

community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

02/2022/EN

Living in fellowship

Editorial

A message for all

Divine service

Together in Christ

Doctrine

Preserving life whenever
possible

New Apostolic Church
International



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A message for all

Dear brothers and sisters,

Are you familiar with the story of Jesus reading from the Torah in the synagogue of his hometown of Nazareth? He was reading from Isaiah 61: 1–2 where it says: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.”

As all eyes were fixed on Him, Jesus told those who had gathered that this was referring to Him (Luke 4: 21).

Jesus always emphasised that He had come for the poor, the oppressed, the sick, and the sorrowful—those who really needed Him.

And here is the good news for all those who can say of themselves: I am not really poor, oppressed, sick, or sad. So does the gospel even apply to me?

Yes, because although Jesus is specifically addressing the poor here, He is also referring to those who are figuratively poor:

- the humble who know that they need grace,
- those who suffer because of the separation from God on account of sin, and
- those who are trapped in sin.



NAC International

It was to them that Jesus proclaimed the gospel, and He sent the Apostles to spread the gospel. And even today, the Apostles, and all of us, are sent by God to proclaim the gospel.

The gospel is there for all people because all suffer from sin. We have been commissioned by God to say: God wants to set people free from sin and bring them back into fellowship with Him.

Some will accept the gospel, others will not. Let's not allow this to discourage us. It will not stop the Lord from completing His work.

With heartfelt greetings

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'S'.

Jean-Luc Schneider

| Together in Christ



The Chief Apostle conducted the first divine service of the year 2022 in our church in Gifhorn, Germany, on 2 January



Acts 2: 44

“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common.”

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters, we are thankful to God that we have been given the opportunity to come together again right at the start of this year to enjoy this divine service, even though it is still not quite in the manner to which we are accustomed. I know very well that the start of this new year is not quite in line with our wishes. We would have wished for things to be different. Everything is still rather defined by the pandemic. Things are unusual and complicated. But this does nothing to change our agenda for the year 2022. Our agenda is and remains to prepare ourselves for the return of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. And this is not just some platitude! I would like to emphasise this quite consciously: this changes nothing about our agenda! We wait for the return of the Lord, and we prepare ourselves for this event. Divine life must never be suffocated by our cares, our daily lives, the pandemic, or anything else. There we must really be careful. This must not be! Naturally this is a serious matter, and we approach it in a very responsible manner—with all due reason, but also with trust in God—in the knowledge that we are doing our

part and that God will do His part. However, this is not to prevent us from continuing our preparations for the return of Christ. There I see the danger that these things might take the upper hand and drain us of all our strength. This must not be! Let us just think about our parents or grandparents who had to endure times of war! I do not want to make this too dramatic now, but those were certainly some different conditions! And they simply continued preparing themselves for the return of the Lord.

I am reminded of the many brothers and sisters in other countries, where things are much more difficult, for example, in Mali and Burkina Faso in West Africa, where the majority of our members must live with the constant threat of jihadi Islamist extremists. I can attest to the fact that they continue to prepare themselves for the coming of the Lord. I am reminded of our members in Myanmar and in Latin America, who must live through very difficult circumstances. Just think of our members right here in Germany who are so sorely tried by illness, or others who find themselves in situations of dire need, who seem to get one piece of bad news after another. Yet we simply expect them to keep preparing themselves for the coming of the Lord. What applies to them applies to us too. I do not want to go into this any further, dear brothers and sisters. Let us just watch out for this. We deal with the matter with reason, with a sense of responsibility, but also with trust in God—and none of this is to prevent us from focusing on what is important. Our priority is the return of Jesus Christ. We prepare ourselves for this event, come what may.

We are waiting for the Lord Jesus to come and take us to Himself. I have put special emphasis on the word “us” because the Lord will not come to take a group of kind and nice individualists to Himself. He will come in order to take a congregation to Himself—a congregation of believers who have managed to become one in Christ through the activity of the Holy Spirit. That is the bridal congregation. The Lord Jesus will come to take this bride to Himself. And for this reason, our motto for the year will be: “Together in Christ”. We want to have eternal fellowship with God. So who is part of the bride? These are those who are filled with His life and who heed His will. Their endeavour already today is to have fellowship with God. At the return of Christ, they will be led into eternal fellowship with God. Already today, their desire is to have fellowship with God because they are determined to be filled with His life. I have often emphasised that divine life is, by definition, a life in fellowship. The triune God is a God of fellowship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This

is not just a brilliant idea thought up by some theologian. This is a divine truth. There is a great deal to this! God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, however, they are in constant fellowship and are always enduringly one! God has created mankind in His image. This is also something that has come to expression: He did not create man as an individual. He created man in the form of man and woman, who were to live in fellowship with one another. They are of the same essence and of the same nature, but they needed one another and were to live in fellowship: in fellowship with God and with one another. And for as long as this was the case, they were aligned with the will of God. They enjoyed fellowship with God and fellowship with one another. This quickly changed after the fall into sin, but that was the will of God.

What is the will of the Son of God for His bride? “Father, let them be one as I am one with You!” This proves that godly life is a life in fellowship and community. Let us allow ourselves to be filled with this divine life and strive to be one with God, but let us also strive to be one in fellowship with one another. And let us endeavour to make the unity among us as believers stronger and stronger, and ever more evident.

Divine life is a life in fellowship

“Together in Christ” also means that, like the early Christians, we must come together regularly and celebrate divine service together. The book of Acts

relates that the early Christians also felt this need to be together after they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were always together, and even had all things in common. They went to the temple regularly to hear the Jewish divine services, and then they would come together in their houses in order to celebrate Holy Communion together as Christians. At least this was the case in the congregation of Jerusalem, not so much in other congregations later on. They decided: “Come, let us do everything together. Let us share everything. No one is to come short of anything.” In our time things are different. Each of us can have our own car, our own assets. However, this is not a matter of earthly wealth. Here we are talking about spiritual wealth. But we have many things in common. We have the same calling. We have the same faith. We have the same Lord and Master. We have the same future: Christ is our everything! And because it is so important for us to have these things in common, we simply feel the need to come together and have fellowship with God and with one another in divine service.

Concerning this Paul says that, because we have the same Spirit, we have the same mind and feel the need to come together to praise God with one mouth, one voice. This



results from the fact that those who have come to faith, those who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit—the church that is filled with the Holy Spirit—are of one mind, and they come together in one accord and praise and glorify God with one mouth. In other words, they feel the need to experience divine service with one another and to praise, honour, and glorify God because they have so much in common. The Lord Jesus calls us together because He desires to pray with us—together! He wants to eat together with us. He wants to strengthen us together, just as He did with His disciples: “Come to Me, all of you!” He will care for us. He is in our midst when we are together.

The following is a personal remark. Attending the divine services also has a social dimension. Now please do not misunderstand me: I am not making a political statement. This is simply how people are: if they want to make their opinion known, and if it is so important to them, then they realise: “If I do this alone, it won’t do any good.” So what do they do to ensure everyone knows that this is their opinion and that this is what they want? They collect signatures, or they come together for a demonstration and march up and down the streets—together, collectively—because they know that this will now have greater impact. “If we

Attending the divine services also has a social dimension

do this all together, if we all sign this petition, if we all send the same letter, if we all march and demonstrate together, people will notice.” They are aware of the fact that together they will make more of an impact. As Christians, let

us declare that we do not agree that the world should be ruled by the evil one. We are against the rule of the evil one. We are for the rule of Jesus Christ. Allow me to put it this way: it is nice when each one of us declares this as an individual, but if the Christians do not come together for divine service, this will really not accomplish much at all. In this respect, our participation in divine services does have a social dimension. For this is where Christians declare: “We are not in agreement with the things that are happening. We are against evil. We are for Jesus Christ. We experience fellowship in divine service.”

However, this goes even further. In the divine service, each one is seated in his or her place, and indeed, we may even greet one another and speak briefly with one another, but that is not what makes this event so important. It goes much further than that! We must also learn to live in fellowship with one another. That is a step further. To create unity in the congregation, we must also learn to live in fellowship. Living in fellowship means that we must learn to overcome



that which divides us. There are so many things that divide us, and that is absolutely okay. After all, we are all different. We all have our own opinions. We all have our own ideas. We all have our own ways and means of doing things. And all of this is completely in order. We must simply learn to deal with this. This does not mean that we must all give up our own identities and all fit into the same template, all become the same. That is not the point. We must simply learn to accept the otherness of our neighbour and learn to deal with it.

I cannot help notice that people these days keep using our methods of communication in foolish ways. There have never been so many possibilities for human beings to communicate with one another. And what do they do? This is something I am noticing more and more: they only deal with people who think and act as they do. There is one group over here, and another group over there, and one group talks among themselves, and the other group talks among themselves. And each group is only focused on those who think and act as they do. That is not the point, though. We

are supposed to learn to accept the otherness of our neighbour and learn to live with it. This is not only for the sake of peace and because we want everything to be okay. No, it goes much further. We must learn, and also prove, that the things we have in common are more important to us than the things which divide us. That is the turning-point.

We have many things in common: we have the same calling; we have the same faith; we have the same Lord and Master; we have the same future. Christ is our everything. All of this is much more important to us than our own opinion, than our own differences. And this is where I see the huge problem, namely that our opinion, our own person, might become so significant that it is more important than the things we have in common with our brothers and sisters: Christ, our faith, our future! Dear brothers and sisters, this won't do! Let us overcome that which divides us and thereby make it clear that Christ is more important than anything to us—and that is what we have in common.

Living in fellowship also means being prepared to share. This already started with John the Baptist. Indeed, it did not go down too well when he said this, but he told the Jews at the time in no uncertain terms: "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none." This was not terribly popular at the time, and will likely be even less popular today. Here too, it is not a question of our money, our house, or our car. It is about our mindset. Already then the Holy Spirit wanted to make people aware through John the Baptist: "Look out for your neighbour. You are supposed to notice and respond to his needs." That is what is behind it! Let us not only think about ourselves, but rather overcome our egoism and egocentricity. Let us perceive the needs of our neighbour and do something to help him. That is what it means to be a Christian! And this means we must learn to look a little further. We must be able to look beyond our own generation. That is also a big subject in our society.

Each generation has different needs, different wishes—and each one fights for these needs quite selfishly. But let us look past our own generation and also see that which the other generations—those who came before us and those who come after us—need. Let us see their needs and do something to help. Let us see beyond our own congregation. Let us see beyond our own country and let us see the needs of our neighbour in all aspects. And let us do something about them!

Living in fellowship... Paul described this in a wonderful way. He applied the image of the body of Christ. It is a wonderful explanation, a wonderful image, for life in fellowship: the body of Christ. And he says very vividly that the eye cannot say, "I do not need the hand." And the head cannot say, "I do not need the foot." Living in fellowship is ordained by God because God knew exactly: "They have a service to fulfil, and they cannot do it alone." If the church of Christ wants to fulfil its task, it must do so as a collective. An individual cannot perform the service that Jesus expects of him. That is one part of it. This is something we can only accomplish together as a church, as the church of Jesus Christ. We need the body of Christ. This applies especially to the relationship between the ministers and the congregation. After all, it is not like the ministers are on one side, and the congregation is on the other. It is not as though the congregation cannot manage without the ministers, but the ministers can take care of their own salvation without the congregation. They need one another. Anything else will not work. They support one another and pray for one another. This is very nicely described in the Bible. There it mentions that one sows and the other reaps. In other words, the tasks and responsibilities may well be different, but the joy is shared collectively. Dear brothers and sisters, each one in the congregation has his or her function and duty, each one has his or her own responsibility. One has this gift and the other has a different gift. One has this task, and the other has a different task. These may all be very different. But if we all fulfil our tasks in our given place, we will all share in the same joy, and that is the joy in Jesus Christ.

Dear brethren, living in fellowship not only means being prepared to give to others, but—and this is a very important point—also receiving from others. Here one might say, "Well, it is easy to receive something." But it is not as easy as it seems. I have noticed that more and more people feel that they do not want anything from others. They want to be independent. They do not want to be bound. They want to be self-sufficient. In other words, we would rather refrain from accepting anything from others because we do not want to be dependent on them. We simply do not want



District Apostle Helper Helge Mutschler

this. We would rather do with less than accept something from someone else. That is simply one of the developments in our society. People no longer want to receive anything from anyone else because they do not want to be indebted to anyone. People want to look out for themselves. This is completely contrary to the image of the body of Christ and is therefore contrary to the will of God. Part of God's will is for us to give to others—but He also wants us to receive from others. He wants us to be humble enough to do this. He wants us to say, "I cannot do without others." This is also part of living in fellowship. Let us also work with this thought in the year 2022: we want to live in fellowship! Let us overcome that which seeks to divide us because the most important thing for us is that we have one Lord, one goal, one Spirit, and one calling.

Otherwise we can indeed have different attitudes and thoughts, we can have different opinions—and that will not change: I will remain a Frenchman, and you will remain German. And that is fine. The most important thing is what we have in common. Let us also think about how we might share even more, and how we might share on a more intensive level. Let us perceive the needs of our neighbour in every aspect and let us help them with these needs. And let us truly serve as one body of Christ. Let us together fulfil the service expected of us. Let us be there for one another, and also be prepared to receive something from someone else from time to time—because we realise and acknowledge that we will never manage on our own.

The fourth and last aspect of this fellowship is the fellowship of the living and the dead. This is also something very beautiful. After all, we do not live in separate worlds. There is only one congregation, only one church: comprised of the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead. I will



Top: Apostle Ralf Vicariesmann said that we must foster our relationship with others



Right: The Chief Apostle dispenses a blessing on the golden wedding of the retired Apostle Edmund Stegmaier and his wife, Gerda

come back to something I mentioned earlier: the generations before us have sown, and today we reap! After all, we reap because of their work, because of their sacrifices, and because of what they have built up, but our joy is shared in common. This also applies to the souls in the beyond: we have only one body, we belong to one church. We have one Spirit, namely the Holy Spirit. And we have only one bread, namely Holy Communion. This is true both here and in the beyond. And we have one future. We share one faith. When we think about our loved ones in the beyond, we remember them as they were before, but that does not apply any more. In some way or another they are present in every divine service, after all. And they all feel the effects of the activity of the Holy Spirit. They have not remained stationary. They have moved on along with us. They are not stuck in the opinions they held fifty years ago or even ten years ago; the Holy Spirit helps them along. And the conditions for being prepared and for growing in fellowship are exactly the same here as in the beyond. We need to be reminded of that every now and again. When they look at us today, they do not get upset and say, “Oh, look how things are today!” They have the same teaching of the Holy Spirit, and I can believe—I am absolutely convinced of it—that they follow along with us. After all, they have the same word of God. They are also of the same mind as we are today—or as we ought to be if we follow the Holy Spirit. One Spirit, one future, one joy.

Isn't it beautiful that we are also given this confidence again and again? These are not separate worlds. Indeed, there is a visible world and an invisible one, but our loved ones

from the beyond are with us. They experience the same divine services. They follow the same path, and they have the same goal. When the Lord returns, He will take all of us, both the living and the dead, to Himself—and then we will truly be one heart and one soul. We will then still have our own spirit, our own soul, but we will then have a new body, namely the resurrection body. After all, it is not as if the soul will just float around like an angel. We will have a new body, and we will be able to recognise that this is you and that is me! The person will remain. The identity will remain. Only all the unpleasant things cease to exist. We will then all be perfect in Christ and will have eternal fellowship with our Lord. Dear brothers and sisters, that is our future! Please let us not be distracted from this by that which is going on around us. It is naturally quite serious, but it is not so serious that we should ever forget: the Lord is coming soon! Amen.

CORE THOUGHTS

- Learning to live in fellowship is part of our spiritual preparation for the return of Christ.
- We learn to overcome our differences, exhibit solidarity with one another, and serve Christ together.



■ NAC Zambia

How children can come to Jesus unhindered

“Let us be aware that Jesus also looks at the way we behave with children.” And that was not even the most important message that Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider had to impart in the divine service he conducted in Kabwe, Zambia.

“We consider the abuse of a child to be a crime and a terrible sin. Anyone who uses a child to satisfy his desires is a sinner and a criminal, and I want to make this statement clear. As a church, we fight against child abuse, and we support all efforts made to prevent and avoid this.”

To begin with, the Chief Apostle called upon his audience to take the children just as seriously as Jesus did. At that time, the younger generation was unimportant in terms of religious life: they were hardly able to understand the commandments, much less fulfil them, and without possessions they were not in a position to bring offerings and sacrifices on their own.

It was for this reason that the disciples had wanted to send the children away—something that Jesus prevented. The Chief Apostle identified several lessons in this, namely: “Jesus loved the children. He loved the weak ones, He loved

those who were rejected by others. He thought of each human being as a soul to be saved. He did not care if they were poor or rich, old, or young.” And: “Salvation has nothing to do with merit, with works, or with deeds. Salvation is grace offered by God to everyone—to the poor and the rich, to the strong and the weak.” And the third lesson: “You cannot measure the love of God just by considering your condition of life on earth. You cannot say that God loves this person because He gave him a lot of money, and that He does not love the other because he is poor. The greatest sign of Jesus’ love for all of us is that He died for us, and that He offers us perfect salvation.”

Then Chief Apostle Schneider called upon his listeners to take the children as their role models, just as Jesus presented them: “To enter the kingdom of God, we must first become like children. We must be humble and we must be aware that we are fully dependent on God’s grace.” And: “A



More than 7,000 people participated in the divine service in Kabwe, Zambia

child naturally trusts its parents. A child could not imagine that the parents would ever do anything bad. Let us be true children of God. We trust our Father, even if we do not understand Him.” And then: “We have to be like children: willing to learn, allowing ourselves to be taught. We need to be aware that we are not yet old enough in our faith, and that we must still grow up.”

And last but not least, Chief Apostle Schneider admonished his audience never to stop the children from coming to Jesus. This, he said, not only applies to extreme cases such as child abuse. This already begins when adults take out their frustration on their children—for example, by scolding them harshly even when they haven’t done anything serious. “That is a sin. That is sinful behaviour.” And: “A lie is a lie—no matter whether I tell it to an adult or a child. It remains a lie and it is a sin.”

The Chief Apostle gave the following recommendations: “We can prepare the way for the children to come to Jesus in the way we introduce God to them. Do not describe God to them as a judge who will punish them. Tell them that God is love.”

“Tell them that you pray to God, and that He answers your prayers. Tell them about the protection of the angels, which you have experienced. Tell them also how God comforts you. Then we can encourage the children to come to Jesus.”

“Show them how God works instead of talking about everything that is wrong in the congregation.”

And here is a special admonition to the ministers: every time a minister misuses his ministry, misuses his power and authority, his behaviour becomes an obstacle for the children.

“We also want Jesus to be the future of our children,” said the Chief Apostle, addressing not only the parents, but all the members in the congregations: “It

is up to us to prepare the way for them, to teach them the law of God in the proper manner, to teach them to trust in God, and to help them to discover the wonderful works of God. God will bless all of the efforts we undertake in order to help our children come to Jesus and remain with Him.”

CORE THOUGHTS

Mark 10: 13–14

“Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.’”

Jesus loves the children. He offers salvation to those who are humble, those who trust in Him. Our relationship to the children is defined by the law requiring us to love our neighbour. Let us help our children come to Jesus.

| God does not sleep!

Lifting up our eyes to the Lord is the best thing we can do when it comes to the deliverance and salvation of our soul. This does not put an end to earthly suffering, but it does bring us salvation for eternity, the Chief Apostle confirmed.



■ NAC Argentina



Finally, he was able to travel to Argentina again! Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider had made several attempts to visit the congregations in this South American country over the last 18 months, but his plans were always thwarted by the ongoing pandemic. At the beginning of November 2021, he was finally able to conduct a divine service in Buenos Aires.

We need to lift up our eyes when it comes to the Lord, the Chief Apostle explained unequivocally. Earlier, in the Old Testament, high mountains had been revered as the place where God dwells and where people could meet Him. “Abraham went up a mountain to sacrifice his son. The temple in Jerusalem was built on a hill.”

Help comes from above

The question of where help comes from is one that many people ask themselves to this day, the Chief Apostle pointed out. “They don’t know how to deal with a particular situation, do not see a solution for their problems, and have no one who can help them.”

And then there is a change: “We believe and proclaim: God can and wants to help every human being. He is the Almighty, for whom nothing is impossible. Jesus Christ has conquered evil and death; they are no longer an obstacle on the way to salvation. God does not sleep: He is aware of each person’s fate, shares in their pain, and makes sure that they can obtain salvation.” His help does not consist of simply putting an end to people’s suffering or compensating them for all the evil they have suffered, he said. “His purpose is to lead human beings into His glory, into eternal communion with Him.”

Look up!

To obtain salvation human beings have to lift up their eyes to God. Those who look up to God and fear Him know that they are dependent on God’s grace. The Chief Apostle cited a few examples from the Bible: Job, who submitted to God’s will and was saved. Or the people of Israel who had to look up to a brazen serpent that Moses had made in order to save them. “God’s help did not lie in ridding the people of the snakes, but in healing those who trusted His word. Jesus ex-



Just over 700 people were able to participate in the service in the church, while another 23,598 were connected by transmission in 462 congregations

plained that this brazen serpent prefigured His sacrifice on the cross.” The Chief Apostle drew the conclusion from this that, since man’s fall into sin, evil has established its dominion over humankind and makes us suffer. And God does not intervene to change the world. “He asks us to look up to Jesus Christ. Those who believe in Christ can be delivered from evil and attain eternal life.”

Another example from Scripture: Stephen, one of the early Deacons, looked up to heaven when he was arrested and brought before the high council for preaching the gospel. He saw the glory of God. This vision, the Chief Apostle said, gave him the strength to remain faithful to Christ until his death and even to forgive his murderers! “When we go through affliction and distress, let us not focus on our sufferings and those who caused them. Let us rather follow the impulses of the Holy Spirit and lift up our eyes to God.” Then the Holy Spirit can reveal the glory of God to us, the presence of God, and His promise.

Weekend in Buenos Aires

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider spent an extended weekend in Buenos Aires. On Friday, 5 November 2021 he had a meeting with representatives of the Ecumenical Commission of Christian Churches in Argentina (CEICA), of which the New Apostolic Church has been a full member since

2018. Afterwards the Chief Apostle gave an interview to a group of young people. On Saturday morning he led a meeting with all the active Apostles and Bishops from District Apostle Enrique Minio’s region. The joy of being able to see each other again was written on everyone’s face and could be seen despite the masks, the Chief Apostle said.

CORE THOUGHTS

Psalm 121: 1–2

“I will lift up my eyes to the hills from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

We come to God with humble hearts, filled with holy reverence. We believe in Jesus Christ, our Saviour. The Holy Spirit strengthens us by revealing to us the glory of God, His presence at our side, and the salvation He has in store for us.

A message for the poor

Jesus came to deliver us from evil. When He left, He instructed the Apostles to spread His message everywhere. And today every single Christian is sent by Jesus to testify of His love.



■ NAC Paris



Children welcome the Chief Apostle to Paris (below)

fellow was Jesus Christ. He brought the message that He was one who had come to bring the good news to the poor, the afflicted, the imprisoned, and the blind. It was this Bible story that Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider brought to the brothers and sisters in Paris, France, and the connected congregations on 17 October 2021.

Jesus the Saviour

Jesus came for the poor, the neglected, the lowly, the humble. Why? “Because God wants to deliver people from the grip of sin,” explained the Chief Apostle. “He wants to deliver people from the suffering of the evil caused by sin, by overcoming death and delivering people and leading them into fellowship with Himself.” So Jesus was especially close to those who suffered the most from the consequences of sin.

Jesus had not come to revolutionise society, but to deliver mankind from sin, the Chief Apostle explained. And Jesus did this without a lot of human intervention. People only had to meet a few conditions in order to be saved: they had

This fellow came into the synagogue whom everyone had known since he was a little boy. His father was a simple carpenter. He stood up to read the lesson and was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He found the passage where it speaks about one who has been sent to proclaim freedom to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind. And suddenly He claimed to be the one sent by God. At first the people were excited, but then their excitement turned to wrath. “He can’t be the one sent by God. How can that be? We saw Him grow up.” They were so furious that they planned to kill Him. But God prevented that. Fortunately, because this



Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider



Apostle Stefan Pöschel



Apostle Jens Korbien

to be humble, they had to be aware that they were trapped in sin, and they had to suffer from the fact of being separated from God. It certainly did not sound complicated, but for many it was. “His message was not accepted, the messenger was not accepted,” the Chief Apostle recounted. But Jesus did not stop there. He refused to give up on mankind.

The Apostles sent by God

“Jesus went back to His Father, and what did He do? He sent His Apostles. His Apostles, equipped with the Holy Spirit, were sent out to proclaim exactly the same message,” the Chief Apostle said. The mission of the apostolate was exactly the same, namely to proclaim the good news. Today, this word is fulfilled in His church. Christ wants to deliver the poor, the sinners, the oppressed, the sick, and the broken-hearted. Jesus is here to bring you salvation. And this is the message that the Apostles, sent by the Lord Jesus, deliver today.”

Through the Apostles, Jesus addresses everyone, but especially those who suffer the consequences of sin. However, the Chief Apostle also made it clear: “Even today, in order to be saved, it is not necessary to be unhappy, to be poor, or to be disadvantaged. The message of the Apostles is addressed to all: to the sick and the healthy, to the poor and the rich, to the young and the old, to men and women and children.” To receive the message of the Apostles, the same conditions apply as in Jesus’ time: one must have the same heart’s disposition and be humble, recognise that one is dependent on God, and want to be close to Him.

...and we

Sent by God, the Lord came to announce this message. The Apostles have been sent by Jesus to proclaim this message. But that is not everything, the Chief Apostle added. “The church, you and I, have been sent by God. We have been filled with the Holy Spirit to proclaim the same message,”

he said. “Every child of God is anointed with the Holy Spirit and has been sent into this world by God to pass on this same message.” In concrete terms, this means making the love of Jesus tangible to others through our actions and conduct. “In the church, the broken-hearted are comforted. In the church, the unfortunate and disadvantaged are not ignored; they are helped. Those who weep are comforted, those who are weak are comforted,” the Chief Apostle urged.

One thing is particularly important to the Chief Apostle: forgiveness. “Let’s put an end to these quarrels, these sensitivities, these feuds that have been going on for years,” he implored the brothers and sisters, asking them to reconcile with one another.

CORE THOUGHTS

Luke 4: 21–22

“And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ So all bore witness to Him, and marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’”

Jesus Christ wants to deliver human beings from evil. He sent His Apostles in order to proclaim salvation to the people. He sends us to testify to others of His love, His truth, and His grace.

DAVID AND JONATHAN

ACCORDING TO 1 SAMUEL 18–20

After his fight with the Philistine Goliath, David lived with King Saul, who was Jonathan's father. Jonathan and David became good friends.

Jonathan should actually have been the next king because he was the king's son. However, God chose David to inherit the throne.

Jonathan was not at all jealous or envious. David was his friend and he loved him. To show him this he stripped off his cloak and tunic he was wearing, and gave them to David, together with his sword, his bow, and his belt.

King Saul, however, was jealous of David, for David was a good fighter and the people liked him more than the king. Saul became angrier and angrier and one day he hurled a spear at David, who was playing on the lyre. David managed to dodge the spear, but Saul was set on killing him.

Jonathan warned his friend: "Hide until morning. I will speak to my father and tell you what he plans to do to you."

Jonathan talked to his father, "David has always fought well for you. He killed the giant, Goliath. He has never once done anything against you. Why do you want to kill someone who has not done anything wrong?"

Saul promised his son that he would not kill David. David returned to the palace.

It was not long before Saul forgot his promise and again threw a spear at David.

Again, David managed to dodge the king's thrust. That night he fled. He came back one more time to ask his friend Jonathan: "Jonathan, what did I do wrong? Why does your father want to kill me?"

Jonathan answered: "You will not die. My father would tell me if he wanted to kill you."

"Yes," said David, "but your father knows that we are friends. Maybe that is why he is not telling you anything."

Jonathan wanted to go and

find out whether David was right. He said he would return with a servant and shoot three arrows as though aiming at a target. He told him, "If I tell my servant, 'Look, the arrows are on this side,' you will know that you are safe and can come out of hiding. But if I call to the servant and say, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' you will know that it is not safe for you to return to the king's house and you will have to go away."

Again the two reaffirmed their vow of friendship. David went to hide in a field.

Meanwhile, in the palace, there was a big feast. Saul asked why David was not there. Jonathan made excuses for his friend's absence. Saul became so angry that his son was sticking up for David that he threw a spear at his own son. Now Jonathan knew that David was right and he would have to go away. That night he ate nothing; he was too sad.

Next morning, accompanied by a servant, he went out into the

fields to warn David. He shot three arrows and shouted to his servant, "Look, the arrows are beyond you." He then gave his bow and arrows to his servant and sent him back to the palace. He wanted to see David one more time. They cried together because they knew that David had to leave.



AT CALVIN'S IN LONDON (ENGLAND)



Hello! My name is **Calvin** and I am ten years old. I want to tell you a bit more about myself and London, where I am from. Meet my pet rabbits Puffy and Marble.



My **parents**, Ellen and Michael, are both architects, which means that we always look at lots of buildings wherever we go. We also go to lots of galleries and exhibitions. Some are very interesting, but a lot of them I find very boring.

My mum suffers from young onset dementia. She has been living in a care home for a little over two years now. We visit her every other day and take a **walk** in the park with her when the weather is nice. She loves to walk.

The rest of my **family** lives in Germany. I love to visit them over Christmas and over the summer. When my granddad celebrated his 70th birthday we had a party. Both my dad and granddad each have four siblings. So there are always lots of people that come together for special occasions.

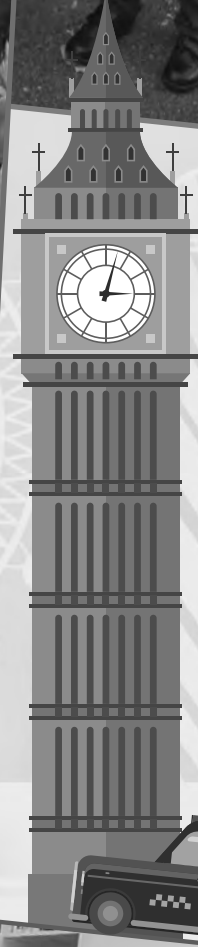
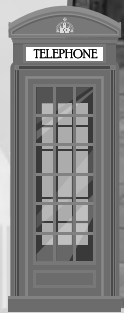


I love to cook my own **breakfast**, either eggs sunny side up with toast (best without the crust), porridge, or pancakes.



This is me in my **school uniform** on my first day of school. I was four years old then. I go to a bilingual school, although all classes are taught in English, except the two lessons of German we have every week.

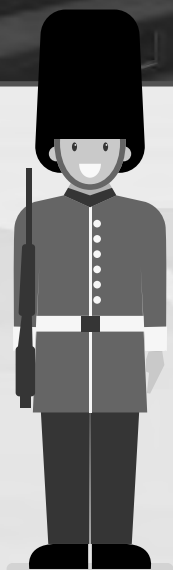
London is the capital of England and the United Kingdom. Whenever we get visitors we go sightseeing. **St Pauls Cathedral** is one of the biggest churches in the world. The acoustics are amazing: if someone whispers something on the circular walkway of the dome, you can still understand them on the other side of the walkway. Other famous sights in London are Tower Bridge, the London Eye (a ferris wheel), and Madame Tussaud's, where you can see wax statues of celebrities from all over the world.



Our congregation is London Central. On the picture you can see all of my special **friends** I have at church. After service we love hanging around for fellowship with fantastic food from all over the world. Our congregation is comprised of people from many different countries.

The good thing about living on an island is that it is never too far to the beach. I love going crabbing.

I caught several big crabs once and released them back into the water again afterwards. I also love to ride my bike, practise karate, and do arts at school or build stuff. We made a **dragon** from paper mache when we learned about the legend of St George the Dragon Slayer.





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Preserving life whenever possible

Even if there are understandable reasons for terminating a pregnancy in some cases, the position of the Church should carry special weight, considering the gravity of the decision.

An induced abortion is the deliberate termination of an intact pregnancy. The embryo or foetus is killed. The legitimacy of abortion is a socially controversial topic. The right to life of the embryo or foetus, a woman's right of self-determination, personal responsibility of the parents, as well as religious directives and ethical values are topics for discussion here. This results in very different evaluations and legislation

Apart from the medical risks of a termination of pregnancy, the invasive procedure can also have psychological consequences. Therefore, the mother or the parents should

give serious thought to the medical forecast as well as the social and psychological aspects of a pregnancy or its termination.

The Church is an advocate for life

Life is given by God. Human life must be protected and preserved. The New Apostolic Church is an advocate for life.

Life begins with the union of egg cell (ovum) and sperm. The fertilised egg cell (zygote) is an individual life, which

enjoys the right to protection. The child's right to life must never be disregarded. Children are—from the viewpoint of the Christian faith—a gift of God and every human being is wanted, created, and loved by God. From the moment of conception, that is, the fertilisation of the ovum, a human being is to be regarded as ensouled.

Transgression of the Fifth Commandment

The New Apostolic Church rejects abortions as they constitute a transgression of the Fifth Commandment. The burden of guilt before God which is associated with a termination of pregnancy can vary; God alone determines this. The awareness and intention of the sinner with regards to her actions is the deciding factor here. Likewise, certain influences can play a part, like for example the individual's situation in life, social structures, legal standards in the country, or emergency situations.

Experience teaches that even for believing Christians an abortion can be an issue. The reasons why pregnancies are ended are indeed individual, but also depend on the behaviour of people in the social circle the mother or parents move in.

If the life of the mother is at risk according to medical opinion, then the life of the mother needs to be saved. Also in this case the Fifth Commandment is transgressed, even though the burden of guilt can, by all means, be small. If there are other reasons for an abortion, another alternative would be to put the child up for adoption after birth.

Personal responsibility and pastoral support

Because of the importance of the decision the Apostle should be involved in the decision-making process; he will arrange the pastoral care. Mothers or couples who have seriously contemplated the medical, personal, and theological aspects, can rely on the respect of the Church for their self-responsible decision for or against a termination of pregnancy, and can count on unbiased pastoral care.

From the Church's understanding of sin and guilt, and the associated consequences, the Church advises both parents to acknowledge the sin before God and to ask for forgiveness. Abortion is a socially sensitive topic. Confidentiality by ministers is of significant importance!

Threat to the mother's life

If the diagnosis clearly and unmistakably indicates that the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother, then the Church will put aside its serious reservations about termination of pregnancy and speak out for saving the mother's life.

In such situations, the treating physicians might possibly advise in favour of a termination of pregnancy as a precautionary measure before the life of the mother is actually threatened. In that case, the situation must be carefully assessed.

Substantial abnormalities in the unborn child

Substantial abnormalities may occur in the unborn child as a result of genetic defects, chromosomal abnormalities, and exposure to exterior factors during pregnancy such as alcohol, medication, or infections. There are medical guidelines in many countries where doctors have to offer special pre-birth (prenatal) diagnostic tests when there is an increased risk, for example, if there is a known genetic disease or if the mother is older. This kind of prenatal screening concentrates on suspected defects. It cannot detect all possible abnormalities and, in particular, not the degree of severity of a disability. On the other hand, it can also not guarantee the birth of a healthy human being.

In some countries it is by now obligatory to conduct a thorough consultation on the possibilities and consequences of such a procedure prior to diagnostic testing in order to make it easier for the mother or the parents to decide. Parents have a right not to know and are able to decline the procedures offered. On learning of the diagnosis of an abnormality that implies severe physical and/or mental handicaps, parents often have an involuntary reaction similar to that of a grief reaction. Their hope for a healthy child has been destroyed, they "lose" their child and initially reject the disabled child. In this situation, the advice to end the pregnancy can be a hasty solution. The parents' initial reaction of rejecting the handicapped child can change during the course of the pregnancy to a loving acceptance of the child.

From the experience of caring for handicapped people and their families it can be said that

- life in itself—despite a disability—is valuable.

- life can be fulfilling despite a disability.
- people with a disability usually value their lives and are possibly contented with them.
- it is not uncommon for parents to develop a special love for their handicapped children.
- handicapped or sick people often have particular abilities. People with Down syndrome, for example, can develop excellent social skills, which can even be enriching for affected families.
- children with a disability can also have a stabilising influence on a marriage or the family.
- it can be helpful to make contact with affected families or self-help support groups.

Abnormalities which are not compatible with a life after birth, or that would lead to the death of the child shortly afterwards, are considered separately when a prenatal diagnosis is made. In such cases, an abortion is often suggested by the medical profession.

Even if there are humanly understandable reasons for rejecting a severely impaired child, the Church's point of view should—bearing in mind the significance of the decision—be taken into consideration. Should there be a desire for a discussion with a minister, the Apostle (or someone designated by him) is primarily available to help; he will arrange the pastoral care. In principle it must be said that the killing of human beings who are sick or unwanted is contrary to Christian teaching. This ultimately also includes killing unborn children who would probably die after birth or only survive for a short time. The minister should show understanding, independent of the decision taken, and ensure unconditional pastoral care.

Pregnancy as a result of rape

Women who have been raped are usually physically as well as psychologically traumatised. They often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This may relieve the event through so-called flashbacks, which manifest themselves as nightmares, emotional numbness, jumpiness, overexcitability, fears, and avoidance of social contacts as well as sexual relationships.

If pregnancy results from the rape, the reliving of the situation can be intensified by the presence of the child. The aggression of the mother against the rapist and her bitterness (mostly unconscious) can be directed towards the unwanted child. If the woman becomes conscious of this, it can lead

to guilt complexes and further psychological disorders. This conflict can also impact significantly on the development of the child.

Problems which could be significant in the pastoral care of a woman who was the victim of rape:

- she will be uneasy to talk about the subject openly, especially with a man/minister. (There may be suitable sisters in the Church, who could be points of contact in these cases.)
- her self-confidence could be shattered.
- she could feel dirty.
- some women feel wrongly that they are partly to blame.

Placing blame on the woman for the rape must be categorically avoided. Psychotherapeutic counselling for the woman is recommended. She must not be prevented from pressing criminal charges. Ministers are advocates for the conceived life. Therefore, they will show the greatest consideration for the experience and situation of the woman on the one hand, but they will on the other hand also talk about carrying the pregnancy to term and the possibility of giving the baby up for adoption.

Women under guardianship

Depending on the type and severity of the illness, severely mentally handicapped people or people with severe psychiatric illness cannot take on personal responsibilities so that a legal representative (parents, guardian) takes over this responsibility. In these cases, it is also usually not possible for people with these conditions to care for a child as its father or mother.

In these situations, one should consider whether the continuation of a pregnancy is a responsible course of action considering the implications for mother and child.

The Church will not give up its attitude to life, but will ultimately respect the decision made by the person responsible.

Pregnancy in underage girls

A pregnancy in underage girls can present serious problems, if their education has not been completed and their personal development into adulthood seems unfinished. Often, the expectant mother has no independent income.

She is therefore usually not able to care for her child on her own, so that in such a case the decision over the continuation of the pregnancy is rarely made by the pregnant girl herself.

In order to support her in this situation, and to help her accept the new life, the father of the child, as well as the parents of the pregnant girl and of the father, should be involved in the counselling and pastoral care. For this the consent of the expectant mother is necessary. Support centres can give advice on financial support and social security benefits.

Termination of pregnancy and guilt

Abortions are violations to the Fifth Commandment and are therefore a sin. The responsibility for a termination lies with both parents. The guilt before God resulting from sin can be minimal in some of the circumstances described. Practical experience shows nevertheless that the feelings of guilt can sometimes be considerable. Asking God for forgiveness and receiving grace can also help in coming to terms with the termination emotionally.

Adoption is an alternative

As an alternative to a planned abortion, giving the child up for adoption presents a possibility. In case of an adoption (accepting a child as one's own) a parent-child relationship develops without regard to the natural parentage.

Aside from the well-known incognito adoption, where there is no connection between the biological parents and the child and its family, there is the option of semi-open adoption, where contact can be maintained between birth parents and child by means of letters and photos via a neutral address. In the case of an open adoption, both birth parents and adoptive parents know each other and maintain long-term contact. Open adoptions often occur within a family or among friends. Further information can be obtained in literature on the subject and relevant internet sites.

Prevention through contraception

Family planning by methods or drugs which avoid the fusion of egg cell and sperm is supported, thereby preventing unintended pregnancy which could result in a termination of pregnancy.



Brief statement

The New Apostolic Church understands itself as an advocate for life. Already the fertilised egg cell (ovum) is an individual life which enjoys the right to protection. The New Apostolic Church rejects terminations of pregnancy because they constitute a transgression of the Fifth Commandment. The guilt before God associated with it can vary greatly depending on individual circumstances. Even if there are humanly understandable reasons in favour of a termination of pregnancy, the viewpoint of the Church should carry particular weight considering the significance of the decision. Mothers or couples who have given serious thought to the medical, personal, and theological perspectives can rely on the respect of the Church for their self-responsible decision for or against a termination of pregnancy, and can count on unbiased pastoral care.

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■ Jessica Krämer, Oliver Rütten

Ministry, women, and the Bible

Now that we've covered the question of what, it's time to tackle the question of who: expanding on our understanding of the concept of ministry was also high on the Church's list of things to do in 2021. And some initial answers have indeed been found since, along with a detailed roadmap for the rest of the journey.

The comprehensive formulation of the concept of ministry has been an ongoing project since 2014. The results to date range from basing the concept's theological foundation on the doctrine of the dual nature of Christ to concentrating on a three-level ministerial structure as of Pentecost 2019.

Now that the question of what has been answered, the questions about who can follow. Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider already made that much clear at the International Church Convention of 2014: approaching the matter from the perspective that "we do not have enough men, so you women will need to preach", is not a good starting point. However, there are also other questions to think about, such as: "What will the congregation accept?"

Women and men are equal

In his annual interview the Church leader explained how these deliberations are currently going. Accordingly, the decision-making process endeavours to answer the basic questions: "What does God say?", "What does the Bible say?", "What does the Church say?", and "What does the regional culture say?"

The first question—namely about the will of God—has already been answered on the basis of the biblical accounts of the creation. This was something the District Apostle Meeting discussed in November 2020, before going on to publish a doctrinal paper on the subject of "Man and woman in



The District Apostle Helpers, District Apostles, and the Chief Apostle at one of their international conferences

the image of God” in March 2021. The core statements of this paper are as follows:

- women and man are equally created in the image of God. They are equal to one another and interdependent. They are of the same nature and dignity.
- women and men are both called in equal measure to protect and have dominion over the creation. In giving them this mandate, God did not assign them any different areas of domain or activity.
- the duties of woman and man are understood differently owing to social and political developments within human society, among other things.

Content takes precedence over authorship

The second question—namely as to the further biblical findings—is of a twofold nature: “What prompted Jesus to call only men to the Apostle ministry?” And: “What does the early church, as reflected in the Pastoral Letters, for example, have to say about the matter?”

In November 2021, the New Apostolic Church also made its position known in this context: as a guideline for interpreting the Bible. Accordingly, it is the content of the biblical books, not the name of their authors, that confers upon them their spiritual authority.

The resolution reads as follows:

- “God is the actual author of the biblical books. The authority of the biblical writings is based upon their divine inspiration, and is not dependent on their authors, whether or not they were Apostles and prophets.

- “Therefore, the exegetical conclusion that a particular text derives from a particular author or not is of no relevance whatsoever for the authority of that text.
- “The teaching authority of the apostolate does not serve to solve individual exegetical problems. Rather, it is given to assure the purity of the Church’s doctrine and preaching.”

Independent and at our own pace

This much is clear: the Church leadership will not allow itself to be put under pressure by one side or the other, nor by societal circumstances, to make a specific decision one way or another. “The matter is too important to deal with hastily or by considering only social trends,” said the Chief Apostle at the most recent conference of the District Apostles. “We will take our time. We will decide for the New Apostolic Church as a whole, not for one or the other side.”

In the process, the Church leader made reference to the great developments of the past decades, above all, the opening of our understanding of church under Chief Apostle Richard Fehr and the recognition of the baptisms of other denominations under his successor Wilhelm Leber. “That took years!” summarised the incumbent Chief Apostle.

There is one significant difference to the current decision-making process. In its public relations work, the Church has opened itself up more than ever before: this time, the Church media have been able to monitor the developments right from the beginning and share them in detail with all interested parties.



Envato

Love, regardless of vaccination status

Should one get vaccinated or not? There will be no official statement from the New Apostolic Church on this. Just as little as on eating meat or not, or driving combustion vehicles. The Chief Apostle explains why in one of his weekly circulars.

“As far as I am concerned, I am vaccinated,” Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider writes to the Apostles around the world. “By necessity—to travel—and out of conviction.” He admits, he says, that he does not understand the arguments of the anti-vaxxers. This is often completely foreign to his way of thinking. “But this is not a reason to ostracise my brothers and sisters who do not share my opinion!”

Lately, many voices have been raised to request that the New Apostolic Church, like other Churches, take an official position in favour of vaccination against Covid. “The inten-

tion of these brothers and sisters is certainly commendable. But we will not act upon their wish.” For the Church leader, there are fundamental considerations that speak against this.

Not with spiritual authority

For one thing: “As Apostles, we have been given the authority to proclaim God’s word. Our mission is to preach the gospel.” He said that they cannot use this authority to assure the faithful that the vaccine is safe or tell them that God wants them to be vaccinated.

Secondly, an appeal by the Church without reference to the spiritual authority makes little sense. “Why should we succeed where governments, the medical profession, and the media have failed?” it says in the circular. “I very much doubt that it would change the mind of anyone who is opposed to the vaccine.”

And finally: “Some people accuse those opposed to the vaccine of lacking love for their neighbour because they are putting those around them in danger.” The same arguments are used by those who stigmatise smokers (they endanger the health of others), drivers of large vehicles (they contribute to global warming), and even meat-eaters. Following the same logic, the Church would then have to speak out against this behaviour as well. “Who should decide on the issues and according to what criteria?”

Not at war with the world out there

The Chief Apostle draws two very different lessons from the Covid crisis: “First, many opposed to the vaccine are convinced that they hold a truth that the general public does not know.” If some New Apostolic Christians subscribe to these theories, it is perhaps because they recognise familiar structures. “For them the world, understood as everything outside the Church, is fundamentally bad.”

There were times when this was even preached in our Church. “That is why we need to watch how we proclaim the gospel,” the Chief Apostle points out. “We are not at war with the outside world, but with evil. We have been chosen to make Christ’s love known to mankind.”

The only unchanging truth

And secondly, in this unprecedented crisis, governments and experts have also shown uncertainties and issued changing, sometimes contradictory rules.

This “reinforces the anti-vaxxers in their distrust of the authorities and media”.

Chief Apostle Schneider draws the following conclusion from this: “The only unchanging truth is the truth of the gospel.” Everything else is a matter of human understanding and is therefore only valid for a limited time. “Let us only use our ministerial authority to proclaim what is essential for salvation.”

The same love and concern for all

In any case, he said, the mandate of the ministers is to urge believers to base their decisions on the gospel. “In no way can we decide for them! What the Lord asks of us is that we show the same love and concern to all, regardless of their opinions and behaviour.”

One thing, however, the Chief Apostle also made clear: “As an institution, and in line with the Tenth Article of our Creed, we ensure that the rules laid down by the authorities are observed in our premises.” Because: “As far as I know, the various regulations that are in force are not contrary to God’s law.”



■ Jessica Krämer



It takes hours to set everything up and find the best spot in the church for the shoot



■ Oliver Rütten

Recording of the New Year's message

The French wine connoisseur comes to Germany and all he gets is water. Even so the words flow fluently from his lips—and in three languages. Here is a look behind the scenes at the recording of the New Year's message for 2022.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee and welcoming smiles greet the communications team at the church in Sachsenhausen, a city quarter of Frankfurt, Germany. There is also an inviting “Come” in the windows. The church hall, built in a timeless Bauhaus style, is friendly and flooded with light.

Due to the pandemic, the communications team was unable to travel to Zurich for the recording of the New Year's message. Seeing that the Chief Apostle had a meeting in Neu-Isenburg—to chair the board meeting at Bischoff Publishers—it seemed only logical to do the recording in

the area. The offices of Bischoff Publishers were not available because of ongoing renovation work, but the modern church in Frankfurt-Sachsenhausen was a perfect fit. And the congregation had just celebrated its centenary the day before.

The set-up

The camera crew met at the Sachsenhausen church at ten in the morning. The best spot for the recording had to be found, and the camera and the teleprompter set up. And some flowers were needed too. The team spent hours get-



Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider reads his New Year's message in French, English, and German

ting everything ready: image and sound, light and shadow, foreground and background... then everything was put through its paces.

The church was a fairly cool 16 degrees Celsius. The heating had broken down the day before. For the male members of the crew the temperature was just right, but not for the only woman on the set. Fortunately, cameraman Kevin had remembered to bring his heated jacket along.

The Chief Apostle has no issues with a such temperatures either. He was in a good mood. After a bit of banter, the New Year's message was recorded in German, English, and French—in that order. The home game came last. Although the French text was a lot longer on paper, the Chief Apostle managed to read it in half the time.

Blunders and Co.

Hardly any professional production does without one: a teleprompter. This is a computer that projects text onto a mirror so that the person being filmed can read the text without it being visible to the viewers and maintain eye contact with the viewers.

Already over the last several years, the device had been a little temperamental. One year the text was displayed upside-down or back-to-front. This time around, it would not allow the lines to be scrolled at the desired pace. The Chief Apostle spoke faster and faster until he burst out laughing

because he could not keep up—all the while the technicians were trying in vain to stop the text from scrolling.

No problem whatsoever. They just started over again. The Chief Apostle had said that he did not need to eat between takes. A few slips of the tongue later he sighed for a glass of wine. But water and cookies were all there was.

"Together in Christ" is the motto for 2022. The Chief Apostle explained what this means by counting the points off on his fingers. But how do you show first, second, third, and fourth? Do you start counting with your thumb or index finger? That depends not only on a person's dexterity, but also on his or her cultural background. But the Chief Apostle mastered this little feat with aplomb—and in the correct language to boot. Will the audience notice?

We did it!

That was quick. Before everyone knew it, the message was in the can, that is, on two independent storage media—just to make sure. Then it was time to dismantle everything. Everything had to be stored away and secured for transport. The Chief Apostle drove home to France, where a well-deserved glass of wine was hopefully waiting for him.

For the crew, however, the work was far from done: the video had to be edited, and subtitles and trailers added. The result was featured on nac.today, nak.org, Facebook, and YouTube on 1 January 2022.

Below: The new altar of the Madina congregation in Ghana

Right: Children in Taucha, Germany, prepare a hole with cement into which the time capsule will be placed



■ NAC Ghana, NAC Taucha



A spirit of optimism in the Church

Back in November 2021, the third Covid wave still had a firm grip on society, but it could not keep believers from building on their mutual bonds in the congregations. At the time, we took a look around the world to see how the congregations were coping—and came up with promising news.

New churches, new altars, in-person services, and seminars. A wave of optimism is spreading in the Church and the congregations.

A new place for God's word

Thanksgiving Sunday in Madina, Ghana: The acting district rector, John Hammond, conducted a divine service on the topic of gratitude towards God. He based his sermon on Genesis 2: 2–3: “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” The

minister spoke about gratitude from behind a special place: members, who had wanted to express their gratitude on Thanksgiving Day, had donated a new altar to the congregation.

Building up the congregations

Meetings for ministers took place in Yekaterinburg and in Stockholm in September and October 2021. The ministers were able to exchange ideas with their Apostles Marat Akchurin and David Heynes and discuss questions arising from faith in everyday life. In Stockholm, Sweden, a teacher training session took place at the same time; the teachers also discussed faith-related topics and fostered fellowship.

Below: A small choir accompanies the ceremonial act of laying the foundation stone in Taucha, Germany



■ NAC Cuba, Rainer Knobloch

The participants of both groups in Stockholm were treated to local specialities, and the highlight was a joint final divine service with District Apostle Helper Helge Mutschler.

Kick-off for a new church building

It was on a cloudy but rainless day in September that 120 New Apostolic members and other Christians met on the grounds of the church in Taucha, Germany, for the laying of the foundation stone of the new church. After the project manager's speech, Bishop Thomas Matthes read Isaiah 45: 18 and wished the congregation that the church, just like the earth created by God, should not remain empty but that it should be a place that is inhabited and where God is present. He wished the congregation that it be a place of harmony, love, and forgiveness.

The mayor of Taucha, the architect, the pastor of the local Protestant church, and the parish assistant of the Catholic church also spoke. The latter emphasised how happy he was that a church was now being built on the plot of land which had once belonged to the Catholic Church.

Bishop Matthes placed a few items—including the official certificate, a recent issue of the Church magazine *Unsere Familie*, as well as copy of the local newspaper *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, into a metal case and sealed it to form a time capsule. Children from the congregation and the neighbourhood then placed it in the prepared concrete.



Above: Members in Cuba at their first divine service in a long time
Below: Meeting of ministers and teachers in Stockholm, Sweden



Back to church in Cuba

The authorities in Cuba had ordered the closing of churches right at the start of the pandemic. Although the country was still experiencing a third wave at the time this article was written, with the highest number of Covid cases so far, the government had decided to ease the restrictions.

On 31 October 2021 then, the first divine service could finally be held again. Even the heavy rains could not prevent the brothers and sisters from coming to church. The sermon was based on Psalm 135: 6: "Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places." The members were overjoyed to finally be able to join an in-person service and be able to see each other again and have fellowship. In the weeks after, divine services were also possible again in the other congregations in the country.

DISTRICT APOSTLE MICHAEL EHRLICH:

Learning From Our Role Model

In Philippians 2: 5 it says: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Experience teaches us that sometimes one and the same act can be based on different attitudes. For example, Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God. Abel's offering pleased God, but Cain's attitude towards offering did not please God (Genesis 4: 3 et seq.). The brothers' different temperament was responsible for this. Jesus addressed certain issues concerning conduct and various attitudes using well-known and simple stories. He wanted the people to understand how important it is to look into their own hearts.

- In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the Lord showed that God grants grace to the one who approaches Him with humility, and not to the one who boasts about his own works (Luke 18: 9–14).
- The parable of the sower shows us that it takes a God-fearing heart to understand the word of God and accept it (Luke 8: 15).
- The parable of the unforgiving servant makes clear that one can only receive grace if one is also merciful to one's neighbour (Matthew 18: 21–35).

There are many other examples that could be cited. Let's go to our motto for 2022. "Together in Christ" means to be aware of the fellowship we have with the Lord, and to harmonise our own inner disposition with His. The best way to achieve this

is to take Christ as our model. And through the rebirth out of water and Spirit we have the conditions required for this:

Here are some of the behaviours we can learn from our role model Jesus Christ:

- The Lord did not turn a blind eye to the distress and poverty of human beings. Compassion for those in need must be found in us as well.
- Jesus Christ turned to the people out of love. Many came to Him and asked Him for help. He told no one: "I don't have any time for you." Let us pray for others, make time for them, and give them practical help. This is how we can show love for God and our neighbour.
- The Son of God was humble. He did not mind bowing down in front of His disciples (John 13: 1 et seq.). Let us be humble before the Lord and not elevate ourselves above others. Let us be willing to serve and sacrifice.

GHANA: Like Jesus

Following Jesus Christ also means following Him in word, deed, and nature. One of Jesus' notable attributes is His humility and love for children. Lead Apostle Oppong-Brenya actually tries to live out these attributes. Recently at the Antseambua congregation, he walked with the Sunday School through parts of a village as part of the their Sunday School activities. As he often does on many of his visits, he also took time to interact with the children



Our little ones walking side by side with Lead Apostle Oppong-Brenya towards the Antseambua congregation

GHANA: Togetherness

In the Konongo Apostle Area, two major youth programs have been held to foster unity and socialization among the youth in Domeabra and Obuasi districts respectively. There were doctrinal lessons and bible discussions, open fora for interactions between the youth and ministry as well as some fun-games in which the Bishop Charles Kesse also participated. The Bishop encouraged the youth to live that same energy and togetherness in their congregations.



Some fun games, in which Bishop Charles Kesse also participated, strengthen the sense of togetherness



Sisters presenting the work group results in Libreville



Much joy after a blessed meeting



Brethren following a presentation

GABON:

Learning from Jesus Christ!

"Learning from the example of Jesus Christ!" This theme guided several gatherings of Sunday School and Confirmation Class teachers as well as active sisters and

and brothers in various localities in Gabon in order to strengthen faith, understanding and fellowship in the congregations.

BENIN:

Become Like Jesus

"Learn from the example of Jesus Christ." On the occasion of the youth day in Mono, Apostle Olou Kouessivi Justin insisted on the model of forgiveness, peace and love of Jesus. He urged young people to imitate Christ Jesus in their daily lives.



Apostle Olou after the youth service



A role play about forgiveness

BENIN:

Learning to Share

If there is a proven and instructive fact, it is that Jesus Christ taught a lot during His visits. In the Porto-Novo district, visiting the elderly and the sick is an activity that creates much joy. The people visited can share the joy of communion in Christ with their brothers and sisters.



Visit to the home of an elderly Evangelist

NIGERIA:

Learning Takes Time

Jesus' parables are about everyday situations that are easy to understand. They still touch us today and motivate us to follow and serve Jesus.

Apostle Geoffrey Jediels made it easy for the confirmands in Yola District, Northern Nigeria to learn what fellowship is. He spent a lot of time with the confirmands and the congregation even after the service. In this way, they were also able to share their earthly concerns and desires with the Apostle.



Apostle Jediels with the 2022 confirmands in Yola congregation

NIGERIA:

Children in Focus

"And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:2-3) – This was also the focus of the newly ordained Apostle Felix Barisi Kpegasin during his visit to the South South District.

He showed his love and appreciation for the young children in his area of work.



Apostle Kpegasin being received at Bodo congregation by the children



Humanitarian aid



Visit to the sick



Role play: Jesus with his disciples (left)



Welcome to the Youth Meeting (right)

GUINEA:

Our Example is Jesus

Through many actions, the brothers and sisters of the congregation try to give life to the words of Jesus Christ: "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15).

It is with this in mind that the brothers, sisters and children strive every day to put into practice with their neighbours the character of Christ; humility, exceptional leadership (living for others), compassion, love ... through the teaching of the Apostles.



Living fellowship - being there for the other person

GUINEA:

Baptism and Belief

To help us separate ourselves from our old nature, the young people of the community of Guéckédou centre used, during their local meeting, the interview of Jesus with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21).

Through role-playing, they made clear some of Jesus' teaching words, including: "... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3) and "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:15).



Youth encouraging to read the magazine "Community" together

SIERRA LEONE:

Together in Christ

Youth from the Makeni Central Church joined the congregation of the village of Madina - a suburb of the city of Makeni - for an Easter Monday outing. Together with Apostle Sanpha Sesay, over 850 participants experienced a strengthening community experience. The focus was on elements of unity in Christ, peace, love and harmony. This was also expressed in a role play based on the Bible story of Ruth and Naomi. In addition, everyone in this community enjoyed games, music, singing, dancing and sports.



Everyone joins in: Tug of war for peace

GUINEA:

Youth Weekend

Four issues facing Christian youth; worldly lust, marriage, management of a community & offerings and the behaviour of a minister's wife, were explained during a youth meeting at Guéckédou in April 2022.

At the closing divine service of the meeting, the Apostle Leno said "I am persuaded that He who began this good work in you will make it perfect for the day of Jesus Christ" (Philipp.1:6). He said the values of love, patience, faith...began in the youth will make them perfect.



Melody players provide musical accompaniment to the divine service



A group picture after the Apostles' Meeting



A warm welcome to Ho from the children



Chief Apostle at the altar in Accra

GHANA:

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider in Ghana

At the end of March, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider travelled to Ghana. Our District Apostle Michael Ehrich, District Apostle Tshitshi Tshisekedi (District Church of the Democratic Republic of Congo South-East) and District Apostle Helper Patrick Mandla Mkhwanazi (District Church of South-East Africa) accompanied him.

The journey kicked off on Friday, 25 March 2022, with an Apostles' Meeting in Accra, the capital of Ghana. Around 40 Apostles and Bishops from the countries of Equatorial Guinea, Benin, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria and Togo came together to deal intensively with spiritual topics.

The following day, they went to Ho, a city about 150 kilometres from Accra. For the first time in 18 years, a Chief Apostle conducted a divine service there.

The trip was concluded on Sunday, 27 March 2022, with a large festive divine service in the Central Church in Accra attended by more than 2,000 participants. The service was also broadcast on television and via Youtube to selected congregations in Africa. The divine service was given a special tone by the retirements of Apostle Andrew Boakye from Ghana and Apostles Augustine Rotimi and Effiong Ekpenyong from Nigeria. Chief Apostle Schneider then ordained five new Apostles for Ghana and Nigeria (see below).



Blessings to the five newly ordained Apostles



Chief Apostle applauds the choir



The Chief Apostle and District Apostle in conversation

GHANA

RETIREMENT

In the divine service on 27 March 2022 in Accra, an Apostle from Ghana and two Apostles from Nigeria were retired:



Apostle Andrew Boakye
Date of Ordination: 2004
Area: Nkawkaw, Ghana



Apostle Augustine Rotimi
Date of Ordination: 2002
Area: South West Nigeria



Apostle Effiong Ekpenyong
Date of Ordination: 2008
Area: South Central Nigeria

NIGERIA

ORDINATION

The Chief Apostle ordained two new Apostles for Ghana and three new Apostles for Nigeria in Accra on 27 March 2022:



Apostle Charles Addo Asare
Date of birth: 29-10-1962
Area: Accra, Ghana



Apostle Isaac Opoku Mensah
Date of birth: 21-12-1966
Area: Nkawkaw, Ghana



Apostle Emmanuel Armstrong Inyang
Date of birth: 02-10-1972
Area: South Central Nigeria



Apostle Felix Barisi Kpegasin
Date of birth: 01-04-1961
Area: South South Nigeria



Apostle Geoffrey Jediel Gwani
Date of birth: 03-02-1968
Area: Northern Nigeria

South Germany: Divine service with the District Apostle

On Sunday, April 3 2022, District Apostle Michael Ehrich conducted a divine service for all the congregations in his working area. This was transmitted from the church in Heidelberg via IPTV and live internet stream to numerous congregations in South Germany, and also to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Israel, Croatia, northern Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, the Persian Gulf region as well as East and West Africa.

Bible text: **"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."**
(James 5:8)

Core thoughts: At the beginning of his sermon, the District Apostle first addressed the performance of the singing ensemble: *"Behold, I spread abroad full of desire..."* - which reminded him of the incident of the blind beggar Bartimaeus. He cried out for Jesus. The people told him to be quiet. However, Bartimaeus continued to cry out for Jesus. Jesus then turned to him and healed him of his blindness with the words: "... your faith has helped you" (Mark 10:52). The District Apostle transferred this incident to us and asked us to "cry out" for Jesus today. This means turning to Jesus in the divine service community and in prayer. Jesus does not ignore our requests, but He does not always help immediately. Patience is often necessary. Only the Triune God knows when Jesus Christ will return. Those who believe in the return of Christ also adjust their lives accordingly. The patience mentioned in the Bible passage can come from a proven faith. Apostle Jürgen Loy (Apostle District Stuttgart) and Apostle Hans-Jürgen Bauer (Apostle District Ulm) were called upon to preach.



New Apostolic Church
International

