

Bible provides guidance on voting for leaders.

Today the over-18 residents of Nelson Mandela Bay have the opportunity to determine who will provide political leadership and oversight of the workings of the municipality.

For those who have not taken the opportunity to vote before reading this column we, the church leaders of the metro, urge you to do so. Thousands of people died or were tortured, exiled and banished to win the right for all of us to vote. With rights come responsibilities.

By not voting we are telling those heroes and their families that their struggle was in vain. We are also doing ourselves a disservice, as democracy determines that people get the leadership they choose.

Many withhold their votes simply because they do not know who to trust. The Bible provides us with guidance.

Jeremiah 22: 13-16: "A legitimate government upholds the rights of the poor and vulnerable".

Our votes will influence our daily lives for the next five years – safety, the state of the roads, power supplies, water, sewage and, most importantly, the ability of business to create sustainable jobs. Well-run municipalities attract investment.

What we have perhaps forgotten or not realised is that we are also voting for the soul of the metro we live in. Those councillors and parties are the public face of the metro, and they are responsible for the ethical conduct of the municipal employees, whose job it is to deliver those services.

The job of councillors and political parties is not to fix lights or plug sewage leaks, but to hold those responsible accountable in terms of delivery and in the way that public funds are spent.

If the person standing in your ward is asking for another term, ask yourself what have they done to uphold the rights of the poor and vulnerable in your neighbourhood. How visible and involved have they been? How moral has their behaviour been?

If they are new to the ward, Google them to see their track record. If that does not work, then look at what the party they represent has delivered. Not promises – but real delivery through moral accountability that has made a difference in the lives of residents.

Jeremiah 29:4-7: "Seek the welfare of the city, for in its welfare you will find your welfare".

In short, we must choose moral councillors.

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, in his position as chair of the South African Council of Churches National Church Leaders Forum, wrote in his commendation of the 2015 SACC "The South Africa we Pray4" call to action : "This initiative is a call for a "New Struggle", a struggle for reconciliation based on justice, for a more equal society, for equality of opportunity, and a struggle against greed, against corruption and against the selfish accumulation of material goods at the expense of the poor. It is an acknowledgement that the incalculable sacrifices made by those who fought for our liberation cannot - must not - be squandered".

A Pastoral Letter on the 2021 election by the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference stresses that voting is a moral choice: “At a fundamental level, the results of an election are a mirror of our moral values, that which we consider as valuable as a nation. If we want a kind of politics where leaders are held to account when implicated of corruption and incompetence, if accountability and integrity in leadership are valuable to us, it must be shown in our votes. We must always consider the moral implications of our vote”.

Professor Barney Pityana, in an interview before the last national elections said that we need to look at those who are expressing themselves, who really want to bring Kingdom values to the country. “Ask yourself, what is it that God tells me to do as I stand here and put this cross? You must take responsibility because you are called by God.”

So, what criteria should guide our choice of councillor?

The Bible is a source of guidance in this area. In 1 Timothy, Paul gives Timothy the criteria for appointing Overseers, or Bishops as has been translated in other versions of scripture. In vs 8, Paul lists the qualifications of Deacons, which is probably modelled on what happened in Acts, i.e. the assistants to the Apostles and in this case, the assistants to the Bishops or as the original meaning of the word suggests, attendants.

Modelled on that scripture, the following are the minimum moral requirements of councillors:

1. Honesty. (Not double tongued. Entirely truthful...)
2. Faithful to family relationships (Husbands of one wife)
3. Free of selfish ambitions (Not greedy for money. To do nothing out of
4. Never to elicit, accept or pay bribes (Holding the mystery.....)
5. Sober in habits (Of sober habits.....)

As a practical guide, you will have two votes: one for the ward councillor, and one for a registered political party.

In the case of the Nelson Mandela Bay metro there are 60 Wards, and therefore 60 Ward Councillors and 60 proportional representation (PR) councillors.

We vote directly for the ward councillor, and our party vote determines how many PR council positions are allocated to a party as determined by a formula.

So, if you know the councillor is morally sound and is active in your ward but does not belong to a political party you support, you can still vote for the councillor as you are supporting a person. Your second vote could go to your party.

We urge you to pray for guidance and then vote. It is your moral duty.

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