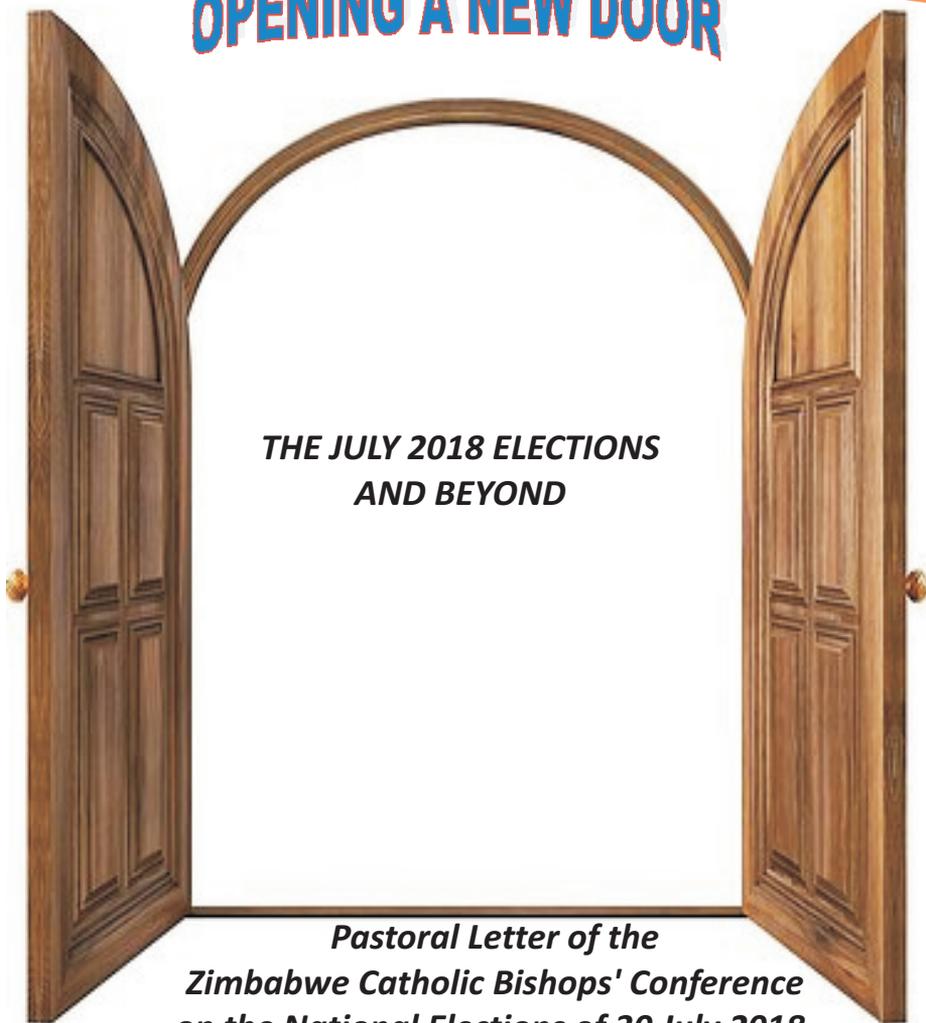




ZIMBABWE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

OPENING A NEW DOOR



***THE JULY 2018 ELECTIONS
AND BEYOND***

***Pastoral Letter of the
Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference
on the National Elections of 30 July 2018.***

Published on 29 June 2018, feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, Apostles.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,
All men and women of Zimbabwe

[1] We, the Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe, write to you as our nation prepares for elections on 30th July 2018, a moment in our history that could prove to be pivotal. The dramatic events of last November 2017 seemed to many Zimbabweans to promise a new chapter of that history and were greeted by most with immediate and spontaneous rejoicing. Although the appearance of armed men and vehicles on our streets was alarming, people were quickly reassured and many came out onto the streets in support in a joyfully inclusive celebration.

There were arrests by the military, reports of some beatings, and rumours of looting and even of loss of life, though comparatively little, thank God. The transition to a civilian administration was managed effectively by the military, and a new president duly sworn in to general enthusiasm in Zimbabwe and abroad. A great and tangible sense of relief prevailed, a release from fear, and hope for the future: our politicians, too, were possessed by a new spirit of cooperation. In all this we have much to thank God for.

[2] In the six months since those events, we have seen many reasons for hope. The Government and its President have created new space for political activity, setting a new tone of freedom of speech, and promising free, fair, credible and undisputed elections under reformed electoral processes and institutions with access for international observers. Government Ministers and Ministries now have targets to which they are accountable. The anti-corruption rhetoric is now accompanied by legal action against some high-profile figures, and parliamentary committees have begun to use their teeth.

The President is energetically seeking the foreign investment that he sees as essential to “get the economy working again”. At the same time, however, other voices have raised concerns about the unconstitutional mode of these changes, and in particular the initial and continuing role of the military with the risks to the freedom of our political processes that this might carry for the future. Sometimes it has seemed that steps are taken against only some of those generally taken to be corrupt and not others, some of whom have even been given Government responsibilities.

Many ordinary Zimbabweans express disappointment that hoped-for changes are yet to be felt, in access to employment and cash. Once again, our currency operates with multiple exchange rates, an illegal situation that appears to be tolerated and allows easy profits for the unscrupulous few.

The Elections: Opening a New Door

[3] Now that the elections required by our Constitution have been announced, we write to reflect with you upon their significance at this point of our history. For Zimbabweans, elections have been occasions either of great hope and excitement or of fear and anger ending in disillusionment. It is true that elections are never, in themselves, the answers to problems. But, as part of a wider programme of transformation, they can be moments of national recommitment.

We believe, we hope and we pray, that the coming elections of 30th July 2018 will be such a moment for us all. Genuinely free and fair elections will return us to constitutionality and the 'will of the people' will clarify what happened in November 2017.

All Zimbabweans must therefore put any fear and disillusionment of previous elections behind them and prepare carefully for generous participation in the electoral process that is central to our democracy. Recent isolated events of violence and bomb attacks are regrettable, unacceptable and unfortunate for the country.

[4] As Catholic Bishops, we have set out before major national elections in the past the conditions for free and fair elections and offered our reflections on criteria for Christians and others to make the free choice that is guaranteed by our Constitution. In our letter *Only When Power Stands Under God's Blessing Can It Be Trusted (December 2007, before the 2008 elections)*, we wrote that "...we urge Government and all the contesting parties, to create a social, political and economic climate that enhances moral integrity."

We advocated for free and fair elections which would have local and international recognition. In doing so, we were aiming at building the

foundation of the Kingdom of God here on earth, a Kingdom of peace, love, justice and freedom. This is a fundamental role of the Church.

[5] In March 2013, in our letter entitled *Zimbabwe Elections and the God of Second Chances* (before the 2013 elections), we wrote that “We call upon all contesting parties to sign up for The Zimbabwe Political Parties Code of Conduct.” All political parties should be free to campaign within the limits of this Code, to set out their manifestos for the free and reasoned choice of all voters. In particular, “Political parties that contest in the forth-coming elections should have equal access to State media coverage. The electorate have a right to be fully informed before they make their political choices.” At this time, we need to emphasise this right which is guaranteed by the Constitution: an uninformed choice is not a free choice.

We acknowledge the progress made in preparing the Voters' Roll, particularly the use of new technology. Everything that makes for greater transparency will contribute to the credibility of the election and its result both inside and outside Zimbabwe. The process of casting and counting votes on the day of the election needs to be well-organized, safe and efficient, protecting both the confidentiality of the individual voter and open to the proper scrutiny of authorized observers.

[6] To individual voters, we repeat what we said in our letter of February 2002, *A Call to Work for Unity, Peace and Harmony (before the 2002 presidential election)*, “We call upon all of you once again to make the optimum use of your vote for the good of the country. Use your vote, it is your right and nobody can take it from you. Make your choice in the freedom of your conscience. Do not be afraid, it is a secret. Act as a free citizen...”

As Christians we understand our role of building the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, of shaping according to the values of the Gospel the societies in which we live, work and pray and in which we raise our children. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God as God's rule in human lives begun here on earth and completed in Heaven. The Kingdom Jesus speaks of is not just the afterlife but an expression of how God wants the world to be and live (Mk. 4:26-34).

In March 2013 (*Zimbabwe Elections and the God of Second Chances, before the 2013 elections*), we listed qualities to be looked for in our leaders

and representatives:

- (1) “Selfless Service: a good candidate is not selfish. He or she has the people who elected him or her at heart. The interest of the people comes first before his own personal interest”;
- (2) “Responsibility: a responsible leader sets goals and makes a follow-up in order to see that those goals are fulfilled”;
- (3) “Accountability: an accountable candidate is ready to explain to the people the motives of his or her directions and performance. He/she has no problems with being transparent when it comes to handling public funds”;
- (4) “Truthfulness: a good candidate is truthful. A good leader does not necessarily have to be perfect. A leader who admits failure wins respect among the people because he admits the truth”;
- (5) “Respect for Human Dignity: this is a fundamental quality that a leader should have. A good leader should have respect for human dignity. All human rights such as right to life, decent accommodation, freedom of worship, etc. are based on the need for respect and promotion of human dignity”.

Beyond the Elections: Towards a New Politics

[7] It is in the nature of free and fair elections that no individual or small group should be able to determine the results. It is certain, therefore, that some will be disappointed. The issues that face us are not simple, and we are divided in our opinions about the way forward. It is quite possible that the results of this election may give no individual leader or party an outright or clear majority. But if it is true that, as we wrote in March 2013, “most Zimbabweans have lost trust in the leadership”, it is also true that an exaggerated trust in individual leaders or parties has not in the end served us well. We must go into the process committed to accept the results of a free and fair vote by the people, whatever they are.

The experience of the Government of National Unity of 2009 was, for some, a disappointment. But a result that accurately indicates a more or less equal division of opinions would be a sign, not of electoral failure, but of success. It would invite us to a new and challenging kind of politics, a new cooperation and harmony based on reasoned argument, generous compromise and respectful toleration. It would be a door to a new Zimbabwe. Whatever the

results, a new Zimbabwean politics will need to be more collaborative, inclusive and based not on one or two leaders, however effective and charismatic, but rather on strong democratic institutions that embody and secure the values of our democracy, regulate our politics and administer peace, truth and justice to all.

[8] We invite you, therefore, to look beyond these elections, important though they are, and set our main focus on the type of society that we desire in Zimbabwe. We need to look at the bigger picture. Ultimately, what we are voting for is not this or that government but rather a particular kind of society for ourselves and for our children.

It is good, therefore, to revisit Section 3, “Vision and Values” of the document *The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe* produced in September 2006 by the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and ourselves. “Where there is no vision the people perish (Prov. 11:14),” we wrote. “Zimbabwe needs a new national vision to restore our self-confidence, dignity and hope.”

In that document, representatives of Christian leaders of Zimbabwe proposed a vision for Zimbabwe as follows:

Our vision is that of a sovereign and democratic nation characterised by good governance as reflected in all its structures and operations at all levels and in all our institutions.

The current vision of our Conference (ZCBC) is of **a reconciled Zimbabwean society living in harmony, justice and peace, in a democratic developmental State.**

The preamble of our National Constitution can help us crystallize a shared National Vision.

[9] The coming elections, if credible, will also mark Zimbabwe's return to full participation in the community of nations of the world. Each family relies for its flourishing on goods and structures which it cannot itself produce, such as schools and law and order. So also each nation flourishes through cooperation with other nations and with the community of nations

beyond its borders. Zimbabwe also has to contribute to the common good of all humanity. Already, many Zimbabweans in 'the diaspora' make important contributions to health and education and business in other countries. Many young people participate in international youth events.

As Zimbabweans, we need to contribute as equal and respected members to solutions to problems such as migration, environmental degradation and terrorism that are addressed in groupings like SADC, the African Union, the Commonwealth and the United Nations.

[10] This vision of The Zimbabwe We Want draws heavily on the resources of Catholic Social Teaching, a treasure that, like the Gospel which inspires it, the Church holds in trust for humanity. We, your Bishops, call on Catholics to read and reflect on The Zimbabwe We Want and on our letters The Cry of the Poor (June 2005) and Let Us Work for the Common Good (January 2011).

We call especially on Catholic universities and tertiary institutions to stimulate and sustain a debate about these matters that will guide those we will elect on 30 July 2018 to shape the policies for a Zimbabwe that we all want. Remember the words of Jesus, which he repeats to us in these days: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt. 22:37-39). Let us use this election to fulfil this commandment in all its demands, especially justice and charity.

[11] All of this will come to nothing without prayer. We are at a new '*Kairos moment*' in the history of Zimbabwe, a moment of grace. We, your Shepherds, ask that parishes, schools, religious communities, universities and colleges make use of the prayer attached below individually and collectively. We call on all priests, religious and faithful; and on all women and men of good will to demonstrate our joint trust and confidence in God and witness to our faith in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord by praying together with us and spreading the message of this pastoral letter.

PRAYER FOR PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

Almighty God, you are the Creator of all. You have given us this beautiful land of Zimbabwe and its people. You have given us your Son Jesus Christ to usher in your Kingdom, and to show us how to work and live together in love, peace, harmony and justice. Thank you for the opportunity in our elections to choose leaders who will help us to establish your Kingdom in our land.

Lord Jesus, you preached a Kingdom to which all, without exception, are invited. It is like a big tree where all the birds are free to build their nests (Mt.13:31-32). It is the great banquet to which all are invited (Mt.22:1-14). As the Good Shepherd, you love, reverence and respect each one of your sheep, so much so that you die for them (Jn.10:15).

May all Zimbabweans be free to vote according to their conscience in this important election. May this election give us leaders who truly serve the people, just as you came not to be served but to serve (Mk10:45). You want all your children to have the fullness of life (Jn. 10:10).

May this election be conducted in an honest, truthful and transparent manner. Each day we pray that your Kingdom of love, peace, justice and freedom, may come (Mt.6:10). May our prayer not be an empty plea, or just a dream, but may your Kingdom be realized in Zimbabwe as we conclude by praying together in the words Our Lord taught us: "Our Father . . ."

Amen.

- + **Robert C. Ndlovu, Archbishop of Harare (ZCBC President)**
- + **Alex Thomas, Archbishop of Bulawayo (ZCBC Vice President)**
- + **Paul Horan, Bishop of Mutare (ZCBC Secretary/Treasurer)**
- + **Michael D. Bhasera, Bishop of Masvingo & Pontifical Administrator of Gweru**
- + **Albert Serrano, Bishop of Hwange**
- + **Rudolf Nyandoro, Bishop of Gokwe**
- + **Raymond Mupandasekwa, Bishop of Chinhoyi**

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DTP by The Social Communications Commission.