



“Nothing else will change the world but people who fight for justice and human dignity. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes...”

POPE FRANCIS

Step out and Vote

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops' 2017 Election Statement

Ki ō tātou tuākana, tēina i roto i te whakapono,
ā, ki ō tātou hoa kirirarau o Aotearoa

Politics is never far from conversations in family homes and with colleagues at work.

Our fast approaching election this September comes against a backdrop of a rapidly changing world. Once we divided the world into democracies and dictatorships. Today that neat division no longer exists. Terrorism, cronyism, corruption, fake news, WikiLeaks and the galloping gap between the rich and the poor all undermine people's faith in politics and traditional political parties.



How can we make a difference? Expectations, aspirations and a desire to help shape our community all stir within us the duty to exercise our democratic right and vote. In every election there are those who vote for the first time in their life. Together with all of us, you face a complex and precious decision.

Faith shapes our world view. Faith guides our political choices. Faith demands that we take the duty to vote very seriously. Your vote is not just a vote for you. Your vote is a vote for New Zealand. This means that we expect of our politicians and our political parties a vision for the home we call Aotearoa. Indeed, in scripture we read “where there is no vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18).

As Bishops, we sat down recently and shared ideas about what kind of questions and policies shape the vision we might have for New Zealand. We did so aware of our leadership role and also aware that deep in every human heart there is a desire to contribute to the building of a nation in which all citizens – whānau and individuals alike – are valued and given equal opportunities to flourish.

The mix of ideals and realities we grappled with included the following:



PRO-LIFE POLICIES

We hope for positive, pro-life attitudes and policies. Love and care for the unborn, the vulnerable, the disabled, the elderly and the different, are marks of a compassionate society, as are well-funded palliative care services. Legalisation of assisted suicide undermines trust in the medical profession and puts vulnerable groups in our society at risk.

BICULTURAL NEW ZEALAND

We embrace the bicultural nature of Aotearoa New Zealand.

We ourselves are growing in our understanding that this is much more than questions of language. Bicultural partnerships and participation enrich any group because they anticipate an expansion of understanding of the fundamental elements of human society, including land, people and purpose. Every absence of bicultural partnership is an impoverishment of our society.



We welcome the completion of iwi treaty claims and rejoice in the renewed mana that these agreements unleash.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

We delight in the cultural diversity of contemporary New Zealand and we wish to welcome to our shores not only those people whose skills are deemed to be of immediate benefit to our economy, but also those for whom their homeland has become unsafe, including refugees and asylum seekers.

MIGRATION

We envisage a nation that strives to welcome and appreciate migrants as an integral part of our nation.

We share the angst that migrant families experience when changes in policy deem them no longer wanted, due to perceived shifts in the labour needs of our economy.

SAFE SOCIETY

We want Kiwi children and mokopuna to grow up in a safe society. Moves to legalise 'soft' drugs and other substances – which wreak havoc in particular sectors of our society – are a deeply cynical and cheap way of side-lining a complex social ill that needs to be addressed creatively and resolutely.

Drugs such as 'P' are rife in some areas, destroying individuals and family life. This curse needs to be tackled full on.



CARING FOR OUR PLANET

Care for our common home, Mother Earth is a centre stage global challenge. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* has become an authoritative reference point in this quest. New Zealand's export-based economy has started to show its environmental limits, with increased greenhouse gas emissions, diffuse freshwater pollution and threats to biodiversity. Are we, as a nation, really pulling our weight on climate change when we plan to meet our commitments in this regard by simply buying carbon credits from other countries?

FAIR TAX STRUCTURE

We appreciate the work ethic of so many of our fellow citizens.

We desire a tax structure that is fair to low income earners and respects the contributions of all workers to our society. In a globalised economy we recognise New Zealand has much to offer in the upholding of sound business and investment ethics.

MENTAL HEALTH

The wellbeing of all New Zealanders is of concern to everyone.

Mental health services and facilities are a telling measure of a society's attitude to its vulnerable. Years of inadequate funding is resulting in much stress and angst in families, and our suicide rates bring shame upon us as a nation. We advocate a thorough review and strengthening of the mental health sector as part of an integrated health system.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We support efforts to bring about affordable housing. Excessive rents and inflated house prices are leaving families homeless and young couples despondent. Without effective policies to support regional and provincial economic development and consequent employment we miss opportunities to alleviate this problem, which is worst in our biggest cities.

PRISON POPULATION

We are deeply disturbed by the growing prison population in New Zealand. It is a national disgrace. Crime rates have in fact fallen in New Zealand. What is driving the increase in prison numbers is changes to bail law, sentencing and parole. We want our communities to be safe. We want deterrents to be positive. Pathways of care and guidance, of participation and belonging, of work and purpose are what our at-risk young need, not corridors of bars and negative mentors.



Brothers and Sisters in Christ, these observations are just part of a heartfelt korero we had as brothers in faith around our Bishops' table. We know your homes and hostels and flats too will resonate with vision and political talk as the coming months unfold.

We urge you all to pray about, reflect on, discuss and debate what kind of society New Zealand can be in the eyes of God. Faith has a vital role in the public forum. Stand up, uphold the common good of our nation, choose wisely, and your vote will be a blessing for our nation.

Bishop Patrick Dunn

Bishop of Auckland
President, NZCBC

Cardinal John Dew

Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington
Vice-President, NZCBC

Bishop Charles Drennan

Bishop of Palmerston North
Secretary, NZCBC

Bishop Colin Campbell

Bishop of Dunedin

Bishop Steve Lowe

Bishop of Hamilton

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Te Huinga o ngā Pihopa Katorika o Aoteroa

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