

A MEMORANDUM FROM THE DIOCESE OF ALIWAL NORTH

A CHANCE TO EXERCISE GOD-GIVEN TALENTS (AUGUST 1987)

Should present leaders stay in office for ever? Or should they be replaced after some years even when they are doing well? Is it good to rotate leadership? Should elections be held for office bearers after some years? Many Catholic associations, sodality executives and parish Pastoral Councils face these questions.

This memorandum from the Commission for the Laity of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference wants to encourage rotation of office bearers and to show why Christian faith favours it. Deeply interested in the healthy life of all Catholic movements and associations the Commission for the Laity offers guidelines to both members and leaders because it is clear that rotation of office bearers will only succeed if all desire it and if all work towards it. Leaders can only hand on their office to others if all members see this as something valuable and if they cooperate to achieve it.

Generosity

The Church expects leaders and office-bearers to have the humility to step down to make room for others when their time of office expires. It expects that they have the generosity to organise with dedication the very elections, which may vote them out of office. The Church expects that they assist new and inexperienced office-bearers in their new task. It expects that they do not withdraw after their office ends, but continue to offer their talents by working faithfully as members.

It must be expected that members do not leave all their work to the leaders, that they help them when difficulties arise, and that they continue to respect them after they have handed their office to others. Furthermore, all members should increase their abilities and their knowledge, so that they can assume tasks whenever the community calls them to do so.

Participation

Christian faith urges all members to participate in the election of office bearers in a spirit of love and justice. Members should acknowledge with gratitude that God has given talents to many, not only to one person. While secular groups may see elections as a struggle to win the highest number of votes, Christian communities should see them as an effort to find the charisms, which God Himself has given. It is not right if a Christian group takes no interest in new elections and, out of carelessness, leaves the same leaders in office beyond their term of office.

Rotation of office bearers should be seen as an act of love for in love we acknowledge that God has given talents to all of us and rejoice if each one is given a chance to exercise talents and make room for others. We help and do not seek our own success but also the success of others and we assist those who make mistakes to rectify them. We help the weak to become stronger and create a spirit of equality in each group, council, or sodality so that tasks and responsibilities are shared.

Jesus said to His young community: “You know that among the pagans the rulers lord over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you.” (Mt 20: 15-16) This is why councils and groups do not extol our leaders more than necessary, do not leave all tasks to one, await the downfall of leaders nor enjoy their weaknesses, and also do not attempt them to misuse their authority.

Togetherness by example

Our Christian rule and basic constitution is love. Love means sharing, equality, mutual help, togetherness, and therefore also rotation of office.

All this takes on special importance in South Africa where we want to overcome the past and the stage where one group rules alone and forever. We want to create a society of sharing and togetherness. We need examples of sharing, and Christian groups should be the first to show that sharing of leadership is possible.

The dioceses of our country have decided on a Pastoral Plan and chose the theme **Community serving humanity**. If we want to become a community, we must practise sharing, and this includes sharing leadership and rotation of leadership. If we want to serve humanity, we must set an example of humble and serving leadership.

We are aware that many of us come from cultural traditions where old age was highly valued and where ageing leaders were not replaced out of respect. But we are also aware that our traditions are in fact continually adapted to the present times. Most people of today feel that the times call for a sharing of leadership and a rotation of office. It is our Christian task to recognise these and, if they promote the common good, to accept them.

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