

BEYOND SURVIVAL: Rising Above the Floods of Corruption

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines pastoral letter on flood control corruption

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“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24)

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives are now investigating corruption in flood-

control projects. Yet we must ask: how credible are these inquiries when the very institutions conducting them are themselves implicated? Who inserted these projects into the national budget as pork, often at the expense of education, health, and social programs?

The Floods of Corruption

For years, the anatomy of corruption in public works has been public knowledge. Senator Panfilo Lacson laid it bare. Mayors like Benjamin Magalang and Vico Sotto confirmed that a multi-layered system of “commissions” often consumes sixty percent of project funds, leaving less than half for construction. No wonder so many projects are substandard and require constant repairs.

In recent hearings, the rebuke “Mahiya naman kayo!” was directed

only at contractors. But shame must be inclusive: legislators, district engineers, government auditors, and political patrons also share in the plunder. Equally guilty are private contractors and financiers who collude in this racket. The prophet Isaiah's words still sting: "Your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves; they all love bribes and run after gifts." (Isaiah 1:23)

True justice, however, demands more than punishment. It also calls for restitution: that stolen wealth be returned to the public coffers from which it was taken. Many of those implicated will not be impoverished by such reparation, yet the nation remains poor if the funds are not restored. Retribution in this sense is not personal vengeance but the rightful act of giving back what was stolen, so that the people may finally benefit from resources meant for their welfare.

Beyond Survival Politics

A viral reflection by Filipina digital and behavior change strategist, Kia Alvarez-Abrera, reminds us: corruption thrives not only because of brazen elites, but because of a survival politics that conditions the poor to reward whoever eases today's pain with handouts, since long-term promises feel like luxuries. Patronage weaponized *utang na loob* and *pakikisama*. Dynasties and disinformation made corruption appear "normal."

But Christ calls us higher: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10). Survival cannot be the standard of our politics. We must demand visible accountability: quick audits, real penalties, and transparency that people can see. And renewal must also begin with us. Each time we excuse dishonesty or abuse *padrino*

ties, we reinforce the mindset that enables billion-peso theft. St. Paul exhorts us: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” (Romans 12:2)

And because renewal is a matter of basic human principles, we must also be mindful again of the values formation of the young. The teaching of GMRC (Good Manners and Right Conduct) is a proactive way to shape consciences early. As Robert Fulghum reminded us in his book All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, the most important lessons for living are the simplest: share what you have, play fair, clean up your own mess, don’t take things that aren’t yours, etc. Such values, instilled in the young are essential in building a culture that abhors and resists corruption.

A Call to Action, Especially for the Young

As a group of civil society movements has also pledged in their joint statement, accountability must apply to both public officials and private contractors. Blacklisting is not enough; collusion in corruption is a crime and must be punished.

To our young people: you hold the keys to a new culture. You live in the digital space where truth and lies battle daily. Use your platforms not only for outrage, but for vigilance. Expose injustice, share facts, demand reforms. Make corruption shameful again.

CONCRETE STEPS WE MUST TAKE TOGETHER

This challenge is not only for government, business, or contractors. It is for all of us, including the Church. We too have

often failed, whether by silence, by tolerating corruption in our own ranks, or by not setting a consistent example of integrity. That is why this call begins with us. Together, as one people of God, let us commit ourselves to these steps:

1. Be vigilant and vocal – Let us not allow cynicism to numb our outrage.
2. Reject patronage politics – Let us refuse to trade our votes for favors, and instead demand integrity in leadership.
3. Model honesty in daily life – Integrity starts in small things: in the family, the classroom, the workplace, and the barangay.
4. Build communities of truth – Let us share verified information, counter disinformation, and support accountability.

5. Join civic and parish initiatives – Let us work together in movements for good governance, ecological justice, and social renewal.

6. Support an independent probe – Let us unite in calling for the creation of an independent committee to investigate corruption in flood-control projects and other budget insertions.

7. Demand justice, not impunity – Let us insist on legal action, including criminal charges against those guilty of systematically plundering public funds.

8. Lead by example in the Church – Let our dioceses, parishes, and Church institutions model transparency and accountability, instituting reforms where needed.

9. Live modestly, resist excess – To our leaders in government, business, and the Church, we appeal: let us

reject extravagance and mindless consumerism, and embrace a life of simplicity and solidarity with the poor.

Conclusion

If floodwaters rise because public funds are stolen, the greater flood is corruption itself, drowning our nation's future. Yet God promises: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." (Isaiah 43:2).

Let us rise above the floods of corruption together. Let justice roll down like waters across our land. Let us rebuild our nation on truth, justice, and the common good.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines:

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8 September 2025, Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Mother

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