

# HOW TO HOLD AN ELECTION CANDIDATES' MEETING

## Preliminary planning

1. Draw together a working group – 3 or 4 or 5 people are probably enough – all from the one electorate. Draw on all the main churches in your area/suburb/town if you can – candidates are more likely to take the meeting seriously if it's been organised ecumenically.
2. Decide whether you are going to have all the candidates at one time, a selection, or one at a time. If separately, is that appropriate? Could it appear that the Church is endorsing one candidate?

3. Do the basic research:

What happened last election? How many came? Was it effective? What would you do differently?

How many candidates are standing in your electorate?

Are they all based in or near your town or do they come from far away?

What's the best venue for a church-based event? Is there a good-sized church or church hall? If you have to use a public hall, how will you pay the hall hire?

## When the election date is announced

1. Explore possible date(s) for your event(s): can you perhaps hold the meeting(s) on a Sunday after church? Get in early!
2. How are you going to approach the candidates? Best to go through electorate offices of the major candidates, who know the schedules and negotiate bookings. With minor party and independent candidates, work out who you want to hear from and approach them. (Don't be surprised if others turn up!)
3. Make those who are standing for election your priority for getting along to speak. Your meeting content can be diluted by parties who are running only for the list vote. If that is the case, ask for a speaker who is reasonably high on the party list.
4. Confirm the arrangements by letter. Tell them about parking arrangements. If you've worked out specific questions related to local issues beforehand (see over), advise the candidates of them in your invitation letter. Ask about any special needs they may have (disability etc) and whether they have time limits on their attendance.

## Once date & venue are fixed

1. Choose your chairperson ahead of time and ensure they are committed to the event.
2. Have a reserve chair just in case of a no-show.
3. Give each chairperson a copy of the letter you sent, a detailed list of the candidates and notes about the questions.
4. Set the programme in consultation. Best to have introductions, five minutes from each candidate to address your pre-set topics or to make their own case, (allow 10 minutes if there are only one or two), followed by questions.
5. Work out some good questions that should get interesting answers and give them to congregation members you know are planning to attend. Tell the chair who they are.
6. Set some ground rules about heckling, questions (not speeches) from the floor and length of answers.
7. Plan for the possibility of
  - party substitutes for the actual candidate;
  - unexpected independent candidates arriving;
  - no-shows by candidates
  - candidates getting lost and/or arriving lateand work out what you'll do before it happens.
8. Assign the chairperson an assistant (the substitute chair could be helpful) as timekeeper, and to consult about matters of procedure.

9. Arrange for a brief welcome by the host parish representative (or mayor, elder), and for a vote of thanks to all candidates from the floor. Tell/point out to the chair who is doing that task.
10. Check out lighting, whiteboard, power point, acoustics (arrange a microphone if there is any doubt about audibility).
11. Sort out your publicity – posters, pulpit announcements, letter-box flyers, paid advertising in local papers, radio community announcements – and work out who's paying for it or whether you're taking a collection.
12. Arrange for support in case things get heated. Just wise up a few authoritative people in the audience to be on hand and to intervene if someone starts shouting.

## **Media**

1. Decide beforehand if you're going to invite the media.
2. Don't be surprised if they turn up anyway - a candidate may have notified them.
3. Ask any media to identify themselves on arrival to the organisers, and advise the candidates and the chairperson if any do arrive. Get their name, paper/station and phone number and give them yours to follow up.

## **At the event**

1. Try and set up the venue so the candidates are seated in a single row along the wide axis of the hall so it's easier to see and hear. Set out a realistic number of seats but have more in reserve.
2. Give candidates a table to put papers on, and write their name in LARGE letters on a card in front of each, so everyone knows who they are.
3. Set up a table at the entrance, and welcome people. Ask for donations if you need them to pay for the hall. Put out another table for leaflets etc brought by candidates.
4. Start on time.
5. Set the time for finishing (90 minutes is plenty, 60 maybe OK for a small number of candidates or an after-church session), and stick to it.
6. The Chair outlines ground rules: they're going to be firm, fair, encouraging debate not abuse, content not rhetoric, and sticking to time.
7. If acoustics are a problem, or you can't arrange roving microphones, ask people to write down questions and get runners to take them up to the chairperson.
8. Allow time for spontaneous questions as well as some prepared ones, but no hogging the floor. If someone is persistent, tell them they can discuss the issue following the meeting directly with the candidate.
9. Expect a bit of interaction between some people (and candidates) once the meeting ends, but don't let it go on too long.
10. Ensure every candidate is individually thanked and (if alone) escorted from the hall to their vehicle.

## **Afterwards**

1. Hold a de-brief, preferably after a day or two to let things settle.
2. Write thank-you notes to the candidates and follow up any topics that were particularly important to you (or them).
3. Keep notes of who came, what was asked, copies of publicity, any media reports, and any important matters to give to the next election's committee.

## **Possible questions**

### **to keep candidates off party policy-speak**

1. Why are you personally standing to be a member of Parliament?
2. How do your personal values align with those of your Party, and your Party's policies?
3. Is there one issue on which you personally would like to make changes to the present law or practice? Is that why you're standing for Parliament?
3. On what issue (if any) would you cross the floor of Parliament to vote against your own Party?

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