



“BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE WELFARE OF OTHERS”

(cf. Philippians 2:4)

(A CBCP Pastoral Letter on the 2022 Election)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others (Philippians 2:3-4).

With the words of the Apostle Paul, we greet and call upon you as the Election draws near and as the local campaign is just starting.

Our Current Situation

While the threat of Covid has not been completely eradicated, the situation has somehow eased. Yet while we were slowly getting back on our feet, suddenly war exploded in Ukraine, worsening the economic and global peace crises. This is very sad and worrisome.

Clearly, moral progress is lagging behind material progress. Our tools and processes have become sophisticated. But, poverty and war have also become sophisticated. The present is complex. The future is uncertain. The current realities are volatile and ambiguous.

We need competent leaders and lawmakers with sincere intentions to serve the welfare of our communities, i.e., municipalities, cities, provinces and the whole country.

The 2022 Election

The 2022 Election is of great importance. It is the time when we choose the people whom we entrust both our lives and future.

We are moved by the courageous defense of the people of Ukraine for their country and their freedom. Theirs is an example of love for country.

Although we are not at war, we need to protect our freedom and ensure the common good. We must improve the lives of our people, especially the poor and the vulnerable. This is the primary responsibility of a public servant.

The Separation of Church and State

We call upon you once again. There is no law that prohibits any church or religion to speak about and engage in politics. In truth, the principle of *Separation of Church and State* respects the free exercise of religion. It prohibits the Government from establishing a state religion (cf. 1987 Philippine Constitution Art. 2, Sec. 6; Art. 3, Sec. 5). And any church, being part of the society, has the right and the responsibility to speak out, especially on the moral aspect of politics and governance.

Thus, when the good, the truth, life and the welfare of all are at stake, be assured that we shall raise our voice. In the words of St. Paul: “*Woe to us if we do not preach the gospel*” (cf. 1 Cor 9:16). We pray that we shall always be on the side of the truth, of the good and of justice, as we strive to work for unity and peace. The Church and the State serve one and the same people. The Church, however, cannot be indifferent towards the truth, good and justice.

The Common Good is the Responsibility of All

The election is not only for the candidates and the voters. All of us, whatever our status in life, will surely be affected by the results of the election.

Each vote is important, so important that it is sought, bought or even stolen. Our vote is our voice and decision. When we sell our vote, we lose our voice and our decision. It is like giving up our freedom and our future.

And we should be reminded that taking advantage of the poverty and vulnerability of people in order to acquire votes or advance one's selfish gain is a serious offense against God.

May we not forget: the welfare of all is everybody's responsibility. All of us, whether voters or not, have an important role to play. All of us have something to contribute to the welfare of our nation. Can we afford to be indifferent while our freedom and our future are at stake?

Our Suggestions

We, therefore, recommend the following:

1. Let us continue with our conversations, scrutiny and evaluation (circles of discernment) of (a) the political and social situation; and (b) national and local candidates.

Let us seek those candidates who prioritize Life and Dignity of the Human Person; protect the Family, Community, and encourage Participation; defend Rights and fulfill Responsibilities; demonstrate preferential option for the Poor and Vulnerable; uphold the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; work for Solidarity; and care for God's Creation.

Let us identify the candidates who put the welfare of the nation above their personal interests. We can employ the 'LASER test' on the candidates. LASER stands for *L*.ifestyle, *A*.ction, *S*.upporters, *E*.lection conduct and *R*.eputation of a candidate.

2. Let us continue with our *Voter's Education* towards *Voter's Empowerment* in view of electing freely and towards greater political and social engagement of every citizen. Let us remember: Our engagement and concern for others do not end with the election.

3. Let us uphold and not compromise our moral principles in the task of political engagement and nation building. Let us follow our conscience, striving to maintain an informed and correct conscience.

While there may be a lot hindrances and challenges in ensuring the welfare of our country, may we not allow ourselves to be overcome by any fear or threat. May we not be paralyzed by evil nor by our own failures. Upholding the good is a fight against evil. Let us not give up the search for truth and our concern for the common good.

4. Let us be on guard against the suspicious and the dubious. Let us be vigilant and call out those who use violence, money and power, or other forms of cheating; those who spread lies and hatred; those who manipulate people for their own personal interest; and those who take advantage of the weak and the vulnerable.

Let us demand accountability and transparency from the candidates, our leaders and ourselves. We all want a fair election.

5. Let us continue praying, doing good to our neighbor, offering sacrifices and begging God for the grace of a credible, peaceful and successful election for our common good.

A Call for Concern

Dear brothers and sisters, let us participate and express ourselves in a just, respectful and peaceful manner. Let us fight indifference. Let us especially be concerned for the welfare of our people and country.

Perhaps there are those among us who have always been mere spectators – unconcerned until they are personally affected; simply waiting for the results of the election without lifting a finger. Where, then, is the love and care for our neighbor?

Let us contribute by fulfilling our responsibilities. We cannot build the future without being involved. Let us not leave this task to others. We need to actively participate in this endeavor.

Let us gradually transform our political culture. If we maintain a negative view of politics and belittle our efforts, then we shall not reap positive results. Let us not gamble on our future.

We appeal to all the candidates, their parties and supporters, all civic clubs, the different sectors of our society – especially the Youth, the Government, its agencies and departments (national and local), Non-Government Organizations, Military and Educational institutions, Parish and Barangay Pastoral Councils, BEC's, Church Organizations and Associations, Religious Congregations and Movements, the COMELEC, Board of Election Inspectors, SMARTMATIC, PPCRV, NAMFREL, other Election Watchdogs and volunteers, the Media (local and international), Brothers and Sisters of other Faiths – let us bond together to ensure that the election is *Clean, Honest, Accurate, Meaningful and Peaceful* [CHAMP]; and also *Safe, Accurate, Fair Election* [SAFE]].

A Call to Conversion

Dear brothers and sisters, the transformation of the way we do politics requires a change of heart, attitude and priorities. This is also the invitation of Lent: conversion and reconciliation with God. May our discipleship of Jesus, *the Word Made Flesh*, serve as our guide and light in making decisions and actions.

We may have different views and positions, however, let us remember the Latin saying: "*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.*" ('In necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity.')

In all our endeavors, we need the Divine assistance. Let us pray, offer sacrifices and beg forgiveness for our faults and failures (*cf. 2 Chronicles 7:14*). The Father awaits our return, to welcome us and renew us, as He did to the Prodigal Son (*cf. Luke 15:11-32*).

May the Almighty, the God of mercy and love, bless all of us. May our loving Mother, the Lady of Peace, help and protect us. We entrusted ourselves and Ukraine and Russia to her Immaculate Heart on the Feast of the Annunciation by the Angel to Mary about the Incarnation of the Son of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that He may reconcile us to the Father.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines:


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