



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

**South Africa, a living Democracy.
Preparing for the Elections**

A Pastoral Statement of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.

To be read in all churches as soon as possible.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and all people of goodwill,

For Democracy to live, we all need to participate. For Christian voters, this participation is a serious obligation. Participation is not only about making your mark on Election Day, but also means that we need to participate in a responsible way in the preparations for the Election.

For Christian voters, voting expresses our love and concern for our country and for the common good of all who live in South Africa. Each vote will affect the lives of every individual and group in the country.

To vote responsibly means that you need to prepare well so that you know what you are doing. To be well prepared means that you have to find out all you can about the policies of the different political parties and how they might affect the country. You must ask the question of yourself and of political parties if the policies and practices of a particular party are or will be good for the whole country.

Politically motivated hate speech, intimidation, violence and disruption kill democracy. People have different views and so they support different parties. For a democracy to live, we must tolerate the different views of others. A wide range of ideas and policies help us to see what might be best for our country and people. This will help us choose what is best for the common good of all. Not to respect the views of others and their right to support the party of their choice is unchristian and undemocratic. Violence or the threat of violence towards those who differ from us or to parties other than the one you support is unchristian and undemocratic.

Your vote and the effort you make to prepare to vote are your personal responsibility and contribution to the democratic life of our country. No one can tell you which party to vote for. Voting for a party just because you voted for it before or because your father or grandmother votes for it does not give life to our democracy. It might be tempting to vote for a party that serves your own interests or

those of your social or economic group, but if other people will suffer because of your choice, you are not making a good choice.

What you should do to prepare to participate responsibly in the election? You can find out what the various parties stand for by attending meetings where people can freely listen and discuss what is best for the country. You can also listen to the radio, watch television and read newspapers to find out more. Organizations such as Churches, Clubs, Societies and Associations can arrange these meetings for themselves so that there can be debate about what is best for our country.

Choosing to be ignorant and voting by prejudice is not a Christian expression of love and concern for our country. Remember that your vote expresses your considered opinion about what will be best for as many people in South Africa as possible – especially the poor, the marginalised and the voiceless in our society. This will help us all act responsibly to make South Africa a home in which all God's Children can live in hope and freedom.

Responsible preparation also means that we pray for peace and for guidance. Prayer is the strongest influence God has put into our hands. Remember how the St Francis Prayer for Peace, prayed every day by individuals in many communities supported our struggle for democracy. Praying this prayer would be a powerful reminder of our responsibility to be instruments of Peace. Pray from now until the Election that all people who will vote will allow the Holy Spirit to guide their choice.



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