



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

PASTORAL LETTER FOR 2024 NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” Jeremiah 29:11

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

These words of the prophet Jeremiah confirm our faith in the presence and goodness of God in whom we have placed our hope. These words encourage us to travel into the future as a nation, to put our faith in God and our trust in each other.

Reclaiming the dream

In our statement of August 2023 (Reclaiming the dream), we acknowledged that *“Thirty years after the elation of our democratic elections, we remain grateful that our democratic structures have withstood numerous attempts on the part of some to weaken them. The separation of powers has stood firm and respect for the rule of law has prevailed. We are encouraged by the goodwill of many leaders and fellow citizens in the face of the numerous crises which bedevil our country.”*

The country is now preparing for the 2024 national and provincial elections. This gives us reason to give thanks that we have maintained our democratic right to go to the polls and freely choose our leaders. We acknowledge the sterling work of the Independent Electoral Commission and the efforts of so many to save us from pre- and post-electoral violence.

“Our faith in God and in the inherent goodness of our fellow citizens urges us to work together in protecting the poor and vulnerable, in giving new hope to so many who have lost hope and in winning the confidence of our youth.” (Reclaiming the dream)

We are called to take a new path together.

“Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes.” (Haggai 1: 5, 6)

The prophet Haggai calls us to examine how we have journeyed as a nation and consider how we could do it differently. Haggai was speaking to his people during their years of trying to rebuild their nation after the magnificent dream they had about returning from exile. They found it hard and challenging work and had given way to despair.

Similarly, we experience the ever-growing gap between those who have and have not, deteriorating infrastructure, rampant corruption on the part of self-serving citizens, and violence. But we do not allow ourselves to be robbed of the hope that together, we can keep to our vision of a country which is home to all.

So, as Catholic leaders, we call on all our fellow Catholics and all South Africans to keep working for a better future in our country. We must not give way to paralysing disillusionment and despair.

These only lead to more hopelessness, discouraging our youth, in particular, from taking their rightful place in the democratic institutions, which are the pillars of our democracy for which so many have sacrificed so much.

We denounce bad shepherds.

"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves" (Ezekiel 34:2-3).

Mindful of the sacrifices that so many made during the struggle against apartheid, we are disgusted by what we have seen and experienced, seeing how many of our leaders feed themselves, betraying the legitimate dreams of our people. We have seen the parable of the rich man and Lazarus become a reality before our eyes. Many of our leaders banquet sumptuously using state funds while the poor, who are the legitimate beneficiaries of these funds, are left hungry outside the gate to the mercy of the dogs. (Luke 16:19-31).

"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves. Should not shepherds feed the flock? You consumed milk, wore wool, and slaughtered fatlings, but the flock you did not feed" (Ezekiel 34:2-3).

Use your vote!

"I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19)

These words of Moses remind us of our duty to choose life. Using our right to vote is one way of choosing life. The election and its results will determine whether the country will be placed on a different path from the current path of corruption and incompetence.

We strongly appeal to all eligible voters to go out and vote and send a message to incoming parliamentarians. Nobody should remain at home.

Vote according to your experience and your conscience!

For the good of the country, vote according to your experience and your conscience, not according to unquestioning loyalty to one or another political party. Consider what is important for the whole nation, not just what is good for you personally, your political party, and its alliance partners.

Since the elections may result in coalitions, consider how your vote may contribute to the formation of a coalition government. Coalitions must not reproduce the divisive and even toxic situations that we have witnessed in some places.

The SACBC Justice and Peace Commission and the Jesuit Institute have jointly developed resource materials to help us prepare for the elections; see [2024 Lenten Reflections – English – SACBC](#). We also recommend the NATIONAL CHURCH LEADERS CONSULTATION statement on elections; for its guidance on matters to consider before voting, see [National Church Leaders' Statement on 2024 elections 2 11 2023](#). We ask all parish priests and pastoral councils to ensure that parishioners are informed about these materials and aids to help them make responsible decisions when voting.

The lay faithful have an indispensable role.

In our Pastoral Plan, "Serving God, Humanity and all Creation", we are called to work together in building a better world where there is justice, peace and non-violence. The Pastoral Plan emphasises the indispensable role of the lay faithful who *"by their vocation, seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations"*. (Lumen Gentium 31).



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In particular, the Pastoral Plan, quoting Pope Benedict XVI, urges that *"the church in Africa must help to build up a society in cooperation with government authorities and public and private institutions that are engaged in building up the common good. The Church, for her part, is committed to promoting within her own ranks and within society a culture that respects the rule of law."* (Africae Munus 81)

The power of prayer

The power of prayer should not be overlooked. Our country needs prayers. Holding free, fair and peaceful elections needs prayer. Let us pray daily for the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Before and after voting, entrust your actions to the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pray for others who are voting.

Pray that those tempted to commit acts of violence in efforts to manipulate the elections or even the results when the votes are being counted; pray that all forms of violence may be hindered by the responsible use of our democratic right to elect the persons of our choice.

We thank God for the right to determine the outcome of the elections. We commend our beloved country to the care of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and Mary, our great Patroness.

We ask that in all parishes and communities, we recite every Sunday and at every opportunity the prayer for the 2024 elections; **"Lord, we, the people of South Africa..."**

Conclusion

"Behold, I am making all things new." (Revelations 21:5)

In the difficult periods during apartheid and when we had to transition from apartheid to a constitutional democracy, we have come to discover that we as a people have the God-given capacity to rise from the ashes, overcome insurmountable crises and find new paths. "We are Easter people and Alleluia is our song" (Pope Saint John Paul II, 30 November 1986). May the Holy Spirit continue to heal what is broken in our hearts, families, and nation as we respond to God's call to build a more just and humane, a more united and peaceful South Africa.

+Sithembele Sipuka
SACBC President
08 February 2024



2024 ELECTION PRAYER



Lord, we the people of South Africa,
thank and praise you for your inexhaustible love and the graces of healing and peace you
continually offer to us as a nation.

As we prepare for the elections in 2024, send us your Holy
Spirit to form our consciences according to the Gospel of
Jesus Christ, so that we may choose leaders who aspire for the common good of our nation,
and have the fear of the Lord in their hearts. And so, we pray the following intentions:
That the youth of our nation may register as voters and prepare themselves for voting in
2024.

Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!

That all the officials and volunteers of the Independent
Electoral Commission may be honest and diligent in preparing for the elections ensuring that
all procedures are implemented according to the IEC regulations.

Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!

That the South African Police Services may be well prepared and ensure that law and order is
maintained during the time of political campaigning and during the time of voting and during
the period of the counting of the votes;

Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!

That all media companies and journalists may do their reporting and communication truthfully
and with fairness to all political parties and ensure that no hate speech is allowed to be
broadcast.

Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!