

A Christian Public Witness

A Statement by Nelson Mandela Bay Churches on the 2026 Local Government Elections

Executive Summary

This statement presents a shared Christian perspective on the Local Government Elections taking place on 4 November 2026. Churches in Nelson Mandela Bay do not endorse any political party or candidate. We call on citizens to make informed and responsible choices based on biblical values, reliable information and concern for the wellbeing of the whole city.

Christians are called to be salt and light and to seek the wellbeing of the communities in which they live. Voting is one way of accepting responsibility for our neighbours and helping to shape the city's future. Our concern includes people in townships, informal settlements, suburbs and rural communities, across every race, language, income group, gender, age and physical ability.

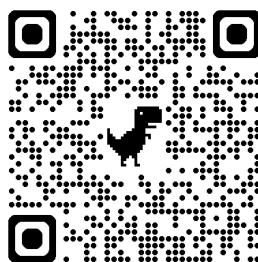
Voters should look for leaders who are wise, honest, competent, accountable and committed to service rather than status or personal gain. Candidates and parties should be assessed by their character, experience, record of service and ability to fulfil realistic promises. This includes their ability to oversee municipal finances, infrastructure, planning and the delivery of basic services.

A metropolitan council must provide dependable water, sanitation, electricity, refuse removal, roads, transport and other municipal services. It must also maintain safe public spaces, support local development, manage public money responsibly, prevent corruption and involve residents in decision-making. Services must be delivered fairly, especially to communities that have experienced long-standing neglect.

Municipal failure affects everyone, but its heaviest burden often falls on poor households, unemployed young people, women, older persons and people with disabilities. Voters should therefore examine whether ward candidates understand local communities and whether party PR lists include trustworthy and capable women and men with the knowledge needed to govern effectively.

Every voter in Nelson Mandela Bay receives two secret ballots: one for a ward candidate and one for a political party. Both votes help determine the composition and quality of the municipal council.

Many residents have lost confidence after years of broken promises and poor services. Their disappointment is understandable, but staying away leaves the choice of future leaders to others. We therefore call on every eligible voter to become informed, use both votes carefully and participate freely and courageously. The future of Nelson Mandela Bay will be shaped by those who show up and vote.



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Key insights for responsible voting

As Christians and citizens, we are called to seek the wellbeing of the whole city. Responsible voting means looking beyond party loyalty, slogans and promises, and carefully considering the character, competence and service record of candidates and parties. Keep these key principles in mind:

- **Christian responsibility to vote:** Use your vote as a practical way of serving your neighbours and seeking the wellbeing of Nelson Mandela Bay.
- **Biblical guidelines:** Let truth, justice, compassion and respect for every person's dignity guide your choice—not fear, prejudice, anger or blind loyalty.
- **Choosing responsible and competent leaders:** Support leaders who are honest, capable, accountable and committed to service rather than status, power or personal gain.
- **Main areas to assess competence and performance:** Ask whether candidates and parties can govern responsibly, manage public money and deliver reliable services fairly across the whole city.
- **Why local government fails:** Reject leaders who put political loyalty, personal interests or party connections above competence, accountability and the needs of residents.
- **The impact of failed local government:** Remember that poor governance damages livelihoods, safety and dignity, with the heaviest burden often falling on poor households, unemployed people, women, older persons and people with disabilities.
- **Overcoming voter apathy:** Disappointment is understandable, but staying away leaves the choice of the city's leaders to others.
- **Motivation to vote:** Voting is both a right and a responsibility because it helps determine who governs, how public money is spent and whether services improve.
- **Who benefits from low voter turnout:** Poorly performing leaders and well-organised political groups benefit when dissatisfied citizens do not vote.
- **The voting system (two votes):** Use both your secret votes carefully—one for a ward candidate and one for a political party.
- **Ward and PR councillors:** Choose a ward candidate who will represent your community well, and a party whose PR list contains trustworthy people with the skills needed to govern the whole metro.
- **Examine the candidates:** Investigate candidates' character, experience, competence and record of service, and do not base your decision on party names or campaign promises alone.
- **Your vote matters:** Show up, make an informed choice and use both votes to support responsible leadership and a better future for everyone.
- **Practical voter information:** Before election day, confirm your voting station, check what identification you need, learn about special votes and candidate lists, and remember that assistance is available and your vote remains secret.

¹ This document and graphics for use on social media are available at:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RR5d2tDe37qol6dW_TNSuTptnDExSvYm?usp=sharing

10 September 2026

STATEMENT

As churches in Nelson Mandela Bay, we call on all eligible citizens to participate thoughtfully and responsibly in the Local Government Elections on 4 November 2026.

Our concern includes every part of Nelson Mandela Bay—townships, informal settlements, suburbs and rural communities—and people of every race, language, income group, gender, age and physical ability.

The church does not support any political party or candidate. We seek to help voters make informed choices based on biblical values, reliable information and concern for the wellbeing of the whole city.

Christian responsibility to vote

Jesus calls his followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16). Christians should therefore make a positive difference in society.

Voting is one way of using our influence responsibly. It allows us to seek the wellbeing of our city and to help shape decisions that affect our neighbours. This is especially important for poor, unemployed and vulnerable people, who suffer most when local government fails.

Biblical guidelines

The Bible does not tell us which party to support. It gives us values by which to judge leaders, policies and promises.

Christians should seek what is right, just and compassionate. We should support honest government, responsible use of public money, fair treatment and respect for every person's God-given dignity. Our choices should be guided by truth and careful thought—not fear, prejudice, anger or blind loyalty.

Choosing responsible and competent leaders

The Bible teaches that leaders should be wise, understanding and respected (Deuteronomy 1:13). Jesus teaches that true leadership is about service, not status, wealth or power (Matthew 20:26–28).

Voters should examine the character, competence and record of candidates. Leaders must be able to manage public resources and deliver water, electricity, sanitation, roads, refuse removal and other essential services.

Responsible leadership must understand the different ways in which municipal decisions affect women and men. Candidates should demonstrate a commitment to women's safety, equal dignity, economic opportunity and full participation in the life and leadership of the city.

Promises are not enough. We must ask whether candidates are honest, their plans are realistic and they can be trusted to do what they promise.

We find ourselves in a situation much like that of God's people when Jerusalem's walls lay in ruins. Nehemiah called them to action: "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem." They responded, "Let us start rebuilding," and together they began this good work. (Nehemiah 2:17,18)

Main areas to assess competence and performance in local government

What type of responsible and competent leaders do we need at local government level? Local government is essential to the wellbeing of communities and the flourishing of society.

South African metropolitan councils are responsible for the government and delivery of services within their metropolitan areas. A metro has both executive and law-making authority over municipal matters.

The Constitution says local government must provide democratic and accountable government, deliver services sustainably, promote social and economic development, protect a safe and healthy environment, and involve communities in decision-making. (Constitution, sections 152–156.)

Responsible government must not only deliver services efficiently; it must also address long-standing inequality and ensure that neglected communities receive fair access to infrastructure, opportunities and municipal resources.

Key areas of responsibility

A metropolitan council is responsible for governing the city, managing public resources and providing essential municipal services. Its main responsibilities are:

- **Basic services:** Providing water, sanitation, electricity, street lighting and refuse removal, and maintaining the infrastructure needed for these services.
- **Roads and transport:** Maintaining municipal roads and stormwater systems and managing traffic, parking and municipal public transport.
- **Planning and development:** Regulating land use and building development, planning the city's growth and creating conditions that support businesses, employment and local tourism.
- **Safe and healthy communities:** Providing firefighting and disaster-management services, enforcing municipal by-laws and addressing environmental health and public nuisances.
- **Public spaces and facilities:** Maintaining parks, beaches, sports facilities, markets, cemeteries and other municipal amenities.
- **Good governance and sound finances:** Approving budgets and by-laws, collecting rates and service charges, appointing capable senior managers, preventing corruption, monitoring performance and involving residents in municipal decisions.

In summary, a metropolitan council is responsible for ensuring that the city is properly governed, financially sound, well planned, clean, safe and able to deliver dependable basic services.

These are therefore the main areas in which voters should assess the competence and performance of parties and candidates.

Why does local government fail?

Local government may fail when political loyalty is valued above competence, when public office becomes a reward for political loyalty, when accountability is weak, or when personal and party interests are placed before the needs of residents. Public office is an opportunity to serve.

Councillors who lack the necessary knowledge, judgement and experience may be unable to oversee complex budgets, infrastructure and service delivery.

Failure deepens when leaders protect political allies, put personal or party interests before residents, tolerate poor performance or use public resources for private gain.

Corruption, weak accountability and constant political instability further damage the municipality.

Leaders who do not understand how investment, business growth and job creation work may also make decisions that weaken the local economy.

Effective local government therefore requires capable, ethical and service-minded representatives who place the common good above themselves and their political connections.

The impact of failed local government

Unreliable municipal services damage both the economy and the daily lives of residents. These failures destroy opportunities, especially for the many unemployed people (and particularly unemployed young people) in our city..

Constant electricity outages interrupt manufacturing, damage equipment, delay production and increase operating costs. Businesses may lose customers, reduce working hours, stop employing new staff or move elsewhere.

A lack of clean, reliable water threatens health, closes schools and businesses, and places an unfair burden on families and vulnerable communities.

Broken streetlights leave roads and public spaces in darkness, increasing the risk of crime, accidents and fear. People become less willing to walk, work or trade after dark.

Women often carry a particularly heavy burden when local government fails. Water interruptions, unsafe public transport, broken streetlights and neglected public spaces affect women's safety, work and family responsibilities. Many women support households, care for children and older persons, or earn an income through small and informal businesses. Dependable services and safe public spaces are therefore essential to women's dignity, security and economic participation.

Reliable electricity, water and street lighting are therefore not luxuries; they are essential for safety, dignity, employment and a functioning city.

Overcoming voter apathy

We recognise that many residents have lost trust after years of broken promises, poor services and political instability. Their disappointment is real. Yet withdrawing from the election leaves the choice of future leaders to others.

Many feel that their vote will make no difference. These feelings are understandable, but staying away does not solve the problem.

Not voting leaves important decisions to other people. It cannot remove failed leaders, elect better representatives or improve accountability. Jeremiah 29:7 calls us to seek the peace and wellbeing of the place where we live. Voting is one practical way of doing so.

Motivation to vote

Voting is more than a right; it is a responsibility. Every vote helps determine who will govern, how public money will be used and whether services will improve.

Change begins when ordinary citizens participate. We therefore call on every eligible voter to become informed, reject intimidation and empty promises, and vote freely and responsibly. Show up, use your vote and encourage others to do the same.

Who benefits from low voter turnout?

Low voter turnout benefits organised political groups whose supporters vote faithfully, even when most citizens stay at home. It may also protect poorly performing leaders because dissatisfied voters have not used the opportunity to vote for change.

When fewer people vote, a small part of the population makes decisions for everyone. Those who do not vote surrender their influence to those who do. A healthy democracy needs broad participation.

The voting system: two important votes

Every voter in a metropolitan municipality receives two ballot papers. Both ballots are secret.

The **first vote** is for a ward councillor. This allows you to choose the individual candidate you believe will best represent your ward and respond to local concerns.

The **second vote** is for a political party. It helps determine how many proportional representation—or PR—councillors each party receives. *Both* the vote for the ward councillor and the PR-vote is counted towards the number of PR-seats a party receives.

Nelson Mandela Bay's council has 120 councillors: 60 ward councillors and 60 PR councillors. Votes cast for ward candidates representing political parties, together with the separate party votes, help determine each party's overall representation in the council.

You may choose any ward candidate and any political party. Your two choices do not have to be from the same party.

Think carefully about both decisions and mark both ballot papers correctly. **Both votes matter. Use them wisely.**

Ward and proportional representation (PR) councillors

Ward and proportional representation (PR) councillors make different but equally important contributions to a metropolitan council.

- **Ward councillors** represent specific communities. They must be accessible, understand local needs, raise residents' concerns in the council and report back on municipal decisions.
- **PR councillors** represent their political parties across the whole metro and contribute to council debates, committees, policy, budgets and oversight. Parties should use their PR lists to include people with knowledge and experience in areas such as finance, engineering, law, planning and good governance.

However, **all councillors**—not only specialists—need a sound understanding of municipal affairs, service delivery and public finance. Together, ward and PR councillors must provide responsible political leadership and hold the municipality's professional officials accountable for effective implementation.

Examine the candidates!

Voters should **carefully examine both their ward candidates and the PR lists** of the political parties.

Voters should look beyond party slogans, popularity and political connections. They should **consider each candidate's character, record of service, understanding of municipal affairs and ability to work for the common good**. Both votes help determine the quality of leadership in the council, so both choices deserve careful attention.

Voters have a right to know who appears on each party's PR list before voting. Political parties should publish their complete PR lists clearly and provide meaningful information about every candidate's character, qualifications, experience and record of service. A party name alone is not enough. Because PR councillors help approve budgets, shape policies and oversee the municipality, voters should examine the people a party intends to place in the council—not only its promises and public leaders.

Voters should also examine whether parties include capable women on their ward and PR candidate lists and place them in positions from which they can realistically be elected. Women should not merely be added to achieve the appearance of representation; their experience, leadership and knowledge must help shape municipal priorities and decisions.

We, as Churches of Nelson Mandela Bay, therefore ask every participating party to make its PR list easily available and explain why its candidates are fit to govern.

Your Vote Matters

The future of Nelson Mandela Bay will be shaped by those who vote. If you stay at home, others will decide who governs, how public money is spent and whether services improve. Not voting does not punish poor leadership—it protects it and weakens accountability. We therefore call on every eligible voter to stand up, take responsibility and participate. Learn about the candidates and parties, make your decision carefully, and use both your votes. Do not surrender your voice or your hope. On 4 November 2026, show up and vote for responsible leadership and a better future for everyone.

Practical Voter Information

Check your voting station: Enter your 13-digit ID number at www.elections.org.za or contact the IEC on 0800 11 8000. In a municipal election, you must vote at the voting station where you are registered.

Take identification: Bring your South African green barcoded ID book, smart ID card or valid temporary identity certificate. A driving licence or passport cannot be used.

Special votes: If you cannot vote at your station on election day, or need a home visit because of illness, disability or reduced mobility, apply for a special vote between 21 September and 12 October 2026. Applications can be made through the IEC Voter Portal at www.elections.org.za.

Know the candidates: Ward and party PR candidate lists will be available on the IEC website. Parties should also make their complete PR lists available to voters.

Assistance is available: Voters with disabilities or special needs may ask election officials for appropriate assistance or voting aids.

Your vote is private: Both ballot papers are secret, known only by God. No one may force you to reveal how you voted.

