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## **PASTORAL LETTER 2**

**25th January 2012**

***“Your Vote is Your Power”***

### **A. THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS 2012**

Within 5 months the citizens of Papua New Guinea will be called to choose their political leaders for the next five years. National elections are an event that affects not only the political life of a country, but also the day-to-day life of people themselves. It is the particular vocation of the laity to transform the world. And this can be done - among other ways - through **responsible voting**.

In these days and in the coming months, Caritas Rabaul, through its “Diocesan Development Team”, will carry out an awareness campaign in view of the National Elections. A program is in place and it will help our people to perform their rights and duties in a responsible way. Limited preferential voting will be used for the second time; consequently, there will be need to help people to understand better how it works and above all to be vigilant when the counting of votes will take place.

As a contribution to the awareness campaign of Caritas Rabaul, I wish

to offer some guidelines to the Catholic faithful of the Archdiocese of Rabaul on their responsibility for voting into office worthy candidates who can bring about real changes in society.

Is this task proper to the Bishop's office? Is not politics the business of government and public service?

For sure, it is not for me or for our clergy to offer an 'end-of-term' report on the performance of those who led us for the last five years or to offer a platform for any party for the next five years, much less to propose that you vote for this or that candidate.

Nevertheless, since the Church lives in the midst of society, the Church cannot remain indifferent to public policy issues. The Church must be free to speak in the public arena on the important issues of the day since these issues affect the destiny of many people. "The Church's social doctrine is an integral part of her evangelizing ministry. Nothing that concerns the community of men and women – situations and problems regarding justice, freedom, development, relations between peoples, peace – is foreign to evangelization, and evangelization would be incomplete if it did not take into account the mutual demands continually made by the Gospel and by the concrete, personal and social life of people" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No. 66*).

For this reason, as a shepherd of the flock entrusted to my care by the Lord, I consider it within my pastoral competence to propose some basic qualifications that political candidates should possess and to request that the candidates' views on certain issues be made known before voting.

This is very important for two reasons:

- First: because the personal qualifications of the candidates and their stand on certain key issues can be very revealing of their overall values and priorities.
- Secondly, because the voters may very well decide to vote for, or against, a particular candidate because of his/her qualifications, as well as his/her views on those issues of importance.

baul area. Also the doctors, serving at St. Mary's are not sufficient. We have tried to find additional doctors, but we were so far unsuccessful. Some lives could have been saved if more doctors had been present in other part of the Province and at Vunapope Hospital.

***What do our candidates propose to do to bring health services and clean drinking water to our people?***

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Dear brothers and sisters, if you wish upon yourselves the blessing of the Lord and peace and prosperity, you should do His will in all things, including politics. You should spare no effort to make these elections honest and meaningful. Therefore,

- Make sure that your name is on the election roll.
- Go out to vote, but do not vote more than once; when you vote more than one time, you are breaking the law of this country, but more importantly you are cheating others of their right to a fair election.
- Do not allow yourselves to be bribed; in other words, do not sell your vote.
- Do not force members of your family to vote for the candidate of your choice.
- Finally, choose the best men and women to represent us and to lead us into a better future.

Since even our best efforts will come to nothing without the help of God, let us invoke upon our people the grace of the Holy Spirit who renews the face of the earth (Ps. 104:30), and let us ask the intercession of Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Mother, to obtain for us through honest elections the leaders we need.

+ Francesco Panfilo, SDB  
Archbishop of Rabaul

## 6. Employment

Very much connected with education is the human and technological formation which is necessary for gainful employment. On the other hand, unemployment is a “real social disaster” (*John Paul II, Laborem Exercens, 18*), above all with regard to the younger generations. We often say that young people are the future of the country. But what is their present? What are the opportunities we offer them? Every year a greater number of Grade 8, 10, and 12 school leavers find themselves out of the educational system and with little opportunity of landing a job. In fact, “over half of the unemployed at the 2000 Census were aged 15-24 years” (National Statistical Office – 2000 National Census – page 49).

*Before the elections, candidates for office should not only make promises of creating jobs, but tell us how they propose to create employment and job opportunities.*

## 7. Social Services and Health

In East New Britain there is only one Hospital – Nonga – while St. Mary’s Hospital is still considered a Health Centre. Through the PNG Incentive Fund, improvements are taking place at St. Mary’s Hospital, Vunapope, especially with a better dormitory for our single nurses. Through AusAID, St. Mary’s School of Nursing will also improve considerably. We are grateful and thank all those who worked hard to achieve these improvements.

The majority of the people who live on the Gazelle Peninsula can avail of the service of the above health structures. In addition, there are also other Health Centres. The same thing cannot be said of the Pomio district, where health services are in the hands of good and dedicated nurses and community health workers, but they cannot take the place of doctors.

In order to find a doctor patients have to travel to Vunapope or to Nonga and we all know how difficult it is during certain periods of the year, as well as how expensive. Not a single doctor is found outside of Ra-

While, therefore, I as your pastor propose to you the following guidelines based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ (*Mt 24:45-51; 25:14-30; Mk 10:35-45; Jn 13:1-17*) to help you in voting for the right persons, I wish to make it clear that it is not the pastoral duty of your pastors - Bishop and Priests - to name for you the persons who meet the following qualifications best. **As your pastors, we can only advise you what kind of persons you should vote for. We are not entitled to tell you whom to vote for.**

**Your vote is your power!** You owe it to yourselves, to your families, and above all to your children, who will bear the consequences of your choice of leaders. Benedict XVI, in this year’s message for the World Day of Peace - “Educating Young people in Justice and Peace” - stated that it is the responsibility of those called to public office to work for the creation of institutions, laws and environments of life that offer new generations opportunities to fully realize themselves (e.g. decent job, education etc.) and to build a civilization of fraternal love directed toward a more profound awareness of truth, freedom, of love and of justice for all persons.

## B. QUALIFICATIONS OF A GOOD POLITICAL LEADER

In the First Book of the Kings, it is recounted that God invited the young King Solomon, who succeeded his father David on the throne, to make a request. The young ruler asked for **a listening heart** so that he could govern God’s people and discern between good and evil. The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for the wisdom to rule justly, instead of success, long life, wealth or the destruction of his enemies (cf. 1 Kg 3:9).

“Through this story, the Bible wants to tell us what should ultimately matter for a politician. His fundamental criterion and the motivation for his work as a politician must not be success, and certainly not material gain. Politics must be a striving for justice, and hence it has to establish the fundamental preconditions for peace. Naturally a politician will seek success, without which he would have no opportunity for effective political action at all. Yet success is subordinated to the

criterion of justice, to the will to do what is right, and to the understanding of what is right” (Benedict XVI to the German Parliament, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2011).

How beautiful it would be if all those who aspire for political office were to ask from the Lord for a listening heart – the capacity to discern between good and evil, and thus to establish true law, to serve justice and peace, and consider people not as their own, but as God’s people!

It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that we vote the right people to office. But who are the right persons to vote for? Who does God want us to choose for that awesome authority which comes from him (*Rom 13:1*)?

In choosing our leaders in the political community some might think to look first at the platforms and programs of the different political parties. For example: in the 2002 elections the National Resource Party of Sir Mekere Morauta ran its campaign on the promise of “free education”, while the National Alliance of Sir Michael Somare opposed such initiative. That was a platform. By and large, nevertheless, there are practically no differences in the platform and programs of the different parties. We need, therefore, to focus our attention on the qualities needed by our elective public officials.

### ***1. Competence***

The most necessary qualification that a candidate must have is COMPETENCE in relation to the office he/she is seeking to be elected to. Is the candidate capable of fulfilling the duties of the office he/she aspires to? Does he/she have the physical health, mental ability, and emotional capability needed to handle the demands of the office? In other words, can the candidate do the job if elected?

An important element of this competence is the candidate’s possession of that quality called LEADERSHIP. We need officials whom the people can look up to, who can inspire confidence and motivate them to unite and aim for the common good. Leadership is not the

## **5. Education**

Without good education there is no future for the country. The aim of education is the total development of a person, so that the new generations will fully assume their responsibilities as citizens capable of being actors in the nation’s progress. Education should be within everyone’s reach, but this is not the case for various reasons, one of which is the lack of funds on the part of many parents. In addition, there is a lot of talk about making the six national high schools and adding two more national high schools as “schools of excellence”.

The Catholic Church believes that this proposal will

- create an elitist group that is not conducive to PNG society and will divide society rather than unite it;
- discriminate against the people of PNG and against the Church Agencies that conduct secondary schools within the PNG education systems;
- set up a two-tier education system in which some students will not have equal access to higher education and ‘Agencies’ schools’ will have their identities significantly altered because better staff and leadership will be taken to the exclusive national high schools.

In short, the Catholic Church believes that our PNG education system does not need exclusive or select schools at this time. Maybe in ten or twelve years there may be a need. At the present time we need to improve the standard of language, mathematics and science teaching across all the high schools of PNG. This is where the falling standards are happening.

***What is the stand of candidates in regards to ‘free or subsidized education’? How do they intend to reach out to parents and children who can’t afford the cost of education? What is their stand on “schools of excellence”? How do they intend to help teachers, especially those who are exercising their profession in disadvantaged places?***

sionate and promote condom use to save lives among members of our own Church as well as among those who do not share our faith and choose to be sexually active before marriage. This may appear to be good common sense but it is surely not the teaching of Jesus who truly respects young people and has higher expectations of them” (Hugh Slattery, MSC).

***What is the stand of the candidates in regards to HIV/AIDS prevention? How do they intend to care for victims? Are they willing to make financial resources available to the Churches so that they may be able to prepare educational material for an aggressive campaign on abstinence and marital faithfulness?***

#### **4. Preservation of our natural resources**

Good governance demands that the proper use of natural resources, as given to all generations by the Creator, should be used for the benefit of everyone. Our people have the right to use their resources, sharing them with others, as well as to develop technologies for their effective use and preservation.

There are concerns about our natural resources, their exploitation and the lack of substantial benefits that come to the people of East New Britain. People tell me that with the oil, fishing, logging, and mining concessions, they don't get a fair deal in term of financial returns and development of social services.

The Church is not against the use of the natural resources, especially if done in a judicious manner, and she is not against profit, provided it is done to the great benefit of the resources' owners and not only of greedy companies. Certainly the profit of these companies should not be at the expense of our poor people.

***Candidates for office should clearly state what they intend to do about safeguarding the natural resources of our Province and, above all, how they intend to have the “Memorandum of Understanding” (MOU) signed and later respected so that our people will get what is just, in order to improve their lot.***

same as popularity or smooth talking. Neither is it the capacity to manipulate people towards self-serving ends. Leadership is rather a way of serving that draws people together and draws the best from them so that they dare to build a better future together despite all obstacles and difficulties. The competence of candidates is to be measured from their qualities and their track record in serving the community. The way a person has served in the past is a better gauge of his/her competence than any academic credentials he/she may hold. Performance, not promises or popularity, is the test of competence.

#### **2. Personal Integrity**

The second qualification necessary is the PERSONAL INTEGRITY of the candidates. The candidates should not only be competent. They should also be God-fearing, God-loving and honest. And honesty means first of all an absolute commitment to uphold the human rights and freedoms of others and to handle the rich natural resources of the Province and public funds. Honesty also means truthfulness, and upright conduct in one's private life.

Our political leaders must tell the truth at all times. In the past months, even on the floor of Parliament, too many contradictory statements were heard, so much so that people did not know who was telling the truth and who was lying.

Personal integrity, finally, means that, while we must make allowances for human weakness and sin in our public officials, we have a right to expect from them the practice of the virtues, such as: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance (so-called cardinal virtues).

#### **3. Commitment to the Common Good**

A third paramount quality we should seek in candidates for public office is proven COMMITMENT TO THE COMMON GOOD. By common good is to be understood as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily” (GS 26, 2). “The common

good consists of three essential elements: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members” (CCC 1925).

We should elect persons who can go beyond narrow self and family interest and are willing to make sacrifices for the public good. Corrupt persons, or persons with criminal records, do not have this commitment. Neither do those politicians whose actions are guided only by convenience or the desire to do the popular thing whether it be right or wrong. The common good of people requires that candidates for office should faithfully uphold the Constitution of the country at all times. What happened, following the Supreme Court decision of last December 2011, set a very dangerous precedent. In that particular case it was the Constitution rather than numbers in parliament that should have decided what was right or wrong.

### C. IMPORTANT ISSUES

During the political campaign, we will hear more and more promises from candidates about delivery of services, money, improvement in living conditions, improvements in roads and communications, and so on. The voters must carefully consider the words and actions of candidates. They must try to discern what is true and what is just campaign talk.

At the same time, it is of great importance for voters to know where candidates - especially those who run for Parliament - stand in regards to certain issues that for the Church are not negotiable. Among these the following emerge clearly today:

#### 1. Human life

Human life is a gift of the Almighty. Our sacred duty is to preserve it, and this should be the concern not only of religious people, but also of political leaders. It is, therefore, necessary to assert constantly the highest value of human life from conception to the final breath and natural death.

*What is the public stand of candidates in regards to abortion, euthanasia, cloning, capital punishment, etc.?*

#### 2. Family life and population issues

For the sake of the common good we must safeguard family life. For Catholics the family is a “**domestic church**” and it is the right place for cultivating free, intelligent, and moral children. Often we hear from some of our politicians that the “population is increasing fast and outstripping the services government is able to provide”. It is true that the population of PNG is growing faster than the delivery of services, but political leaders should tell us why the Government is unable to provide more and better services when - it is believed - the country has the resources on the ground and underground and on the sea to feed and support more than 100 million people. If the resources of PNG are so abundant and more food can be placed on the table, why should we reduce the people at table?

*Where do candidates stand publicly on issues such as marriage, divorce, polygamy, same-sex relationships, the status of women and children, domestic violence, and policies to regulate population growth? Do candidates propose to introduce no tax rebates and no school fee discounts for more than two dependents to keep the family size small?*

#### 3. HIV/AIDS prevention and care

Regarding HIV/AIDS. The Catholic Church has worked and it will continue to work to prevent the spread of AIDS, but it does it by encouraging people, especially the young, to abstain from sex before marriage and to be faithful in marriage.

Others, instead, “claim that in today’s world the Catholic Church is out of touch with people and especially with young people in the area of sexual morality. They notice that every day the youth are becoming sexually active at a younger age. This is our reality, they say, and we must accept it. Then they argue that we should therefore be compas-