

community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

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Motto 2020

Christ makes free!

Editorial

Christ makes free!

Divine service

It is God who grants
salvation

Doctrine

Behold, I am coming
quickly!

■ Editorial

- 3 Christ makes free!

■ Divine service

- 4 It is God who grants salvation

■ A visit in Africa

- 10 God blesses those who trust Him

■ A visit in Asia

- 12 God's word in all its power and beauty

■ A visit in Europe

- 14 Seven good reasons for the Apostle ministry

■ Children's corner

- 16 Workers in the vineyard
18 At Valentin's in Paris (France)

■ Doctrine

- 20 Behold, I am coming quickly!

■ Global news

- 24 Baking wafers outside of Bielefeld
26 Working hand in hand for the well-being of others
28 I fight for what I believe in.
30 Journeying through time in the South Pacific

■ NEWS FROM DISTRICT APOSTLE AREA

- 32 District Apostle Michael Ehrich: Strong Fellowship
32 Ghana: A Strong Fellowship of Kindred Minds
33 Nigeria: Active charity is a sign of a strong fellowship
33 Ghana: Perfectly United Minds and Hearts
34 Togo: Experience Fellowship
34 Benin: Very blessed days
34 Guinea: We look forward to seeing our Chief Apostle
35 Equatorial Guinea / Gabun / Cameroon: District Apostle introduces new Lead Apostle
35 Ghana / Togo / Benin: Changes to Lead Apostles Areas
36 South Germany / East and West Africa: Divine service with the District Apostle

Christ makes free!

Dear brothers and sisters,

Hopefully the year that lies behind you was a good one! It is my hope that you will always find enough reasons to give thanks to our Lord for all of His benefits!

Now the New Year has dawned. It has become a tradition for me to publish an annual motto in consultation with the District Apostles. Our motto for 2020 is: **“Christ makes free!”**

We find the corresponding Bible text in Apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5: 1).

Liberty—this is a great and precious gift! As children of God, we not only apply this to our earthly existence. We make liberty in Christ our top priority.

- God is completely free. His love for us is unconditional.
- We can choose liberty. It is completely up to us to reciprocate the love of God.
- Christ makes us free—from sin, from evil, and from all afflictions.

For the year 2020, I recommend that we concentrate on this spiritual dynamic: “Christ makes free!”



■ NAC International

There is one thing that is of special importance to me in this context: liberty in Christ is a gift of God. Let us allow the Lord to liberate us by surrendering ourselves completely to the activity of the Holy Spirit.

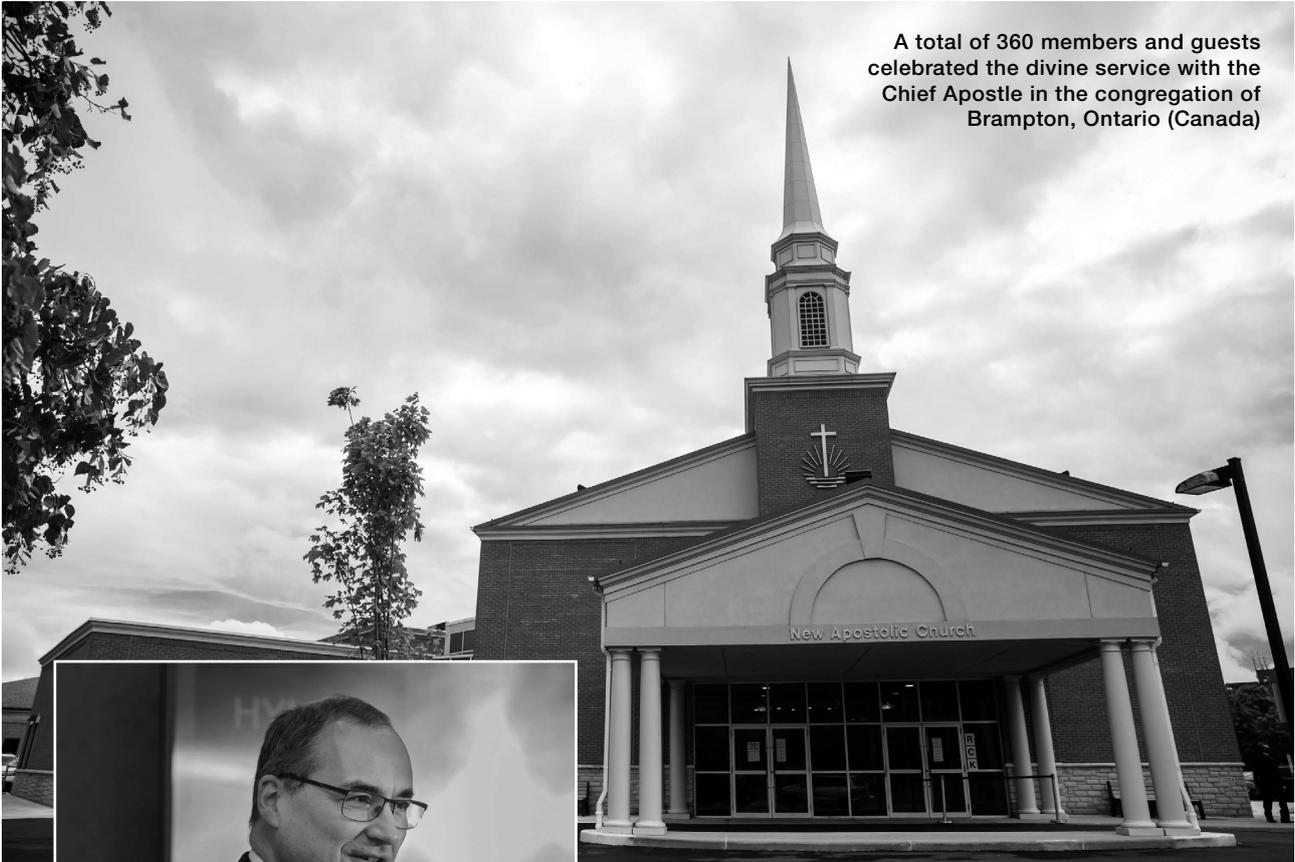
Because we know that the almighty God loves us, we can look into the future with confidence. And by remaining faithful to Christ, we craft our future.

Together with all the Apostles, I extend warm greetings to all of you, and wish you a good and blessed new year!

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script that is difficult to read but appears to be the name Jean-Luc Schneider.

Jean-Luc Schneider



Psalm 135: 6

*“Whatever the Lord pleases He does,
in heaven and in earth, in the seas,
and in all deep places.”*

It is God who grants salvation

My dear brothers and sisters, here and in the connected congregations, we have gathered together this morning in order to hear the word of God. God desires to address all of us. He is not only addressing a group of believers, nor is He only addressing His people as a whole. He is addressing each individual in his or her own personal circumstances. He desires to speak to each and every one of us, to His child. He is also talking to those who have fallen asleep in their life of faith. That happens from time to time. Perhaps some of our younger brothers and sisters—or maybe even some of our seniors—are of the impression: “Things are always the same. Nothing new ever happens any more. It is always the same story, the same music, the same people ... Things are becoming monotonous. Nothing ever happens. Nothing ever changes.” And slowly one begins to fall asleep.

I am reminded of the account of Paul when he was in Troas. Paul delivered a long sermon that lasted until midnight, and one young man, who was seated high up in a window, fell asleep because Paul had been talking for so long. It says in Scripture: “He was overcome by sleep, and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third storey and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, ‘Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him’” (Acts 20: 9–10).

Dear brothers and sisters, perhaps one or the other is thinking: “There is nothing left. My faith is dead.” Perhaps he or she is only holding on to it out of habit at this point.

May those who have such thoughts make the experience today: “The life I have received from God is still there! My soul is still alive! It has needs! It longs for fellowship with the Lord! It longs to hear the word of God! It desires to partake in Holy Communion! It wants to be with Jesus!”

It is a beautiful experience when someone who has fallen asleep in faith suddenly realises that something is still alive within: “It is the divine life, and my soul wants me to give it the nourishment it needs.” It would be a wonderful experience if that were to happen today.

Perhaps you were a little astonished when you heard the Bible text: “Whatever the Lord pleases He does ...” One might certainly arrive at some interesting thoughts on reading this passage. This is merely a description of the omnipotence of God. God is almighty. For Him there are no limits. He can do all things. Nothing is impossible for Him. He can do whatever He wants. This also means that He is completely sovereign. No one can tell Him what to do. No one can force Him to do anything—no person, no spirit, and no circumstance. Nor can anyone influence Him. It is not true when people say, “If I do this or that, then God will act accordingly.” No! He does exactly as He pleases. No one can force Him to act in a particular manner, no matter how holy he happens to be! The Lord does whatever He wants. This also means that we cannot truly understand Him, because His will and His thoughts far surpass our understanding. We cannot say that we do not accept the will of God. Perhaps we do not understand it and perhaps we do not want to agree with it, but God does whatever He desires. He wants us to accept His will. This is not a matter for discussion! He can do anything. No one can force Him to

do anything. But this does not mean that He acts in an arbitrary or random way without any rules! No, God is faithful. That is a special point. We can rely on Him. He is the truth. He is the Righteous One. He is love. He says what He will do and does what He says.

But now we come to the interesting question: “What is the will of God? What does He want to do?” That is very simple. Right from the start, God wanted to have fellowship with the human beings He had created. That is a good way to summarise the will of God. God wants mankind to live in fellowship with Him for all eternity. This is very easy to comprehend. The fall into sin did nothing to change the will of God. The will of God remained the same. The behaviour of man did not change anything about this. He wants us to have fellowship with Him. That is His will. And He does whatever He pleases. It is good to know that everything God does—and has ever done—serves this singular purpose. He wants all human beings to be saved. He wants all of them to have fellowship with Him.

*God desires mankind to
live in fellowship with Him
for all eternity*

It is His sovereign will that there should be a way that leads to salvation, that there should be a way that leads to fellowship with Him—and that way is belief in Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said, “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14: 6). There is no salvation in any other name except the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4: 12). That is the will of God, and there is nothing man can do but to accept it. This is not something that is up for discussion: “Well, it seems a little unfair. After all, there are so many good people out there who do not believe in Christ.” This is not a question of moral considerations. Here we are talking about fellowship with God. Whether people like it or not, there is only one way: Jesus Christ. That is the only way. There is no other. Human beings must believe in Jesus Christ. I know that there are many today who see this differently, and that many are of the opinion that there must be more than one way to God. That is definitely not the case, however. God does not need us to understand Him. He simply says, “I do whatever I please, and you must accept this. Forget about discussing it. This is the way it is! There is only one way: Jesus Christ. You must believe in Him.”

The call of God, especially the call to come to Jesus and follow Him, is also an expression of His will. God calls whomever He desires whenever He pleases. And once again: we cannot understand this. Nor does He give us any explana-

tion for it. He has decided that His plan of salvation will unfold in phases. We wait for the return of Christ. We are waiting to partake in the marriage of the Lamb as part of the bride of Christ, and to enter into the kingdom of God as firstlings. Another phase will be the great tribulation. Even souls from the great tribulation will be called in order to enter into the kingdom of God. Others will be called during the kingdom of peace. We cannot comprehend why God calls some today and others at a later point in time. Don't ask why God wants it that way. We cannot understand this. We must simply accept it in humbleness: "This is what God has decided." All we know is that He has elected us. How do we know that? It is because He has given us the opportunity to be baptised with water and the Spirit. The rebirth out of water and the Spirit is the sign of our election. God has simply decided to call this one, that one, and the other. "I have elected them for the time of the church. They will be part of the church of Christ. If they follow the Apostles, they will be prepared for the return of Christ and will have the opportunity to enter into My kingdom as firstlings." That is what is important for us. We do not know why we have been elected or why God does things this way and not in some other way. It is the will of God. And this is simply something we must accept. Whatever the Lord pleases He does. But He does not act arbitrarily. He is faithful. He says what He does and He does what He says.

He has created man with a free will. He did not want man to do anything by force. Human beings are to decide for God freely, out of their own resolve: "I want to respond to the call of God." That is the important thing. God is faithful. He has created the world. He has created human beings with a free will, and He will always respect our freedom of choice. He has elected us, and He wants us to respond to His call by our own will. He will never force salvation upon us. He will never threaten us: "Watch out! If you do not do this or that, things will go terribly for you!" No!

How did He act in the case of Adam and Eve? They had the opportunity to experience the love of God. They even lived with God and received everything they needed. In His love, God gave them everything and told Him what He expected of them. That was all. Everything else was up to them. God did not force them. He did not influence them. He said, "You can see that I love you. I have proven My love to you. You can feel it. And this is what I expect of you. Now you can decide freely for yourselves."

And that is exactly what He does with us. He gives us the opportunity to experience His love, and He tells us what He expects of us. Now all we must do is make our decision:



will we say yes to God or will we say no to Him? He will not force us into anything.

We are and remain free. God does not threaten us. He does not exert any pressure on us. We can freely decide what we want to do. God makes sure that we remain free in our decisions to the very end. We will never be forced to say yes to God. He will always see to it—and this is an important point—that we are never forced to say no to Him either. No matter what the circumstances, He will always ensure that it is possible for us to say yes to Him, to answer His call and to follow Him. This is something very important,

From Brampton, the divine service was transmitted to 60 congregations in Canada, reaching some 3,600 believers across the country



*Whether people like it or not, there is only one way:
Jesus Christ*

dear brothers and sisters. Think about this. Paul said that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8: 35). This means God always ensures that—no matter what happens—it will always be possible for us to make the right decision and say yes to Him. Otherwise, if the temptations were so difficult—and our trials so great—that we could no longer endure, and were forced to leave God and become unfaithful to Him, then we would not be free. God wants us to be free. That is why He sees to it that we always have the ability to say yes to Him and follow Him in all situations. That is part of His faithfulness. He respects the rules and He ensures that He is also respected. That is why He has elected us. He asks us: “Do you want to respond to My call?” No matter what happens—or does not happen—it is completely and solely up to you. You can decide.

God creates our redemption. We cannot create our own redemption. We are and remain sinners. We cannot ensure that we will enter into the kingdom of God. We need sanctification. We need purification. To put it very simply, we must be made glorious. Only God can do that. We cannot say, “I am worthy now. I am such a good person now that I can enter into the kingdom of God.” That will not work! It is God who brings about our redemption, but we must respect His conditions. He will redeem those who remain faithful. It is only to such that He will grant entry into His kingdom. He wants us to believe in Jesus Christ until the end, and we must follow this path of faith—no matter what happens. It is not always pleasant and not always comfortable. Often we would prefer to follow another path. But God says, “No! I have decided once and for all. You must simply believe.” In other words, “Trust in Me. I give you My word. I will tell you what you must do. Trust in My word. Trust in My love.”

That is the only way to be purified, sanctified, and glorified. That is the way of faith. Even if something you see does not seem to correspond to the word. Even if that which you experience is completely different from what you are told, you must trust in God. Trust in His word. Trust in His love.



If you trust in Him, He will also redeem you. He will purify you. He will sanctify you. He will glorify you. You will be able to enter into His kingdom.

He brings about redemption—but only for those who trust in Him to the end. He fulfils His plan. We are called to be part of the bride of Christ, to be prepared by the Apostles in the church of Christ, and to enter into the kingdom of God as firstlings. God will bring this about. No one can prevent Him from doing so. He will ensure that everything goes the way He wants it to go. He does whatever He pleases, and He has promised that the evil one will never be in a position to overcome the church.

Jesus has promised to be with the Apostles to the end of the age. Just think about the image of the dragon in Revelation, who attempts to attack the woman, but no one can prevent the birth of the male child, and no one can prevent the male child from being caught up to God (Revelation 12: 15). All these statements about God simply mean that God will ensure that that which He has decided will also occur. And for Him it has already happened! In Revelation—and I think this is also the case in the English Bible—everything is described in the past tense. The things which are shown there are not things that are about to happen, but rather things that have already come to pass, because time does not exist for God. He is not making any predictions here. He is not prophesying anything. He is simply describing reality—because He stands above time. For Him everything is clear. Everything has already been done. No one has been able to prevent this.

Be assured, the evil one will not be able to conquer the church. The Apostles will be in a position to fulfil their commission until the end, and the bride of Christ will defi-

nitely enter into the kingdom of God. God will see to this. This also means, however, that the time is limited, and that His Son will come when He decides to send Him. Once again: we little human beings cannot influence Him. God is not dependent on human beings. He can send His Son whenever He desires. The Son of God has not yet come, but it is not because He has not been able to come. It is because God has not yet desired it. He does not need us in order to complete His plan of redemption. I said recently that Jesus could have come fifty years ago in order to take home all those who were ready at that time. He is not dependent on the number or the constitution of the people. He can do great things with very few. He could already have come fifty years ago. The fact that He has not done so is only because God did not want Him to come sooner because He loves us and wants to give us the chance to prepare ourselves. He does whatever He pleases. But this means that we must take it seriously and be aware that the time of grace is limited. At times I hear people say, “Yes, but if we aren’t part of the bride of Christ at that point in time, we will still have the opportunity to attain salvation in the kingdom of peace.”

The Lord does whatever He pleases. He has called me now, in this time period. I cannot simply assume that this call also applies to the period of the kingdom of peace. God does as He pleases! I cannot say, “I was not ready, heavenly Father. Give me a second chance.” Maybe He will, but perhaps He will not! I am not trying to threaten anyone now and say, “You’d better watch out!” But we should be clear about the fact that we as human beings cannot tell God what He has to do.

He has called us now: “Please come, make your decision now!” I do not have the ability—nor do I see any way—to influence Him to give me a second chance in the kingdom

of peace. I cannot possibly know whether He will do this or not. He will not ask me what I would prefer!

This means that we must respond to the call of God today. For us the time of grace is *now*.

Let me summarise this in a few words? God wants us to have fellowship with Him. He has decided to elect us. He is calling us now, in this time period. We can say yes or no to this call, completely uninfluenced by the circumstances. No one will be able to say, “Under these particular circumstances it was impossible to remain faithful.” That is simply not true. God is faithful. He will always see to it that it will be possible for us, that there is a way for us, to say yes to Him. Nothing can force me to leave Him. This is completely up to me. My redemption is dependent on my faith and on my willingness to follow Him and to have fellowship with Him. That is the point, dear brothers and sisters: my redemption is dependent on me, and only me. My redemption depends on my faith. That is why the disciples asked, “Increase our faith!” (Luke 17: 5). How can our faith be increased? Jesus Himself decided that. Paul says that faith comes from the preaching of the word (Romans 10: 17). We must listen to the sermon—we must hear the word of God—in order to have faith and to be increased in faith.

Jesus prayed for those who would come to believe in Him through the word of the Apostles (John 17: 20). Chief Apostle Fehr often said—and I would like to underline this: “In order to be redeemed, we need a strong faith in every situation, and the only way to have a strong faith is to hear the gospel preached by the Apostles.” When I say “hear”, this is not just a question of listening, such that we can say, “Yes, he said this and that.” We must really “eat” the word. We must “digest” it—and we must work with it. That is our problem nowadays. In our society we are accustomed to fast food. I assume it is the same in Canada as it is in France and elsewhere in Europe. We have ready-made meals or fast food. Everything is done already.

That is not the case with the word of God. If we want to derive some benefit from the word of God, we must work with it, we must occupy ourselves with it, we must reflect upon it. We must ask ourselves the question, “What does this mean for me? What does God want from me? What am I supposed to do?” The more we work with the word of preaching, the better we will “digest” it, and the stronger our faith will become. This is not some invention of the New Apostolic Church to try and fill the churches. That is the will of God! He does whatever He pleases. He makes a decision. And He has decided that this is the way—the

only way—to arrive at a strong faith. Hear the word of God. “Eat” the word. “Digest” it. Work with it. That is the important thing.

Beyond that, we must have the desire to say yes to God in all situations, in all circumstances. Not because we wish to escape a particular danger, or because we want to avoid illnesses or other problems. We say yes to God because we want to be with Him, because we love Him. We are here because we want to strengthen our will to follow the Lord, because we want to increase our love for God. The only way for us is to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. I have often said already—and I really mean it: “The more you know Jesus and the more you love Him, the stronger your resolve to follow Him and be with Him will be. Let us be connected with Jesus. When we read the Bible, it is nice to see all the things He has done. But there is a message in that for us today. What would Jesus do today? What does it mean for me today in my situation? What has He done for me? What does He do for me now? And what will He still do for me in the future? The more connected we are to Jesus and the better we know Him, the more we will love Him, and the greater our will to follow Him will be. This gives us the strength to say yes to God in all circumstances and in every situation.

God does what He wants. We must accept His will. But let us not forget: He wants us to be redeemed. He has elected you. He tells you what you must do. You must decide.

If we have sufficient faith and sufficient love, it will be possible for us to say yes to God until the very end—and then He will glorify us.

CORE THOUGHTS

God desires our salvation. He has elected us and called us to enter into His kingdom as firstlings. He will always see to it that we are able to heed His call. Our salvation depends upon our faith and our will to be with God.



God blesses those who trust Him

“The resurrection of Christ is such a bizarre story,” young people have told the Chief Apostle. Human beings generally know very little about the omnipotence of God. But the Chief Apostle is sure that there are no limits to the power of God.

In a divine service in Lavistown (South Africa) on Sunday, 12 May 2019, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider spoke about trust and hope in God and the blessing resulting from this

In Old Testament times, God expected the chosen people to remain faithful to Him. He did not want them to turn to other gods or rely on their own strength. This has not changed. Even today God asks us to trust in Him, the Chief Apostle said.

We trust ...

- in the word of God. Those who trust in God say, “Okay, what you tell me is contrary to my own experience and knowledge, but because it is You who tells me to do it this way and to walk this path, I will do it.” That is a sign of trust: you have twenty reasons to do the opposite, but you keep the commandments.
- in the love of God. We do not always understand everything that God does. We cannot explain the actions of God, we do not understand them, but we trust



At the end of the divine service, the Chief Apostle retired Apostle Allister Kriel, who dedicated over forty years to the Church in various ministries

in His love and know that everything He does aims to lead us into His kingdom.

- in God's omnipotence. Trusting in the Lord means trusting in His power. Quite often, especially young people want to know and ask me: "Chief Apostle, how can we believe in Christ's resurrection? That is such a bizarre story! How do you think it happened?" I have no idea, how God managed to raise Christ from the dead. But He did it! God has unlimited power.

We hope ...

- in Jesus' promise. Jesus promised to come back. God promised to send His Son and to take us with Him, and we hope in this promise. We don't just believe that it might eventually happen. No, we are absolutely sure.
- in Jesus' grace. We remain humble, ask for forgiveness, and forgive our neighbour. Nor do we pretend to have earned something. We hope in the grace of Jesus Christ.
- in the glory of the kingdom of God. Coming from Europe and hearing about the things that happen in some countries and what some people have to go through I often think: that is just not possible. But, sadly enough, it is possible and it is a reality. But then we remember that the glory of God far outweighs this. When we enter the glory of God we will receive far more than mere

compensation for all the evil that man has had to experience on earth. It will be much more.

We are blessed ...

- through the presence of God which we perceive. This is the kind of blessing God wants to give us: those whose trust and hope in the Lord is strong like a tree planted by the waters. Nothing—no matter what happens—can influence our relationship, our connection to the Lord.
- in the eternal fellowship with God. Those who trust in God see more, see further, and know that Jesus will return. How comforting!
- in being able to recognise God's benefits. Believers are grateful to God because they are aware of the treasure they have been given. They know what God will do for them. They are thankful: thankful for God's grace, for His blessing, and for the future they are being prepared for.

In summing up, the Chief Apostle said: "We have full confidence in God's word, love, and power. We hope in His promise, grace, and glory. Blessings allow us to confirm God's presence by our side, to see beyond afflictions, and to persevere in serving God and others."

CORE THOUGHTS

Jeremiah 17: 7–8

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit."

We have full confidence in God's word, love, and power. We hope in His promise, grace, and glory. Blessings allow us to confirm God's presence by our side, to see beyond afflictions, and to persevere in serving God and others.



NAC Indonesia

God's word in all its power and beauty

Living and powerful, sharp and piercing: the word of God is full of surprises. And a single Bible verse makes this abundantly clear: a small lexicology from a divine service by the Chief Apostle.

“The Bible text describes God’s word in a very comprehensive and beautiful way.” This is how Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider started the divine service on 22 November 2018 in Palangkaraya on the island of Borneo (Indonesia).

The living word

The word of God is living. Here the Chief Apostle saw a triple significance. First he explained that the word of God is the source of eternal life: “You have to believe it and do it in order to be saved.” Then he said, “The gospel of Jesus Christ is not some old story: it’s a current reality. It is still valid.” Finally, he said, “It is the living word because it is still being preached today to teach us how to live according to the gospel.” And this is precisely the mission of the Apostles today.

The effective word

God’s word is powerful, the Chief Apostle said. “The word of God contains the full power of God.” It was the origin of creation. Through His word, Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. And His word is still active today: it heals from sin and prepares for resurrection. Don’t ask God for great miracles, just do His word.

The word that differentiates

God’s word is sharp. It clearly distinguishes between good and evil and between truth and falsehood, the Chief Apostle said. Acting upon it inevitably means that one makes a definitive decision for Jesus Christ. “Let us make clear de-



More than 300 brothers and sisters participated in the divine service Chief Apostle Schneider held in Palangkaraya. That morning they welcomed him with a traditional ceremony



cisions. We have decided that the gospel of the Lord is the truth. We do not follow the main stream, we do God's will."

The penetrating word

God's word penetrates. That means it penetrates deeply into man. The word of God is directed at the heart, not at human reason, the Chief Apostle said. "That is the essence of the whole Bible. God loves you and tells you, 'Come!'" This message wants to and must permeate our entire lives: our marriages, our families, our congregations, our workplaces, and society in general.

The word that recognises

God's word: a judgement? "God knows us better than we know ourselves," the Chief Apostle said and went on to say, "Let us be humble enough to accept that He wants to tell us something through His word." His judgement of a person does not only include his or her deeds, but also the motivation behind them. Love for God and our neighbour is our true motivation. Let us act accordingly, and we will be saved.

CORE THOUGHTS

Hebrews 4: 12

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

God delivers us through His word.

Salvation occurs when we accept and do God's word. Let us apply His word in all areas of life and follow the recommendations of the Lord and serve Him in love.



Seven good reasons for the Apostle ministry

What exactly is the mission of the Apostles today? What have they been called for? What are they supposed to preach? These are some of the questions that are regularly asked. In a divine service in Stockholm (Sweden) on 19 May 2019 Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider gave some answers.

By means of seven points, he explained to the congregation what this means for him specifically. He made it very clear that the Apostles are servants of the congregation. “In the work of God there is only one Lord, and that is Jesus Christ.” Sometimes we hear the wish expressed that the Apostles should adapt the gospel to the present reality, the Chief Apostle said, “but we can’t do that. We are only servants of God. He makes the rules. We cannot change the gospel of Christ.” Although the Apostles baptise with water and Spirit, they do not decide who gets to enter the kingdom of heaven. The dispensation of the sacraments is only the beginning: “The new creature in Christ must develop.” He went on to say that Jesus Christ decides, and only He, who gets to enter the kingdom of God! The role of the Apostles is to help along, but every believer has to work on his own salvation.

How the Apostles help

The Apostles contribute and help by:

- preaching eternal wealth. The Lord explained to His disciples that spiritual riches are more important than earthly ones. “Seek first the kingdom of God.” That does not mean that believers should despise earthly life and deny themselves beautiful things and should be poor. Our priorities are clear. We are glad that our names are written in heaven. We are happy about the fact that salvation is being offered to us. This joy accompanies us in good and in bad days, because Christians know: “I have received salvation, Jesus Christ has died for me. He redeems me. He leads me into His kingdom.”
- proclaiming God’s commandments. Jesus repeatedly urged His Apostles to keep His commandments. Some



The divine service in Stockholm with Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider was transmitted throughout Sweden and to congregations in Denmark, Finland, and Norway

people are reluctant to do this. They think it restricts their freedom. Continuous obedience is a thing of the past, they say. “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him,” Jesus said. Admittedly, this is not the way that leads to prosperity and success in life, but it allows you to experience the nearness of God!

- preaching repentance. Jesus explained to His Apostles that they must repent and change their ways, that they need grace. The mandate of the Apostles is to preach repentance and tell the believers: we need grace, we are poor sinners. When the Apostles preach repentance and call on the faithful to change their ways, they do so with a single purpose: to enable believers to obtain a full measure of grace, to gain freedom in Christ.
- teaching us how to pray. The Lord taught His disciples how to pray. This too, is part of the mission of the Apostles, to help the congregation in praying in the name of Jesus Christ. “Whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16: 23–24). The intention is not to frustrate us. In fact, the mission of the Apostle ministry is to help us formulate our prayers in such a way that God can answer them, that we can be sure that He will answer them.

- teaching Jesus’ example. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples how to serve. Before His sacrificial death, He gave them an example by washing their feet. Let us serve the Lord, let us serve one another. Those who serve the Lord will be able to regularly experience that, although they are weak, they can accomplish great things through Jesus Christ. This is not a theory, but a very concrete reality.
- addressing afflictions. Jesus spoke to His Apostles about affliction and persecution, asking them to be joyful in spite of all of this. This is a central theme in the gospel. Paul too preached about this: whoever suffers with Christ will also rejoice with Him. It is not our mission to abolish affliction and tribulation and restore order in the world, but to strengthen faith and assure the believers of the following: those who suffer with Christ and because of Christ will share eternal joy with Him. That is a fundamental principle of the gospel.
- preaching about the return of the Lord. Jesus told His disciples that He will return in order to take them unto Himself. I know of no greater reason to rejoice than this: the Lord will come soon! He will come for me and lead me into His kingdom. Whoever accepts this with a believing heart, will have profound joy already today. God loves us. He will come and take us with Him very soon.

CORE THOUGHTS

2 Corinthians 1: 24

“Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.”

Jesus sent His Apostles to proclaim salvation to mankind, to baptise and to teach them. The Apostles contribute to our joy by inviting us to align our lives to the teaching of Jesus.

WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 20: 1-16

Once again Jesus told His disciples about the kingdom of God. He compared it with the man who owned a vineyard and employed workers to help him. They all worked different hours, yet all received the same wage for their work.

The vineyard owner went out early in the morning to find workers to help him. He agreed to give the workers a silver coin for a day's work and sent them off to his vineyard.

Three hours later the man saw that there were still men in the market place who had not found any work. He said to them, "Go to my vineyard. I'll pay you the appropriate wage." They too went off to work for him.

Six hours after he had sent the first workers to the vineyard, the man returned to the market place again and found that there were still men there without work. He sent them to his vine-

yard as well. Three hours later the same happened again. When the first men to have been employed had been working for eleven hours, the owner found some more men who had no work.

He asked them, "Why have you been standing there all day and not working?"

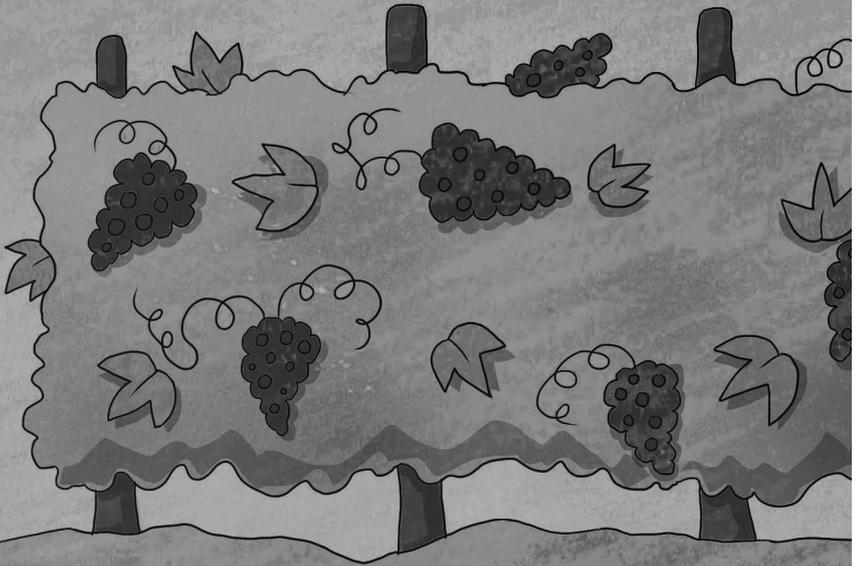
They replied, "No one gave us any work." The man sent them off to his vineyard as well.

By now it was evening. The owner said to his manager, "Call the workers and give them their wages. Give those their wages first who came here last." So the workers who had only arrived at the eleventh hour were paid first. Each one received a silver coin.

Finally, the workers who had started early in the morning were paid. They expected to receive more money than those who had only worked a short time. But they too received one silver coin, as agreed.

They started to complain and said, "The ones who came last only worked for an hour. Yet you have paid them exactly the same as us and we had to work hard all day in the heat."

The owner said to one of them, "My friend, I am not being unfair. Did we not agree that you would receive a silver coin for your work? Take what you have earned and go home! I wanted to give those who came later the same as you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my money? Are you jealous because I have been so kind?"



AT VALENTIN'S IN PARIS (FRANCE)

Paris is the capital of France. More than two million people live here. So do I. My name is Valentin and I am five years old. On Sundays I go to church with my mother. I attend Sunday School. My teachers are Patricia and Stéphanie. This picture was taken during one of our outings.



Last Christmas the children in our congregation put on a play about the birth of Jesus. I was dressed up as a shepherd and had a shepherd's staff. We even made some sheep. We got a lot of applause. That was great!

Last year **Chief Apostle** Jean-Luc Schneider surprised our congregation. That was really exciting. At the end of the divine service I got my picture taken together with the Chief Apostle.



This past year, during the summer holidays, I was in New York City with my mama, Sonia, and my papa, André. We saw the **Statue of Liberty**.



While in New York City, I even got my picture taken with some **fire-fighters** at one of the fire stations.

I go to **kindergarten**. This is my last year. Next year I will start school, where I will learn to read. I can already write my first name and count to 50. This is a photo of my kindergarten class. Can you identify me in the picture? Here is a little tip: you'll find me in the first row. By the way, my best friends are Clotaire, Evan, and Maxime.



I love to play with Playmobil figures. My parents took me to a Playmobil Funpark, where you can play with every Playmobil toy there is. That was a lot of fun. I also like **sports**.

I love animals. When we went to a zoo during the holidays I tried to get closer to a small **kangaroo**. When we visit my grandparents in the country, we often see deer and European mouflon, which is a kind of small wild sheep.



I have two cousins. Their names are Tobias and Diane. Tobias and I often play cowboys and Indians, or we pretend to hunt mammoths with bows and arrows. Here we are standing in front of our **tepee**.



My favourite dish is spaghetti Bolognese, but I also like boiled eggs and, of course, French fries. I also like fruit, especially strawberries and melon. Sometimes I even cook. Here I am making **risotto**.





■ Oliver Rütten

Behold, I am coming quickly!

The return of Christ is beyond human calculation. All we know is what Jesus said about this. In a doctrinal paper, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider answers many questions, except one.

What does the Bible say about God's actions in the past?

God reveals Himself in nature and history. The manifestation of God in history is explained in detail in the Catechism, where it says: "The fact that God revealed Himself in history first becomes clear in the development of the people of Israel as attested in the Old Testament" (CNAC 1.1.2).

"The central event of salvation for the people of Israel is their liberation from slavery in Egypt" (CNAC 1.1.2). Within the history of Israel, lost wars were interpreted as divine punishment, for example. The Babylonian captivity was also understood as a divine punishment, while the return to Jerusalem was seen as an act of divine grace. An example for this view of history is found in 2 Chronicles 36: 19–23.

The central message of the New Testament is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, which is firmly established in history. God's incarnation in Jesus Christ is the historical self-revelation of God that surpasses everything before it (John 1: 14; 1 Timothy 3: 16).

What is the relationship between human and salvation history?

"The gospel according to Luke expressly places the birth of the Son of God in a historical framework" (CNAC 1.1.3). The wording in the New Testament, "when the fullness of the time had come", establishes the connection between secular history and salvation history.

In the gospel of Luke, the birth of Jesus is associated with concrete historical events, while Galatians 4: 4 only says: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law ...". What is noticeable here is that Paul refrains from making any specific historical references. No mention is made here of any outward historical conditions that would have been considered necessary for the Son of God to become man. What comes to expression here instead is that His incarnation occurred at the right point in time and in a manner that was appropriate for salvation history. Why this is the case lies in the will of God alone.

The emergence and preaching of Jesus are of symbolic character according to Mark 1: 15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Belief in the fact that Jesus proclaims God's will in an authentic and authoritative way is the prerequisite here for being able to recognise His Person as the central event of salvation history and its course.

Can man understand the will of God?

Those who believe in Jesus recognise that the kingdom of God becomes present in them. Additional outward signs are the deeds of Jesus—the proclamation of His teaching, His miracles—whose divine origin can also only be revealed through faith in Him.

In summary we can say that it is a central notion for both the Old and New Testaments that God acts in history. However, the key to understanding that God acts in history is not history itself, but faith.

In the following we will deal with the question of whether concrete historical events can be interpreted as objective indications of the state of salvation history. Does it make sense to look for indications of the imminent return of Christ in contemporary history?

Are there signs that indicate the imminent return of Christ?

The Synoptic Gospels—the gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke—include Jesus' discourse on the end-time. They point to events which herald the appearance of the Son of Man.

In Mark 13: 4–10 the disciples of Jesus ask about the end and receive the following answer from Him: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. But when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows. But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations." At the same time, Jesus warns of false christs who will rise: "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Mark 13: 21–22).

Finally He talks about the arrival of the Son of Man—the return of Christ: "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its

light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven” (Mark 13: 24–27).

Why can historical events not herald the return of Christ?

On reading these verses, one may at first have the impression that a clear link can be established to concrete historical events. But a closer examination will reveal that this is not as clear as it seems. Wars, false teachers, and the persecution of Christians, but also positive events such as the universal preaching of the gospel, are listed as heralds of the end. In addition to this—and these are things that are already beyond history—cosmic events are mentioned as signs: the darkening of the sun and moon, the stars falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens that will be shaken. 2 Peter 3: 10 also speaks about the powers in heaven being shaken: “... the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.”

A more detailed analysis of the text will show that it is impossible to link these statements to concrete historical events. Historical events have often been considered so monstrous and unique that they were taken as a portent of the return of Christ. One need only think back to the Catholic Apostolic Church’s assessment of the French Revolution as an end-time event. Often the focus was only on Europe, and people tended to forget the historical catastrophes on other continents. Nor can we say that our experiences today are worse or less tolerable than the experiences of our ancestors or of nations on other continents. We must rather recognise that the totality of all historical events is an indication that the return of Christ is necessary.

Can signs not substantiate our faith?

Apostolic tradition understands the renewed occupation of the Apostle ministry as an important sign of the return of Christ. In the explanations concerning the plan of salvation we can read in CNAC 4.4 “that the reoccupation of the Apostle ministry ... is geared toward preparing the bridal congregation for the return of Jesus Christ”. This notion is also emphasised in other places in the Catechism, for example in CNAC 6.4.2.3: “The activity of the newly called Apostles [in the nineteenth century] was not intended to establish another Christian denomination. Its goal was rather to prepare all of Christianity for the return of the



Lord.” The Apostle ministry is therefore a sign that salvation history has entered a phase that will end with the return of Christ. However, the modern-day apostolate is only a sign or reference to the return of Christ for those who believe that it re-emerged as result of a divine act.

Attempts to identify special historical events as signs indicating the imminent return of Christ might be taken to suggest that belief in the return of Christ requires verification and confirmation. Jesus clearly rejected any demand for signs to prove His authority: “But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah’” (Matthew 12: 39). The “sign of the prophet Jonah” is Jesus’ abode in the kingdom of the dead and His resurrection. This sign, however, can only be recognised and accepted in faith. Basing arguments on historical signs contradicts the message of the New Testament. Faith cannot be verified through signs! This is also pointed out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1: 22–23, where he critically observes: “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.”



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We believe that God acts in history. He acted upon the people of Israel, He acts upon mankind through Jesus Christ, and He acts in the era of the church. We can certainly understand events in church history such as the ecumenical councils or the reoccupation of the Apostle ministry as works of the Holy Spirit, which affirm the promise of the return of Christ. The return of Christ will also have the character of a historical event. However, what is important for us today is that we trust in Jesus Christ's promise to return.

Can we do more than believe and be prepared?

Jesus' end-time discourse, as recorded by Matthew, speaks to the point and provides an important impetus for us: "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24: 44). Once again we see that belief in the return of Christ cannot be verified

by specific historical events. It would not be faith if it were possible to verify it by the events of the times such as those we hear reported in the media.

Jesus Christ will come when He decides. There will be no historically identifiable signs for this. We cannot infer that this event is any more or less imminent from the horrible things that are taking place in this world and say, "The Lord must be coming now." The only sign is: "I proclaim it unto you. I tell you: I am coming quickly!" And this promise is continually proclaimed and reinforced by the apostolate. What is required here is our faith, in the biblical testimony and the apostolate. Let us hold on to this faith, whose sole foundation is the promise of Jesus Christ, and let us profess it to others. Any attempt to verify it would be tantamount to a vote of nonconfidence in God's faithfulness to His promise!

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NAC Zambia

Baking wafers outside of Bielefeld

Something has to happen when the machines run twice as quickly as originally planned. But even elsewhere, baking wafers is anything but child's play—how production started in Africa, America, and Asia.

The Church-owned factory in Germany produced nearly 240 million wafers in the year 2001—more than ever before since its establishment 70 years prior. But this brought the production facility in Bielefeld to its limit. The future lay in Africa. It is there that the New Apostolic Church has the majority of its members. Beyond that, the transportation routes are shorter and the labour is cheaper.

The show gets on the road starting in March 2002, with the start of renovations to a former carpenter's shop in Cape Town. Starting in October 2002, professionals begin installing machines—under the watchful eye of Bernd Nölke. The then director of the mother bakery monitored the technical installations all the way up to the start of the production phase at the start of 2003.

Twin sisters in Africa

In principle, the Cape Town facility has very similar equipment to what is found in Bielefeld—from the mixing machine to the oven to the humidifier to the wine dabbler, the stamping machine, and the packing station. The difference: the facility in Germany is fully automatic. A conveyor belt brings the developing product from machine to machine. In South Africa, the wafers are transported from one machine to the next by hand—and on foot.

In the meantime, the wafer bakery in Cape Town has a twin sister in Lusaka. In comparison to Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia exhibited the best conditions for further expansion in Africa. The planning



Left: Sheets of wafers are put into the machine that puts the three drops of wine on the wafers

Below: Each of these white boxes contain some 1,200 wafers; twenty of these boxes are packed into one large box and shipped to the customer



significant problems, relates Kahangu Mututa, managing director of the wafer bakery in Lusaka. The only thing that can mitigate the heat in summer is to throw some ice cubes into the batter. Often, it has to be started all over again.

In the meantime, all of these early difficulties have been overcome, says Jan Tischendorf, chief baker in Cape Town. He could write entire novels about these issues, from the “toy compressor” that lost all of its air right from the start, to the dabbing plate that suddenly flew through the air, taking the wine bowl right along with it. Or the control units that tended to forget all about their programming.

Together, these three bakeries achieve an annual capacity of some 250 million wafers. Anyone who thinks this figure will help them calculate the number of people in attendance in the services is fooling himself, however. This is because—beyond the fact that midweek services are not a given everywhere around the world—there are still other production facilities even beyond Africa.

The oldest outposts

The oldest outpost is located in Bengaluru, in the administration headquarters of the New Apostolic Church India. The facility came into being between 1973 and 1974, and was financed by the District Church of Canada, explains Madhu Sankaran from the local church office. Two waffle irons, one dabber, and one stamping machine operate in the space of some 40 square metres there. The wafers are delivered by post throughout all of India and Sri Lanka.

began at the end of 2009, and construction started in mid 2011. In February 2012 the machines from Germany were delivered.

This was not without its obstacles, however—as Bernd Nölke, who also served as a kind of midwife for this project, together with his colleague, Jan Tischendorf from Cape Town, explains. Even the access to the production facility had to be specially reinforced in order to assure the safe unloading of the equipment—which weighs several tons each—by crane.

Both dough and dabber have their quirks

Production in Africa is not without its own idiosyncrasies, however: in addition to what are sometimes very different qualities of flour, the climate is responsible for the most

The New Apostolic Church in Argentina owns not one but two production facilities. One of them was already installed before the turn of the millennium, while the other was only completed a few years ago, relates Elisabeth Köcher, who works in the church office in Buenos Aires. Both facilities are located in Buenos Aires, consist of three machines, and produce exclusively gluten-free wafers. This is sufficient to produce enough wafers, not only for Argentina, but also for Chile and Paraguay. And although the country of Uruguay basically produces enough wafers for its own consumption, it imports suitable wafers from Argentina for those who suffer from celiac disease.

In earlier times, the South Americans had purchased their wafers from an external factory, but each of these wafers still had to be hand-sprinkled with wine—just as in the early days of the combo-wafers used in Germany.



■ Martin Pezoldt

Below: The former government building (left) beside the church in Balingsoela is presently used as a kindergarten and youth centre, now that it has been renovated by Stichting Corantijn



Working hand in hand for the well-being of others

Since its founding in the year 1997, Stichting Corantijn, the relief agency of the New Apostolic Church in the Netherlands, has been providing charitable aid to Suriname. For a few years now, it has been receiving some support from the Church aid organisation NAK-karitativ.

Many people only know about the country of Suriname by hearsay: some 8,000 kilometres of air travel lie between the Netherlands and the country in South America, which requires a flight time of nine hours to reach. In the north, Suriname is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, in the east by French Guyana, in the south by Brazil, and in the west by Guyana.

With an average temperature of between 26 and 34 degrees Celsius, the climate is tropical throughout the year. From the start of December to the start of February there is a small rainy season, and from the end of April to the middle of August, there is a major rainy season. In addition to a large variety of agricultural products, Suriname is known for its mineral wealth, of which it primarily exports bauxite,

gold, and petroleum to the outside world. Large quantities of petroleum in particular have been produced off the coast of Suriname since 2007.

On the threshold of becoming an industrial nation

Despite its commodities and a regular trade surplus, the country is not particularly attractive to investors. On the one hand, this has to do with the country's slow economic growth and its poorly developed infrastructure, but on the other hand, it has also resulted from the mass exodus of educated people who could not see much in the way of economic prospects for themselves after the country declared its independence. Suriname was still under the administra-

tion of the Netherlands until November 1975. Despite this, Suriname should not be considered a developing country, but rather an emerging country.

Despite its national independence, the influence of the Netherlands is still clearly apparent today in various ways: for example, some 60 percent of the population of Suriname speaks Dutch as its mother tongue, although many also speak a creole known as Sranan Tongo. The diversity of Suriname is also reflected in the distribution of the country's religions: some 48 per cent of the population is Christian, while 22 per cent is Hindu, and 14 per cent is Muslim.

Support from the Netherlands

The New Apostolic congregations in the country, which are part of the district of District Apostle Rainer Storck, only number a few hundred members. The contact person for Church visitors and the aid agencies of the New Apostolic Church is also the leader of the Suriname district, District Elder Harvey Sanredjo.

Stichting Corantijn, the charitable organisation of the New Apostolic Church of the Netherlands, is only active in Suriname, and provides support in the areas of education and training there. Two to three times each year, a container filled with second-hand clothing, school supplies, medical supplies, and aid supplies for the disabled is shipped to the country. In addition, building support is provided to a limited degree, for example by a retired Dutch Priest who helped set up the ambulance vehicle control centre in Paramaribo.

House construction and chili peppers

Larger projects are executed in collaboration with NAK-karitativ: in the year 2017, seven houses were built on the Church's own sixhectare property in Welbedacht, which is located some 40 kilometres from the capital city. The housing situation of the people there was extremely inadequate. In the meantime, these three-room houses have been rented out, which helps the foundation generate rental income—with which it in turn finances additional relief measures on a smaller scale.

At the same time the construction of the houses was completed, a shop selling second-hand clothing, school supplies, and shoes was also completed with donations from Stichting Corantijn, and it was inaugurated in March 2018. Customers even come all the way from Paramaribo, as word of the good quality of the products being sold has made its way around.

Another local development project was the cultivation of chili peppers. In order to acquire sufficient agricultural land for it, one and a half hectares of terrain were cleared. The dried pods and spicy powder derived from the peppers is in high demand at the local market and even in the restaurants of the Netherlands.

Kindergarten in a government building

In Balingsoela, which is located some 130 kilometres south-east of Paramaribo in a much neglected part of the country, a rather unusual project was executed by the Church relief agencies, namely the construction of a *lijkenhuis*, a funeral home. The building, with its cool rooms, ceremonial hall, running water, and sanitary facilities allows for longer periods of time before burial, and now provides relatives the chance to take a dignified farewell from their deceased loved ones—something that was not always possible in the past, due to the climatic conditions and the great distances between villages and towns.

Beyond that, Stichting Corantijn renovated a dilapidated government building located in the immediate vicinity of the church, and was able to develop a remarkable plan of use with the village elders: the building, which covers an area of 2000 square metres was equipped with a kindergarten, two meeting rooms for young people with a library and computer room, two apartments for village teachers, and a drying room for chili peppers, all by the end of 2018.



A chili pepper expert examines the harvest

I fight for what I believe in.

She is a remarkable personality: Lucie Bindu is a journalist. Today the native of the Democratic Republic of the Congo lives in Oslo. In our interview, the 27-year-old talks about the things that have influenced her significantly in faith and as a person.

■ *In your homeland there has been political unrest for about two decades. There has been one civil war after another. Did these experiences have an effect on you as a child?*

When I was a very small child, I was quite innocent and did not know what was going on in the country at all. But things changed. As a five-year-old girl I experienced war and fear for the first time. Our village was under fire and we had to leave. For days, we walked through a forest before we reached another village, where a caravan comprised of many people took us along to Kisangani, in another province. I will spare you the details here.

■ *When did you begin to understand the political circumstances? What sort of influence did this have on your life?*

At the age of 15 I became aware of what was going on in my country. I heard about people in villages—but even in cities—who were being killed, and about women and

girls being raped. And as I listened to all these stories, I always felt so powerless. During my studies, I completed a training programme in journalism. When I was given the opportunity to work as a journalist at a local radio station in Goma, I did not hesitate for a moment. I wanted to give a voice to the victims of war, to tell the world their stories. Later I received a job in international media. I travelled to villages and refugee camps. It was dangerous, but I had the feeling that this was exactly what I should be doing—namely fighting for those who could not fight for themselves.

■ *A duty that is also a heavy personal burden ...*

I had not expected that these horrific things would become a psychological and even a physical burden for me, but all the stories that I heard, and which I reported about—and all the people whom I met—occupied my mind constantly and would not leave me any peace.



■ Marcel Felde



■ Oliver Rütten

Left and above: At a meeting of the IYC ambassadors in February 2019 in Düsseldorf (Germany)

At a certain point, I found I wasn't even able to sleep any more at night. Many journalists in the DR Congo have been killed in the last ten years. When I was arrested in a village while on assignment, I was terrified. The situation became unbearable for me, and so I took advantage of the opportunity to leave the country. Now I work for a Norwegian NGO that supports victims of rape and children who have lost their parents in war and other conflicts in the Congo. For me this is a way to continue fighting for justice and a better life for my people. I am happy that I can still help those who need it the most, especially the women and children.

■ *You were present in person at the last Nobel Peace Prize ceremony. How did that come about? What does this experience mean to you?*

The NGO for which I work has been supporting the work of Congolese Doctor Denis Mukwege—one of the two prize recipients—for many years. So it was that the whole team was invited to take part in the ceremony. As a journalist and a Congolese national it meant a great deal to me to be there. And in fact, after the Nobel Prize was awarded, all the media were reporting on the DR Congo.

■ *Let's talk about faith. What is it like to live as a Christian in the DR Congo?*

Everyone has the right to practise their faith in public. And in fact, people are happy to talk about religion. They

are very proud of their churches. Almost everyone goes to church on Sunday. Only ten per cent of the population are non-Christians. None of the people keep their faith to themselves—but at the same time, each respects the faith of the other.

■ *Tell us a little about your congregation. How was it at home, and how is it now in Oslo?*

In my congregation in Goma there were over 800 believers in the divine services. Naturally, I had not expected that it would be the same here in Oslo, but when you are used to a large congregation, the adjustment can be somewhat difficult at first. We are a small congregation with only about 60 members. The one thing that the two congregations (Goma and Oslo) have in common is the love that we share. No matter where I am, I am surrounded by brothers and sisters. They are my family. And I am so thankful to be part of a church where I can feel so at home, and so loved, in any congregation.

■ *What was one of your most beautiful experiences of faith?*

I remember being very depressed about a year ago. One weekend, I was so depressed that I decided not to go to church. But on Sunday morning I heard a voice within me say that I simply had to go to church. The divine service began, and during the sermon the Priest at the altar said, "I know how disappointed you are in life. I know how you feel. But do you know how much I love you? You are not alone.

I am with you the whole way. Everything will turn out well."

My eyes filled with tears. It was no longer the Priest who was preaching. It was God talking directly to me. And in that moment I knew that everything would turn out well. And it did!

When I look back today, I am thankful for all the ordeals I have endured. I have grown in faith and as a person. I now have even more reasons to trust in God. It is a beautiful feeling to be able to rest in God our Father with the certainty that He is the one who is leading us.



Left: Lucie Bindu became a journalist in order to give a voice to the victims of war in her home country

Journeying through time in the South Pacific

Two divine services—on the same day and at the same time, but in two different places: and the Chief Apostle does not need to tear himself in two in order to make this happen. All he has to do is travel backwards in time. Totally normal for ministers in the South Pacific, that is.



NAC Western Pacific

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider spent ten days travelling in Oceania



Samoa, American Samoa, Fiji, and New Zealand: these were the stops along Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider's trip to the Western Pacific District this past September, the working area of District Apostle Peter Schulte. In addition to divine services, the trip's itinerary also included youth gatherings, musical events, and panel discussions. On top of that, the pastoral tour also presented its own special elements and challenges.

Depart today, arrive yesterday

Sunday, 15 September 2019, 10 a.m.: The Chief Apostle was scheduled to conduct a divine service in Apia (Samoa). And on Sunday, 15 September, 10 a.m., the Chief Apostle was also scheduled to conduct another divine service in Pago Pago (American Samoa). In between, he undertook a 30-minute flight that departed on 15 September—and landed on 14 September.

The International Date Line is to blame for these temporal distortions: the earth is divided into 24 time zones. Starting

from this special line that extends from north to south over Great Britain, the clocks to the east move ahead, and the clocks to the west move backward. On the exact opposite side of the globe, in the middle of the Pacific, the time zones collide again—with a 24-hour difference, in other words, a full calendar day.

For Peter Eves, this kind of thing is simply part of daily life. The District Elder often conducts minister meetings on Saturday, with a Sunday service to follow in Samoa—and then another minister meeting on Saturday, followed by a Sunday service on the same day in American Samoa. His working area encompasses ten congregations with roughly 1,200 members.

Music and fellowship

“Music is a very important part of the Samoan culture,” the retired District Apostle Andrew Andersen explained, who helped his successors with the preparations. “The musical talent of the members in the congregations is enormous.



The Chief Apostle visited brothers and sisters in four different countries and conducted five divine services



The Chief Apostle's itinerary also included meetings with Bishops and Apostles



A normal choir practice could easily be confused with a concert performance. And fellowship is also a very important element in the Polynesian culture.” With a grin, he adds, “And the regular church fellowship feasts are not suited to anyone on a diet.”

Another thing that is typical for both island groups—whether the independent state in the west, or the American foreign territory in the east—is their Christian character: more than 98 per cent of the population is Christian, and they also practise their faith, as District Apostle Andersen emphasises: on Sundays the churches are so full that public life, with the possible exception of bus traffic, practically comes to a standstill.

Religions and cultures in harmony

Things are rather different in Fiji. Just under 60 per cent of the citizens of the 332 islands of Fiji consist of the origi-

nal Melanesian population, while the other 40 per cent are originally from India, though most have already lived here for four or five generations. So it is that Christians account for some two thirds of the population, and Hindus account for around one third of the overall population. But the cultures and religions coexist peacefully and harmoniously, explains Andrew Andersen.

The New Apostolic Church here numbers some 1,900 members in 17 congregations—overwhelmingly in the rural areas, but also distributed among both population groups. “The love of music is also a way of life among the Melanesian Fijians,” the retired District Apostle says. “They have tremendous musical abilities, and music has a very prominent place in congregational life. Adults and children alike participate in the choirs.”



DISTRICT APOSTLE MICHAEL EHRIK: **Strong Fellowship**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are part of the strongest fellowship which exists – fellowship with the triune God.

He is amongst us in the divine services, for Jesus Christ said: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18: 20). We have the closest fellowship with Him in Holy Communion, through participation in the body and blood of Christ. In the benediction God, the Holy Spirit, assures us that we are integrated in this fellowship.

We are also part of the fellowship in our congregation. I wish to sincerely thank you for all your involvement in the congregations, for all sacrifices and financial offerings. Moreover, God’s good pleasure rests on everything.

With sincere greetings, yours

M. Ehrich
Michael Ehrich

THAT SAYS THE CATECHISM

What does “communion” signify in the divine service?

“Communion” in divine service is understood as the fulfilment of the words of Jesus Christ: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18: 20).

This “fellowship” in the divine service also refers to the fact that the believers worship, praise, and give thanks to God together. Thus they also have fellowship with one another.

Questions and Answers – Question 621



GHANA:

A Strong Fellowship of Kindred Minds

Many brothers and ministers of the Madina congregation epitomized the scripture of Ecclesiastes 4:9. They agreed to offer their financial resources, physical strength and occupational skills to give the interior of the Madina chapel a structural facelift, at no cost or



Many brothers sacrificed their wages to beautify the house of the Lord

burden to the congregation or church administration.

The project began on 1st October 2019 and was completed in time for the Thanksgiving service. The upgrade was a great source of delight to the Madina congregation.



Members and ministers working on the new floor



The upgraded stage for the altar all ready for the Thanksgiving service

NIGERIA:

Active charity is a sign of a strong fellowship



Sister Phillip sitting at her demolished home



Thankful for the food

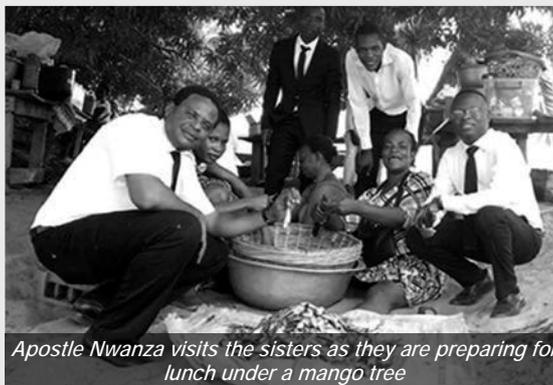


Our sister preparing fufu

Many of our brethren in Kobina congregation (Island District) of Ilashe Village, Lagos, lost virtually everything during a demolition exercise that was carried out by the government in their community.

It took boldness, love, faith and kindness of some of our sisters to organize a reliable makeshift kitchen to feed most of the displaced villagers to get something to eat. The sisters created an open-air kitchen under a mango tree, by the sea side, where everyone could come during lunch hours and enjoy a serving of fufu and some soup made with fish.

Apostle Nwanza, together with ministers from the Island District, visited the kitchen to see for himself the atmosphere and strong community fellowship that the brethren were experiencing in this place.



Apostle Nwanza visits the sisters as they are preparing for lunch under a mango tree

The fellowship was so strong that many of the displaced brethren forgot about their pains and sorrows while together. Despite the tragedy, the brethren kept their faith and perseverance through the encouraging words of comfort, prayers and songs.

The Apostle's visit brought so much joy, hope, strength and confidence for their future.

GHANA:

Perfectly United Minds and Hearts

In Apostle Paul's first letter to the people of Corinth, he appealed to them to be united in mind and thought. A strong and united community promotes the vision of "a church in which people feel at home..." This unity / solidarity was displayed in many ways by the people of the Accra East district.



The Tema congregation prepare a traditional Akan meal

On 6th December 2019, choristers of the Accra East district came together to cook various dishes to share with the Accra East Sunday School and the Tema congregation.

It also afforded an opportunity to applaud long serving members of the district choir.



The Ashaiman congregation preparing their dish



District Elder Adjei joins the fun with ministers as well as the choristers



Group photo of Youth Days in Northern Togo

TOGO:

Experience Fellowship

Young brothers and sisters from the north of Togo experienced a special community. They were together with Apostle Kloutsé for a three-day youth day in Tampialim.

Assistance to a handicapped sister:

Apostle Kloutsé handed over a handicapped sister a tricycle. This is of great help, to enable the sister join and experience the fellowship in the congregation of Kpinkberpark in the future, despite her physical challenges.



Apostle Kloutsé with the happy sister



Welcome to Atchoukpa

BENIN:

Very blessed days

From December 14 to 17, 2019, District Apostle Michael Ehrich was on tour in Togo and Benin to present the new Lead Apostle Benjamin Ohene-Saffo, now in charge of the two countries.

Apostle Herbert Bansbach, previously in charge of the two countries, will continue in his field of work in Germany. These were very blessed days with our District Apostle.

In total, 8 ministers were retired, and 45 brothers ordained and appointed.



Ordinations and appointments at Comè

GUINEA:

We look forward to seeing our Chief Apostle



The choir in concert of Conakry



Lead Apostle Bauer



The sisters singing locally with castanets

In January, Lead Apostle Bauer visited the congregation of Conakry and prepared it for the visit of our Chief Apostle.

“For the visit of our Chief Apostle in Guinea 2020, let us work in synergy for the liberal blessing to each and everyone.” Lead Apostle Bauer further thanked the congregation for their preparations to ensure the success of the very first visit of a

Chief Apostle to serve in Conakry, in the strong community of the Cité de l’Air, which always works in fraternity.

The divine service was preceded by a preparatory concert for the visit of the Apostle Patriarch, who has worked beyond the expectations of our Lead Apostle Bauer. Unity is our joy.



The District Apostle introduces the new Lead Apostle Geoffrey Nwogu



Divine service in Libreville (Gabon) - District Apostle with Apostle Kühnle

EQUATORIAL GUINEA / GABON / CAMEROON:

District Apostle introduces new Lead Apostle

Our District Apostle visited Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Cameroon together with Apostle Kühnle in January 2020.

Apostle Volker Kühnle had been responsible for Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Gabon until his retirement. In this task, which he performed with great commitment and blessing, Apostle Kühnle served the congregations in Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Gabon since 1988, 1990 and 1999 respectively. He also worked as an Apostle in Nigeria from 1999 to 2016.

At the divine service on Saturday, January 25, in Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, the District Apostle carried out a

"handover" by introducing Apostle Nwogu as the new Lead Apostle responsible for Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Cameroon. Apostle Nwogu has also been the successor to Apostle Kühnle as Lead Apostle in his home country Nigeria since 2016.

On the evening of January 25, to the delight of the visitors, a rousing concert took place in the church at Bata (Equatorial Guinea).

As part of his itinerary, our District Apostle also held divine services and district ministers' meetings in Gabon and Cameroon.



Divine service in Malabo (Equatorial Guinea)



Divine service in Youndé-Ekounou (Cameroon)

GHANA / TOGO / BENIN:

Changes to Lead Apostles Areas

In December 2019, our District Apostle visited Benin and Togo. On this journey, he released **Apostle Herbert Bansbach** from his assignment as Lead Apostle for these two countries.



Apostle Bansbach



Apostle Ohene-Saffo



Apostle Oppong-Brenyah

With this appointment, the assignment of the two Lead Apostle areas in Ghana as of January 1, 2020 has been adjusted:

Lead Apostle Samuel Oppong-Brenyah continues to be responsible for the Apostle areas

Apostle Bansbach worked in this position for many years. He accomplished this great task with God's help and blessing. The Apostle will retire in April 2020.

Bolgatanga, Cape Coast, Dunkwa, Konongo, Kumasi, Takoradi, Techiman, Sunyani and Wiawso.

Apostle Benjamin Ohene-Saffo will lead Benin and Togo as Lead Apostle.

Lead Apostle Benjamin Ohene-Saffo is responsible for the Apostle areas Accra, Koforidua, Nkawkaw, Volta Central, Volta North and Volta South as well as for the countries of Benin and Togo.

South Germany / West Africa: Divine service with the District Apostle

On Sunday, 12th January 2020, our District Apostle conducted a divine service in Albstadt (South Germany), which was transmitted to the District Apostle Area Europe and per live streaming to the District Apostle Area East and West Africa.

Bible text: **“When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” ’**
(Matthew 8: 10)

Core thoughts: In Capernaum the Lord met a Roman centurion who asked Him to heal his sick servant. Since Jesus was a Jew, and devout Jews were not allowed to simply enter the home of a Roman, the centurion professed his belief that Jesus had the authority to heal his servant alone through His word. The Scriptures report that Jesus marveled at this great faith! A wonderful testimony for the Roman centurion! On the other hand, the Lord marveled because of the unbelief of the Jews since they rejected Him in Nazareth (Mark 6: 6). The Lord placed the question: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? (Luke 18: 8b)?” Since belief in the Lord is of central significance, it is repeatedly necessary to examine oneself. Such a faith:

- Brings forth works. Without works, faith by itself is dead (James 2: 14-17).
- Becomes evident in deep trust. Where our trust in Him is evident in all situations, His power will be revealed upon us.
- Grows in knowledge. Apostle Peter professed to the Lord that the twelve had come to believe and know (John 6: 69). However, it is also important to consolidate the knowledge wrought by the Holy Spirit.

Faith can sometimes also be subject to a certain degree of ups and downs. Even if our faith should become weak for once, we must hold on to the Lord, for He will comfort us and strengthen our faith: “But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail” (Luke 22: 32).

