



## **TOWARDS NATIONAL COHESION**

**“Be reconciled to God,” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)**

**Pastoral Letter for Advent 2020 of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference On Being Reconciled to God, to One Another and to the Whole Universe  
18 November 2020**

“Be not Afraid: for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all people” (Luke 2:10).

1. Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, Advent is a time for us of great promise. It is a time to be hopeful. As Pope Francis wrote recently, “I invite everyone to renewed hope, for hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart... Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope.” (*Fratelli Tutti*. N. 55).

Whatever our circumstances as individuals, as families, communities, as a nation and at global level, this is the time we look forward to the good news that comes with the grace of our Lord. As the People of God we wait for the birth of Christ. The waiting in hopeful anticipation for the encounter with Christ is a humbling experience. As we prayerfully expect the coming of the Messiah and of Salvation we must remember our weaknesses and our sins from which we are to be saved. We must do our part to show appreciation for the redemption and the freedom that comes with it. We are like the children of Israel on pilgrimage to the promised land and yet we must cross the Red Sea, and this can be a big challenge. Working for freedom and justice can be daunting and we can be frightened. As your bishops in Zimbabwe, we encourage you to look forward in eager anticipation to the coming of Christ's kingdom of justice, peace, respect of every human being and of all creation. This salvation – this justice is not only for the believers but for all people. Announcing the first coming of Christ, the angel proclaimed to the shepherds in Bethlehem: “Be not afraid: for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all people” (Luke 2:10).

2. The word Advent itself comes from the Latin *Advenio* meaning “behold I come.” It is the Lord Jesus who comes to live among us in order to renew us. The coming of the Lord is also a coming of new things, new ideas, a renewed hope in him and in each other and what we are capable of doing together if only we can trust, reach out and find each other across our set social and political boundaries. We encourage the government to extend a new hand of welcome to all the opposition parties so that advent hope can be rekindled among our suffering people.

The cry of John the Baptist, “prepare a way for the Lord, make his path straight” must be heard in all the socio-political, economic and religious spheres of life. How do we bring ourselves and our country into Advent, the season of renewal? Let us be led first and foremost by the book of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 which underlines the need for each other: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him. But pity the one who falls and has no one to help him!”

3. Pope Francis in his most recent Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, translated 'brothers and sisters to all' underlines the central role of 'fraternity and social friendships', a “fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives” and regardless of political affiliation. Quoting the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope Francis writes “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters.” This call to live together and to recognise each other's dignity and rights is an important Advent message and the basis for a national convergence.

4. Advent 2020 comes in the midst of a pandemic that has ravaged the whole world. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused upheaval in our social, family, economic, educational, spiritual, liturgical and work dynamics. The Ecclesiastes text already quoted emphasises that we are, at our core, social beings. Genuine love for society and

commitment to the common good are expressions of charity which affect not only relationships between individuals but also macro relationships - social, economic and political. Pope Francis invites us to recognise “that all people are our brothers and sisters and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone...is a noble exercise of charity.” (180) He further points out that, “A false notion of tolerance has to give way to a dialogic realism on the part of men and women who remain faithful to their own principles while recognizing that others also have the right to do likewise. This is the genuine acknowledgment of the other that is made possible by love alone. We have to stand in the place of others, if we are to discover what is genuine, or at least understandable, in their motivations and concerns” (FT 221).

If we are to care truly for each other, we need to begin by looking at the relationships between people. When we cultivate good relationships, a shared sense of purpose and identity emerges. This, in turn, means that the quality of life of **all** becomes important. Genuine solidarity emerges when we care about other people and live with the awareness that we share the common home that God has entrusted to us. A true human and humane community can break out of the indifference brought about by consumerism and lack of political charity.

5. God gave us the ability to create conditions in which we can all flourish. Each one of us has this responsibility. This for Christians may mean involvement in politics inspired by the encounter with Christ and imbued with love and political charity. “Good politics will seek ways of building communities at every level of social life”.(FT 03) and Pope Francis adds “Once more I appeal for a renewed appreciation of politics as a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity inasmuch as it seeks the common good.” (FT 180). Politics without charity can never bring about the common good. A politician's love for the nation and for the common good is seen in how they treat dissenting voices. “There is no end to the building of a country's social peace; rather, it is an open-ended endeavour, a never-ending task that demands the commitment of everyone and challenges us to work tirelessly to build the unity of the nation. Despite obstacles, differences and varying perspectives on the way to achieve peaceful coexistence, this task summons us to persevere in the struggle to promote a 'culture of encounter'. This requires us to place at the centre of all political, social and economic activity the human person, who enjoys the highest dignity, and respect for the common good” (FT 232).

## **6. Advent and ecology**

In the encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis enters into dialogue with all people about our common home. He spends time talking about the ecological crisis which calls for a profound interior conversion. This ecological crisis as we know is not far from our doorstep. In fact it is inside our home fuelled by poverty, business interests and consumerism.

Pope Francis writes that “the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to cause related to human and social degradation” (LS 48). There is a growing awareness that conversion is necessary if we are to build the bonds of human relationships and take care of our common home. The two are intricately connected. Our religious traditions have an immense contribution to make. Spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. The season of Advent calls us to look again on how we can curb the destruction of this jewel of Africa. Hope for a better future means this is truly possible.

Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si*, says that the external deserts are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast (#217). These are internal deserts born of selfishness and self aggrandisement. This, for Christians, means that our personal encounter with Jesus Christ becomes evident in our relationship with the world around us.

Living the spiritual path freely and consciously liberates us. It helps us to live life to the full. St Paul reminds us in his second letter to the Corinthians, that our riches lie in our willingness and ability to see the world through the lens of generosity (2 Cor. 8:1-15).

Every person has the right to dignity, to enjoy life and happiness. However, these rights cannot be realised when some people are excluded and pushed to the margins. Environmental exploitation and degradation affect people's lives and their God-given rights to enjoy what was created for all.

## **7. Conclusion**

That we have had a difficult journey this year is an understatement. Family and friends have died. We need to put the common good at the heart of our recovery plans. We need to help each other. Simply being kind is one small way to do this. Returning to communal liturgical celebrations will help foster communion among us. Advent is a good time to resume physical attendance at the Eucharistic celebration if we have not already started. Let us use our time to talk creatively, positively and concretely about the future we dream and desire to

build the Zimbabwe We Want.

We, your bishops, realise that we have raised many important issues in this pastoral letter. We ask that where possible you take time to read it reflectively and prayerfully. We also suggest that groups may possibly come together to see how we can become more effective *heralds of hope* in this Advent and Christmas season.

8. We offer the following questions for consideration and discussion.

Do I recognize my need for others?

Do I realize and accept the fact that I am responsible for others and the natural world by virtue of being human?

*Lord God, give me the grace to see how I am dependent on others if I am to thrive. Awaken in me a real sense of responsibility. Help me to sow peace and friendship wherever I may go so that I genuinely contribute to building a better world. Amen*

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**+Alex Thomas, Archbishop of Bulawayo**

**+Paul Horan, Bishop of Mutare**

**+Michael D. Bhasera, Bishop of Masvingo**

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