

A CALL FOR A NEW ERA IN MALAWI



Pastoral Letter 29th April 2018

Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM)

Pastoral Letter of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, on the occasion of the 5th Sunday of Easter, we greet you all as we celebrate the fulfillment of God's promises to mankind through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. May you be strengthened in your faith, grow in God's love, live with unshaken hope, be endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and know the joy and peace of the Risen Christ.

Preamble

We, your Bishops, mindful of our responsibility to embrace as our own “the joy and hopes, griefs and the anxieties of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1) are saddened to note that the hard won freedom and democratic dispensation in our country have not yielded the fruits that we all hoped for. We have observed with deep sorrow that the majority of the people in this country still languish under the yokes of poverty, ignorance, disease, hunger and a seriously distorted mindset that has led to a dangerous moral decadence in our society. Fifty-four years after independence the people of Malawi have not achieved what they had been aspiring for. We have God-given resources such as a hardworking people, the third largest lake in Africa, arable land, majestic mountains, natural resources and the precious gift of peace which Malawi as a nation has enjoyed since independence. In spite of all these, Malawi continues to be ranked among the poorest countries in the world. This situation calls for serious soul searching by all of us. In this Pastoral Letter, we Bishops attempt to suggest areas that need to be addressed if the prosperity and integrity we have been aspiring for since independence and the democracy we opted for 25 years ago are to be achieved.

CHAPTER ONE

NEED FOR A NEW ERA IN MALAWI

We, your Bishops, commissioned to preach the Gospel of Christ “whether it is convenient or inconvenient” (2 Timothy 4:2), wish to bring to the attention of the nation that there is something wrong in our society that needs to be put right. We are of the opinion that Malawi as a nation needs a change of direction if we are to reverse the situation. We mean a total change in the way of doing things other than business as usual. This entails a change of mindset leading to a new era of fairness and justice for all. The following are some of the areas that need a radical change of mindset by all.

1.1. Democracy in Malawi

As Malawi celebrates the silver jubilee anniversary of the re-introduction of multi-party democracy, it is important to reflect deeply on the progress made in entrenching democracy as our chosen system of governing ourselves. We need to ask ourselves whether this chosen system of government has, over the years, delivered on its promise to uplift the lives of all the citizens or whether we have paid lip service to democracy by allowing a few people to exercise power and authority and enjoy the wealth of this country at the expense of the vast majority. We must never pretend that all is well.

1.2. Pre-1993

The period preceding the monumental decision of Malawians to usher in multiparty democracy was a period of darkness and gloom. This was highlighted in the 1992 Pastoral Letter, **Living Our Faith**. Many Malawians were deprived of their right to participate freely in the governance of their country. Free speech was muzzled. Dissent was brutally suppressed. There was a distorted rule of law. Justice and fairness were the preserve of a few. There was no debate about government policies and priorities. Political association was forced. Within the single party itself, positions were mostly appointed. Appointments reflected deep-rooted cronyism and nepotism. Even within the tightly controlled corridors of power, display of political ambition,

no matter how muted, could be fatal, politically and literally. Tired of this system of government which benefited a few, Malawians on 14th June, 1993 decided, with an overwhelming majority, to abandon one-party rule for multiparty democracy, thus embracing pluralism. It is important, therefore, to reflect on the strides made in entrenching pluralism in our country.

1.3. Intra-party Democracy

The role of political parties in a multi-party democracy like ours cannot be overemphasized. It is mostly through political parties that candidates wishing to run for political positions are chosen and canvass for votes. Through their manifestos, political parties formulate policies. Upon successful election they are expected to implement these policies. Opposition parties play a crucial role in offering different policy options and providing much-needed checks and balances on the ruling party's governance. Indeed, it is mainly through their chosen political parties that Malawians find full expression of their political rights as guaranteed by the Constitution.

The foregoing said, it is abundantly clear that the success of our process of democratization is heavily dependent on how the concept of democracy itself is fully understood and accepted by the political parties that dominate the country's political landscape. Our shared dream of a prosperous democratic Malawi shall not be realized if intra-party democracy is not embraced by our political parties, both in government and in opposition. Intra-party democracy means, at a bare minimum, that a political party belongs to its members and its members manage its affairs. It imposes a solemn obligation on the leadership of the party and all its members to abide by the party's own rules as embodied in its constitution. In a party where intra-party democracy is flourishing, the leadership makes decisions solely for the benefit of the party and its members and not for the party's leader and his/her cronies.

Regretfully, most if not all political parties in Malawi have since 1993 failed to promote intra-party democracy. Just as we outlined in our 2008 Pastoral Letter (*Taking Responsibility for our Future and Reading the Signs of the Times*), examples abound:

- key decisions are made by the party leader alone and sometimes only upon consultation with cronies, hangers-on or tribesmen;
- failure to have open debate about which parties to partner with in elections and who may be the party's presidential candidate's running mate in a general election;
- many party leadership positions are appointed by the party leader and not elected through a convention;
- conventions themselves are rarely held and when they are, the process is highly stage-managed and there is not sufficient debate;
- election results are often pre-determined;
- the selection of party candidates at ward or constituency level is oftentimes not open and transparent;
- senior party officials and those connected to them are heavily favoured leading to frustrations and defections;
- those that hold views differing from the party's leadership are banished and considered as traitors and called all manner of derogatory terms;
- attempts are made to suffocate other parties by buying members and parading them in public rallies;
- aligning developmental projects in areas deemed to be supporting the ruling party;
- lack of continuity in development policies and programmes because each political administration comes up with its own agenda;
- inadequate or insufficient service delivery of the state machinery to the people of Malawi as they seem to favour the supporters of the ruling party;
- it is not uncommon to see popular candidates being rejected at party level only to win in the general election as independents.

This, sadly, is happening in almost all parties in this country. As we celebrate the silver jubilee of the re-introduction of multi-party democracy, we should accept that the lack of open debate and the stifling of intra-party democracy in this country has not served us well. We cannot expect party leaders who stifle intra-party democracy and promote a culture of fear in their own parties to

suddenly become democrats once they are in government. The hero worshipping and the cult of personality that is prevalent in political parties have continued. This situation requires a complete change of mindset. We therefore urge leaders of all political parties in this country to promote democracy within their parties. Only in this way can we ever create a truly democratic Malawi.

1.4. Citizens' Perceptions of Democracy

The success of the process of entrenching genuine democracy in Malawi largely depends on citizens' understanding of and participating in democracy. Most Malawians have a strong preference for democracy as a system of government. They appreciate the benefits of democracy such as freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and freedom of the press.

However, there is a general mistrust of political parties and political leaders who claim to be acting for the common good. This is mainly due to rampant corruption and a general perception of the failure of political institutions to address basic needs including energy, health, education and infrastructure as well as the failure to tackle the wealth gap and provide access to opportunities. For this reason many Malawians hanker back to the one-party era way of doing things. This nostalgia for a dark and gloomy era in our country's history and citizens' readiness to gloss over the excesses of that time speak volumes about the frustrations felt by Malawians today.

In Malawian society the big man syndrome is prevalent. This is seen in the extensive appointing powers of the president and the deployment of party officials and tribesmen to government departments and agencies. This gives the impression that government only exists to benefit a connected few. Clearly there are not enough checks and balances and proper separation of powers between the three main branches of government.

There is need for the country's leadership at all levels to revisit their constitutional mandate which is to govern solely for the benefit of the people of Malawi and to appreciate that they hold their positions on trust. Democracy

is meaningless if it is not used as a tool for meeting the country's development needs. Citizens' frustration with a system of government that they view as only benefitting the few and as failing to uplift their lives threatens our young democracy. Political leaders and public officers must work hard to regain the trust of the people of Malawi. In the words of Pope Francis "Healthy politics is sorely needed, capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practices and overcoming undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia" (*Laudato Si*, no. 181). Both leaders and citizens must understand that genuine democracy calls for not only demanding one's rights and privileges but also acting responsibly in everything we do. In the words of Pope Benedict: "Only if we live in the right way, with one another and for one another, can freedom develop" (*Pope Benedict XVI, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Thursday, 8 December 2005*).

As a country we must aim at strengthening oversight institutions and jealously guard the separation of powers between the three branches of government to ensure that there is no attack on the checks and balances as enshrined in our Constitution. Peoples' trust in government and its institutions shall only be restored if law enforcement agencies are allowed to freely conduct their work fairly and professionally. The perception among Malawians is that law enforcement agencies are powerless against the rich and politically connected. This can only lead to a loss of respect for the law and state institutions.

CHAPTER TWO

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

2.1. Health

The delivery of health services is in crisis. Challenges faced across all health centres in Malawi range from inadequate trained medical personnel, to shortage of the most basic medicines like painkillers and malaria drugs, to lack of essentials like surgical gloves, cotton wool and surgical spirits. This is exacerbated by high doctor-patient ratios, poor hygiene and inadequate supplies of necessities like beds, bed sheets and blankets.

The situation at the main referral hospitals is worsened by a cartel of unscrupulous individuals who have turned the medical supply system into their gold mine. Their well-woven syndicate cuts across different professions, from law enforcement agents to owners of private clinics and civil servants, who go about plundering whatever has monetary value within the confines of the hospital. The chain of looting starts way before the initial purchase of any medical supply as there is insider trading of information to position a member of the cartel to win the tender. From that moment onwards, everything is downhill, to the point where our Central Medical Stores is suspected of receiving expired medicines without rejecting them, as orders to receive and process payment for such supplies have already cascaded down the chain of command.

With rampant institutionalised corruption across the whole medical spectrum, there is no relief expected at the bottom of the pyramid. In the words of Pope Francis, “Corruption is the plague, it’s the gangrene of society” (Pope Francis, 12 July, 2015). Patients and their guardians are forced to become beggars for medical attention. Everything from doctor’s consultation to having an x-ray, getting a hospital bed, medicine and the not so-nutritious cabbage, beans and *mgaiwa*, is a privilege reserved for those that have parted ways with their hard earned kwachas. This in spite of the fact that all these services are meant to be free. All this is happening in full view of those chosen to govern our nation.

2.2. Education/Schools

The education system lags behind and faces innumerable difficulties. Many of these difficulties are clearly obvious such as:

- high pupil-teacher ratio;
- inadequate number of trained teachers;
- meager salaries given to teachers;
- poor conditions of service;
- poor infrastructure;
- lack of teaching materials;
- changing of school curriculum without proper planning and preparation.

As pointed out in our Pastoral Letter of 2016, duty bearers and policy makers must seriously invest in education if this country is to achieve any meaningful development (*Mercy of God as a Path of Hope*, no. 2.9).

2.3. Agriculture and Food Security

The Malawian economy largely depends on Agriculture. This sector has the potential of significantly supporting industrial development. However, this potential is hampered by among other things, the continuous dependency on rain-fed agriculture, poor water harvesting systems, climate change challenges, lack of crop diversification, high cost of farm inputs for poor farmers, corruption in the management of Farm Inputs Subsidy Programme (FISP) and lack of readily available markets for the rural farmers. The right to food is every human person's right. Long term measures must be put in place to transform Malawi into a food secure nation. There must be markets where rural farmers can sell their agricultural produce in order to reap the fruits of their labour. As we exhorted in our 2016 Pastoral Letter, there is need to reform FISP or develop an exit strategy (*Mercy of God as a Path of Hope*, no. 2.10).

2.4. Infrastructure

In the multiparty era, a lot of effort has been put into improving the face of the country with imposing structures, buildings and roads spread across the country. But in many cases such laudable developments are being frustrated by vested interests, political patronage, corruption, poor planning and resource scarcity. There are many incomplete projects and others are way past their completion dates. As a result extra exorbitant costs are incurred and in some cases, quality is compromised because contractors and clients now chase unrealistic completion agreements.

The biggest evil is corruption. “This festering wound is a grave sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance, because it threatens the very foundations of personal and social life” (Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, no. 19). In Malawi corruption is rife in the procurement process. It is compounded by political interference leading to unjust enrichment of individuals. This gives rise to a booming construction industry which benefits the few who are connected while leaving the vast majority in sub-standard living conditions.

We have to ask, what are the priorities for the infrastructural development of this country? One gets the impression that funds and loans that could have been used for more productive or useful projects such as water harvesting, irrigation and solar power are invested in projects that will take years to pay back. Thus we saddle the next generation with a debt burden that could have delivered better results.

2.5. The Rich-man and Lazarus Situation in Malawi

It is a fallacy to think that 54 years after independence, people’s standard of living has improved. In actual fact, the opposite is true. Vast numbers of people do not have quality water, proper sanitation, electricity or satisfactory access roads. This is further exacerbated by poor planning in towns and cities. This goes hand in hand with political interference, poor economic management and rampant corruption. It is a fact that the majority of the people in the country are living very poor and miserable lives while the leaders they elect live posh lives and build mansions in the face of the poor.

The ‘Rich-man and Lazarus Situation’ confronts us every day (*cf.* Luke 16:19-31). Against a background of a population boom and stagnant economic activity, this scenario is a recipe for civil strife if left unchecked. This is why we call for a radical change of mindset in the way of doing things before the situation gets out of control. Perhaps the biggest challenge facing our government and our country is how to address this widening gap between those who have and those who have not. Pope Saint John Paul II wrote, “One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 28). Pope Francis never tires of drawing attention to this ever-widening gap. The inequality gap is also recognised by international bodies such as the United Nations as one of the greatest evils of our time. (See message of UN Secretary-General António Guterres’ delivered on 1 February, 2017). The gap between the haves and have-nots in Malawi is patently obvious and is getting wider and wider. Examples for all to see are the benefits that seem to favour those in high positions such as free and expensive duty free vehicles, free house rentals, free education for their children, free medication, exorbitant allowances and many other benefits that are paid for by the taxes of poor people.

2.6. The Destruction of the Environment

Closely related to the widening gap between rich and poor is the destruction of our environment. The environment is often ravished to further enrich the wealthy and well-connected. The destruction of Chikangawa Forest is a clear example. Pope Francis points out the close connection between the impoverishment of the poor and vulnerable and the wanton destruction of the environment. “The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together... In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people” (*Laudato Sí*, no. 48). Pope Benedict also underlines the connection between care for the environment and sustainable living in the lives of peoples when he wrote: “Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family.” (*Pope Benedict XVI, Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople on*

the Occasion of the Seventh Symposium of the Religion, Science and the Environment Movement, September 1, 2007). The destruction of the environment in Malawi is clearly seen in the accelerated destruction of natural resources like forests and natural habitats as well as the failure to seriously develop renewable energies.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FORTHCOMING TRIPARTITE ELECTIONS IN 2019

3.1. Initiating a New Era

In this democratic dispensation, citizens are duty bound to elect and put into positions of power people they trust to implement their pre-election promises or those who have demonstrated that they delivered on their promises while in previous leadership positions. A timely reminder from Pope Francis is his call to make choices of leaders “not based on hand-outs and lip-service ...butwhere every single person will act as a *craftsman of his or her destiny*” (Addressing the 5th National Convention of the Italian Church, November 10, 2015). Each election year presents a new opportunity to the citizens to usher into office individuals who have the interests of the majority at heart.

3.2. Necessary Qualities of Aspiring Leaders

Here, as we did in our 2013 Pastoral Letter (*Strengthening the Vision of our Destiny, Chapter 4*), we list some qualities that citizens should look for in potential leaders.

- **Honesty** – A person of integrity who can be trusted because he/she speaks the truth, walks the talk, accepts responsibility and allows for financial probity among others.
- **Transformational Leadership** – Leaders who will work with others to change the primitive politics that continues to delay progress in this country and will strive to unlock opportunities for growth.
- **Selflessness** – A person who is concerned more with the needs and wishes of others than with his/her own vested interests.

- **Servant Leader** – “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10: 44).
- **Decisive Leader** – A person who will make correct decisions effectively without fear of the consequences.
- **Respects the Law** - A person who upholds the law and lives by it.
- **Willingness to Step Down** – A person who will not cling to power at all costs. “So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘we are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do’” (Luke 17:10).
- **Above tribal/regional/political interests:** Malawi needs leaders whose agenda and interests are above tribal/regional considerations. Leaders who advance the common good of the country.
- **God-fearing Leader** – Being a God-fearing nation, Malawi needs leaders who are genuinely God-fearing, respecting human and faith values.

3.3. Change of Mindset by Malawians

In general Malawians within the multiparty democracy project appreciate the freedom they have gained. However, they have often times blamed leadership at all levels for the decay in society, for the lack of development, for the rampant corruption and for marginalization and oppression. Time has arrived that we Malawians should conduct some serious soul-searching in how far we, as the citizens of this country, have contributed to this state of affairs about which we keep on complaining, moaning and lamenting. We certainly need a change of mindset if the situation we are constantly moaning about should be reversed. To repeat Pope Francis’ words every single person has the potential to “act as a *craftsman of his or her destiny*” (Addressing the 5th National Convention of the Italian Church, November 10, 2015). The following are some suggestions for facilitating a change of mindset and ushering in a new era:

- Corrupt leadership is propped up and kept in power by citizens who unjustly and selfishly enjoy the benefits of that leadership. It falls on

citizens, and not only on leaders, to cease to support a corrupt system fuelled by a handout and receiving syndrome.

- Let us take responsibility for creating a better society and avoid giving the impression that we are helpless.
- As citizens, we must refrain from looking to government and politicians for the solutions to all our problems. Some problems that Malawi is facing are individual or household and do not need the state to solve.
- Let us vote wisely for leaders who demonstrate servant-style leadership and not just vote for a leader because he or she belongs to a political party that is predominant in our area.

Such a change of mindset can usher in a government fit to reverse evils such as corruption, executive arrogance, nepotism, media intimidation, intolerance to criticism, indecision, indifference to the suffering caused by poverty, destruction of the environment, unfulfilled promises, a stagnant economy and lack of financial probity.

Conclusion

We call on all Malawians to help create a new era in our country, an era where truth, fairness and respect for the dignity of all are observed. This calls for the change of mindset we have spoken of on the part of citizens and in particular a new way of governing by those entrusted with governance. This means wisely choosing servant leaders who can become heroic agents of change. These will be the heroes not only for the deeds they do but for the stand they take on unpopular issues. They will stand out because of their constant refusal to discard or water down democratic principles no matter what pressures are exerted on them. They will have a concern for all the citizens irrespective of party loyalties. They will take to heart the advice that Moses gave to those whom he appointed leaders: “In rendering judgment, do not consider who a person is; give ear to the lowly and the great alike, fearing no man, for judgment is God’s” (Deuteronomy 1:17). Just like Jesus and the prophets in the Old Testament, heroes often lose their reputations and even their lives. Men and women may shamefully shut their ears to the truth; they may indeed kill the one who tells it, but in the end the truth comes to the surface. Heroes act courageously because they believe that their course of

action is the best one. To stand for truth and fairness demands courage on the part of us all. But that is the only way to usher in a new era for Malawi.

We call on all Catholics and people of good will to continue to discuss this Pastoral Letter at all levels, in Families, in Small Christian Communities, in Church Councils, in Parish Councils, in Schools, in Health Centres, in Media Houses, in Justice and Peace Groups, in CADECOM Groups, in Lay Movements, in Religious Communities and especially in Youth Groups and in all Diocesan Fora.

May Mary, the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ and model of discipleship, intercede for us and our Nation so that our country may enjoy genuine democracy, good governance and prosperity for all.

Most Reverend Thomas Msusa
Right Reverend Martin Mtumbuka
Most Reverend Tarsizio G. Ziyaye
Right Reverend Peter Musikuwa
Right Reverend Montfort Stima
Right Reverend George Tambala
Right Reverend John A. Ryan
Very Reverend John Chithonje

Chairman and Archbishop of Blantyre
Vice-Chairman and Bishop of Karonga
Archbishop of Lilongwe
Bishop of Chikwawa
Bishop of Mangochi
Bishop of Zomba
Bishop of Mzuzu
Diocesan Administrator of Dedza

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3. Choosing Our Future (1993)
4. Building Our Future (1994)
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6. Families Take Care (World AIDS Day Message, 1994)
7. Let Us Care for the Orphans (World AIDS Day Message, 1995)
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