

Reflections for Small Groups
on the SACBC Pastoral Letter for 2009 Elections:
Awake! Awake! Protect Our Democracy

Looking towards South Africa's and Botswana's elections in 2009 the Bishops of the SACBC have prepared a pastoral letter - *Awake! Awake! Protect Democracy* - for the two countries' Catholic communities. The Justice and Peace Department of the SACBC offers the following reflection process which can help small groups to deepen their reflections on the Bishops' pastoral message.

1. Outstanding Challenges:

- a) *Read the text from the Pastoral Letter*
- b) The challenges which are mentioned in the pastoral letter are particularly relevant for South Africa but many of them are also real for Botswana. Not everyone may be affected by them to the same degree but they remain a serious threat to peace and justice and as such a threat to our democracies.
 - Reflection:
What has been your personal experience and what other challenges do you see besides the ones mentioned by the Bishops?
- c) Suggested scriptural reading: Romans 8: 18-24
 - Reflection
 - Every election gives citizens the opportunity and hope for a better life.
 - How are we sometimes part of the problem related to the challenges faced by our society?
 - What are the changes and improvements which we would like to see after the elections?
- d) Prayer: O Lord – We have squandered your gifts and have failed to use them in the service of others. The good life of some is built on the pain of many. The pleasure of a few is the agony of millions. Teach us anew what it means to be your people. We believe that our longings can be fulfilled beyond imagining and that our hope is not in vain.

2. What is it that we should guard against?

- a) *Read the text from the Pastoral Letter*
- b) Voting in the elections starts long before making a cross next to the name of a party of choice. What we need to remember as voters is that until the next elections our choice will have consequences for our lives and the lives of all our fellow citizens. It is for this reason that we should interrogate the reasons for our choosing one political party over another. Election time is a time of expectation, tension and competition as people and politicians try to convince others that what they offer is the best for people and country. It is a time when intolerance of different views increases, and many forms of intimidation and manipulation are used to sway the minds of people. It is indeed a time when we have to guard against *blind loyalty, intolerance and intimidation, corruption and doing nothing*, the four dangers to which the Bishops draw our attention.
 - Reflection
What other things are there which could threaten the fairness of the elections and prevent all citizens from making a free choice?

- c) Suggested Scriptural Reading: Rom 14: 1-4; Deut 16:18-20; Jas 2: 14-17
- Reflection:

Church Social Teaching teaches us that the fulfilling of our civic duties should be ‘guided by a Christian conscience’¹ which is concerned about protecting human rights and promoting justice for all especially the poor and marginalized.

 - What can we do to avoid these threats?
- d) Prayer: O Lord you mean us to be a single people, ruled by peace, freed from injustice, responsible and responsive in the life we lead. Forgive the subtle ways in which we contribute to the conflicts in our country. Remove the insecurity which leads to our narrow preference for ‘our kind of people’. In its place give us not only tolerance but an appreciation for our diversity. Help us to find an overarching unity in the service of Jesus, our common Lord, in whose name we pray.

3. Our Role as Christians

a) *Read the text from the Pastoral Letter*

b) Reflection:

- What are we already doing to respond to each of these challenges?
- How am I helping encourage members of our communities to work for just, peaceful and fair elections in 2009?

c) Suggested scriptural reading: Ps 146:1-8

• Reflection:

- Who are the oppressed in my community?
- How am I helping them secure justice?
- How am I helping to feed and give support to those most in need?
- What can we do to respond more fully to these challenges to us as Christians in the pastoral letter?

d) Prayer: Lord, strengthen our hope in the Lord. Help us to keep the faith by striving for justice in our land. Give us hearts, hands, and feet to truly reach out to those in need. Share out among us the tongues of your spirit that we may each burn with compassion for all who hunger for justice and peace; that we may be doers of the Word and so speak with credibility.

4. A Call to Prayer

a) *Read the text from the Pastoral Letter*

b) What can we do in our parish to promote prayer, reflection and action about the elections?

¹ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 76.