



RESTORING FAITH IN DEMOCRACY

It pains us to speak at this time, but, as a network of Catholic educational institutions committed to the Lasallian Mission of *teaching minds, touching hearts* and *transforming lives*, it behooves us to let our collective thoughts be heard by our people, most especially the young who are entrusted to our care.

Our nation is beset anew by a serious and profound political crisis. The turmoil is spurred by allegations of fraud and deceit leveled against our nation's Chief Executive, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Though the charges have yet to be proven and we cannot discount the possibility that these allegations are orchestrated by forces with selfish interests, the present political turbulence has brought a heavy cloud of uncertainty over our already troubled nation.

The on-going congressional investigation and the President's admission of a lapse in judgment have not quelled the restiveness of our people. We fear that there are groups that will exploit the increasing instability to further their political ambitions. As Christians, we humbly accept the President's offer of apology, but also wish to respectfully remind her that it is imperative that she provide our people with a more substantive explanation and more convincing proof that indeed she did not in any way participate in electoral fraud. Anything less puts her legitimacy in question. It is also imperative that, as a people, we demand the same from our COMELEC officials and all other government and non-government organizations responsible for the conduct of the past elections.

We must restore our people's faith in the Presidency and in the democratic process. This will most certainly require the full exercise of leadership that our President alone could effect. We would like to believe that she was sincere when she expressed her commitment to make a personal sacrifice for the nation's interest. **We now pray her to bring it to full fruition — the supreme sacrifice of surrendering personal want, comfort and position. We pray her to voluntarily relinquish power so that a constitutional process of succession may proceed.**

We firmly believe that moral ascendancy is a critical ingredient in effective governance, and that even if she stays in Office for the next five years, she will be unable to realistically command the respect of the nation. While lapses in judgment may be acceptable in some other circumstances, we cannot agree that a phone call to a COMELEC official is a case of mere impropriety, especially since the right of suffrage is the cornerstone of democracy. Precisely because she took on the mantle of leadership at a time when the nation was looking for greater accountability and transparency, it is even more incumbent upon her to be without reproach.

But even as we ask her to give up her post voluntarily, we must, however, **reject all other extra-constitutional solutions to this present crisis or any other means which may lead to violence.** We must adhere to the rule of law and allow the constitutional succession process to be refined and perfected so that the next generation of leaders may restore our people's faith in our political institutions. The challenge for us now is to find other creative options that we can pursue within the parameters set by the Constitution which can allow for a smooth transition without having to resort to another popular uprising which, at this time, may only contribute to further political destabilization.

While the President's supreme sacrifice may temporarily restore our people's faith in our political institutions through the implementation of a constitutional process of leadership succession, the bigger work remains for the successor government and for all Filipinos to address the chronic democratic deficit. Our nation's democratic deficit is a product of the weakness of our political institutions and factors that prohibit the full exercise of our people's right to effective and expansive participation. Unlike the fiscal deficit that required merely a statutory fiat, the democratic deficit necessitates changes in our Constitution and the activation of a greater number of citizens whose participation is necessary to ensure inclusive, participative, transparent and responsive governance. If we are able to do this, then we can face the children in our classroom as effective teachers and really teach them the ways of honesty, integrity and truthfulness.

If we ask from the President a supreme sacrifice, nothing less should be required of every Filipino. Let this be a learning moment for us as we go through an authentic soul-searching and as we work assiduously towards healing and conversion. We are calling on all institutions of learning to provide their academic community with objective information, to initiate multi-disciplinary discussions that are critical and transformative, and to create venues for community prayer. Our efforts will be futile if we do not humble ourselves, fall on our knees, and acknowledge that nation-building is as much our work as it is God's.

In this time of chaos, let us always remember that we are in the most holy presence of God. We need more light and less heat. Let us ask for the Spirit of Wisdom to gently lead us so we may see clearly, judge fairly, and act zealously. The God of History has never abandoned us in the past. Today, more than at any other time, we must re-affirm our faith that God will raise up true shepherds for our people. Live, Jesus, in our hearts forever!

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