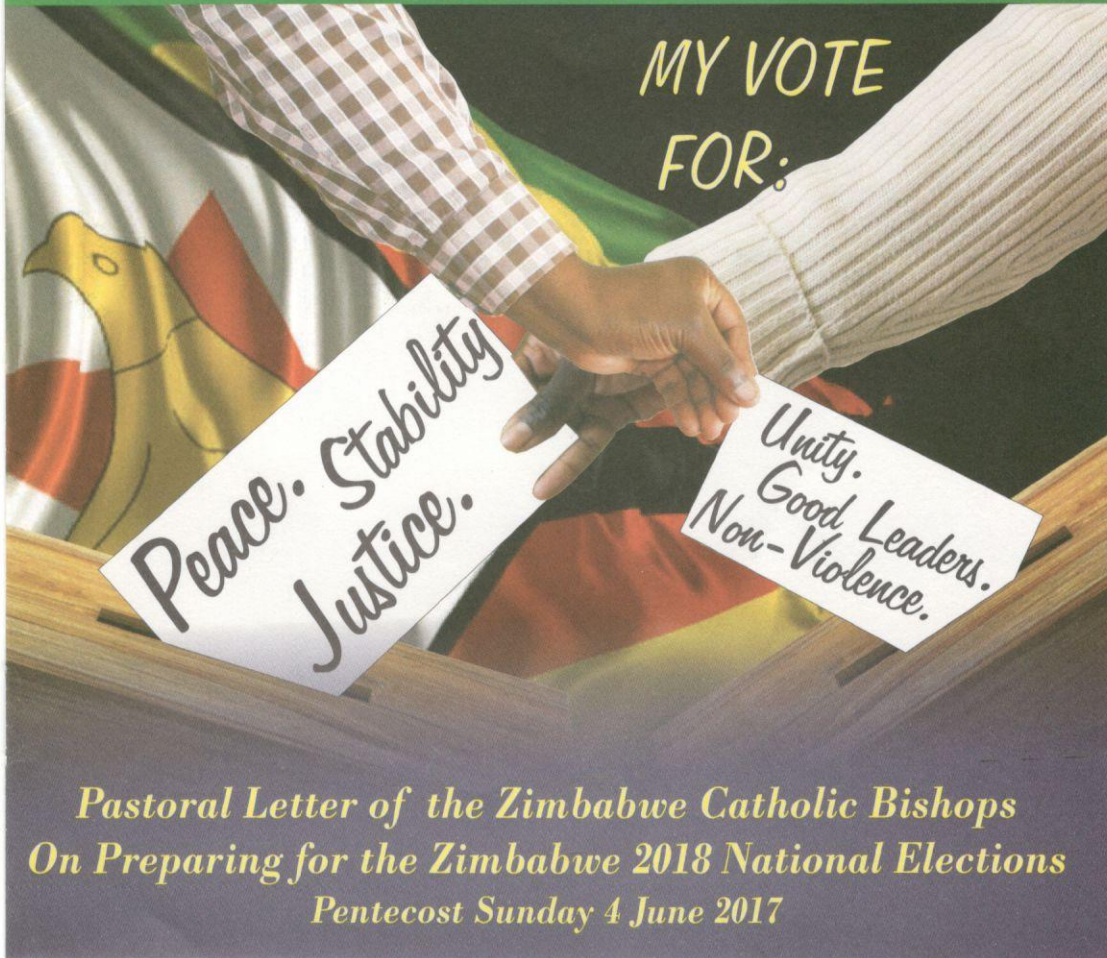




**ZIMBABWE CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE**

ELECTIONS, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT



*Peace. Stability
Justice.*

*Unity.
Good Leaders.
Non-Violence.*

*Pastoral Letter of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops
On Preparing for the Zimbabwe 2018 National Elections
Pentecost Sunday 4 June 2017*

*For everyone to fully enjoy
their political rights and
freedom of expression,
we ask the responsible
authorities to align our
laws so that they
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ELECTIONS, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Pastoral Letter of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops On Preparing for the Zimbabwe 2018 National Elections Pentecost Sunday 4 June 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Peace to you and all people of Zimbabwe!

We are writing to you about the elections scheduled for 2018. It will be a time when those who seek to serve us, the people of Zimbabwe, will ask for our vote. As your shepherds, we would like to reflect with you on this new decisive moment in our country's journey.

1. ***Accept one another.*** *We appeal first for acceptance of one another and respect for different opinions. We all know that this election will, like others, be contested by people different from us and holding different views. This is not a threat to democracy and peace but rather the very life blood of it.*

We, Zimbabweans, are responsible for our society and how we build our future. Intolerance of each other will block our progress. As we prepare for 2018, let us respect each other and even mirror in our words and actions the love of God, Father of us all. Jesus gave us only two commands to govern our lives: to love God and to love one another. If we show this love in the coming elections, we will not only be fulfilling the law and prophets but building peace for our nation. We now have our own Constitution, a great achievement, and it says in one place, "The State and every person, including the juristic persons, and every institution and agency of government at every level, must promote national unity, peace and stability". (#10)

2. ***Choosing our words.*** *Our acceptance and respect for one another will be shown by the way we speak. Will our words build unity or will they divide us? We appeal to all: use restraint in your words.*

"The tongue is only a tiny part of the body," St James tells us (3:5ff), "but its boasts are great. Think how small a flame can set fire to a huge

forest. The tongue is a flame too.”

A tongue can build or destroy a nation. A tongue can command violence. It can also pronounce peace. It has power to bring death or life. (Proverbs 18:21). As 2018 approaches, there are already some tongues releasing rancour and bitterness. We appeal to people who do not control their tongues; please consider what you are doing! Our home grown constitution gives everyone “the right to human dignity in their private and public life, and the right to have that dignity respected and protected.” The Church applauds this sentiment: our dignity is what constitutes us in the image of God.

We urge everybody, whether you are in large gatherings or behind closed doors: speak in words that build up our community of Zimbabwe and not in ones that destroy. Let us speak words of peace and healing.

And let us, in the pre-election period, allow access for all contesting parties to the media, as our constitution guarantees so that we may have a healthy public debate on the issues that affect us today. We all have a contribution to make to the development of our country however different we are. In fact, our diversity is one of our strengths. A garden is not made of one type of flower nor does the forest contain only one type of animal.

3. *Revere our Constitution.* *It is a precious document, hammered out through wide consultation over a long period. It gives us rights and duties and guarantees our freedom. Abraham Lincoln once told the American people to be true to themselves and the Constitution. If they did these things they would come to little harm.*

During the liberation war, the Voice of Zimbabwe used to end its broadcasts from Mozambique with the cry, A luta continua! Today our struggle is not with arms and violence but with ourselves, our own fearful hearts. In those far off days we had no constitution to protect us and so some of us took to arms. Today we have a constitution. There is no need for violence.

Let us trust our constitution. Let us find, within ourselves, the courage of the gospel and the courage the constitution gives us. Our constitution announces our human dignity and aspirations. It is like an application of the gospel values to human life. We are called to trust the constitution we have written.

We have enjoyed and have been inspired by the slogans: No pain, no gain! No sweat, no sweet! Let us apply them to our situation. We have the responsibility to grasp our constitution and to use it. It is not only the guarantee of our freedom but also of our mutual relations with each other. We could even dare to say: our constitution has binding force which, in a broad sense, find biblical approval in the words of Jesus to Peter: "whatever you bind on earth will be bound also in heaven". Our human constitutions are our efforts to reflect the values of the gospel in human life.

4. ***An appeal to the Government.*** *For everyone to fully enjoy their political rights and freedom of expression, we ask the responsible authorities to align our laws so that they harmonise with our constitution.*

In effect this means ensuring that all electoral responsibilities, as stated in the constitution, be implemented. In particular we have in mind (i) immediate voter education and registration, (ii) adherence to the Political Parties' Code of Conduct and Traditional Leaders Act (iii) equal access to state media by all electoral contestants. "An athlete is not crowned unless he or she competes according to rules" (2 Timothy 2:5).

5. ***Enjoying the fruits of peace.*** *We feel a great affection for the people of Zimbabwe. We long to see each one enjoying the fruits God has given us in our land. Our constitution gives us the right to food and water, education, health care and many others. (Chapter 4)*

In this pre-election period, we may hear many promises. They will be straws in the wind if we, the people, simply sit and wait. There is no need for anyone to be short of food or clothing or work or housing or education or health care or water. There is not a person in Zimbabwe who does not want growth and a better life for their children. But it will not happen unless we become engaged in the struggle to make it happen. We have all the resources so that each one can find the fullness of life.

6. ***Choosing our leaders.*** *Let us be engaged in bringing this about! Let us choose public servants who show by their actions, rather than just their words, that they are really working for the benefit of all! And let us pray for our present and future leaders that they may find the*

courage and the wisdom to put the people's interests above their own.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, our message to you and to ourselves is to be deeply engaged in the coming election. Let us be clear what kind of Zimbabwe we want! Jesus gave us an example for us to follow. "Now that you know these things," he said, "blessed are you if you do them."

In particular we encourage you, (i) to register to vote, (ii) acquire a full understanding of the voting processes and procedures and (iii) make informed political choices to "select capable men (and women) from all the people, men and women who fear God, trustworthy people who hate dishonest gain". (Exodus 18:21). Further, we encourage you (iv) to report any human rights violations to the responsible authorities and, finally, (v) desist from violence.

7. *We reiterate: Reject all forms of violence and coercion: Violence and coercion only serve to discredit our elections. Any use of force takes away the credibility and integrity of the elections. People must be able to make free choices according to their own judgement.*

There is a latent violence, a desire to destroy, in all of us. Violence, once unleashed, is like fire, devouring and destroying everything it encounters. Many of the taboos and strange customs of ancient societies, like the Jewish scapegoat, symbolically laden with Israel's sins and driven into the desert to be destroyed, are attempts to contain and limit the danger of raging violence.

The Greek historian, Thucydides, wrote that the first casualty in war is truth, for in war vicious and cruel killing becomes virtue. We have seen the horrors of unleashed violence in the last century. We all deplore it, throw up our hands in horror, and then proceed to restore law and order by more violence. Of its nature, violence is imitative and contagious. Those who counter violence by violence are infected by the violence they deplore and add to it.

The seeds of violence are in our own minds and hearts, nurtured by every form of prejudice, strengthened and sustained by our fears, and they infect every aspect of our lives, turning all our engagements, including elections, into instruments of violence.

We ask our Father in Heaven to bless each one of us and the whole country so that we may enter into a new era of peace, development and communion. Social cohesion will win blessings for us from above. May God eradicate from our minds and hearts the hidden roots of violence and destruction. May He infect our minds and hearts with the gentleness of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we learn to counter violence with blessing, hatred with love, and cruelty with kindness. May we all cherish the peace of Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in all that we do. God Bless you all.

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