



65 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 2BX
Tel: 0141 333 0238
e-mail: office@justiceandpeacescotland.org
www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk
President: Bishop William Nolan

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Winston Churchill is quoted as saying that: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried."¹

Those living in a democracy can understand what he means, for often people feel that they have no say in determining what those in power do, that they are unable to influence decisions that affect their lives, that government is remote from the people that is governed.

Good government, though, is essential, and democracy, despite its limitations, does allow people to work for the good government that we need at national and international level.

For major issues confronting the world today - such as climate change, war and conflict, global poverty, refugees and migrants - cannot be solved by individuals no matter how committed.

But that is not to say that governments can be left to get on with it.

Those working for justice and peace, those concerned about saving the planet, those engaged in caring for those in need, can be frustrated by the policies that governments put into practice.

Pressure needs to be put on governments to persuade them to act in the common good, with concern for the whole of humanity: to act for peace, to welcome the stranger, to care for the environment, to protect the unborn and the elderly.

To bring about good government those with a true Christian spirit need to engage with politics, and that means more than just voting in elections.

Every time there is an election you get to vote for a candidate – but that is not enough.

Who decides who the candidates are? Who picks the candidates – the political parties do. If you are not involved in a party you have no say in that. Unless you are a party member you can't help choose the candidates nor can you help steer party policy in the right direction. Those Catholics therefore who get involved in party politics are putting their faith into action.

¹ Winston Churchill in House of Commons, 11th November 1947.

Pope Francis has repeatedly said that “political engagement is one of the highest expressions of charity”.² He urges those who follow Christ to engage in politics and says that to do so they need to be “courageous, because politics is a sort of daily martyrdom: to seek the common good without allowing oneself to be corrupted”.³

Once elected, politicians, as we know, are influenced by public opinion.

Each of us has to ask ourselves: How can I influence public opinion if I never express an opinion in public? How can I influence government and politicians if I never let them know what I think?

In a democracy it is never enough just to allow ourselves to be governed, to presume that those who make decisions will make the right decisions, that the values we have are the values that they will put into practice.

Democracy puts an obligation on the citizen to be engaged with the political process, to work for the good of society, to be active in trying to achieve good government - and not just leave it to others.

The followers of Jesus Christ are called to be like John the Baptist. He was a voice crying in the wilderness. Christians are called to be a voice for the voiceless, a voice upholding the dignity of every human person, a voice proclaiming the values of Jesus Christ, a voice urging governments and politicians and those in power to act always for the common good of all humanity. We are that voice: sometimes we may shout, sometimes we may whisper, but we are a voice that should never be silent.

May this New Year be a time of peace and happiness for you, your families and for all of humanity.

With my prayers and best wishes,

+



+William Nolan

Bishop of Galloway

President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland Justice and Peace Commission

² Pope Francis, Santa Marta Homily, 16 September 2013

³ Pope Francis' address to Communities of Christian Life, 30th April 2015