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31 August, 2015

PREPARING FOR GENERAL ELECTION 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The date of the General Election has been announced. Singaporeans will go to the polls on 11 September, 2015. Some of you have asked the Church for guidance as we ponder on how to exercise our vote as responsible citizens and Catholics. It behooves us to be aware of the Church's stand on religion and politics.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its Doctrinal Note regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life states that *the primary function of the Church is to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good.*

The just ordering of society or the state is not the central responsibility of the Church. Yet, as citizens of the state, we are called to participate in public life in a personal capacity. These two spheres, religion and politics, though distinct, are interrelated. A good Catholic should also be a good citizen on earth and in heaven.

Secondly, we have a moral obligation to exercise our vote responsibly. This means conscientiously assessing for ourselves, each candidate or party in the light of the following considerations, alongside their electoral promises, when deciding who to elect to government:

1. Is the candidate/party one of good moral standing, in particular with regard to the values of honesty and integrity?
2. Does the candidate/party uphold the principles that are enshrined in the Singapore Pledge, namely, justice, equality, progress, peace and harmony?
3. Does the candidate/party promote a culture of life and dignity of the human person?
4. Does the candidate/party work to preserve and promote moral values?
5. Does the candidate/party protect and care for the weak, elderly, under-privileged, and those with special needs?
6. Does the candidate/party protect and support marriages and family life?
7. Does the candidate/party build an inclusive society, free from oppression and discrimination?
8. Is the candidate/party in touch with the needs of the people and demonstrate selfless service, putting the nation before self?

For further elaboration and insight, I urge you to read this in conjunction with the attached FAQ.

Finally, I invite all of you to pray, fast or offer up some sacrifices for our country's future. Mass should be celebrated and offered with this intention too.

We thank the Lord for the past fifty years. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to vote wisely for leaders that will take us into the next lap.

Yours in Christ,


Most Rev. William Goh
Archbishop of Singapore

FAQ For Singaporean Catholic Voters

With the General Election set for 11 September 2015, many Singaporeans are asking themselves, "Who shall I vote? How will my vote affect Singapore's future?" As Catholics, we are not exempt from these questions. In fact, the Church calls us to contribute to the common good of the nation by exercising our right to vote. We are morally obliged to vote responsibly, using our God-given reason and a well-formed conscience.

It is important to note that **the Catholic Church in Singapore does not endorse any political party, candidate or manifesto.** But the Church's role is to help form our consciences so that on September 11 we will cast our ballots, not for the sake of narrow sectarian interests, but for the good of the whole country. As active citizenry is an important element of living our Catholic faith, we have put together this FAQ to help you address some common concerns of Catholic voters.

Q1. Why is it important for me, as a Catholic, to vote?

A: Voting is a moral duty. The Church teaches that voting is an important way for citizens – including Catholics – to participate in governance, and to help society achieve the common good. Therefore, we must vote responsibly and conscientiously.

"It is the duty of citizens to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom... Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2239-2240)

Q2. How should I vote?

A: We must scrutinize our candidates, their parties, and the policies they advocate, to help us make an informed choice.

Catholics are called to work for the common good of everyone in Singapore, that is, to help everyone to flourish and fulfil themselves. **The Church helps form our consciences by highlighting key elements of the common good.** These include: respecting the dignity of every person from conception to natural death; social well-being and development; and peace and stability. Hence, in deciding who to vote, we should consider where the parties stand on issues such as (but not limited to) family life, education, economic policies, workers' rights, the poor and the marginalized, the environment, racial harmony and religious freedom.

"The Church's social teaching argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being... [T]he Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice." (Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 28)

Q3. What is the Catholic Church's position on the issues of the day?

A: Safe for issues concerning the dignity and preservation of life, justice and equality, the unity and indissolubility of marriage between husband and wife, the Church does not preach any specific views on how society and governments manage the socio-economic-political issues of the day. **On the vast majority of issues, there is space for legitimate disagreement** over what the state's policies and goals should be, and

how to achieve them. Catholics are free to differ on how the state should try to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth, or on how many immigrants to welcome, for example. But whatever stance we take on such issues, it must be because our reason and an informed conscience have discerned which policy proposals will enhance the good of everyone in Singapore.

"It is not the Church's task to set forth specific political solutions – and even less to propose a single solution as the acceptable one – to temporal questions that God has left to the free and responsible judgment of each person. It is, however, the Church's right and duty to provide a moral judgment on temporal matters when this is required by faith or the moral law." (Doctrinal Note on Some Questions regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, 3)

Q4. Singapore is a secular country. Would I be guilty of imposing my beliefs on others if I let my Catholic faith influence my vote?

A: A secular society does not mean that religion has no place, or that religion cannot inform public discourse. Christ calls us to be the light of the world. This cannot happen if we believe that Catholic principles are only for Catholics. In working for the common good, we do so with the conviction that the Church's teachings – which come from divine revelation and natural reason – benefit everyone. Our faith in God and our love of neighbour compel us to share the light we have received. **We vote as good Catholics and as good citizens; the two are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.**

"By fulfilling their civic duties, guided by a Christian conscience, in conformity with its values, the lay faithful exercise their proper task of infusing the temporal order with Christian values, all the while respecting the nature and rightful autonomy of that order, and cooperating with other citizens according to their particular competence and responsibility." (Doctrinal Note on Some Questions regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, 1)

Q5. Besides voting, how else can I participate in this election?

A: A responsible voter with a well-formed conscience must also be well-informed about the candidates in his constituency, their party manifestoes and policy proposals. We can participate in the political process by keeping updated on election issues and engaging in political dialogue to nurture a sense of civic responsibility. **Catholics should keep their political activity clean, charitable, and honest, avoiding personal attacks or misrepresentation.** Pray before voting, and, if possible, pray and fast for the candidates; that they may always work for the common good of Singapore.

"Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family. In an increasingly globalised society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations, in such a way as to shape the earthly city in unity and peace." (Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 7)