-45 min. ZOOM meeting with the Representative as soon as convenient for his/her schedule.”

The Staffer will ask you, “What is the meeting about?” “First of all, we want to begin a relationship with the representative. None of our members have ever met with him/her. But we also want to get his/her opinion on a couple of items, particularly legislation providing Drivers Licenses to Immigrants. But most of all, we want to build that relationship between him/her and our Circle and our Parish.”

Staffer: “How many people will be on the call?” YOU: “We have about 10 members our Circle, but we will be inviting other leaders in the parish, including the pastor, depending on his schedule. So, my best guess is between 10 and 20 people.”

Once you have the date and time, you can set up the zoom call. Perhaps the staffer will offer that service. And of course, Strangers No Longer can set it up for you.

Whom do you invite? Circle Members, friends, parish leaders, the pastor. They need to know that the floor will be open for them to ask questions. But they need to know that this is a first meeting to build the relationship, get to know the representative. But we also want the rep to know us and the parish.

BUILD THE AGENDA OF THE ZOOM MEETING – THIS IS THE EASY PART!

1. Circle Leader welcomes everyone to the Parish’s Circle of Support conversation with the Rep. (Chair).
2. Welcome the State Rep. Assure him/her that the purpose is for us to develop a working relationship with him/her, to get to know him/her.
3. Introduce the parishioners on the call: perhaps name, and what neighborhood they live in.
4. Circle leader: our first question: “Our Circle of Support is working in SE Michigan with other parishes, and with the Michigan Catholic Conference in Lansing, to get legislation passed that would enable all immigrants to have Drivers Licenses. Have you heard of the proposed legislation and what is your opinion?”
5. **ALLOW FOR HIS/HER RESPONSE.** Ask if s/he is familiar with the Michigan Catholic Conference stand on the matter, and offer to get copies to his office.
6. Circle Leader: Our second question: “Please give us your background: where you grew up, what you did before running for office and if you have had any connections with our parish.” The Circle Leader can interrupt for details (e.g., “where did you go to high school, what kind of work would you be doing if you were not an elected official? What is most rewarding, least enjoyable aspect of your work?”)
7. Circle Leader opens the floor to other questions from the people on the call.
8. Circle leader asks the Rep if this was a worthwhile call, and why. Circle leader can press for more depth or details. E.g., does this conversation help your work? Do you have such conversations with other churches in your district?
9. Circle leader or pastor invites the State Rep to join us for Mass one weekend, and hopes to continue the conversation in the future. Thanks the State Rep., and tells him that the group will stay on the call for a few minutes after s/he leaves.
10. Conduct an evaluation of the meeting. Communicate with the parish. Attend the Nov. 14 Assembly and reports on the meeting.

YOU DID IT – GOOD JOB!!!