

## **Outcomes we want to see from local elections**

### **Jacob Freemantle**

Now that the election has come and gone, we should, as we congratulate and encourage all our political leaders, share some honest reflection on the message the electorate delivered.

This was the most difficult election since South Africa was ushered into a democratic dispensation in 1994. Many churches put in a lot of effort to encourage an apathetic electorate to go and vote as an act of good citizenry.

But we could feel that the people's enthusiasm to vote has diminished. They have been deeply hurt and disappointed by the behaviour of political leaders at both national and local government levels.

What is perhaps more painful than the lack of delivery is the arrogance with which honest warnings from the church are dismissed by politicians.

The following are some of the reasons of voter apathy that resulted in a 48 per cent turnout;

- **A disconnect between the people and politicians**

The incongruence of what our political leaders promise to voters and the actual practice is so evident that political life is seen as one of lies, greed, theft, corruption and elements of racism.

When a country reaches such unprecedented evil proportions due mainly to political distortions, you can kiss goodbye to future investment. Young people also shy away from public service through political leadership.

The response to reminders about promises of service delivery is met with such arrogance and intimidation that voters stay away.

The stealing of critical resources through government channels and the rise of mediocre leadership has left citizens without hope.

Such political duplicity, across the political spectrum, has both destroyed trust in our leadership and created a dangerous "I don't care to vote" attitude. This can be catastrophic for the development and renewal of a country, especially one with a young democracy like South Africa.

- **The patronising behaviour towards the churches**

The behaviour of politicians towards the churches leaves a lot that needs to be desired.

When politicians want votes, they come smiling and dancing.

Churches will respectfully reschedule their own plans to accommodate these opportunistic politicians who do not even worship anywhere.

In parliament, these same politicians will wake up to pass unchristian legislation under the guise of democracy. Publicly, they equate church gatherings with those in taverns when defending Covid-19 regulations.

Churches have closed their doors regardless of the fact that they strictly adhere to Covid-19 protocols. Yet, when the politicians wanted votes, they acted as though Covid did not exist.

They treat the churches with so much disdain, you would think they were never cradled in the arms of prayerful churches. They forget the enormous contribution of the churches towards the good and well-ordered cohesion of our society. This is not asking the government to give special treatment to the church, but to point out that political leadership cannot blatantly ignore the church when it speaks about injustice.

- **Coalition/Unity Governance**

Political parties have their own way of interpreting the low voter turnout, but what is important is that no political party can afford to be arrogant. Voters have forced them to enter into coalitions of some kind.

Coalition is a difficult form of governance that has to be entered with humility and mutual respect. It must be executed without scoring political points. There must be clear understanding that the people want different political leadership, free of pride and arrogance.

We pray that councillors will refrain from ridiculous physical fights and disrupting procedures. They must use the power of words for the good of the metro. Please focus on infrastructure, such as water, roads and electricity.

- **Encourage agriculture and farming** for the sake of hungry masses. Hungry people turn to violence as you cannot reason with a hungry stomach.
- **Engage with business** to craft renewal initiatives that address challenges such as the collapsing infrastructure, sport and health. Business leaders are keen to provide both expertise and resources to help build this city.
- **Address unemployment** in our metro. Start by creating jobs that clean up the metro, clear the drains and fixing dilapidated buildings which are breeding heavens for criminal activity.
- **Remove corruption** at all levels, starting with the tendering system.

Councillors, you do not have to be an economist to see that the current system is not working for the masses.

Leverage the existing legislation such as the Public Finance Management Act for the benefit of the metro.

Let us hear you pull no punches in debates and when defending the metro and its people. Please refrain from racist and demeaning political rhetoric that has nothing to do with what the citizens need from you.

We are not your voting fodder. Respect us for the sake of the generations who will come after you.

Lastly, please restore the effectiveness of governance. Create a safe environment, deal decisively with drug abuse, murders, theft and, especially, the killing and raping of women and children.

As churches we are praying for you to be true stewards who will honestly and sincerely account to the citizenry that elected you.

**Rev Dr Jacob Freemantle: Bishop of The Methodist Church of Southern Africa: William Kama District**