



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF INDIA (CBCI)

C.B.C.I. Centre, 1 Ashok Place, Near Gole Dakkhana, New Delhi-110 001. India

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**Cardinal Oswald Gracias**

President

## PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA

Our country is in an election mode. The dates for the General Elections have been announced. From April 11 – May 19, 2019, the country will be going through the gigantic process of elections to choose our members of Parliament. Hundreds of millions will go to vote in the largest democracy in the world: we are more than all of Europe and Australia put together! All of us are truly proud of our country: the generally peaceful election process getting better each time as every Government tries to make improvements. India can truly be a model for other countries to imitate and adapt to local circumstances.

As Pastors of our people, we Bishops consider it is our duty to address you through this Pastoral Letter so that joining hands with all people of good will, our community can effectively contribute to shaping the future of our nation.

At the very outset we wish to make it clear that the Catholic Church does not identify herself with or side any political party. This is the stated policy of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, as before every election we feel called to give some general guidance to our people for the good of our country. Our country has made great progress because of advancement of science and technology. Infrastructure and public facilities have improved. We are a fast growing economy. Every government has contributed to the great progress that has been made over the years. There is great hope for the future. At the same time there are several areas of concern. The big gap between the rich and the poor seems to be widening. Many unorganized and casual labourers are barely able to survive with what they earn. Farmers and those in agricultural sector are under serious stress. Further, ethics is losing primacy as the guiding principle of society. Economics seems to be driving forces behind many decisions. India is a spiritual nation, and yet God is slowly being pushed to the periphery. It is in this context and at this moment in history that we are going into elections.

We remind ourselves first of all of our duty to exercise our vote. Every citizen above 18 years has the right to vote, but voting is also a sacred obligation we owe to our country. All our Parish Priests are urged to impress on our people this obligation. Every single vote does count. Hence, we owe it to ourselves, to our children and to our country to fulfil this sacred duty and thus get involved in bettering the direction of our nation.

I urge every community to pray and to discern in prayer what is best for our country. We have to vote judiciously. The Catholic Church hopes that the General Elections will give us leaders who listen to the people, understand their anxieties and their needs and respond effectively.

We need leaders in India who understand that authority is service and therefore:

1. work for an economy that seeks specially to help the poor and under privileged, protecting their dignity, working for their uplift and enabling them to play a role in nation building.
2. ensure a totally safe environment for all people, particularly women and children.
3. safeguard the rights of tribals over land, water and forests.
4. take particular care of Dalits and ensure they are not discriminated against, granting equal rights to all Dalits.



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5. promote communal harmony and a spirit of national integration through inter-religious dialogue and understanding.
6. take steps to protect the environment, preserving the riches of nature for future generations.

These are national issues. There would be other local and particular needs to be considered as well.

We urge our people to spend time in prayer in Church, and at home, so as to be able to discern what is best for India and for our common good. All of us must pray ardently for a good government. God sent his Son Jesus that we may have life and life in its fullness (John 10:10). With the Lord's strength and guided by the Spirit we must all work unitedly for a better India. We lift our country to Mother Mary asking her to always protect our country and bring us abundant graces. God bless India!

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March 14, 2019

\* **Oswald Cardinal Gracias**  
Archbishop of Bombay &  
President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India