

**PASTORAL LETTER OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE ON PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS
(5 November 1993)**

1. 1992 – A call to build a new South Africa

In our 1992 pastoral letter entitled “A call to build a new South Africa” we attempted to answer the question: how can we as Catholics contribute to the building up of a new South Africa? We stressed the need to counteract violence by working as peacemakers to promote a spirit of tolerance. We expressed our support for democratic government in that it uses ‘the peaceful means of debate to solve problems’. We called for a new economic vision that should aim at mending our country’s two urgent needs ‘greater economic growth and fairer distribution of wealth’. Finally we called for enthusiastic support for the building of a united nation, which would respect the rich diversity in language and culture with which our country is blessed so that everyone could feel they belong to the one family of South Africa.

2. 1993 – towards a democratic future

Our letter of 1993 attempted to explore the links between the Christian faith and democracy. We reflected that our faith compels us at all times to strive for a more human society as a way of living out our daily prayer for the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We stressed that love makes us promote tolerance and respect for others especially those whom we regard as different: We pointed out that hope makes us overcome our apathy, fear and ignorance. Hope makes us strong enough to demand that democracy should not be just a matter of mechanical processes and legal structures but that it should be built on moral values, and that it should be built on moral values, and that it should be administered by honest leaders.

3. People’s response to the pastoral letter

The response to our letters has been most encouraging. Catholics have been active in many spheres in helping to bring about a new and better South Africa. Many have become actively involved in voter education and in preparing themselves and others to play responsible roles in the forthcoming elections.

4. Preparing for elections

In the course of voter education, some have expressed their confusion at the different messages they are receiving from all sides and have asked for clearer guidance. Some people even ask church leaders “Who should we vote for?” Unfortunately some local leaders attempt to give simple answers to that question. But that is not enough. There is no democracy without hard work. We need to try to understand who and what we are voting for and why. The following list of questions may help individuals and groups in this process. We can use them to challenge political parties, to scrutinize their policy manifestos and to question individual candidates and leaders. The answers given will help us discern which party is likely to contribute most to national unity, to political and economic progress and to social justice.

Questions for politicians and political parties

A Political policy

1. What is your position on democracy? And on majority rule?
2. What criteria did you use in selecting the candidates on your party list?
3. What will you do if your party loses the election?
4. Do you want a unitary or a federal state in South Africa? Why?
5. How do you intend to restructure the police and security forces so that they will enjoy credibility among all the people?
6. How do you intend to counteract violence?
7. How will you deal with militant opposition groups?

B. Economic policy

8. What is your economic policy?
9. Will you adopt a totally free market system in which the government will not interfere at all?
10. Do you intend to take over key economic resources i.e. to nationalise them?
11. If you don't intend to nationalise the economy or to have a totally free market system, what form of state intervention in the economy do you plan? What will be the implications of this?
12. What is your policy on multinational corporations operating in South Africa?
13. Do you intend to raise loans from the World Bank? How do you intend to use them and to repay them?
14. What is your policy on taxation re V.A.T., P.A.Y.E, company tax, tax on wealth and inheritance?
15. How do you intend to tackle the problem of unemployment?

C. Social policy

16. What is your policy on land redistribution and how do you intend to finance it?
17. What is your position on promoting Black workers through affirmative action?
18. What is your policy on education and especially how do you intend to deal with the backlog in black education resulting from apartheid.
19. How do you intend to finance your reforms?
20. What is your policy on Church schools?
21. How do you intend to deal with the seven million homeless people in the country? How do you intend to finance housing?
22. How do you intend to provide primary health services for all and how do you intend to finance this programme?
23. How do you intend to help those who were neglected under apartheid, especially the rural poor, the alienated youth and the marginalised generally and how do you intend to finance this help?

D. Human rights policy

24. What is your policy on a Bill of Human Rights; especially what is your position on women's rights and advancement, and family and cultural values in such a Bill?
25. What is your position on the right to life from the moment of conception until death. What therefore is your position on abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment?
26. Will you allow free activity for non-political organisations and how will you support non-government organisations?
27. What is your plans for reconciliation especially on a programme to improve race relations? How will you finance the programme?

E. Finally

28. Do you think your policies are in line with Christian values?

5. Conclusion

Asking these and similar questions will help us in preparing for elections. They will help us learn that democracy works when we play our part as responsible citizens. If we are alert and well informed, corrupt leaders cannot use us as puppets. We are free to vote for a more just South Africa. Indeed we must vote. The alternative to voting is continuing violence. Violence is a spiral, which feeds and grows on itself. It will not bring solutions. Violence will turn our country into a devastated wasteland. It is not as if we have not been warned. We have seen this happening in several countries throughout the world. To repeat what we said in 1990: Two paths lie ahead for South Africa. We have 'a choice between the way of life and the way of death' (Jeremiah 21:8). The 1994 elections may be our last chance to reject war and violence and to choose instead justice, peace and reconciliation. For this we must prepare well and we must vote well.