

Local Elections An Opportunity for All

The story of what happened in one Italian municipality points us to the method of renewed presence.

In anticipation of the local elections that will take place in over 1,000 Italian municipalities during the month of June, we are publishing an excerpt from a conversation between Fr. Carrón and a number of local leaders from the Movement in Lombardy, which took place in May 2017.

Contribution. *I'd like to briefly tell the story of what has been happening over the last few months in my city. My goal in doing so is to underline how taking seriously your needs, really facing them, sets the freedom of the person into motion, bringing people together to respond to the needs that emerge in reality. This is what happened.*

Last December, a few of us were provoked to make a commitment to get involved regarding the local elections that will take place in our city. The elections are coming at the end of a disastrous year and a half: the entire council resigned together, resulting in the appointment of a temporary commissioner. In this climate of absolute distrust of the government, possibly even worse than the national average, one pastor pushed us asking, "Do Christians have something to say in this situation? Do we have a viewpoint that could be a help for everyone?"

At this provocation, a few of us got involved and started working together with other civil society groups and Catholic associations.

Putting the sense of urgency we had to respond to our needs, and therefore to the needs of our fellow citizens, out there brought down a series of walls (made up of preconceptions and prejudice) in completely unexpected ways. Which lead up to the preparation of a shared document (building on what had happened among Catholics in Milan last year) that we presented to the entire city, and it attracted a significant response, in terms of attendance.

The beautiful thing is that the people who came to the presentation also started to take action. And, most of all, having seen how some of us started to take action and how we were growing more mature and more human, and therefore more interesting for them, they started asking what is at the origin of our commitment, which led to their getting involved and working alongside of us. After a while, a number of us decided to run as part of one of the city's "civil lists" and one was even asked to run for mayor.

Our decision not to censure our need for a presence, for fullness, for witness and for happiness brought the birth of something that our city hadn't seen in a long time.

All of this was also a provocation within our own community, which had at a certain point run the risk of settling into thinking we "already knew everything," even if it was a fairly recent phenomenon, because all true things get old fast if care is not taken to maintain their original newness. One of our friends said to us, "I won't vote for friends who are running just because they're 'ours;' I need something more to convince me!" Provoked by her observation, a group of us got together for a discussion, during which a shared judgment emerged: what makes you decide to support a particular person is the change you see in him or her; you don't vote for them because of the party they're in or because they belong to the same group, even if it's CL.

Julián Carrón. This episode documents how the elections are an opportunity to verify our faith, to verify the extent to which our needs are alive in us and are able to set us in motion.

The real issue is whether we recognize that we need to belong to a place that constantly reawakens us and pushes us again to verify what we have encountered in reality, growing more and

more passionate about it. No one decides how reality reaches him or her; right now, for example, it's calling us through the elections in many local areas. We can ignore it or we can use the circumstance to see what needs it opens in us. No one gave our friends marching orders to do what they did. They themselves perceived the need to get involved, a need reawakened by the Christian event and prompted by seeing atmosphere absolute distrust of politics. And no one tried to stop them from taking action, in fact others even started to get involved seeing our friends in action.—This is God's method, at this level as at others: one person starts moving and others, seeing him or her, set into motion as well—Why? Because they understood where their interest in the elections came from: in not having censured their need, which is exactly the opposite of settling into thinking you “already know everything.”

If we don't constantly verify the extent to which our needs are alive in us and are able to move us, and if, therefore, we aren't willing to accept the challenges reality throws our way, we'll find ourselves empty-handed, even if we have the whole history of the Movement behind us, it will just be a thing of the past. The Movement itself, in fact, can only continue to exist through the way that each of us personally responds to the call we receive in reality, a response no one else can give for us. This is the very point that Fr. Giussani indicated back in the 1970s as the second of two factors are the reasons for our commitment to politics. I'll review them briefly:

1. “The first level of political effect of a lively Christian community is its very existence, as this entails having the space and possibility to express itself, (...) its influence on civil society naturally tends toward growing in importance, and so the Christian experience becomes one of the protagonists in the life of society, in constant dialogue and comparison with all the other initiatives and resources present that make up that life.”

2. If the first factor is that the Christian community is by nature a political fact, the second is this: “Because of the profound experience of brotherhood that is formed within the Christian community, it cannot help but develop its own ideas and methods on how to face problems shared by all, both at a practical and theoretical level, which can be offered as the community's particular way of collaborating with the rest of the society which surrounds it.”

Every Christian community, inasmuch as it is rooted in history in a particular political entity—in our case, a municipality—cannot avoid turning its gaze to the needs and most urgent questions that come up in that place.

Because of this, getting involved in the upcoming local elections is a possibility that's open to everyone; no one can consider themselves excluded. Our friends from the municipality with an appointed commissioner have given us a glowing testimony.

Then, after the elections, it would be nice to organize assemblies to verify what we've made out of this circumstance. Have we really engaged with the proposal we've been given? Or not? Were we indifferent? Have we also given in to the widespread distrust? In other words, what happened? Those who have welcomed the challenge will be able to judge if having really engaged with the circumstance, which we didn't decide, helped to verify what we were saying at the beginning, that is, if what we have encountered helps us to face everything, even in this climate of distrust we feel surrounding us.

We cannot let ourselves be defined by this climate, nor can we let others take over the spaces for a presence that we, out of laziness, are not filling. So each of us can see in his or her own environment if what we're saying is a living fact—as it has been for these friends of ours—or if it's simply a slogan that has nothing to do with the pressing things of life.

It seems to me that all of us, really every one of us, not only those who are directly engaged in the political realm or who have decided to run, have a wonderful opportunity in front of us to verify if we are really engaged in seeking to realize that “common good” that we're always talking about.