



# Everyone should be able to participate

*'Human dignity is the basis for cooperation'*

*Letter from the Roman Catholic bishops of the Netherlands*

*on the occasion of the elections of the House of Representatives on 22 November 2023*

On 22 November, we will elect the members of the House of Representatives. Together with you, as citizens of faith, we want to reflect on the good we can do for society by using our vote. We face great challenges and the developing of far-reaching visions on being human. In view of the elections, we want to reflect on this with you.

## **What is good for all**

How we as believing citizens view life and living together defined by our faith and responsibility determines how we want to organize the Netherlands. That we live in a democracy means not only that we can vote, but also that we do so with an eye on what is good for all and not just what is good for ourselves. Pope Francis calls this "a better kind of politics, a politics that truly serves the common good" (Fratelli tutti 2020, no 154).

This 'better' politics pursues the common good by recognizing the dignity of every human being and the solidarity we all share. Such recognition helps politicians find answers to current challenges and in shaping a society in which everyone comes into their own. There is also room for those who come from elsewhere, are in need and require our care. All people are equal in dignity. Poverty, lack of education and exclusion threaten that dignity. We need social arrangements that allow everyone to participate.

Human dignity is the basis for cooperation and calls for developing talents in freedom, equality, creativity, and solidarity. Agreements are needed that focus the economy even more clearly on the common good. In today's society, the value of people is too often determined from a one-sided perspective market economy. This galvanizes contacts between people. Our society is individualized. The loneliness in which more and more people live means that we are becoming a society of strangers. However, a human being can only develop properly through and with other people. Being human is always being a fellow human.

Everyone should have access to services. Livelihood security means not only sufficient income, but also support for community life, support for volunteers and informal carers, accessible debt relief, accessible education, sufficient and affordable housing, and support for families. We can assess legislation and political policies for their impact on a society where participation, care and fairness are rewarded.

## **Culture of life**

From our faith, we choose respect and equality. Underlying this is the inviolability of human life, regardless of its state or stage. Our belief in the dignity of every human being calls for the promotion and protection of a 'culture of life' in which abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide have no place. Every human being is willed by God. This means that human dignity does not depend on illness, health, life expectancy or quality of life. The idea that gender is neither innate nor immutable is gaining ground and is taught in schools as self-determination. This idea is incompatible with the Christian view of human life.

## **Gender theory**

In all sectors of society, the most vicious gender theory is currently being widely implemented. This gender theory assumes that the social role of being male or female (gender) can be completely separated from biological sex. Clearly, gender roles can undergo changes under the influence of social, economic and cultural factors. However, there are constant elements in gender role that derive from biological sex. These also flow from the essence of the human person, as the body is an essential dimension of the human being. These constant elements are the mutual God-willed complementarity between man and woman, marriage, which is only possible between a man and a woman, as well as fatherhood and motherhood. Therefore, a total decoupling of gender roles and biological sex is not possible.

Pope Francis says: "It is undeniable that the biological sex (gender) and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated from each other" (Amoris Laetitia 2016, no 56).

### **Care for creation**

Human dignity and concern for the environment go hand in hand. It is urgent to continue working to generate energy more sustainably and consume it more economically to keep the earth livable and prevent even more serious damage. Accelerated global cooperation is essential to address the climate crisis (Laudate Deum 2023, no. 42). The earth is a gift from God, a gift we want to cherish and protect. Those who violate creation, thereby violate the Creator (Laudate Deum 2023, no 62-73). The energy transition we face is not easy. Short-term thinking offers no solution to the ecological crisis. It requires inspiration, dialogue on novel approaches, vision for the future and concrete action.

### **Culture of encounter**

We are deeply concerned about growing divisions and increased fears in our country due to conflicts elsewhere in the world, which have as a result that Jews as well as Muslims in our society, are unfairly targeted and negatively affected. That there are compatriots who no longer dare to walk the streets recognizably and whose homes and buildings of assembly have to be secured, is unacceptable.

Many do not feel seen. An increasing number of people are becoming distanced from politics. Indifference, anger, intolerance, and polarization paralyze our collective commitment to the common good. Restoring trust in politicians and the political process requires a broad vision of the future that includes everyone. Pope Francis calls for a "culture of authentic encounter". According to him, this also means to "respect and listen to each other, including those with whom we may strongly disagree" (Pope Francis, speech lawmakers 26 August 2023).

The Catholic Church views the organization of society from the order that God placed in creation. This also means that we respect what people can do themselves and devote to a strong civil society. From the government, we ask for support and protection. Pope Francis: "The common good requires the commitment of all. If everyone does their part, and if no one is excluded, we can restore good relations at the community, on national and international levels, as well as in harmony with nature" (Laudato Si', 2015, no. 236). Common good is promoted not only by connecting people, but also by uniting them in common projects such as Europe, which began as a peace project by building trust and cooperation.

Politicians develop policies resulting in concrete actions. Together with them and everyone else, we want to build a society based on human dignity, where people look after each other and where everyone can participate. Responsibility, connection, and solidarity are rooted in faith and nourished by prayer. The language of witness and love transforms every person into a neighbor. Everyone deserves our nearness. Together with you, as believing citizens, we stand for the principles of the message of Christ in society. Based on our mission to be the 'salt of the earth', we make a difference (Matthew 5.13).

### **Baarn, 2 November 2023**

The Roman Catholic bishops of the Netherlands