

2019 Independence Message from Bishop Gabriel Malzaire

Independence & Hope “Saluting Resilience and Rejuvenation ... Two Years On”

In the humdrum of everyday life, every individual and every group of persons need objects of *hope* to sustain them on the journey towards their particular vision of ultimate fulfilment. This is no less true for a nation. Forty-one (41) years ago our nation, Dominica, took the major step towards self-determination out of a conviction that we have what it takes to chart a course towards development in keeping with our deepest sentiments regarding our needs as a people. A retrospective glance at the socio-cultural and socio-political climate of 1978, one is certain to conclude that it was a great risk.

In addition to the turbulent seas on which the Nation had set itself, the breaking from the “safe” administrative and defence ties with the Queen, came Hurricane David in its first ten months. It was no less than a Baptism by fire, as put in biblical parlance. However, here we are, forty-one years hence, having traversed countless trials and challenges, whether by natural causes, like *Misses Erika* and *Maria*, or those caused by our many human inadequacies. Thus, the applicability of this year’s national Theme: “*Saluting Resilience and Rejuvenation ...Two Years On*” (or rather *41 Years On*).

Every year we gather as a nation around this historic occasion to celebrate achievements and to recommit ourselves to nation building with the tacit intention to avoid the errors of the past. In that regard, therefore, every Independence celebration is at one and the same time a moment of festivity and reflection.

This year, 2019, is of particular significance, in that, we are on the eve of another very important event in the life of our people. I am referring to the upcoming General Elections, in which every eligible Dominican voter is afforded the opportunity and privilege of having a say in the governance of this beloved country. Like *Independence* it is one of the greatest symbols of the *maturity* of a nation. As such, therefore, we are duty bound to act accordingly. While enjoying the full benefit of this festive moment, I wish to invite every patriotic national, to take some time to ponder deeply on the future of our country, as it prepares to engage in this “sacred act”.

Therefore, I challenge all citizens: Government, Parliamentary Opposition, the religious community, the Media Association and the entire civil society to take a conscientious look at the *Election Code* issued by the Dominica Christian Council and which has served throughout the years of Independence, to guide the conduct of the various persons and groups during this pre-election period. It is as follows:

ELECTION CODE

PREAMBLE

Recognizing that the People of Dominica, through the Constitution, have affirmed their belief in principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God and faith in fundamental rights and freedoms;

Acknowledging that men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law; and
Desiring the continuance of a democratic society in which all persons may, to the extent of their capacity, play some part in the institutions of national life and thus develop and maintain due respect for lawfully constituted authority;

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WE AS POLITICAL PARTIES, POLITICIANS AND PARTY SUPPORTERS AGREE:

1. To address issues and to avoid character assassination and/or mud-slinging (“*mepuis*”) about our opponents;
2. To avoid half-truths and mis-representations which confuse issues and mislead the electorate;
3. To avoid language or behaviour that is intolerant of others on account of their colour, sex or creed;
4. To uphold the laws of this country regulating the conduct of elections;
5. To vigorously resist the temptation to use bribery or the threat of victimization in any form or fashion in order to gain votes or to intimidate the electorate;
6. To avoid all forms of violence and to do everything possible to defuse any situation which might lead to violence;
7. To discourage all persons from using walls and buildings for offensive inscriptions and graffiti; and
8. To remember that those elected to office as parliamentarians are called to be faithful stewards and that accountability in office should be their prime commitment.

WE AS CITIZENS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE AGREE:

1. To recognize that every adult citizen has the privilege to vote according to his or her conscience, and therefore the duty not to neglect to exercise this precious right;
2. To make an effort to know the parties, their aims, objectives and policies in order to make a reasonable choice;
3. To vote as free persons and not to debase ourselves by selling our votes for money or any personal favour;
4. To oppose and reject any candidates who use bribery, intimidation or threats of violence to win votes;
5. To reject any invitation to join in the harassment of those whose political views are different from ours;
6. To consider that integrity, impartiality, good character and sound judgment are qualities required of those to be chosen;
7. To remember that no political or economic system is perfect; and
8. To accept the verdict of the majority, even if this differs from how one has voted in accordance with one’s conscience.

WE AS PERSONNEL OF THE MEDIA AGREE:

1. To remember the tremendous influence, we wield over the public;
2. To discharge our responsibility in reporting the news and views with bias toward none and in fairness to all;
3. To avoid the temptation of sensational reporting;
4. To be scrupulous in the search for what is true and honest; and
5. To remember that the freedom of the Press is one of the pillars to build up the community rather than to destroy it.

WE AS PASTORS AND PREACHERS AGREE:

1. To recognize that our basic obligation is to promote unity in our communities, and therefore to refrain from saying or doing anything likely to be interpreted as partisan politics; and

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2. To recognize our responsibility to give, at all times and especially during the period before and up to election time, moral and spiritual guidance to our flocks.

It is my hope that in the days to come the representatives of the various groups: the Dominica Labour Party, United Workers Party, Freedom Party, Dominica Christian Council, Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches and the Media Association will meet to affix their signatures to the document as a sign of their commitment to work for Justice, Love and Peace in this great country, thus continuing on the trajectory of *hope* for the future that we all deserve. May the good Lord take us safely through this important time of decision-making.

Happy Independence to everyone!