Candidate Forums – Victorian State Election

A candidate forum is an event, held a few weeks before an election, where the main candidates for an electorate are invited to speak to the Christians in that electorate and answer their questions.

Candidate forums are not "being political". Instead, they are an opportunity for politicians to hear the concerns of the Christian community, and give specific and direct responses. They are also an opportunity for Christian voters to hear directly from their candidates on a variety of issues, so that they can make a wise choice.

Politicians want to win our vote, and the only way they can do this is by understanding our concerns and being able to tell us what they are going to do about them. The sad reality is that many politicians have a shallow understanding of what Christians think and care about, and many Christian voters do not realise where their politicians stand on important issues that are not covered by the press.

This is an opportunity to build mutual understanding and relationships. Candidate forums also strengthen relationships between MPs and local ministers, which has ongoing benefit and improved communication after the election.

> Read more about the process at:
> https://freedomforfaith.org.au/forums

Policy impact

Candidate forums can also affect party policies. In tight elections, every vote counts. If the major political parties understand that there is an issue that could swing a decent number of votes, then they will consider shifting their policy. This was demonstrated in NSW in 2023 when the Labor opposition took a sensible approach to "conversion therapy" to the election in response to the candidate forums being run there.

> You can read our case study on the NSW election here:
> https://freedomforfaith.org.au/forums/forums-case-study/

How does Freedom for Faith help?

Freedom for Faith has experience helping churches run candidate forums. **It is important to us that the events are run by the local church and owned by them, and not a "Freedom for Faith" event.** We give the church complete control over the process, but also help to make it as easy as possible to run the event.

Freedom for Faith will provide ongoing support to the hosting church, including:

- How-to guides for each stage of the process.
- Support contacting and inviting candidates, keeping track of responses and following up
- Suggested questions coordinated with main denominations
- Suggested outline and structure of the event
- Help promoting the events including suggested PPT slides and newsletter texts, and help communicating with other churches in the electorate
- Co-ordination at denominational level, developing questions and promoting across the State

For more information, contact Mike Southon at mike@freedomforfaith.org.au or 0412 651 660

What's involved in hosting a forum?

Running a candidate forum is no harder than holding any other meeting at your church. Freedom for Faith can give a lot of support for the tasks that are unique to forums – inviting candidates, setting questions, etc.

We provide a suggested run sheet and will work with denominations to provide some suggested "set" questions to open the night.

The main tasks for the event are:

- Host church with a venue (or host church and separate venue)
- Someone to open the evening pray, possibly with a 5 min devotion
- MC who will introduce the candidates, and manage the question process
  (We provide a guide for the MC)
- Someone to monitor questions for appropriateness, and to feedback to the forum; you may wish to use Slido for this purpose.
  (We provide a guide to using Slido)
- Livestream facilities so people who cannot make the night due to time or distance can participate.

Date and Venue

You may wish to host at your church, or there might be a more appropriate venue who you want to collaborate with. Christian schools can be a great venue for a forum. However, it is important that the churches are still "hosting" the event. Freedom for Faith can help in contacting school networks for approval.

The election will be held on November 28, 2026, with pre-poll most likely opening November 16.

The best window for your forum is the first two weeks of November.

Your knowledge of your community will determine the day and time. Usually, we suggest an evening on Monday-Thursday, starting at 7 or 7:30. In some electorates, including regional areas, a weekend afternoon or evening might be more appropriate.

Coordinating with other churches

Churches are more likely to promote and be supportive if they have been involved in the conversation early. We suggest two approaches of connecting with churches:

- Hosting church connects with the churches in the electorate and invites them to be part of the planning

- FFF will coordinate with denominations to send emails to all the churches in the electorate telling them that these events are being planned and encouraging them to participate

Invitations for Candidates

FFF will discuss with churches and denominations the best candidates to invite for each electorate. We will provide churches with their contact details and suggested invitation text. All they need to do is cut and paste the email and send it to the provided address (it is better coming from the church than straight from FFF).

When churches hear a response, they let us know and we will keep track of responses in our data system.

Any candidates who have not responded in a few days will be followed up by email (again, FFF provides the details and text) and a phone call. FFF can call on the churches behalf and do that chasing.

Promotion

FFF will provide resources to help promote, including suggested PPT templates and text to go into church newsletters. We will be coordinating with denominations to promote the event and pass on the promotional details to churches, and will be working with Christian media where appropriate. However, we also suggest churches personally ask other churches they have a relationship with to promote the event too.