



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE 2021 ELECTION

POLITICS INFLUENCED BY NARROW INTERESTS

“Let us not go back to normality, sick with injustice, inequality and environmental degradation. The normality to which we are called is that of the Kingdom of God, where there is bread for all and the social organisation is based on contributing, sharing and distributing.” (Pope Francis, 30 September 2020).

In Fratelli Tutti and in other platforms, Pope Francis has consistently reminded us that politics is as yet to discover its calling in relation to the poor and the interests of the common good. Politics should be lived as “the highest form of charity since it seeks to serve the common good and the poor.” (Pope Francis, 1 May 2015)

Decades into constitutional democracy, that which we consider normal in South African politics is clearly failing the poor and the interests of the common good. This is because our politics is not yet firmly rooted in ethical values. It is instead strongly influenced by narrow interests of politicians, political organizations that they represent, as well as the business elite who have managed to capture our politics.

A CALL TO MORAL RENEWAL IN SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICS

With time, the kind of politics that refuses to subject itself to ethical values gradually develops into a virus that entrenches consideration of politics as an opportunity for self-enrichment, protects those who are implicated of corruption, and destroys public confidence in the rule of law, elections and other democratic processes.

Along with this, politics without an ethical soul loses its capacity to hear the cries of the poor and to effectively address the economic challenges, like unemployment, inequalities, and poverty, which the current pandemic has exposed and aggravated.

The elections should influence a new vision of politics where there are consequences when politicians display serious failures in clean governance, effective service delivery and the consideration of the common good.

LET US NOT RESORT TO VIOLENCE AND THE BOYCOTTING OF THE ELECTIONS

In the face of these circumstances, our answer should not be a resort to violent protests or a boycott of elections, as some seem to be advocating, but a greater commitment to building a new normal in our politics, a moral transformation of our politics, using all legally accepted tools at our disposal as citizens.

As the nation prepares for municipal elections, we therefore make a strong appeal to all eligible voters to participate in the elections, and not boycott them as sign of protest and disillusionment against the state of our politics.



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In our call for participation in the election, we also urge all to vote according to your conscience and in a manner that influences our country to take the first steps in the moral renewal of its politics.

A CALL TO FOLLOW AN INFORMED CONSCIENCE WHEN VOTING

The building of this new normal requires that each one of us behaves differently and ethically in relation to the forthcoming elections. Particularly, we should give serious attention to the importance of prayer, discernment of the Spirit and formation of conscience before casting a vote. The discernment of the spirit and the formation of conscience can itself be guided by these and similar questions:

- 1. What is the vision of South Africa that God wants? What is the kind of South Africa that I want? What kind of leaders should I vote for so that our country achieves this vision?*
- 2. Should I vote according to my conscience or in accordance with my loyalty to a particular politician or a particular political party?*
- 3. The moral strength of our politics and our democracy is diminished when there are no consequences for failure in ethical leadership. Which candidate should I vote for so that these elections send a warning message to politicians that there will now be consequences when critical municipal services (water, sanitation, waste management etc) are disrupted as result of corruption, incompetence, and factional politics?*
- 4. There cannot be true democracy amid deep inequalities that diminish a sense of being one human family, created equal before God. Which candidate should I vote so that these elections send a warning that there will be consequences when the poor continue to become poorer while a few live-in extreme wealth?*
- 5. What are the service delivery needs of our community? Which candidate and political party will be more effective and efficient in the delivery of such services?*

VOTING AS A MOMENT OF MAKING A MORAL CHOICE

At a fundamental level, the results of an election are a mirror of our moral values, that which we consider as valuable as a nation. If we want a kind of politics where leaders are held to account when implicated of corruption and incompetence, if accountability and integrity in leadership are valuable to us, it must be shown in our votes. We must always consider the moral implications of our vote.

A CALL FOR A FAIR AND VIOLENCE-FREE ELECTION

The forthcoming elections will become a first step towards moral transformation of South African politics if we have peaceful elections that can produce leaders who *act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God* (Micah 6:8).



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To ensure peaceful and fair elections, we urge political parties/independents:

- To refrain from inflammatory, intimidating and inappropriate statements;
- To take visible, decisive action when candidates and their supporters are involved in acts of intolerance, intimidation, harassment and disturbance;
- To respect the election results;
- To do everything to ensure that the rule of law is respected.
- To take measures to end the practice of political assassinations during election season.

We call on the media:

- To refrain from sensationalism.
- To report appropriately and responsibly for the benefit of the common good.

While the responsibility for peaceful and fair elections falls heavily on the political parties and the media, it is also the responsibility of each one of us. All of us have a responsibility to create an environment of tolerance and acceptance which enables every South African to support and vote for the party or the independent candidate that they choose, without fear of violence and intimidation.

A CALL TO PRAYER

On our own, it will be impossible to change and transform what we consider normal in our politics. The nation should rely on the strength of God's grace as we seek the integration of Gospel values into the circumstances of our politics. As such, in working with the Holy Spirit to build this new normal in South African politics, we should all "be guided by the love of the Gospel, which is the spring of all change and which urges us to enter into the wounds of history and rise again." (Pope Francis, 3 October 2021).

We therefore invite you to recite this prayer in your families and parishes as we prepare for the elections and also during the elections.

Heavenly Father, we pray that the Holy Spirit may enable us to choose upright leaders committed to human dignity and the common good.

Give us the courage to work for your Kingdom through promoting justice and peace in our society.

May your Holy Spirit continually transform us so that we become examples of your mercy and peace in our families and to others.

We pray for peaceful elections.

We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Bishop Sithembele Sipuka
Bishop of Mthatha - President of the SACBC
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