

An abstract painting with vibrant, thick brushstrokes in red, blue, yellow, green, and white, creating a textured and energetic background. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular area that is partially covered by a grey rectangle.

# P Portrait of an IDEAL Leader

*Educating Nigerians  
for Political Participation Based on the  
Catholic Social Teaching.*

*“Politics is a noble mission to promote the common good. As such, it is about ethics and principles as well as issues, candidates, and officeholders. To engage in 'politics,' then, is more than getting involved in current polemics and debates; it is about acting with others and through institutions for the benefit of all. The fact that much of our political rhetoric has become very negative and that political polarization seems to have grown should not dissuade us from the high calling to work for a [country] that allows everyone to thrive, a [country] in which all persons, all families, have what they need to fulfil their God-given destiny. In our democracy, one aspect of this task for all of us requires that we weigh issues and related policies. In this brief summary, we [...] call attention to issues with significant moral dimensions that should be carefully considered in each campaign and as policy decisions are made in the years to come” (Faithful citizenship, 2015, no. 63).*

After a careful reflection of the Nigerian political landscape, of its history and peoples, we have been able to draw up a number of qualities that we believe must be exhibited by the ideal candidate.

## **The ideal candidate is one who:**

- ✓ Is a person of character and good-standing, with a verifiable track record of competence, fairness and discipline.
- ✓ Is not a beneficiary of donations from questionable or unscrupulous sources.
- ✓ Is magnanimous in victory
- ✓ Is a bridge-builder.
- ✓ Considers themselves as Nigerian first.
- ✓ Recognizes the equality of all Nigerians before the law regardless of ethnicity, religion, class and political affiliation and uphold the rights of all without prejudice.
- ✓ Is impartial in the discharge of their duties
- ✓ Recognizes religious freedom.
- ✓ Must be a person of reason.
- ✓ Upholds the rule of law.
- ✓ Is a Peacemaker and person of dialogue
- ✓ A person of compassion, who values even the least human life, regardless of ethnicity and religion.
- ✓ Recognizes the sanctity of human life from conception to its natural end.
- ✓ Recognizes the importance of family as historically, traditionally understood, as the stable unit of society and promote/support it.
- ✓ Will respect freedom of speech, of information, and of the press
- ✓ Will champion the rights of workers.
- ✓ Has concrete plans to diversify the Nigerian economy with sound policies untainted by nepotism, cronyism or ethnicism.
- ✓ Recognizes the potential of our youth.
- ✓ Is a visionary
- ✓ Knows when to bow out.
- ✓ Will conduct free and fair elections and abide by the results.

# TO THE ELECTORATE

To the electorate, our fellow Nigerians, we say that the time has come. We have been given our talents, namely our votes, with which to trade. Register and vote! Participate in the electoral exercise! Your vote always counts, even when you think it doesn't, for the very act of going to vote is in itself an act of freedom, an act of defiance against those who seek to rob you of your mandate. That little act of defiance will continue to grow, until someday it becomes a force that cannot be denied. But it all starts with one vote.

*“We encourage all citizens, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity meaningfully to participate in building the culture of life. Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power. We must exercise that power in ways that defend human life, especially those of God's children who are unborn, disabled or otherwise vulnerable. We get the public officials we deserve. Their virtue – or lack thereof – is a judgment not only on them, but on us. Because of this, we urge our fellow citizens to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest” (Living the Gospel of Life, 1998, no. 33).*

Let us therefore trade our votes wisely in ways that will be profitable to that portion of the kingdom that has been entrusted to us – our country Nigeria, and not bury it in the ground (cf Matthew 25:18) and wait for the master to miraculously set Nigeria right on his return. Let us not trade it for selfish, short-term gain, as Esau traded his birthright for some bread and lentil stew (Genesis 25:29-34). Let us not resort to violence, but respect one another's political choices.

## LET US LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES

Let us reflect prayerfully on the points laid down in these guidelines and make our choices accordingly. Let us allow ourselves be guided by sound principles and not be swayed by divisive rhetoric.

Let us think always of the common good rather than narrow sectarian interests. We are in this together, and the sooner we realize that it's only by working together – rather than at one another's expense – that we can make it to the Promised Land, the better for us all.

Let us therefore look for leaders who will lead us in the path of peace, prosperity and progress; where they come from or what they believe is secondary. Let us not join those who say of the righteous leader, “We do not want this man to be our king” (Luke 19:14).

Let us remember that Egypt prospered because of Joseph, a foreigner who was raised to the right hand of the pharaoh, and that Ruth, another foreigner, became the great-grandmother of a king and the ancestress of an even mightier king, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us not forget Esther, a foreigner who God raised to the position of queen in a foreign land. Nor can we forget that even the foreign king, Cyrus, was an instrument of God (Isaiah 44:23-45:8), for we are all his to use as he wills. Let us remember that the Lord raised a mighty king for his people from a lowly shepherd, the youngest of his father's eight sons (1 Samuel 16:6-13). For our ways are not the ways of the Lord (cf Isaiah 55:8-9), who uses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise (cf 1 Corinthians 1:27), raising up the lowly while casting down the mighty from their thrones (cf Luke 1:52). In short, to borrow the words of Martin Luther King Jr., let us evaluate our leaders, and those who aspire to leadership, by the content of their character rather than the tongue they speak or the creed they profess.

## CONCLUSION

There are those who will argue that these guidelines are unrealistic, especially in the here and now of Nigerian politics. We acknowledge that nobody is perfect. However, our aim first and foremost is to propose an ideal against which any candidate may be measured, not just today, but at any point in time.

But also, this document is intended to shape our outlook, to enable us rediscover our dignity as Nigerians and children of the Most High, and to recognize this same dignity in our fellow Nigerians whoever they may be, wherever they may be, and whatever they believe.

While Rome wasn't built in a day, we do not expect that we will see the fruits of this work overnight, perhaps not even in a lifetime. But if we are to start that change, we must begin to know better, to expect better...

...and to demand better.

## New Conscience Initiative (NCI)

is a non-partisan group interested in educating Nigerian Catholics, and all Nigerians of good will, on political participation, based on the rich Catholic Social Teaching tradition. NCI expresses the opinion of its members: It is not the official voice of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. Please use as necessary but credit NCI. Email: [theidealleader2019@gmail.com](mailto:theidealleader2019@gmail.com)