CALL FOR NATIONAL SABBATH FOR TRUST AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING

7th October 2019

We, the leaders of the ZHOCD made up of EFZ, UDACIZA, ZCBC and ZCC, met at the Africa Synod House on the 7th of October 2019 to consider the currently unfolding national crisis in its totality and to propose what we believe is a comprehensive but sustainable solution to it. We have prayerfully come to the conclusion that in light of the current political paralysis, deepening mistrust and the dehumanizing economic decline, the nation will need to take a bold decision to address the root causes of the our national challenges that have a very long history and will not be fully resolved by one entity. In this light we are calling the nation to SABBATH on all political contestation for a period of seven years to allow for the rebuilding of trust and confidence, reset our politics and chart a shared way forward towards a comprehensive economic recovery path in a non-competitive political environment. This position builds on the founding vision of the 2006 church discussion document, the Zimbabwe We Want. The position also builds on the proposal from the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations Episcopal Conference at the Large City Hall, Bulawayo of 08-09 May 2019.

1. The idea of the SABBATH is a deep theological theme in the Old and New Testaments of the bible and in Church tradition. It is based on God's command to his people to set aside the seventh day for a rest. Seven years were also considered as SABBATH years. Seven seven-year sabbaths or forty-nine years constituted what was called the Jubilee season. In this Jubilee season, land would be left fallow so that it could recover its nutrients. Debts would be forgiven. New relationships would be built and God would bless his people. Since its independence in 1980, Zimbabwe reaches her Jubilee year in 2029. The nation could use the coming period to usher in a true Jubilee for the nation by removing all political contestation from the land and focus the period on healing past wounds, recover the economy, and build a new political culture of cooperation focused on nation-building.

2. The current deteriorating economic crisis which is characterized by systemic corruption, shortages of fuel, prices going out of control and collapse of the health sector needs to be built from the ground with everyone's support. As we are meeting, doctors are on strike and other workers such as teachers are threatening the same as they find it difficult to make ends meet with their current remunerations. According to the ZimVAC figures for 2019, an estimated 7.7 million Zimbabweans are in need of food assistance due to drought. Malnutrition and the interruption of basic services such as health and education may have both immediate and long-term negative impact. When this is combined with high levels of unemployment, stagnant salaries and the loss of buying power of salaries for those who are still employed, one can only conclude that Zimbabwe needs an urgent and holistic solution in which the grassroots, organized society and political and policy sectors should contribute to and own.

3. The current political paralysis and logjam characterized by the failure of the ruling party and the main opposition party to find a workable collaborative model is an issue of great concern. The fact that the two main political parties remain stuck in the post-election mode and will soon embark on a new election mode means that Zimbabwe is unlikely to realize any meaningful engagement between these parties towards a shared constitutional alignment agenda. Without a shared approach to national processes, the

efforts by one are undermined by the other, while any positive contribution towards the national good by each is read only within a party-political perspective. We foresee that, whichever political party wins an election, the paralysis will remain, if the opposing parties do not learn how to collaborate. It is the people who will continue to suffer if as a nation we fail to establish some unity in diversity.

4. Zimbabwe has not yet undergone healing from the various periods of national hurt. While we recognize the efforts of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission, the failure of the nation to fully bring healing and mutually acceptable closure to the long past, immediate past and recent past means that hatred fossilizes and the propensity for revenge grows. Casual references to ethnicity as the organizing principle for political mobilization threatens national stability in ways many may not be aware of.

5. Having looked at these issues in a holistic fashion, the Church leaders have observed that the current environment does not allow for meaningful political reforms nor is it conducive for an inclusive economic participation for ordinary citizens. Such an environment of toxic political relations also renders our international re-engagement process futile, which international isolation inhibits investor confidence and slow economic growth. Such a polarized environment weakens respect for national institutions such as the courts, the police and the security sectors. Once such institutions are viewed as partisan and lacking in independence, it becomes impossible to ellicit cooperation among the policy and political actors to drive a national reform process in the best interests of the nation.

6. The Church leaders have also realized that since 2000, election periods have been characterized by violence and paralyzing polarization and have helped to provoke high levels of mistrust. On one hand, the ruling party has blamed the opposition for selective recognition of electoral processes and for celebrating when results go in their favor while crying foul when results go in favor of the incumbents. On the other hand, the opposition has continued to point to gross human rights violations and the skewed political playing field. Different observers and independent commissions have raised the need for a broad-based and comprehensive national dialogue to find lasting solution to these challenges and mutual accusation. What has not been proposed is the environment conducive enough to allow for such transformative national conversation to bring hope. It is such a solution the Church is humbly proposing to the nation.

7. While all the political bickering is continuing, the basic concern for the ordinary citizen across the political divide is to get on with their personal development. In the current context, the citizens have grown weary from struggling against the never-ending waves of electoral polarization that undermine their hard work, disrupt community building and erode progress. The danger is that, the more citizens lose confidence in democratic processes such as elections, the more apathetic they will become, and the less representative political offices will become. We must rescue this situation by providing, not yet other piecemeal solutions. What we need is a proper break with the current paralysis and move towards real renewal and transformation.

8. It is in this light that the Church leaders are proposing a national seven-year SABBATH period for the purposes of (a) establishing an emergency recovery mechanism to address the dire national situation, especially for the most vulnerable communities, (b) rebuilding trust and confidence by healing all the hurts of the past, (c) developing a shared national reform agenda to deepen our democracy, (d) establishing a shared and inclusive national economic vision. The SABBATH proposal entails the suspension of the constitutional provision of elections but such a deficiency will be redressed through a national referendum. The national referendum question would seek to ascertain from all Zimbabweans whether they agree with a proposal for a seven-year suspension of all political contestation for the sake of rebuilding trust and confidence by healing to all hurts of the past, sharing and executing a shared constitutional and political national reform agenda, and establishing and implementing a shared national economic vision.

9. The Church leaders are not proposing any detailed government structure of the SABBATH season. Such an implementation structure must emerge from a process of consultation of citizens at different layers of society. The structure will take into consideration the institutional and systemic requirements to achieve the objectives and safeguard the outcomes of the SABBATH. Through this SABBATH call, the church leaders are soliciting for national acceptance of the seven-year SABBATH period as a season for trust and confidence building, resetting of national politics, and creating an appropriate environment for economic recovery outside party political competition. The assumption is that once the principle receives national acceptance through a referendum, a consultative process to design the operationalization framework of the SABBATH season will be established through a broad-based and comprehensive national dialogue involving all levels of society.

10. Taking into consideration that the SABBATH call is a holistic and long-term process, but also being aware that we are currently faced with a national humanitarian and emergency situation, we as the church commit ourselves to upscaling our efforts towards health, education, development and humanitarian assistance. In the same vein, we call upon all political actors, state and non-state actors to respond to the immediate need for humanitarian assistance and social services to alleviate the suffering of Zimbabweans.

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert…I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43: 18-19, 25)