



United Church of Christ in the Philippines  
**PHILIPPINE ELECTION 2022**  
**Celebration Guide**



**Isaiah 32:1,2**

"Listen to what I say! A king should rule in a way that brings justice. Leaders should make fair decisions when they lead the people. If this would happen, the king would be like a shelter to hide from the wind and rain, like streams of water in a dry land, and like the cool shadow of a large rock in a hot land."

# FOREWORD

## Philippine Election 2022 Celebration Guide



My fellow workers of Gods shalom,

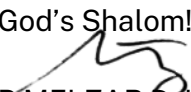
Once again, our country has come to the season of National Elections. As a Church our faith-discernment enables us to broaden our grasp and involvement in the ethical decisions of our people. We aim to participate in the task of educating our faith-communities to meaningful participation, creating ripples of change and contributing to the movement of people for genuine democracy.

The same discernment challenges us to stand by our principles and remain active in our prophetic witness in society and the world. The National Council best encapsulates this in a statement last October 2021, saying that: “It is an imperative of faith to inspire the citizenry to choose leaders of known rectitude and integrity, and whose track record demonstrates clear conviction and commitment to care for the victims of unjust social systems and structures operating in society.”

Also, let us not forget, that the Church does not evade actual involvement in the political arena of our life as a nation. We know that we need national leaders who would put a stop to horrendous acts of injustice and violence inflicted on our church workers, church leaders, and members through red-tagging, image shaming, and other forms of harassments. The malignment of our mission and ministry is a hindrance and a clear sign how marginalized Filipinos have suffered from. Our vote for leaders with credibility, accountability and with spirituality of justice and peace would make a difference.

We hope and pray that this Electoral Material help us in our educational undertaking. May this serve as a guide us in our collective response in these changing times. Let us help each other create a transformed society.

All for God’s Shalom!

  
BISHOP MELZAR D. LABUNTOG  
General Secretary

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SOCIETY.”

# Prayer Before Election

Philippine Election 2022 Celebration Guide

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## Rev. Jerby Salor

National Coordinator,  
Evangelism and Church Development

O God giver of life, all things are possible when we put our trust in you. We acknowledge you today as Lord, not only of individuals but of nations and governments. You have blessed us with sacred wisdom and creative minds to exercise our sanctified freedom and rights in ushering lasting peace and wholesome value in our society.

We humbly come to You as one people and one nation asking Your divine intervention as the election approaches. We seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our country. We are facing immense challenges regarding public health, a pandemic, financial hardship, economic shutdowns, and great political divisions that cause political scandal to our nation.

We pray for discernment so that we may choose leaders who hear your Word, live your love, and keep the ways of your truth.

May your spirit of gentleness, humility, and truth reigns in the heart of every Filipino as we choose the next leaders who we believe are mindful of justice, accountability, and honesty. Guide us as we mark the right candidates on the ballot who we believe can bring genuine change and betterment to the country that we dreamed and long for. Empower us to stay in our unbroken line in seeking a just and lasting peace in our land through our meaningful participation in the coming May 2022 National and Local election.

Grant us the spirit to resist the selling of our sacred votes that monetized our life and dignity. Enlighten us with Your vision of a society without conflict, discrimination, poverty, and deprivation. May our participation in the coming election help us build your kingdom of shalom. Give us all the courage to raise our voices against injustices and to stand with those who are seeking the true meaning of life and value in these most critical and trying times. We call upon Your Name, O Lord, to heal our nation. AMEN.

“WE PRAY FOR  
DISCERNMENT SO  
THAT WE MAY CHOOSE  
LEADERS WHO HEAR  
YOUR WORD, LIVE  
YOUR LOVE, AND KEEP  
THE WAYS OF YOUR  
TRUTH.”

# Prayer After Election

## Philippine Election 2022 Celebration Guide

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### Rev. Jerby Salor

National Coordinator,  
Evangelism and Church Development

God of love and peace, we give you thanks for the freedom we exercised by choosing our national and local leaders who will honestly and sincerely serve our nation. Look upon us with mercy and grace. Use your people and your church in these days of leadership transition. We lift to You all our duly elected leaders and public servants to Your care so they may serve with a common purpose, dedication, and commitment to their duties and roles in the years ahead. We pray that you will grant them the ability to serve with wisdom, honesty, and integrity as they lead and govern our nation. Open their eyes and hearts to see our needs as a nation. Give them minds that would guide and set the priorities for which our government will work and respond to. May they use authority to provide secure and peaceful living conditions in our communities by respecting the law of the land and protecting human rights and sanctity of human life. We know we are all sinful, subject to fall short, so we ask for an extra measure of humility for each of our elected officials to recognize that wisdom only comes from You.

May our leaders inspire us, and so inspire each other with our potential as individuals and as a people, that a new spirit of unity, love, and honesty be born in our nation. Guide us as we recommit ourselves to truly living as one, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

By Your mighty hand, we pray that You would be merciful to our nation, for compassion to work in the hearts of those whom You have given authority. We pray for peace. Empower us to work for justice. We commit our future as a nation into Your Hands. Only through your power can our country and our world be made whole. You will be done. Amen.

“WE PRAY THAT YOU  
WILL GRANT THEM  
THE ABILITY TO SERVE  
WITH WISDOM,  
HONESTY, AND  
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OUR NATION.”

# Liturgy for Voter's Education

## Philippine Election 2022 Celebration Guide

**Rev. Juliet Solis-Aguilar**

National Coordinator, Community Ministry

### SILENT MOMENT OF REFLECTION

"Someday there will be a king who rules with integrity and national leaders who govern with justice. Each of them will be like a shelter from the wind and a place to hide from storms. They will be like streams flowing in a desert, like the shadow of a giant rock in a barren land. Their eyes and ears will be open but they will act with understanding and will say what they mean.

No one will think that a fool is honorable or say that a scoundrel is honest. A fool speaks foolishly and thinks up evil things to do. What he does and what he says are an insult to the Lord, and he never feeds the hungry or gives thirsty people anything to drink. A stupid person is evil and does evil things; he plots to ruin the poor with lies and to keep them from getting their rights. But an honorable person acts honestly and stands firm for what is right. " (Isaiah 32:1-8)

### PRELUDE

Instrumental Music

### PROCESSIONAL

Worship Leaders: Minister/Preacher, Liturgist

### LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE (Liturgist)

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Liturgist: Sisters and brothers in Christ, our country is currently experiencing a tremendous crisis. Poverty, hunger and the insecurity of living with dignity are experienced by the majority of the Filipino people. The price of oil, rice and other basic necessities has been rising relentlessly. More and more of our brothers and sisters are unemployed and without job security. In the midst of the worsening crisis in our country, we continue to discern, stand, pray and act with the Filipino people who are struggling and striving for a life in abundance, dignity, and justice.

Response: We are here to meditate together, pray, listen to the cries of the people who are suffering, hungry, oppressed and struggling for a free society. May our prayers and meditation be meaningful to help us choose the right leaders for our country to lead us in our collective action in the midst of the crisis we are experiencing.

### INVOCATION

O God of history, sow in us the seed of perseverance, resilience and courage to defeat those forces that destroy the dignity of life. Join us in our actions to stand up for a just and meaningful life. Guide us in our collective action and discernment so that we may be able to choose the right leader who will truly promote a society with equality, with respect for every life and eradicate poverty in our communities. We ask for your presence in our gathering.

This is our prayer in the name of Your Son Jesus our brother and of the Holy Spirit who dwells then, now and forever. Amen.

## † HYMN OF PRAISE

“How Can Our Song This Time Be Chanted”  
Hymnal of Faith Journey, p.368 KALISUD

How can our song this time be chanted, Living is yoked with heavy burdens  
Some are not mindful of each other, And life can be bought be money.  
How cheap it is. Can it be?

Refrain:

Open wide, O God the heavens, And let our dreams come falling like the rain.  
Let our hopes be ever brighter, loving Savior, Let not our faith forsake nor fail us.

Many are hungry all around us, Thirsty as well for truth and justice  
While all the rich have more than plenty, They wallow in pleasure always  
Their lives are all so easy.

O Let our vision for tomorrow, Go forth beyond the fiery mountain,  
Up and above the dark clouds hanging, And facing the storm in battle  
O Lord, our Lord, O our Lord

## THE LITANY OF OUR CONTEXT OF MISSION

**Liturgist:** Let us listen to the voice of the people around us and let us together express our response and call for renewal, transformation and peace based on justice.

### Workers

How long, O God, will the oppression of our workers continue? How long will we be deprived of the just wages to live a dignified life? How long will we tolerate long working hours, inhumane conditions and strict labor policies? How long will we rely on our labor power to be exploited only by selfish capitalists?

### Response:

Let us continue to work for God's mission in our communities so that His will may be realized: peace, justice and freedom for God's oppressed people.

### Farmers

How long, O God, shall our farmers weep? We who cultivate the land but cannot own the land. We who create the food of the country but our families are starving. We who work hard to live but are denied the right to live with dignity.

### Response:

Let us continue to work for God's mission in our communities so that His will may be realized: peace, justice and freedom for God's oppressed people.



### **Indigenous People**

How long, O God, will the indigenous people be deprived of a dignified life? How long will the savage landlords and capitalists take from us the lands we inherited from our ancestors. How long will mining and logging destroy the rest of the land we live on? How long will the trans-national corporations steal our country's natural resources?

### **Response:**

Let us continue to work for God's mission in our communities so that His will may be realized: peace, justice and freedom for God's oppressed people.

### **Women**

How long, O God, shall the greater number of our women suffer? How long will our status in society remain low? How long will we be exploited because we are women? How long will we experience all kinds of violence? How long will we be denied equal opportunity? How long will our right to participate at all levels of society be hindered?

### **Response:**

Let us continue to work for God's mission in our communities so that His will may be realized: peace, justice and freedom for God's oppressed people.

### **Children**

How long, O God, will the children suffer because of the existing system of society that doesn't recognize us? How long will most of our children in our communities remain poor? How long will we be denied of our basic rights to live, develop, be protected, and participate? How long will we wait for true peace and abundant life for all?

### **Response:**

Let us continue to work for God's mission in our communities so that His will may be realized: peace, justice and freedom for God's oppressed people.

### **Together:**

O God, You became human to be with us and in solidarity with our struggle. Allow us to recognize Your presence and solidarity with us so that Your justice, peace and true and freedom may be enjoyed by Your oppressed people. Give us the courage and strength to move forward. Because You are with us, we know that a new day is about to come and that life in abundant will be enjoyed by all. Amen.

### **CHURCH AT PRAYER** (Minister)

## SONG-RESPONSE

“Kumbaya my Lord”

Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya, Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya  
Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya, Oh Lord, kumbaya

Someone's crying Lord, kumbaya, Someone's crying Lord, kumbaya  
Someone's crying Lord, kumbaya, Oh Lord, kumbaya

Someone's praying Lord, kumbaya, Someone's praying Lord, kumbaya  
Someone's praying Lord, kumbaya, Oh Lord, kumbaya

## † READING OF THE SCRIPTURES

## † SONG-RESPONSE

“Thy Word”

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.  
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

## MESSAGE THROUGH SONG

## MESSAGE THROUGH SPOKEN WORDS

## † HYMN OF COMMITMENT

“Lord, Give Us A Leader”

Hymnal of Faith Journey p.288, LEADER

Our world is in need of a leader who cares, For people who suffer, and people in need  
A leader who listens to cries of the poor, A leader who lives by Your Word

**Refrain:** Lord, give us a leader who shows us the way, Who gives us new hope, and  
brings us new day

A leader who seeks not for silver and gold, A leader who lives by Your Word

Lord, gives us a leader like Moses of old, Who longs for his people true freedom and  
food

A leader who seeks not first place come what may, A leader who lives by Your Word

Lord, give us a leader like Deb'rah of old, Who leads her own people with justice and  
truth,

A leader who works for true, lasting peace, A leader who lives by Your Word

Lord, give us a leader like Jesus our Lord, Who offers his life so that others may live,  
A leader who serves rather than to be served, A leader who lives by Your Word



## † PRAYER (Minister)

O God, giver of life, all things are possible when we put our trust in you. We acknowledge you today as lord, not only of individuals but of nations and governments. You have blessed us with sacred wisdom and creative minds to exercise our sanctified freedom and rights in ushering lasting peace and wholesome value in our society.

We humbly come to you as one people and one nation asking your divine intervention as the election approaches. We seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our country. We are facing immense challenges regarding public health, a pandemic, financial hardship, economic shutdowns, and great political divisions that cause political scandal to our nation. We pray for discernment so that we may choose leaders who hear your word, live your love, and keep the ways of your truth.

May your spirit of gentleness, humility, and truth reigns in the heart of every Filipino as we choose the next leaders who we believe are mindful of justice, accountability, and honesty. Guide us as we mark the right candidates on the ballot who we believe can bring genuine change and betterment to the country that we dreamed and long for. Empower us to stay in our unbroken line in seeking a just and lasting peace in our land through our meaningful participation in the coming may 2022 national and local election.

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## † BENEDICTION

**WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO GOD,**

who is love and who has given the earth to all peoples.

**WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO JESUS CHRIST,**

who come to heal us and free us from all forms of oppression.

**WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD,**

who works in and through all who have yearned towards the truth.

**WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH,**

who is called to be at service of all people.

**WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO GOD'S PROMISE,**

to finally destroy the power of sin in us all.

to establish the reign of justice and peace for all humanity. Amen!

## † SONG-RESPONSE      "Three-Fold Amen"

## POSTLUDE

## RECESSIONAL

# Sermon

Philippine Election 2022 Celebration Guide

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**Rev. Callum R. Tabada**

Pastor, UP Church of the Risen Lord

## Let Us Choose the Right Leaders to Rule

Proverbs 29: 2

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;  
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.”

As a community that believes in God and lives out the teachings of the Almighty Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, the Church as God’s people carries the great responsibility of making sure that those elected to public office are people who live out the righteousness of the faith. In the running up of the conduct of the country’s national elections where we choose our next set of leaders from the president down to the various officials in the barangays, the Church as bastion of faith and morality is duty-bound to provide guidance to the faithful in choosing the next set of leaders to ensure that the people whom God loves so much will be properly taken-care of and be able to live lives according to God’s standards. As such, the Church cannot afford to see God’s people treated in ways that are degrading and strips them of the dignity they very much deserve as a people created in God’s image.

While we all are gifted with the freedom to choose, that freedom will either lead us to suffering or to a better life, very much like what happened to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and thus suffered the consequence of such wrong choice. In our time today, we are given that freedom to choose leaders from among ourselves whom we will entrust with the responsibility of running our government. Lest we choose wrongly and suffer the consequence of such wrong choice, we therefore need to be very careful in making the right decision as to who to entrust the lives of the people whom God loves so much.

Proverbs 29:2 tells us simply and bluntly that “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan.” While the central concern of the book of Proverbs is practical wisdom for living, our passage focuses on the effects on the nation when certain kinds of people are in leadership. Proverbs is a collection of Israelite wisdom literature with various authors but mostly attributed to King Solomon. In this part, the King writes to his son as a future king of Israel and teaches him about politics, particularly that the people of any nation are seriously affected by the morality of their rulers.

People rejoice, are happy and content, when righteous leaders, those who exercise what is just and right before God and the people, rule or are placed in positions of authority. They provide protection to their people from their enemies and help restore and maintain peace and prosperity among the people. In the Old Testament stories, we find these kinds of leaders in Noah, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Queen Esther, King David and many other leaders. Although none among them are perfect at what they did, they nevertheless showed faith in God and ruled with love and care for God's people. In all these instances of their leadership, the people rejoiced and praised God.

On the other hand we read about wicked leaders in the Bible. Among these are Haman in Persia in the story of Esther where he ordered to “destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews — young and old, women and children — on a single day...and to plunder their goods” (Esther 3:13); Rehoboam who didn't listen to wise counsel and instead added more burden to this people and dealt harshly with them (1 Kings 12); and of course there's Herod the Great who ordered the killing of innocent children in Bethlehem aged two years old and below (Matthew 2:16). In all these, the people groaned, wept and mourned — suffered the wickedness of those in power.

The same is true in our time today as we can see leaders of nations who have led and continue to lead their countries in the right directions, not perfect but nevertheless offered their best in taking care of the people who rightly chose them to be their leader. We see the flourishing of these countries and the rejoicing of their constituencies even in challenging times.

On the other hand we see the sufferings of people due to the rise and rule of wicked leaders who abuse their powers. We see these in dictators of recent past in countries like Italy (Mussolini), Germany (Hitler), Uganda (Idi Amin), Cambodia (Pol Pot) and many others, causing not only suffering from among their people but even death of hundreds, thousands and even millions.

We don't have to look far and wide to see more examples of these leaders who cause sufferings to their people. We have our very own experience of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the 70s and 80s who through Martial Law abused his power, plundered the country, brought suffering to the entire nation and caused the imprisonment, torture, and death to countless Filipinos. Today, we are all witnesses to the debauchery of President Duterte who openly paved the way to a culture of impunity in his highly publicized general order to “kill, kill, kill” people who he believes are not contributing to his ideas of nationhood. Among these are those who are victims of drug abuse, critics of his style of governance and political opponents. They are systematically threatened and harassed, red-tagged, forcibly captured and imprisoned, and even extra-judicially killed.

While all these atrocities against the people are widely documented and even acknowledged by credible organizations in the country and internationally, both Marcos (then) and Duterte as well as their apologists/supporters deny their wrongdoings amidst the groans and loud cries of the people. What is more harrowing is the fact that in the coming national elections, children of both Marcos and Duterte are running for the two top leadership positions of the land. What concerns us is that both children deny the fact of their parents' wrongdoings and have enjoyed and continue to enjoy the spoils of their parents' exploits as well unashamedly parading themselves as the best candidates for such positions. Denying the facts of their parents' wrongdoings and even praising them to high heavens as well as promising in their campaigns to continue the ways and methods of their parents' governance and leadership all paint a picture of our country going back to the dark days in the event of a Marcos-Duterte win in the elections.

Choosing the right leaders to rule therefore is a two-pronged approach. First is to make sure that the "wicked" among those who are running for office are identified. By all means, they should be exposed with all their tendencies and true intentions of vying for the top positions in the land. The people should not only take note of what they represent as far as their ideas of governance is concerned but must seriously remember where these candidates come from (in terms of their influences and their convictions). Secondly, from among the rest of those who are availing themselves for leadership positions, we must carefully choose to see who are the most qualified that would lead the people to rejoice.

As followers of Christ, we must choose from among those who champion the cause of God's people. We must choose leaders who subscribe to the greater task of establishing God's reign in the world, those who carry the vision and desire for the people to achieve full and abundant life as uttered by our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 4:18-19, where a just and compassionate society is built, and where love, justice and peace prevail (UCCP Statement of Faith).

For "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan."

# In Times Like These: (Philippine Electoral Situationer)

Philippine Election 2022 Celebration Guide

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## Jonie Ben Marasigan

Executive Assistant  
UCCP Laity and Local Church Development Ministry (LLCDM)

It's been months before the election day – May 9, 2022. As the national election kicked off on the 8th day of February 2022, the maneuvers and drama already began.

If we are to look back to the events related to the election process i.e., from voters' registration (January 2020 – September 2021, October 11 – 30, 2021) to filing of candidacies for national and local elections (October 1 – 8, 2021), different campaign methodologies were applied by most of the politicians. Even if it is still not campaign period; names and pictures were already printed in the tarpaulins hung everywhere, political advertisements in social media were already streamed, political aspirants began to guest in different television and online shows and/or expose themselves in social media thru online raffles and vlogs, and most of all, they began to visit different areas and municipalities where they can form political alliances. The face of Philippine politics did not change.

### Political Dramas from Filing to Substitution

During the withdrawal and substitution period of candidates from October 9 to November 15, 2021, scripted political dramas which were already expected and happened many times in the previous elections were also played. Some notable aspirants substituted for lesser-known filers - tagged as "placeholders" - for their respective positions. A total of 19 political aspirants withdrew their certificates of candidacy (COCs) and 10 substitutions were recorded by the COMELEC. Among those who made their withdrawals and substitution were;

- Veteran journalist Noli de Castro' who withdrew his COC for the senatorial post as early as Oct. 13, and was replaced by Joseph "Jopet" Sison
- Sen. Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa, who withdrew his COC for the presidency for good to give way to Mayor Sara Duterte if she will be running for the highest post who was expected to file before the deadline
- Sen. Christopher "Bong" Go, who withdrew from the vice-presidential race to run instead for president but withdrew last November 30, 2021

- Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio filed for the mayoral post in Davao City and withdrew last Nov. 9, 2021, and later substituted Lyle Uy for the vice presidency
- President Rodrigo Duterte replaced Liezl Vizorde for the senatorial post who later withdrew last December 14, 2021. First time in the history of Philippine politics that an outgoing Chief Executive run for a lower position
- Former Anti-communist Insurgency Task Force Spokesperson, Antonio Parlade Jr. who replaced Antonio Valdes for president
- Former Chief of Police Guillermo Eleazar who replaced Paolo Capino for senator
- Former Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque who replaced Paolo Marcelino for senator<sup>1</sup>

Under Comelec rules, political parties and coalitions that field a candidate can choose to substitute that candidate if one of these three things happens after COC filing: (1) the candidate dies, (2) the candidate withdraws (3) the candidate is disqualified by the Comelec. For the 2022 elections, if a candidate withdraws, dies, or is disqualified by final judgment, a substitute candidate can file their COC until November 15, 2021, wherein this should reflect the substitute's name. After this period, substitution is allowed only if: (1) the candidate dies and (2) the candidate is disqualified. The substitute can file their COC from November 16, 2021, up to midday of May 9, 2022 (election day), provided that the substitute should have the same surname as the original candidate. But, if the original candidate withdraws from November 16 onwards, they are not allowed to have substitutes.<sup>2</sup>

Having Section 77 of the Omnibus Election Code which currently allows substitution or withdrawal, candidacy filing already serves as a mockery. It has been abused over the years and goes against the intention of the law in upholding orderly and transparent elections.

### **Fake organizational and sectoral representation**

The party-list system allows various groups from the marginalized and underrepresented sectors of society to be represented in Congress. It also allows them to craft laws for their advocacies, causes, and country's benefit. However, in the current situation, many marginalized sectors are still underrepresented. The chance to have genuine representation in a government is greatly dominated and controlled by the rulers to maintain their power.

The ones who work with cultural minorities, farmers, laborers, urban poor, women, youth, and other marginalized sectors in raising their issues in civic and public platforms were tagged as terrorists and targeted to be disqualified.

But those who were in the state and working in the anti-insurgency program were representatives of fake party-lists; Malasakit Movement Party-list – which was later disqualified by the COMELEC due to failure in meeting the requirements for a sectoral party-list organization and unable to prove that they are representing marginalized and underrepresented sectors, Abante Sambayanan and Mothers for Change Party-list. Giving the chance to these fake party-lists will further strengthen the oppression and hinder the marginalized sectors to voice out and raise their plight.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the Duterte Youth which says that they represent the youth in the congress will be running for the second time this 2022 election. The said party-list secured one seat in the House of the Representatives after facing five grounds of cancellation,<sup>4</sup> and complaints against the validity of the last-minute substitution of all of its nominees where Former NYC Chairman Ronald Cardema was the new first nominee that does not qualify to the requirements to represent the youth sector.<sup>5</sup>

### **Traditional Politics and Political Lines**

The poverty crisis in the Philippines, which was heightened by joblessness probably affects the result of the election in 2022. In the previous elections, traditional politicians took advantage of the vulnerability of Filipino people who were willing to sell their votes for them to survive.<sup>6</sup> Vote buying is one of the weapons of “trapos” to retain their power and to protect them and their clans from the possibility of cases being filed against them due to violations and abuses for which they must be accountable. The bulk of corrupted funds, as well as business profits from the winning transactions on government projects, are expected to be spent for the sole purpose of winning the elections.

Aside from it, traditional political families or the practices of these political families dominate political power and public offices from generation to generation and treat the public elective office almost as their property.<sup>7</sup> Political dynasties in the Philippines have existed for about centuries and can be traced back to pre-colonial society. Though there are moves to challenge these thru the filing of bills, these have always been passed over in Congress since 1987. Most prominent political families still hold positions in different levels and branches of the government like the Cayetanos, Gatchalians, Binays, Villars, Revillas, Remullas, Sottos, Ampatuans, and the Dutertes and the Marcoses<sup>8</sup> who are now in tandem for the two of the highest political posts.



## Empty Promises to Real Issues

It is very notable in the Philippines that political campaigns, slogans, and propagandas reverberate in the air like songs filled with promises of bliss and hope for a better life. These campaign mechanisms are targeting the hearts and psyche of the Filipino voters by touching the issues that greatly affect them. But oftentimes than not, these promises ended up hollow and unfulfilled.

Vote buying is never denied nor confirmed. Other sectoral groups challenge the Filipino voters to look at the candidates who have truly grasped the issues affecting the lives of the people and offer viable solutions that truly address the worsening condition.

Voters also need to have a grasp of the issues affecting the lives of the people to be able to critically assess the platforms and campaign promises of all political aspirants.

One important question needs to be raised, “How would these politicians, if given political power, address the following issues?

**Healthcare System.** One of the main reasons why the Philippines was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic was because of our poor healthcare system, aside from the failure to manage our borders before its onslaught. The government failed to respond immediately since there is no existing system for pandemic response installed.



From January 20, 2020, to February 16, 2022 – there have been 3,641,940 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 55,146 deaths, reported to WHO. And as of February 2, 2022, a total of 128,058,330 vaccine doses have been administered.<sup>9</sup> However, the ratio of doctors and nurses as prescribed by the WHO was not met. We only have 3.7 doctors and 8.2 nurses per 10,000 patients.<sup>10</sup> We have lots of healthcare workers but we lack health facilities. Many healthcare workers opted to serve in other countries. While the ones who stayed to serve are overworked, undervalued, and underpaid.

**Poverty and Labor.** Poverty incidence among Filipinos in the first semester of 2021 increased by 2.6 percentage points to 23.7% from 21.1% in the first semester of 2018 based on Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data. This was based on a poverty threshold in 2021 of P14,498 for half a year or P2,416.33 per month which represents the amount a Filipino needs, on average, to meet his basic food and non-food requirements.<sup>11</sup>

To address this situation, the government needs to create more jobs for the people - a job that will compensate laborers equally, that entitled them to all the government and mandated benefits, and that will ensure their job security. One way to

accomplish this is to put HB 3381 or the Security of Tenure Bill into law.

With this, the 5.7 million and more unemployed Filipinos as of November 2021 will be addressed. 2.5 million was added to the 3.2 data from Phil. Statistics Authority that was not counted by the government over the 2016 – 2020 period<sup>12</sup>

**Sovereignty and Filipino Ownership.** If we are to talk about this issue, the first thing that would come into our minds is the West Philippine Sea which was recognized as part of the Philippines' sovereign rights in the landmark ruling of the arbitral tribunal in The Hauge.<sup>13</sup> Despite the recognized ruling, the assertion of our rights was not observed since the Chinese presence continued which contradicts the promises made by Pres. Rodrigo Duterte in his campaign last 2016.



However, the Philippine Senate passed a bill that allows 100% foreign ownership of public services. SB 2094 narrows public utilities to electric distribution and transmission, airports, seaports, water pipeline distribution and sewerage, tollways and expressways, and public utility vehicles. This means that there will be no restriction on foreign ownership for industrial undertakings not classified as public utility.<sup>14</sup>

**Justice System and Peace.** Though living in a democratic country, people are still facing issues on democracy and freedom. The role of the masses in reminding the government of their duties for the Filipino citizen and respecting their rights is highly at stake.

The data gathered by the Karapatan - an alliance of individuals, groups, and organizations working for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines, shows brazen violations on civil and political rights under the Duterte government<sup>15</sup>, excluding at least 8,663 deaths that have been recorded by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as of March 2020.<sup>16</sup>

As the nation continues to suffer during the pandemic, campaigns on killings, fabrication of charges, mass arrests, and red-tagging have been more intensified, thru the enactment of the Anti-terrorism law which prohibits the masses to stand against tyranny and state terror.

Victims of trumped-up and fabrication of charges, illegal arrests, and detention include church workers; Ptr. Jimmy Teves, Ptr. Nathaniel Valente, and Ptr. Dan Balucio and Ptr. Benjie Gomez who are now both out of jail. Even our church – the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, together with other churches is not spared from vilification and harassment because of the prophetic expression of our faith.

**Violations of Civil & Political Rights  
under the Rodrigo Duterte Government  
(July 2016 to August 2021)**

Violation	Number of victims
Extrajudicial Killing	421
Frustrated Extrajudicial Killing	504
Enforced Disappearance	18
Torture	223
Illegal Arrest without Detention	2,758
Illegal Arrest and Detention	1,138
Illegal Search and Seizure	1,338
Physical Assault and Injury	523
Demolition	6,912
Violation of Domicile	1,811
Destruction of Property	7,315
Divestment of Property	966
Forced Evacuation	469,025
Threat/Harassment/Intimidation	572,752
Indiscriminate Firing	11,633
Bombing	372,749
Forced/Fake Surrender	3,423
Forced Labor/Involuntary Servitude	48
Use of Civilians in Police and/or Military Operations as Guides and/or Shield	147
Use of Schools, Medical, Religious and Other Public Places for Military Purpose	45,780
Restriction or Violent Dispersal of Mass Actions, Public Assemblies and Gatherings	4,185

## Electoral Challenges to Filipino People

When the expression of our democratic form of government is at stake, the Filipino people must vote wisely and not just depend on the popularity of the politician. We should elect candidates who have the character, competence, and commitment<sup>17</sup> to perform their political tasks.

Voters need to look at the political aspirants who have the character not based on their popularity, but on their integrity – with a clean track record on public or private services. They should have the courage to stand on what is right and what is just. Most of all, they should uphold democratic rights and the rule of law.

Competent runners however are those individuals with related experiences and expertise in the position that they aspire to. Having a good track record of their previous services should also be a basis, as well as the capability to unite different stakeholders to promote the common good. Aspirants need to have clear platforms and exude political will to influence others towards the implementation of programs and services that benefit all citizens.

Serving for a specific period would require also capable leaders who will commit to truly serve not just providing promises that are meant to be broken. They should bear records of being truthful to their duty according to their positions and offices where they had served.

In this coming election, the voters play an important role, most especially the youth which comprises 60% of the voting population, in ensuring that the person who will be elected in a certain position is the most deserving and the lesser evil.

We should remain educated and aggressive in educating other people so that we are not blinded by false propaganda and sweet campaigns; not be fooled by their promises and small gifts in exchange for our political and human right to vote.

We should be on guard with our votes for us to be assured of our future – in times like these... Pili-pili Pilipinas!



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# Seeing Peace Through Dirty Windows: Preparing to Vote in 2022

Philippine Election 2022 Celebration Guide

And Jesus said, “You have heard that people were told in the past, ‘do not commit murder; anyone who does will be brought to trial’. But now I tell you: whoever is angry with his brother will be brought to trial, whoever calls his brother, ‘you good for nothing’ will be brought before the Council, and whoever calls his brother ‘worthless fool’ will be in danger of going to the fire of hell. So, if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.” (Matthew 5:21-25)

Today, let us begin with Scripture because the topic before us is complicated and disturbing. Let us be reminded that our Lord, who has come into our world and instructed us in the ways of righteousness and living properly, is clear about addressing conflicts. According to the text above, our Lord is so concerned about addressing conflicts, that even before we can face God with our gifts and praises, Jesus says, “go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.” There appears to be nothing more important to Jesus in this bible story than to resolve the conflict and make peace as a priority and first initiative.

Jesus is recorded to have spoken the word peace twenty-three times in the bible. Peace is highly valued by Jesus, and He believed that we can and must settle conflicts peacefully by finding and living out the higher principles of faith. As followers of Christ, we must pursue the settling of conflicts peacefully as far as we possibly can. It is not a Christian virtue to give up on Peace. It is not a Christian virtue to win the war, but not the Peace.

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Jesus prayed the Lord's Prayer that set before us a vision. It is about Peace based on a condition for the earth like it is in Heaven, where daily bread is shared equally by all of us, and where we are forgiven our debts as we forgive our debtors, where the temptation of greed and power are removed from us, and our evil ways are reformed to acts of kindness and compassion. Jesus understood that Peace is built on conditions that we must work to create that will ensure our communities do not exploit, oppress, marginalize, and impoverish a neighbor for the profit of a few. Jesus understood that until the conditions of Peace are created and realized, there will be no Peace.

### The Elections and Presidential Interviews

The coming elections are an opportunity to choose a leader who will place a high value on Peace. A leader who will align our country closer to the intentions of Jesus in the way we manage and arrange the economic, social, and political matters of our country. It is an opportunity which we should not waste, nor should we be misguided by the influence and deceptive character of fake news and untruths in the way that we cast our vote.

The recent Presidential interviews hosted by Jessica Soho of the leading Presidential candidates, which aired on GMA 7 on Saturday, January 22, was a unanimous affirmation for the resumption of Peace Talks as a way forward in resolving historical conflicts in our country. The wisdom of all four candidates interviewed, except for Bong Bong Marcos who was absent, answered "yes" to resume Peace Talks if they are elected President.

This is due to the fact these candidates understand the track record of Peace Talks in resolving conflicts in the Philippines. Over the last several years Peace Talks have been instrumental in reaching the final peace agreements of three armed conflicts. These were Peace Talks with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996; The Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas-Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPMP-RPA-ABB) in 2000; and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2014. These all speak for the viability and possibility of Peace Talks as a way forward in resolving historical conflicts in the Philippines.

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The Communist Party of the Philippines – New People’s Army - National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDF), have been in a conflict with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) for 54 long years, since 1968. Despite the full military power unleashed under Martial Law and even with the support of US military bases through the 1970’s and 1980’s, a military victory by the GRP was unsuccessful in ending this conflict. This speaks volumes to debunk the illusion the present administration of President Rodrigo R. Duterte is feeding the Filipino people that the GRP can achieve peace with the CPP-NPA-NDF through a military victory in consonant with a national entrapment program called the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). It defies logic and is an affront to our Christian values.

### **Historical Notes on the GRP and CPP-NPA-NDF Peace Talks**

The Peace Talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF formally began in 1986. However, the violent response of the Corazon C. Aquino administration to a peaceful rally at Mendiola Bridge, killing 13 persons, led to its termination in February 1987. It was under the succeeding administration of President Fidel V. Ramos that Peace Talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF were given a new start. The first formal Peace Talks were held in Europe at the Hague in the Netherlands and laid out the framework for the Peace Process in what is recognized as the Hague Joint Declaration in 1992.

It was at this time that the Ramos administration created the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (OPAPP) as a special Cabinet position of government to ensure that Peace Talks were carefully attended to by the government. Today, under the administration of President Rodrigo R. Duterte, the name of OPAPP has been changed to Office of the Presidential Advisor on Peace Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU).

The Hague Joint Declaration has guided the Peace Talks between the GRP and CPP-NPA-NDF to numerous signed agreements. Most notably the signing of the first of four substantive agendas which is the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) in 2000. Another important agreement was the invitation of the Royal Norwegian Government (RNG) to serve as the Third-Party Facilitator for the Peace Talks in 2004. Close observers of the Peace Talks between the CPP-NPA-NDF and GRP will admit that the road has not been without detours and debilitating obstacles but the gains and accomplishments toward a final peace agreement have been sincere, significant, and productive.

This year, 2022, marks the 30th year from the signing of the Hague Joint Declaration and through the administrations of five different Presidents, the Peace Talks have been inching its way forward to ensure that the root causes of the conflict are addressed, or as Jesus prayed, the conditions for peace are made right. The fact that primacy in these Peace Talks is placed on creating the conditions for lasting peace, there is the need to negotiate for the restructuring of national economic and social policies. This has made these Peace Talks slow and challenging, but not impossible.

## **Peace Talks**

HAVE BEEN INCHING ITS WAY FORWARD TO ENSURE THAT THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT ARE ADDRESSED, OR AS JESUS PRAYED, THE CONDITIONS FOR PEACE ARE MADE RIGHT.

## A View from the Administration of President Duterte

The Peace Talks between the GRP and the CPP-NPA-NDF began on a high note as President Duterte took the oath of office in 2016. There were signs that gave hope to all involved, including the Royal Norwegian Government who facilitated and enabled four formal meetings between the GRP and CPP-NPA-NDF from August 2016 until April 2017. Never had the Peace Process reached a place so close and near to achieving a final Peace Agreement. The work on both sides was tremendous.

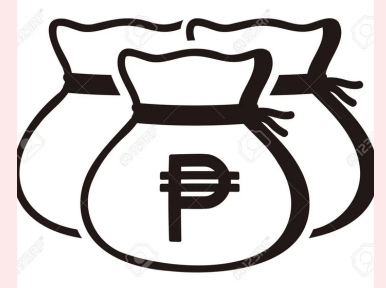
A fifth formal meeting was scheduled for May 2017, but it was called off by the GRP and this began the collapse of the Peace Process that ironically reached its lowest point in its long history as a Peace Process. On November 23, 2017, President Duterte signed Proclamation 360, terminating all peace negotiations with the CPP-NPA-NDF. This was followed the next month on December 5, 2017, with Proclamation 374, designating the CPP and NPA as Terrorist Organizations.

The narrative that the Duterte Administration would like us to believe is that the CPP-NPA-NDF were insincere and are to be blamed for the collapse of the Peace Talks. To believe this narrative has been a convenient excuse not to look deeper into the possible factors. Those of us who are looking to cast our votes in May for a candidate who can assure us that they can defend the Peace Process and resume the Peace Talks must understand several factors that loom dangerously large over our nation.

## There is Money in War

Let me begin with the economic factor. It is no secret that the Armed Forces of the Philippines have long coveted a pending AFP Modernization Program that has been hanging in the balance of uncertainty. This billion peso Program is intended to upgrade the AFP into a force that is capable of defeating terrorism from within and threats from beyond Philippine borders. For the Second Horizon alone, which is the 5-year program that was scheduled for 2018 – 2022, the budget price tag is P300 billion. This amount will be budgeted into five years and divided between the Army P54 billion; Navy P78 billion; Air Force P140 billion; and Headquarters P28 billion.

Among the greatest threats to this AFP Modernization Program is a successful Peace Process. The reason is because to approve such a massive sum of money for the AFP there must be justification. If Peace is attained or moving closer to a final Peace Agreement through the Peace Talks and the threat of terrorism is no longer a clear and present danger, it is more likely that this AFP Modernization Program budget might be denied, and the funds realigned to other more important social needs by the government. In other words, a successful Peace Process could remove the rationale for such a massive expensive Modernization Program. A massive budget to modernize the AFP is less essential without war. In the passing of such a budget the threat of war and terrorism must be imminent.



A MASSIVE BUDGET TO  
MODERNIZE THE AFP IS  
LESS ESSENTIAL  
WITHOUT WAR.

## The Failure of Presidents

Another factor is the indebtedness that the AFP can abuse and hold over a President. In 2004, when President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was seeking re-election, there was an embarrassing moment that became known as the “Hello Garci” scandal. The incident was a call made by the President to the Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano of which the recordings were made public. In the recording, it was clear that Commissioner Garcillano had the assurance of the AFP in Mindanao that election returns will be ensured in her favor. Despite the revelation and expose, it did not stop her from becoming President for another six years. However, what it did to the Peace Process was collapse it and it became evident her voice was beholden now to the position of the AFP that there will be no Peace Talks until the CPP-NPA-NDF lay down their arms. This in effect stalled the talks for the next six years, and the arrests and killings of alleged supporters of the left grew in numbers. The apparent indebtedness of President Macapagal-Arroyo to the AFP for her victory in the election saw the increased influence of AFP over her administration.

Parallel to this has been the AFP success in Marawi in the time of President Duterte. The Marawi siege was a takeover of the City of Marawi by an Islamic militant group in May of 2017. This was a crisis that was beyond President Duterte’s powers to solve. He grew dependent on the AFP and PNP during this period. A long five-month battle followed between the AFP and the militants that led to the defeat of the militants in October 2017. After the “liberation” of Marawi was declared there was a striking change of character in the Duterte Administration. It was in the next two months that the President signed Proclamation 360, terminating all peace negotiations with the CPP-NPA-NDF and Proclamation 374, designating the CPP and NPA as Terrorist Organizations. Furthermore, we observed how his initial civilian led government turned more and more into an AFP/PNP led government, with the unprecedented rise in AFP/PNP appointments of active and retired generals to important and lucrative Cabinet positions and to lead government agencies. The numbers of these AFP/PNP appointees rose from 26 in 2016, to 69 by 2020.

Beyond handing out lucrative Cabinet and government agency positions to the AFP/PNP and allowing them to consolidate their influence and agenda over the government, it would come as no surprise that six months later, on June 20, 2018, President Duterte approved the Second Horizon of the Revised AFP Modernization Program sending it on to receive Congressional approval within the National Budget. The massive price tag of 300 billion pesos has become a heavy burden on the country that requires larger loans and impedes other needs within the National Budget.

## **With the Peace Talks already terminated and the Revised AFP Modernization**

Program approved, the Duterte Administration went on to create later in December 2018 an even loftier program to channel government funds away from much needed social services to another war chest in the name of fighting terrorism with the signing of Executive Order 70 which is the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). The budget allocation for NTF-ELCAC in the 2022 budget now stands at 29.2 billion pesos. This is to be used by a task force of mostly AFP/PNP to build capacity in fighting the CPP-NPA-NDF.

The Duterte Administration continues to try to defend NTF-ELCAC from the meticulous eyes of several senators and congresspersons who are questioning the misuse and unused NTF-ELCAC funds, particularly in the light of the continuing need to address Covid-19 and the Pandemic. The NTF-ELCAC spokesperson Undersecretary Lorraine Marie Badoy, has gone so far as to publicly criticize, in a statement released January 24, the four presidential candidates for announcing that they would resume the Peace Talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF if elected. To defend the integrity of the NTF-ELCAC the statement reads, “the NTF ELCAC views with grave concern the public commitment made by four presidential candidates to resume the bogus peace talks (BPT) with the terrorist organization CPP NPA NDF.” The language alleges insincerity in the use of the word “bogus” and danger in using “terrorist organization”. This is how the Duterte Administration wants us all to believe.

These signal a captured but consenting Administration of President Duterte. We are seeing peace through dirty windows. While not everyone in the Administration would approve of the way President Duterte slid into the clutches of the military minds, the President is surrounded, beholden, and blinded by these military minds who have benefitted considerably from creating the illusion that the CPP-NPA-NDF are terrorists, insincere, and combat victory is imminent. The fear that the Administration continues to instill in our people has destroyed a viable and constructive Peace Process with the CPP-NPA-NDF and is costing our country billions of pesos and legitimizing the arrest and death of hundreds of individuals whose only crime is they dream and work for a Philippines that is free from exploitation, injustices, and the root causes of poverty.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to see peace through dirty windows of deceptions and false narratives that have become the normative viewpoint in the present culture. Fomenting fear of terrorism and the illusion that the defeat of terrorism is only a small step away continues to prove to be immensely profitable for some stakeholders who hold the present Administration and the Nation in its grip. On May 6th we will have the opportunity to cast our vote that could chart a different course. It is of utmost importance that we consider the following qualities in choosing our candidate:

- A Candidate who believes a Final Agreement through Peace Talks is possible and viable.
- A Candidate who believes that Peace is the result of addressing root causes of conflict.
- A Candidate who believes that government shall be ruled and managed by civilian authority.
- A Candidate who believes that civilian authority is superior to military authority.
- A Candidate who will promise to resume the Peace Talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF.
- A Candidate who will promise to defund or terminate the NTF-ELCAC program.

February 1, 2022

# Bible Study Guide

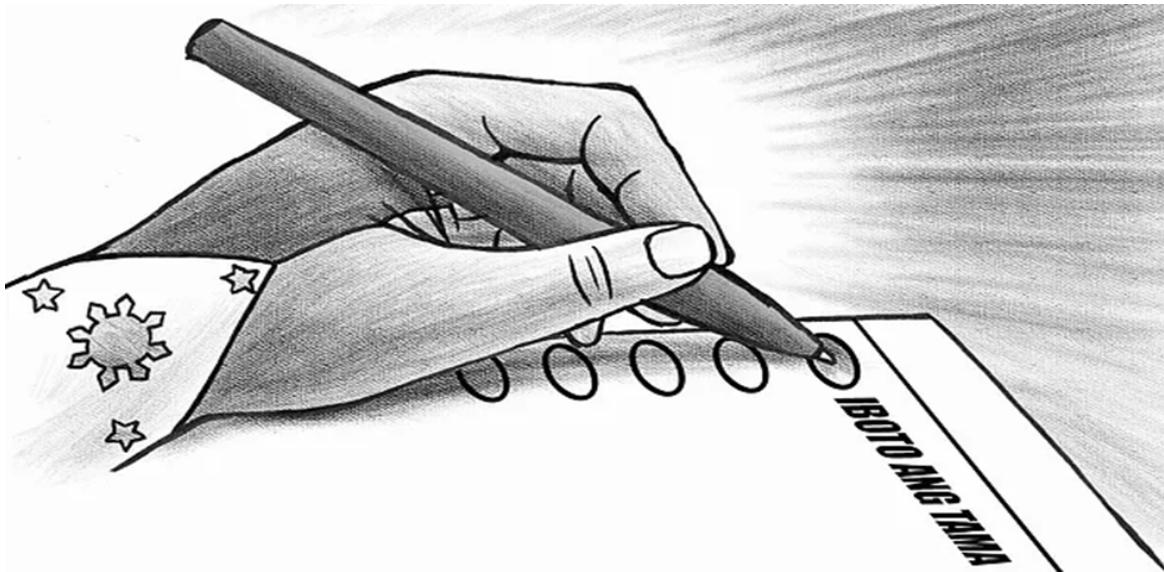
Philippine Election 2022 Celebration Guide

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**Rev. Eric P. Baldonado**

Conference Minister  
Upland Cavite Conference

## WHY DO WE CHOOSE A LEADER? Matthew 20:20-28



### INTRODUCTION

We cannot deny the fact that political elections in the Philippines, like in any other country, remain to be a popular and important process in choosing the next leaders of our nation. Although, when we study assiduously and analyze critically our history, especially from the time of General Emilio Aguinaldo up to the present, elections do not guarantee positive changes in political systems and structures and genuine transformation of leadership and governance in the country. Ka Willie, fisherfolk in Patungan Community in Maragondon, Cavite, the recent victim of development aggression at the height of the spread of Omicron Covid variant, said that the coming elections will just determine the next oppressor and human rights violator of the land.



## SNIPPETS OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE PHILIPPINE ELECTIONS

An election is a process by which citizens are called to choose representatives to adopt important decisions in their interest, according to the principle of political representation, and to decide on specific matters (Oxford Constitutional Law). An election is a democratic process of choosing leaders in our country. “It may be exercised by all citizens of the Philippines not otherwise disqualified by law, who are at least eighteen years of age, and who shall have resided in the Philippines for at least one year, and in the place wherein they propose to vote, for at least six months immediately preceding the election. No literacy, property, or other substantive requirement shall be

imposed on the exercise of suffrage” (see Article V, Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution). In this process, the people are given the right to choose their leaders who will govern them, lead them to meet their interests and needs, and fulfill their dreams and aspirations in life. The Congress shall provide a system for securing the secrecy and sanctity of the ballot as well as a system for absentee voting by qualified Filipinos abroad. “The Congress shall also design a procedure for the disabled and the illiterates to vote without the assistance of other persons. Until then, they shall be allowed to vote under existing laws and such rules as the Commission on Elections may promulgate to protect the secrecy of the ballot” (see Article V, Section 2 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution).



Historically, elections have been used by the elite ruling class to accumulate more wealth, power, and control over the majority of the people. It is an arena in which the country’s elite families compete for political power. It legitimizes their political power to rule over the people, and make sure that their class interests are being protected and upheld. This should not be the case, because the government was established by the people to serve their best interest and welfare. This is the very essence of



democratic governance in our country – “the government of the people, by the people, for the people”. The elite ruling class use elections to preserve the status quo and to extend their stay in power. They are willing to do everything just to ensure that they will get the power and authority they want. This is the reason why political elections in the Philippines have been described as dirty and violent. The elite ruling class is using 4G: Guns, Goons, Gold, and Government machinery. Vote-buying, election manipulation, voter fraud, and fake news or distorted information in social media are rampant during the election period. Elections can be likened to a circus because many politicians are moving from one political party to another. Politicians said that there are no permanent enemies, and no permanent friends, only permanent interests. Politicians are full of promises in their campaign advertisement and political rallies, but they failed to discuss the real situation of the country, and how they will address concretely the issues and concerns of the Filipino people, especially issues on poverty, crime, corruption, social injustices, human rights violations, and environmental degradation.

When the first Philippine Assembly elections were held on July 30, 1907, William Howard Taft, the first civilian governor of the Philippines, proposed that only 10% of the Philippines' population had the right to vote and be elected to any government office. It only includes Filipino collaborators to the U.S., landlords, ilustrado (or the Filipino educated class), and/or those who can speak English and Spanish. Women, and the other marginalized sectors in the society were not allowed to vote during this time. It was only on April 30, 1937, that women were given the right to suffrage. There was also a period in our history that the percentage of Filipinos who are allowed to vote was reduced to 1%. But because of the determination, resistance, and relentless struggle of the Filipino people for independence and democracy, and later on, the development of the Philippine Constitution, suffrage has become the right of every Filipino citizen who is at least eighteen years of age.



## WHY DO WE CHOOSE A LEADER? A BIBLICO-THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

For us Christians, voting is a sacred civil right because it springs from the freedom that God has given every human being in the Creation story as recorded in the Book of Genesis. When God created human beings God made them in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27) and entrusted to them God's creation (Gen 1: 28-30). Rooted in God's trust in human beings is their freedom to cultivate the land and enrich the whole creation (Gen 2:15). The way human beings live their lives in accordance with the trust given to them by God, and the godly exercise of their freedom will define and determine what it means to be created in the image and likeness of the Creator.

The two accounts of the Creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 remind us that we, human beings, should not abuse the freedom that was entrusted to us by God, and therefore, should not think and act as lord of creation and other creatures. Our freedom should not be used to possess, control, and destroy our fellow human beings, and the rest of God's creation. Instead, the God-given freedom must be used to develop and enrich God's creation for the good of all. From this principle, emanates the truth that the freedom to choose leaders of the land is part of the trust God is giving us, and it is considered as divine stewardship. God trusts us that we will choose leaders who will cultivate and protect the land, and develop God's creation in accordance to the will and purpose of God, so that everyone may experience life to the full.



Apostle Paul elucidates this further: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. (Gal 5:13). This emphasizes the truth that the exercise of our freedom, even in choosing leaders of our nation during political elections, should lead to a life that is acceptable to God.

The first story of elections in the Bible is about God choosing the Hebrew people to be freed from the shackles of slavery and domination caused by their Egyptian rulers (Exodus 3). God came to liberate them and bring them to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey so that the people will live with dignity and in peace. This should also be the purpose of exercising the political power entrusted to the leaders of the land – to liberate the people from all forms of slavery, oppression, and subjugation. All leaders must use responsibly the power and authority entrusted to them by the people by prioritizing and putting into the forefront of their decision-making the welfare and well-being of the people, especially the poor, oppressed, and deprived.

The Hebrew people have no unitary king except for the judges who emerge as leaders in times of crisis. God is the only Sovereign Ruler. This was a pure theocracy, not the version of those today who would impose a single established religion. That period saw the confederacy of the tribes of Yahweh, not just those who came from the 12 sons of Jacob but also of others who profess the same loyalty to God, (Gottwald, 1979) gathering together only for one main purpose, to celebrate the harvest. Such celebration, of course, would be in the spirit of worship. They also gather in times of threats to their national security and the tribes provide the soldiers to defend their gains.

God became their leader. God has appointed leaders who must govern as God pleases for the good of everyone. First, God chose a judge and priest like Eli but his sons became abusive despite the rules and guidelines of being a good Judge (Exodus 18: 13-27) “Choose a man of ability, God-fearing, trustworthy and unforgiving,” This is the advice of Jethro a priest to Moses who would be his assistant in leading the people of Israel. Eli's problem with his sons also became Samuel's problem with his sons not following his advice and the principles of good leadership and governance. So in I Samuel 8, because of the failed leadership of Samuel's sons, the people asked that they have a king like the nations around them. Tribal Leaders used to be called Judges, ruled over the 12 tribes of Israel. The government is not yet centralized. So they asked God for a king through Judge and Priest Samuel. What people are rejecting is God's rule through Judges (Theocracy) and what they are asking means adherence and submission to Monarchical rule. When the people clamored for a king like all other nations, as the sons of Samuel turned out to be corrupt, they were not opting for something better. In reality, they want to emulate the political models of the surrounding nations.

God allowed the will of the people to happen. We can find here the essence of the statement, "The voice of the people is the voice of God" (vox populi, vox Dei). That is, God agreed with the will of the people. But God warned the people about having a leader or king, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and be his horsemen, and run before his chariots, and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day" (1 Samuel 8: 10-18). Leaders can be abusive based on this statement. So God's warning to Israel must be taken seriously so that political power will not be abused. But the people ignored this and still insisted on having a king, and God approved it. And Saul, a tall and handsome man from a rich family of the tribe of Benjamin was anointed king and reigned for 22 years. The theocracy became a human monarchy. The pastoral society had become sedentary. The king became the political embodiment of the ruling class.



But God loves the people so much. God never stops guiding them and giving them instructions. So in Deuteronomy 17:15-20, God gave them these guidelines:

1. "You may indeed set over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community." Leaders must identify themselves with the people. They must know and understand the real situation of the community they are serving, and they must respond concretely to the people's needs, issues and concerns.



2. "He must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You must never return that way again.'" Leaders must not be influenced by foreign rulers and colonizers, especially those who used to enslave them. Just like what we experienced as a colonized nation under the power and control of Spain, Japan, U.S., and now China. Our leaders must not become subservient to any foreign rule and domination. They must protect the interest of our country, and respect our sovereign rights at all times.

3. "He must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away." This statement was against King David because of the crimes he did to Bathsheba and her family, and also to King Solomon because of his abuse of power by having 700 wives and 300 concubines. Leaders must show respect to women. Women should not be seen as commodities and properties. They must be just and compassionate to all people. They must protect and uphold the rights of all people. Furthermore, leaders must not use their power and authority for their gains and selfish interest.

4. "He must not acquire silver and gold in great quantities for himself." Leaders must not be corrupt, greedy, and selfish. S/he must not plunder the wealth of the nation, allow extraction of the minerals and resources of the land, and spend the money intended for the good and welfare of the people for her/his agenda.

5. "He shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel." Leaders must hold a strong witness in the authority of the Holy Scripture as an authentic witness of God's dealings with humankind, and as the only rule and standard for Christian faith and practice. Leaders' lives must be marked by high ethical and scriptural standards.

When Saul failed to live up to expectations, a new king had to be chosen. David came from a shepherd family in Bethlehem. This would be an effort to revive the concept of pastoral society and pastoral leadership. Despite his youth, he had impressive credentials. He was a musician, a courageous fighter, and faithful to God. He probably did not make much of his kingly anointing as he served in Saul's army from the time he killed Goliath. He served the king faithfully, soothing his troubled spirit with his harp, and even married into the royal Michal, the king's daughter, and was closest friends with Jonathan. Even when Saul was driven by insecurity to make an attempt on the life of David, he did not retaliate. He even spares Saul's life when he had the opportunity to kill him. He grieved for Saul and Jonathan when they were killed in battle and adopted Jonathan's son Mephibosheth in the palace. But before he ascended to the throne and when Saul was still alive he had to become a fugitive first. With a band of 400 men who were from the fringes of society, he wandered from the place and even sought asylum in Philistia. He endured the life of a Habiru, a stateless person.

Yet the monarchy was also the downfall of the once boy shepherd-musician-psalmist giant slayer. He succumbed to the temptation of power and he could not even unite his household. Absalom his son rebelled against him and temporarily drove him away from the throne. There was a power struggle between his sons after his death with Solomon succeeding him. Yes, Solomon was the builder of the Temple seen to institutionalize the cult of Yahweh. But at the same time, he built numerous castles and places of worship for his 700 wives and concubines. His marriage to numerous women was not so much libido as they were to seal political-economic alliances with neighboring kings. The seeds of division began with his reign and exploited under his son Rehoboam who stupidly promised a heavier-handed reign. Despite occasional reforms by some well-meaning successors, the kingdom of Judah was defeated and the royal household was taken into exile in Babylon.

Prophets provided the undercurrent of resistance to corrupt kings both in Israel and Judah. As spokespersons for God, they denounced, renounced the kings and priests, and announced social alternatives. Elijah and Elisha lived among the common people and served them even in their economic needs. Isaiah, Micah, and Amos (a shepherd and vineyard worker) had a common thread, social justice for the poor and needy. Both Isaiah and Micah shared the same vision of peace described as turning swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (from weapons of war to implements of economic production). With Micah adding that every man shall sit under his fig tree (equitable division of wealth). Amos decried that the poor are sold for a pair of sandals and despised false religiosity. Isaiah's book covered three periods from the impending fall of the kingdom (1-39) to the return from exile (40-55) and the introduction of a new messianic concept of the Suffering Servant and a national identity no longer modeled on David but embraces the whole world (56-66).

Because our votes are sacred, the task of the church is not only to educate the voters and protect our votes, but to expose and oppose the evils and ills of our society like the prophets in the Bible, and to present and lobby to the political candidates the genuine issues of the Filipino people, especially, the poor, oppressed and deprived people, which comprised the vast majority of our population. Indeed, it is time that we hear the cries, sufferings, and legitimate issues of the people, and not only the empty rhetoric, promises, negative campaigning, and black propaganda of the elite ruling class or the unscrupulous politicians during this election season. The eligible candidates must include in their platform of governance the genuine concerns and issues of the toiling masses. It was stated in the National Council Pastoral Letter dated October 13, 2021, that,

“Undeniably, the worsening of the political, economic and social situation in society and the inability of the government to address the widening chasm between wealth and economic depravity of the majority of the Filipino people has produced varying results, from beggary on the streets, forced labor migration both to urban areas and abroad, sex trafficking, induced participation in the illegal drugs trade, and to revolutionary struggle.

Our ministries and mission as a Church have been touching and transforming lives and communities, but we have been subjected to severe persecution by the State forces that are happy to shame the identity of our leaders and sow intrigues among the members in the local churches. Aside from these, actual harassment and persecution have been manifested in the cases compiled by the Justice, Peace and Human Rights program.”



The view of leadership has become even more vivid by the examples of Jesus and his teachings about leadership in Matthew 20: 24-28: “When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’”

Since our votes are holy and the political election is a divine activity, we need to choose the next leaders of our nation who are faithful to the model of leadership exemplified by Jesus Christ. We need to cast our votes in the coming elections, conscious of our divine responsibility, and the future of our nation. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a German theologian who was killed by the Nazis for his participation in the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler) says, “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.” Not to vote is to vote. Choosing our leaders is in keeping with the divinely-entrusted task to bring into fruition the Reign of God. The leaders of our nation play an important role in building communities where peace, justice, and equality are the norms of living, not just empty rhetoric mouthed by unscrupulous politicians. Faithfulness in being a steward of this commission is a responsibility of everyone who believes in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a lowly carpenter's son who stood above his social class to wage an unfinished battle against the tyrannical rule of both the spiritual and temporal dictators of his time. It is not unlikely that many wonder how this Jew - of humble origin and without formal education - inspired people from different walks of life to commit themselves to a vision of a society without barriers, a kingdom of hope and wholeness. No doubt his leadership style was captured by most of his early followers.



Let us learn from the servant-leadership model of Jesus Christ on Matthew 20:24-28.

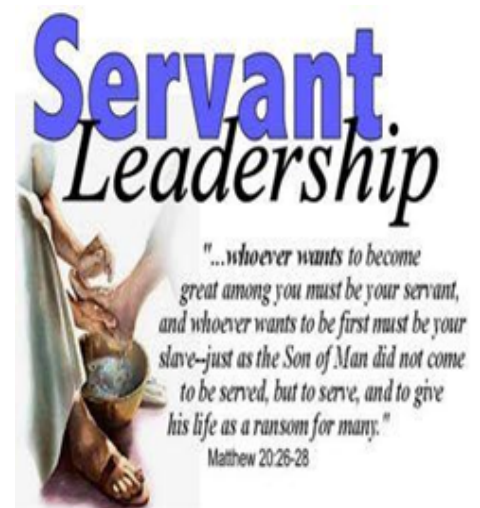
## BACKGROUND OF THE TEXT

Jesus illustrates his earlier comments about how some of the "first will be last and the last first" (Matthew 19:30) with a parable about hired workers. He then clearly tells His disciples about His impending death and resurrection. The mother of James and John asks Jesus to make her sons number two and three in His kingdom. Their desire is for them to be given the powerful positions of being seated on Jesus' left and right hand in His kingdom (Matthew 20:20-21). Jesus makes an obscure reference to His upcoming suffering, asking if they can "drink the cup" ahead of Him. He then explained that they will experience their persecution and suffering, yet greatness in His kingdom won't look like the self-proclaimed authority of the Gentile rulers (Matthew 20:22-23). Upon hearing this, the ten disciples became indignant to them because they were not included in the request. The ten also want to rule with Jesus. Jesus tells the disciples that true greatness won't come by displaying ostentatiously their power and authority as the Gentile leaders do. Instead, they will become great by serving each other, even as a slave does, as Jesus himself has done (Matthew 20:25-28). The warning that the first shall be last and the last be first is embedded in Matthew's notion of the universal nature of the reign of God that Jesus proclaims. That Jesus is a missionary par excellence is explicit in the logion that he came "not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many." Matthew's church adopts this theme to remind all that greatness is achieved through service to others and not in the domination and suppression of others (Manus, 2003). Indeed, the greatest of all will be the one who serves the others as a servant. Jesus, too, has come to serve and not to be served. Jesus then heals two blind men immediately before entering Jerusalem (Matthew 20:29-34).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVANT LEADER: GUIDE IN CHOOSING OUR NEXT LEADERS

### 1. A SERVANT-LEADER LEADS A LIFE OF SERVANTHOOD

The New Testament, specifically the Gospels, affirm that Christ led a life of servanthood. The incarnation passages in John 1 attest to this truth. He was a leader that anchored his brand of leadership as being a servant. This view is also echoed in the epistles, notably the Letter to the Philippians (2:5-8) where the author stressed that Christ "emptied" (kenosis in Greek) himself, meaning he laid aside his privileges, and became a bond-servant - from "a praxis of accumulation" to "praxis of emptiness."



First, Jesus showed a radical abdication of power, privilege, and glory as he entered into the weakness, brokenness, anxieties, and misery of the human condition. It means that Jesus places himself completely shorn of all kinds of security that which God provides. One becomes nothing in following Christ, and it is only in giving up everything that the totality of one's love becomes real and credible. This is the very essence of love. Second, Jesus expressed the kenotic spirit of total solidarity with the object of love or to the victims of injustice, oppression, and exploitation. It means to be one with the poor in their vision, hope, and aspirations, and in their sacrifices, and to be with them whatever the outcome of the struggle might be. And third, Jesus exemplified his readiness and willingness to die. He saw death as an essential component of his total obedience to God and God's mission. In the same manner, embracing the cause of the poor by exposing, opposing, and eliminating structures and forces of injustice and domination that now colonize our given society is a risky undertaking that courts death. To be ready for death means to see the most authentic possibilities that pertain to one's life which in turn actually will lead one to deepest insights and greatest challenge, to rise above the dominant manifestation of sin, and the overzealous concern to establish one's own security (Oracion, 2001). From these key passages we can therefore say that, indeed, Jesus was a servant-leader. Let us now look back and glimpse at vivid pictures provided by everyday situations when Jesus showed his disciples how to be a true leader. These images of Christ could serve as a checklist to help the political aspirants in this coming election to become better servant-leaders and serve as our guide in choosing the next leaders of our nation.

## **2. A SERVANT-LEADER HAS AN IMMEASURABLE LOVE FOR PEOPLE**

The very foundation of Jesus' servant attitude is his immeasurable love for people, most especially those who are pushed to the periphery of society - the poor, deprived, and oppressed. His love led him and his disciples to different cities and towns. They crossed valleys and rivers, climbed mountains, and slept under the starry skies. They walked long distances to be with the sick, to feed the hungry, to play with the children, to teach and learn with the people, to join them in their happiness, or to cry with them in their pains and frustrations. Christ is love incarnate. Do the candidates that we will choose in the coming elections know how to love the way Jesus loved? Are they willing to listen to people who are in pain? Let us pray that humanity's existence alongside an individualistic and self-centered world will not extinguish the flame of love in the hearts of those entrusted with the helm of leadership. A person can never be God's servant-leader if s/he does not have a genuine love for those s/he serves and leads.

### 3. A SERVANT-LEADER LIVES IN HUMILITY

Building on the foundation of God's love, we see another picture of servant-leadership in Christ's humility. During his last meal with his disciples, Jesus must have shocked them when he proposed to wash their feet. "How could he?" They might have thought. In a touching show of humility, we can imagine Jesus kneeling before each of them, gently washing and drying their feet, and in the process revealed to them one of the secrets of being a good leader - a humble heart. This foot-washing drama might not fit today's busy world where every minute counts, but its message still echoes with profound truth then and now. Let us choose leaders who are committed to "washing" someone's feet. Those who are willing and ready to serve and care for a person whom people think, in their air-filled minds, to be a 'lower species in the food chain. It is indeed a challenge for true servant-leaders to treat others with respect, or to humbly seek or receive assistance from concerned people. Jesus' servant attitude is an inspiration for those leaders who are struggling to overcome an "I-know-it-all" mentality. True servant-leaders should not put their faith in titles, academic degrees, or positions in society. Christ could have used all these to gain favor with people, or get the confidence of his small band of followers, but, his humble ways spoke louder, stood taller, and touched their hearts in a way nothing else could do better. Remember, "respect is gained, not forced."

### 4. A SERVANT-LEADER LOVES TO ENCOURAGE AND EMPOWER

One of the things that I believe Jesus loved to do was to encourage and empower people. This is rooted in his faith in the potential of every person. Pictures of a leper whom he touched and healed immediately come to mind. Add to that a prostitute whom he accepted and challenged to lead a new life after being dragged and almost killed by a stone-throwing mob. Jesus talked Zacchaeus into returning the money he stole to its owners and also giving towards the needs of the poor. Let us hope that there will also be political candidates like Zacchaeus who will return the money they stole from the Filipino people. We can opt to vote for the "Zacchaeus" of our time, but we cannot afford to choose the modern-day "Ananias and Sapphira". Jesus' teachings were full of comfort for those who have nothing else in life except the love of God. Even during his most trying moments on the cross, Jesus managed to encourage one of the criminals who was crucified with him that fateful day. Now, that is a true servant-leader. He always had other people in mind: what they needed, where they were, and what they could do to contribute towards a beautiful and prosperous society. How do the candidates of the coming elections fare in this area of servant-leadership? Are they the source of people's hope, inspiration, and empowerment, or are they the reasons why they fall into pits of disappointment and frustration? To be chosen as a leader is not a license to persecute, red-tag, vilify, demonize people; and step on people's ideas, dreams, and aspirations just because they do not agree or mix well with what leaders believe in. Empowerment and encouragement are twin responsibilities for genuine servant-leaders.

## CONCLUSION

Leading is not stepping in front of people and demanding everyone to follow you. It is not being bossy or telling everyone what to do. It is not about having a title like chairman, director, president, or leader. A leader is someone who can influence people to move in a specific direction and that includes being able to lead herself/himself. Leadership begins in the mind and the heart. It requires clear thinking, conviction, vision, and the ability to communicate by words or example.

Anyone who is a true leader must have a sense of service. If a person wants to lead but does not see herself/himself as a servant of those s/he is leading, s/he is destined to fail. When followers of Christ look to his examples, they understand that leading is serving. A good leader knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.

All of the characters of Christ that were mentioned are affirmations of servant-leadership as models taught and practiced by Jesus. It is therefore the pattern that we need to follow if we are to be faithful to Christ's desire to have a serving, leading, and dynamic church. We are to choose the next leaders of our nation. It is fitting that we prepare for this coming election by going back to the essentials of leadership laid down by Jesus Christ. We deserve nothing less. Let us choose leaders who lead by serving, and serve by leading.

## GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do we choose leaders for our nation?
2. What are the criteria or qualities of a good leader that would guide us in our choices?
3. What do you mean by servant-leadership?
4. What are the expressions and embodiments of servant-leadership in our time?
5. How can we be faithful to the model of servant-leadership exemplified by Jesus Christ?

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## UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

877 Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, West Triangle, Quezon City  
P.O. Box 718, Manila Central Post Office, 1099 Ermita, Manila  
Telephone: (632) 8426-1729 \* 8426-3790 \* 436-9157 Fax: (632) 8426-1729  
E-mail: [ogs@uccpchurch.com](mailto:ogs@uccpchurch.com) Website: [www.uccpchurch.com](http://www.uccpchurch.com)

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### THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

#### CHOOSE RIGHTEOUS AND SERVANT LEADERS

#### A Statement of Appeal to the Faithful on the May 2022 Elections

*“When the godly are in authority, the people rejoice.  
But when the wicked are in power, they groan.” --Proverbs 29:2, NLT*

Our country longs for godly leaders who champion the welfare and interest of the people, especially those relegated to the margins of society, and not for their own selfish desire for power and wealth.

We are weary of politicians who, after promising a reversal of people’s desperate situation during the campaign period, lead the people to the quagmire and hopelessness after winning the post. Many Filipinos have lost faith in the merit of election as solution to the insurmountable crises the Filipino people have been facing. We remember five years ago, then Mayor Rodrigo Duterte promised significant changes with his “Change is coming” slogan. Change did not come. Amidst us now are grim realities of backsliding of democracy, good governance and social justice made even worse during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is upsetting that in the Philippine politics there is the proliferation of political dynasty and it is challenging to eventually stop it, unless the electoral laws of the land are changed and the practice of democracy is revolutionized that would prevent continuous political succession from families which have occupied political positions. Political dynasties that ascended to echelons of power do not have the monopoly of competency in governance and accountability. We renounce political dynasty in the Philippines as this concentrates power in the hands of the few.

History tells us that genuine change takes place with people aware of their unique role in affecting such a change as they seriously participate in the election process. It is an imperative of faith to inspire the citizenry to choose leaders of known rectitude and integrity, and whose track record demonstrates clear conviction and commitment to care for the victims of unjust social systems and structures operating in society.

Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, former NCCP General Secretary in a Biblico-Theological Reflection titled “On Electing People to Office,” persuasively emphasized:

*“The national elections is an arena where we can help to secure the election of candidates who are committed to working for the oppressed and the exploited. The elections may not bring about the needed changes, which the people have long clamored and struggled for. Therefore, the more important task for the churches is to accompany the poor in their journey toward their Promised Land, whether in season (election time) or out of season*



*(after election time). For when they shall have thrown off the yoke of oppression and entered their Promised Land, they will surely make the electoral process work for their good.”<sup>1</sup>*

Henceforth, in the spirit of humility and self-examination, churches are called to provide venues where members are empowered to choose genuine servant-leaders in May 2022 elections. The following activities churches can do to involve in the politics of change:

1. Conduct and participate in voter’s education campaigns and promote people’s issues and the need for genuine servant leaders, with special attention to political education among church people (i.e., duty of Christian engagement in politics);
2. Support efforts of people’s organizations in promoting and protecting people’s rights and welfare;
3. Promote candidates with known probity and integrity on human rights, good governance, love of country;
4. Reject candidates whose record and political party affiliation enable injustice, oppression and corruption;
5. Prepare Electoral Watchdog formations, conduct trainings against poll fraud in the automated elections as well as efforts to militarize communities. Volunteer especially in community-level formations;
6. Join and build alliances with the likes of Kontra Daya and People’s Choice Movement.

Our Church’s vision should remind us even as we engage ourselves in the politics of change, “...a responsible, empowered, self-reliant and caring community of Christian believers committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all.”

Let us all do so conscientiously, studiously, and prayerfully, for ourselves, for our people, and for our future as a nation. Let us not allow anymore wicked rulers to govern our country to end the misery of our brothers and sisters well-loved by God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

May the unchanging God of change, freedom and mercy be upon us as we exercise the God-given right to suffrage! Amen!

**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL**  
**11-14 October 2021**  
**Malate, Manila**

  
**Mr. Keith Arleigh Quebral**  
Chairperson

  
**Bishop Melzar D. Labuntog**  
General Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> NCCP, A Guide for Politics of Change and Meaningful Elections, National Council of Churches in the Philippines






**Bishop Joseph G. Agpaoa**  
*North Luzon Jurisdictional Area*



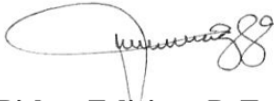
**Bishop Emergencio D. Padillo**  
*Middle Luzon Jurisdictional Area*



**Bishop Joel E. Tendero**  
*South Luzon Jurisdictional Area*



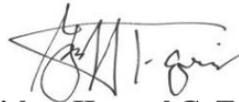
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Middle Luzon Jurisdiction**

Mr. Bernabe Inocian Tampus  
LDC

Rev. Ramil M. Lictawa  
CLC

Rev. Rey Lazaro  
CMAC

Ptr. Elmo Gideon Manapat Jr.  
MNC

Ptr. Armando A. Ramos  
NENEAC

**National Representatives  
Southeast Mindanao Jurisdiction**

Ms. Ceotilde De Jesus Guevarra  
WCLC

Rev. Jolly Hoyle Tubo  
ADC

□

Rev. Rannieh Mercado  
UMC

Rev. Calipay Perez Lubang  
LCSMC

**National Representatives  
South Luzon Jurisdiction**

Ptr. Antonio Guisihan Basig  
PAC

Rev. Eric Baldonado  
UCC

Rev. Melchades Melgar Medina  
NBC

Rev. Jeffrey Joven Rivera  
NESTCON

Rev. Randy Kistoron Pontillas  
OMAC

Rev. Joefre G. Landicho  
OMC

Rev. Jessie Abinales  
STC

Ptr. Dan Balucio  
SBC

Rev. Mario Latido  
BAC

**National Representatives  
East Visayas Jurisdiction**

Rev. Sergio Ramos Jr.  
SIDC

Ms. Bebelyn Balili Inhog  
MC

Mr. Penuel Yepes  
SWLC

Mr. Gerson Apura  
NELBICON

Mr. Arpon Lucero  
NORWESCON

Rev. Joel Calaman Escabas  
CAC

Rev. Annabell Uriarte  
SDDC

Rev. Angelico Cofreros Jr.  
NDDC

Rev. Elmer Zapanta  
SMDC

Rev. Allen Veloso  
SCSDC

Judge Edwin M. Malazarte  
ACS

**National Representatives  
West Visayas Jurisdiction**

Rev. George Aumentado Lungay  
BCI

Rev. Raymundo P. Gelloagan  
CCI

Rev. Rommel Patricio Marcelino  
WVC

Mr. Azil E. Aplao  
NDC

Ms. Juliet Cacaldo Aviles  
CNAC

Rev. Farrah Malahay  
NNC