

Christians are called on to “think before you ink” in local elections

Mike Smith

On the 27th of October, the people of South Africa will be given a once in-five-year opportunity to exercise their right to elect local government representatives.

There might be a difference of opinion about the role the Church should play during election times, but there certainly is agreement on the significance of local elections – a lack of basic service delivery directly affects our daily lives.

“Think before you Ink” is the heading to a voter’s guide produced before the 2016 elections.

Considering what has transpired in our Local government since that time, we as an electorate should perhaps have done a bit more thinking before voting.

This time round people may be wondering whether they should bother voting. As one of the privileged white people born in South Africa just after the Second World War, I was a relatively reluctant voter during the 30 years leading up to 1994, especially as the political party I voted for never came close to governing the country.

But in 1994 that changed, and I could not wait to take part in true democratic elections. I served as a Peace Monitor during the pre- and post-election process.

We met at the camping grounds just behind Happy Valley before driving out in teams to the various polling stations. It was a privilege to observe just how hungry people were to cast their ballots, mostly for the first time.

From a peace point of view our presence was totally unnecessary, as all races stood in long queues in great spirits. For the majority of South Africans this was a hard-fought privilege and a long time coming.

It would seem that this privilege should never be squandered or ignored.

In the case of Christians, our responsibility before God remains the same for both national and local elections Christians are commanded by God to be ‘Salt & Light’ in society. The vote is just one tool available to Christian citizens to advance righteousness in the nation.

So, the next challenge is deciding who to vote for at a local level.

Before 1994, it was individuals who stood for office in local government elections. Some were publicly aligned with a political party, but essentially one was voting for a particular person.

That system changed in 1994. Elections are fought on a party-political basis, with half being appointed because they are members of a party and not because the voters think they can make a difference.

One consequence of this is that councillors are more concerned with their standing in the party than with the needs of the community. Residents have taken to the streets to protest against the resulting lack of service delivery.

But what happens come polling day, is that long-held loyalties result in the very same people being returned to power.

Where they have really failed the residents, voters may choose to stay away from the polls, as can be seen by the low turnouts in recent by-elections.

Given the struggle against apartheid and for the right to cast a vote, this is a tragedy.

Changes in the regulations should bring disenchanted residents back to the polls. Voters have been empowered by a Constitutional Court ruling that allows independent candidates to contest elections.

So, the question then is what does one look for in a candidate?

In an interview before the last National elections Professor Barney Pitso Rosteck said we need to look for those 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.”

Think before you Ink!

Exodus 18:21 tells us: “You should choose some capable men and appoint them as leaders of the people: leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They must be God-fearing men who can be trusted and who cannot be bribed.”

This is what Moses was told what to look for in leaders who would report to him and assume some of the responsibilities to serve the people.

So, who do we want to have represent us as a councillor?

The Bible provides guidance.

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.

Modelled on that scripture, may I suggest the following as the minimum criteria in the case of councillors:

1. Honesty is a prime requirement (Not double tongued. Entirely truthful...)
2. Faithful to family relationships (Husband 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.....)

Mike Smith, Workplace Minister