

Christian Surveys, Form Letters and Petitions

"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." (Matt 5:37)

1. Introduction

- a. How many have received requests for either of the following?
 - o Survey forms asking your opinion on a number of current topics
 - o Form letters or petitions to be signed and returned to the originator for forwarding (or to forward yourself)?
- b. What is your general impression of them?

2. Practical Concerns

- a. They tend to give the feeling of doing something important and being involved, without any real effort to understand the issues or determine a better way of taking action
- b. They tend to be reactive in nature (crisis occurring) and illicit strong emotional response to ensure an action is taken
- c. Generally, there's an opportunity to contribute funds at the same time, giving the impression the primary purpose is a fund raiser (commonality of approach amongst many organizations also demonstrates the marketing technique)
- d. Form letters and petitions to elected or appointed officials are known to be the least effective way to communicate:
 - o They only say what the originator thinks is the most important thing to say
 - o They take very little if any thought on the part of the individual
 - o They give the impression that the constituent cannot think for himself, and must be told what to say (thus they can be easily written off as not representative)
- e. Many times if a Christian organization is spearheading the effort, the result is quickly written off as irrelevant ("ignorant, uneducated, emotional people being led around...")
- e. Surveys also tend to be ineffective because:
 - o They are sent to specific organization's supporters, whose beliefs and inclinations are fairly well understood (expected to agree)
 - o The questions tend to elicit an obvious response (Congressional Representative surveys of the voting public tend to be more balanced)
 - o Statistics gathered from them are questionable (selective audience, specific questions)
 - o They have some of the same traits and appearances as with form letters
 - o Very little if any feedback is typically provided as a follow-up to gauge what the effectiveness was

3. Some Suggested Actions

- a. Go to the official directly (letters; FAX; e-mail; telephone call; personal visit) (Matt 18:15ff)
- b. Be clear on what you want and why, do your homework (Isa 1:18-20; Matt 5:37; 2 Tim 4:2)
- c. Use specifics to illustrate if necessary (Luke 10:25-37)
- d. Always be courteous (Rom 13:7; Col 4:5-6; 1 Peter 2:17)
- e. You don't have to mix evangelism with the point you are trying to get across (Matt 7:6; 10:16), address this in separate correspondence (1 Peter 3:15-16)

Useful Reference: "Tell it to Washington - A Guide for Citizen Action"; (includes a Congressional Directory); Published by the League of Women Voters; \$2.75 (\$1.50 for members)