



# Choose for ‘the actual normal’

“The normal to which we are called is that of the Kingdom of God”.

*Letter from the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Netherlands  
on the occasion of the elections to the House of Representatives on 17 March  
2021*

On 17 March 2021, the elections for the members of the Lower House of Parliament will take place. We call on Catholics to make their voices heard. Voting is not only a right and a privilege, but also an important task through which we let politicians know the kind of society in which we want to live. We would like to think about this together with you as Christian citizens.

## **Choose the actual normal**

As Christians, also during the coronavirus pandemic, we are guided by faith, hope and love. We look ahead and pause to consider how we want to move forward after the coronavirus crisis. The pandemic shows our powerlessness and our shortcomings. The virus exposes the inequality between people even more than already is the case. Therefore, after the coronavirus pandemic, we must not return to the ‘old normal’ of before the crisis, nor to any ‘new normal’. It can be done differently. In the old normal, there was injustice, violence and environmental pollution. Now, more than ever, we have the opportunity to revitalise the society. We judge politicians on their commitment to a society that rewards participation, care, solidarity and fairness. Politicians try to offer hope and perspective in their programmes in a way that stems from their fundamental convictions. In the light of a conscience shaped by the Gospel, we should take a critical look at their ideas on how our country should be governed and how existing problems should be dealt with. “The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politicians. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* 2.28).

## **Choose for life**

We are convinced of the dignity of every human being. It is important to see what politicians think about the essential dignity of every human being. As people of faith, we make choices based on that dignity and the values, rights and duties that flow from it. Making choices is about our actions. We think through the meaning of the Christian faith in our daily lives. How do we want to live with others? How do we structure the society? It is about economics, labour relations and care for creation. Based on our faith, we want a society in which subsidiarity, solidarity, genuine care for the most disadvantaged and a fair and equitable distribution of wealth are the guiding principles for political action. The same applies to respect for freedom of expression and religious freedom. The primary consideration is respect for the inviolability of human life from conception to natural death, irrespective of the state it is in. The Christian belief in the dignity of every human life requires the promotion and protection of a ‘culture of life’. We reject abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide and the sacrifice of embryos for scientific research. “Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary” (Pope Benedict XVI at his inauguration).

## **Choose for an open society**

A culture of life should include an open society, which Pope Francis advocates in his encyclical ‘Fratelli tutti’ (Assisi 3 October 2020). By an open society he means a society in which people are open to fellow human beings, even if they are different: to the vulnerable, to refugees and migrants. It is good that the government has generous criteria for the admission of refugees and migrants, although it can regulate immigration from its special responsibility for the common good. The Pope calls for a true encounter between people that excludes no one. In short, a society in which people are given the opportunity to develop freely, to participate in society and to take responsibility for themselves and their fellow human beings. Everyone has the right to access the necessary services that we as a society must provide. That means support for volunteers and carers, accessible debt assistance, adequate healthcare, help for job-seekers, affordable housing, support for families and sufficient income. The low level of financial assistance is leading people down in a spiral. Should we not provide more financial support and other types of support to those who, together with their families, live below the poverty line? This question also applies to the families who are under pressure as a result of the coronavirus measures. Also, generally speaking, political measures are desirable to support the family and give young people the opportunity to start a family with children and to rent or buy affordable housing. An open society offers room for differences and prevents people from not being allowed to have and express opinions that deviate from public opinion. A society such as this protects the rights of all and the values of minorities. Parents have the right to raise their children according to their beliefs. That is why freedom of education is so important and

why it is good that educational institutions are financed with public money. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that followers of a particular religion or worldview also pay taxes. In an open society, freedom of religion, allowing believers to live and celebrate their faith openly and not only behind their front doors, is naturally.

### **Choose for the common good**

For Christians, the principle of the common good is central to an open society. Pope Francis opposes excessive market thinking. This makes people subordinate to the realisation of the personal interests of a few. Rather than being a goal, it degrades people to a mere means and tramples on the respect due to their human dignity. Moral values and a sense of responsibility for the common good are then sorely lacking. This is being sacrificed to economic interests.

Our society is highly individualised. This makes contacts between people more tenuous and leads to deep loneliness among large groups of people of all ages. This puts a strain on their mutual solidarity. Solidarity is much more than just helping each other from time to time. Solidarity means being able to empathise with your fellow human beings and thinking and acting together as a community for the common good while respecting each other's differences.

### **Choose as brothers and sisters**

The conviction that we are brothers and sisters must be the spiritual heart of politics. That means accepting each other, openness towards others, attention to the vulnerable groups and room for differences. It saves us from self-interest and leads us to solidarity and cooperation.

Strong debate is useful for putting good development into motion, as long as we respect freedom of expression and treat each other with respect, even if we have very different points of view.

Brothers and sisters depend on each other. They share a common future for which they are jointly responsible. Christian brothers and sisters do not simply choose a 'different normal', but rather the 'actual normal'.

### **Choose the normal of the Kingdom of God**

"The normality to which we are called is that of the Kingdom of God, where 'the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them'. (Matthew 11:5). And nobody plays dumb by looking the other way. That is what we have to do in order to change", Pope Francis explained (Catechesis audience 30 September 2020). The coronavirus pandemic shows our interconnectedness. The actual normal has already begun. The vast majority of healthy people are taking vulnerable people into account. Young people are helping the elderly. We are being confronted with our own vulnerability and that of others. The most important commandment that Jesus gave us, to love God and our neighbour, implies solidarity with those affected by the pandemic, who have lost their jobs and livelihoods and who are affected by insecurity, loneliness, illness and death. "In the end, we can only emerge stronger from this crisis by building a culture of care, responsibility, harmony and listening to each other," Pope Francis explains (encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti', Chapter 6). In the normal of God's Kingdom, everyone receives his daily bread and shares it with his fellow men, and society is organised in such a way that it is primarily focused on contributing to the common good, sharing and giving, but not on owning and excluding (cf. Matthew 14:13-21).

The upcoming elections present Christian voters with many challenges. It is important to look beyond pure party politics. It is about reading campaigns critically and electing representatives who we know will take fundamental values as the basis for their political actions.

We thank politicians for their willingness to take responsibility for others. We pray for them for God's Spirit of wisdom, insight and perseverance. After all: "Politics is an exalted vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, since politicians strive for the common good" (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation 'Evangelii Gaudium', no. 205).

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The Roman Catholic Bishops of the Netherlands