

HOLDING AN ELECTION CANDIDATES' MEETING

notes for churches

1. Preliminary planning

Even before (as soon as) the election date is announced:

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?
3. Do the basic research:
 - What happened last election? How many came? Was it effective? What would 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 afield?
 - 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?

2. 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 will 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 (one candidate in the last election was blind and had a guide dog) and whether they have time limits on their attendance.

3. 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 answer.
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 late
 and 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, or 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, 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 retiring 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.

4. 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 followup.

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. 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 may be OK for a small number of candidates or an after-church session), and stick to it.
6. 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 that matter 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?

Questions from from meetings held so far (updated from reports received by CASI)

Red Beach, Whangaparoa

1. There are children living below the poverty line in New Zealand (some say that there are as many as 30% of our children in this situation). Whatever the level; is it acceptable to have such a situation in New Zealand? If it is not, what do you intend to do about it?
2. What is your attitude towards overseas aid? Is New Zealand doing enough? What would you work for if you were elected?
3. Several groups who claim that the work of voluntary organisations is being stifled by rules and regulations that are making it very difficult for them to operate have contacted our committee. Do you agree that this is the case? If you do, how will you improve the situation?
4. New Zealand has a great problem with young people under the age of 18 years being able to obtain alcohol and drugs. What do you plan to do to address this?

Auckland Central

- Families: In practical terms, how will the policies of your party support families?
- Criminal Justice: Citing researched evidence, show how your party's policy on criminal justice will reduce offending and re-offending?
- Refugees and Migrants: In practical terms what will be the impact of your party's policies on Refugees and Migrants?
- Taxation: In practical terms, how does your party's tax policy affect the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society?