

# community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

04/2021/EN

## What really counts

*Editorial*

Essential for salvation

*Divine service*

From nothing to new:  
how the Holy Spirit leads us

*Doctrine*

Man and woman in  
the image of God (Part 2)

New Apostolic Church  
International



## ■ Editorial

- 3 Essential for salvation

## ■ Divine service

- 4 From nothing to new:  
how the Holy Spirit leads us

## ■ A visit in Asia

- 10 Every perfect gift is from God

## ■ A visit in America

- 12 Jesus dries our tears

## ■ A visit in Europe

- 14 Who is God?

## ■ Children's corner

- 16 Abraham pleads for  
the city of Sodom
- 18 At Tabitha's in Tema (Ghana)

## ■ Doctrine

- 20 Man and woman in  
the image of God (Part 2)

## ■ Global news

- 24 Changes in the circle  
of the Apostles
- 26 Ordination of women:  
the decision-making process
- 28 On a humanitarian  
mission in South Kivu
- 30 A pastoral trip ends fatally
- 31 Rays of hope amidst  
the pandemic

## ■ News from District Apostles Area

- 32 District Apostle Michael Ehrich:  
Shaping our future
- 32 Nigeria: Trust in God
- 33 Sierra Leone: Ready for the future?
- 33 Benin: Safe in the future
- 33 Ghana: Our future starts today!
- 33 Ghana: Christ, is our future
- 34 Cameroon: Investment in the future
- 34 Gabon: Joyful pastoral activities
- 34 Togo: Portable water
- 34 Guinea: Vigilant and persistent
- 35 Ghana: Great joy about the visit  
of our District Apostle
- 35 Ghana and Guinea:  
Retirement and ordination
- 36 East and West Africa:  
Divine service with the District Apostle



# Essential for salvation

Dear brothers and sisters,

The question of what really matters often crops up in the course of a human life. And often the following recommendation is given: let's concentrate on the essentials.

Even the disciples had to learn this: if the message they were proclaiming was to reach the people, they would have to focus on the essentials. They had to leave everything else aside, especially the Jewish ideas on circumcision and the dietary rules. This was simply not necessary for salvation.

The same is true for us today. We are to take the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to all people. And that will only be possible if we concentrate on the essentials. Everything that has to do with our person, our history, and our culture is not relevant for salvation. We have to make a distinction here if we want to pass Christ's doctrine of salvation on. Earthly rules of conduct may change over time, but the message of salvation remains.

Likewise, when it comes to our children, it is important that we think about what is truly important for salvation. We



NAC International

do not want to impose our own way of life on them. What we want is that they can experience God as we experience Him. This is what is important!

Heartfelt greetings

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

Jean-Luc Schneider

# From nothing to new: how the Holy Spirit leads us



Bernhard Holdener



Romans 8: 14

*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”*

My dear brothers and sisters, even though we are celebrating this Pentecost in an unusual way, we will stick to our beautiful and cherished tradition and begin with a Bible reading. Our translator will read the passage.

*Reading from Joel 2: 28–29 and Ephesians 3: 14–21:*

*“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.*

*“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is*

*named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.”*

My dear brothers and sisters, as I said, yet again we cannot celebrate Pentecost in the usual manner. I must admit, last year I could not imagine that we would celebrate another Pentecost this way. This year so many things have happened in the world, in the church, and in our personal lives which we just cannot explain. We were not prepared, it was totally unexpected and we are left wondering why God permits all these things. I have to be honest: we don't know, I don't know, nobody knows. We cannot understand God. We have to trust Him and we are determined to do so. After all, we know God and we know, as we heard in the Bible reading, that He “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3: 20). That is our faith and conviction. He can do far more than anything we can ask or think of. For Him there are no limits.

His love is far more powerful than we can imagine. We can experience it through “the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3: 20), as it continues here. God is love, He works for our salvation and upon us. On Pentecost God the Holy Spirit manifested His presence and power in very impressive fashion. The disciples, the people, heard the noise of the powerful wind. They saw tongues of fire. And suddenly they were able to speak in foreign languages. These were such signs of power. And even later, when people received the gift of the Holy Spirit, this was accompanied by powerful signs (Acts 2: 1–4). These signs were meant to make it clear to people that the Holy Spirit was present and at work.

These impressive signs lasted only for a certain time. Increasingly, the Holy Spirit worked in a different manner. He began to work in the soul and heart of those who were baptised and sealed; and this is how He still works upon us today. The Holy Spirit works upon our salvation within us. We can see the effects of His activity upon us to some extent, because under His activity our conduct changes.

One can see that the Holy Spirit is active in the church because the conduct of the faithful changes.

Another aspect of His work is not visible, however. The Holy Spirit cleanses us, He sanctifies us, He purifies us. This is something we cannot see, but we can trust God that He is at work within us in a powerful manner.

The Holy Spirit wants to grant us salvation. Many people for whom the Christian faith means nothing do not agree with this notion, this idea of salvation. They say such things as: “You just want to make sure your members stay in the Church. You tell them that they need to be saved because life on earth is awful, nothing but suffering. The earth is nothing but a valley of tears. So people come to church to escape this valley of tears.” Others say: “You tell the people that they are so bad that God will punish them. The only way to escape this punishment is to be faithful.” Dear brothers

and sisters, that is definitely not our idea of salvation; the salvation we long for is totally different. Christ is our future. Our salvation is to be transformed into the image of Jesus. We want to become like Him; that is our goal; that is the salvation we are waiting for. Jesus was without sin, He always had

peace in His heart, He overcame everything without ever resorting to violence. No matter what happened Jesus was always in control of His destiny. He was able to love in a perfect manner. That is our goal: we want to be transformed into the image of Christ in order to love in a perfect manner, to remain in control of our destiny, to overcome evil without resorting to violence, and to have perfect peace in our hearts.

Our salvation is not an escape but completion! And that is exactly what the work of the Holy Spirit consists of. The Holy Spirit works within us to transform us into this image. God the Holy Spirit is a spirit of creation, the creator of a new creature. Through baptism with water and the Spirit He created something completely new within us. We were born again and became a new creation in Christ—a great work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a spirit of power. He enables us to change into the image of Christ. Everybody who is sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit has the ability and capacity to do so. It is the pledge for our being able to become like Jesus. There is no doubt about that. The Holy Spirit is a spirit of power, but He uses that power in a gentle way. He does not force us, but wants to guide us. He tells us what we should do

*His love is far more  
powerful than we can  
imagine*



and what we should not do, but the decision is ours alone. The Holy Spirit is a spirit of power, but a gentle power; He counsels and guides us.

The Holy Spirit is also a spirit of movement. He wants us to move forward. Again, He does not force us but motivates us. He reveals to us the glory of Jesus Christ and the love of God. He creates in us the desire to have fellowship with God. He tells us about the future that is waiting for us and then prompts us to move forward. He reveals the nature of Christ to us and exhorts us to work on ourselves and tells us: "You can do it! Go forward, move, don't stop." The Holy Spirit is a spirit of movement.

He is a spirit of creation, of power, and of movement. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide and lead you. Follow His inspiration. If you do what He tells you, you will become like Jesus. There is definitely no doubt about that. With His power we can do it.

I said that the Holy Spirit is the creator of the new creation; and I would like to deepen this aspect a little. What does it mean to be a creator? The Holy Spirit creates things that did not exist before. A creator makes something totally new, something previously unknown; he is able to create it out of nothing. That is how God created the world; from nothing. This is incomprehensible. It is impossible for humans to create something out of nothing.

The Holy Spirit creates something completely new: the bride of Christ. He established the church, and wants to bring it to completion.

Those who will enter the kingdom of God will be like Jesus. If we look at it with human eyes, we have to admit that this is not yet the case. The visible church and its members are far from perfect. But trust the Holy Spirit, the Creator, He will do it. And if we allow Him to guide us, we can even contribute to this creation. If we are really led by the Holy Spirit, we will be able to overcome all our differences: we will be able to forgive and be reconciled; we will be able to integrate the strong as well as the weak;

*Our salvation is  
not an escape but  
completion!*

The divine service was conducted in English and interpreted into German



and we will be able to love and serve one another. Don't be discouraged that this is not yet the case. The church will be brought to completion and then it will be as Christ wants it to be. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you, and you can contribute to this work of creation, the building of this wonderful church that corresponds to the will of our Lord. The Holy Spirit has the power to create new things that we previously had no knowledge of.

Much has happened in the past months. I know of many brothers and sisters whose life was turned upside down: a loved one passed away, they became seriously ill, there were unexpected changes in their personal life, or simply because of the pandemic. And now they have to deal with a completely new situation they were not prepared for. Many are simply lost. They don't know what to do. Trust the power of the Holy Spirit! Even if you are faced with an entirely new situation He will create for you the way to be blessed and comforted. He will find ways and means to bless you, to give you peace, and even joy. This new situation will not prevent Him from saving you, from transforming you into the image of Christ. Trust the power of the Creator, the Holy Spirit. He will accomplish this.

I also know of many brothers and sisters who are sad because nothing has changed. I am thinking of all those who live in extremely difficult situations. They have to cope with violence, with crimes, with situations that we, who live in Europe, cannot even begin to imagine. They yearn for change—a little bit more peace, a little bit less insecurity—however, absolutely nothing has changed. I am aware of your situation, brothers and sisters, and I share your suffering. But I would advise you to trust the power of the Creator. He is not restricted in His work by external circumstances. Even in such dreadful circumstances, even if nothing should change, He can save you. He can pave the way for you to be saved, to be blessed, to receive peace and joy even under the worst of conditions. Allow Him to inspire and comfort you.

I also think of brothers and sisters who are hoping that the situation of the Church will improve. I know their wish is to have a decent church building: just four walls, a roof, maybe some pews and toilets. Maybe they even dream of some musical instruments to make some music. They have been waiting for years and nothing has happened. I know it will be decades before all these congregations can even have a



simple church, if ever. I know that you are disappointed. I know that you are even frustrated and upset sometimes. I promise you that we as the Church are doing our best, but we have to be realistic: it will take decades. Don't forget, however, that the activity of the Holy Spirit is not limited by what exists today. He can prepare the bride of Christ under a tree. His power is exactly the same there as in a big, nice building. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you; He will give you joy, peace, and salvation.

Then there are countries where we have to deal with a new and unusual situation. We used to have many congregations there, almost in every village. We used to have many members, and we thought things would continue this way and the Church would keep growing. There were many children, who would again have children, and we thought that there would be continued growth. However, reality is quite different. Now we look back with nostalgia and sadness: "Do you remember how many churches we used to have? Do you remember how many we were in the youth?" I would like to tell all our ministers, the rectors who are suffering under such a situation: I know these thoughts, I know your pain. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to inspire us.

He urges us to move forward. Don't get stuck in the past. Trust the Creator, He will create a new way to bless us and to give us peace and joy. Allow the Spirit to guide us. He will complete His work!

Then there are those who are anxious because they think that our Church is planning a revolution and they are far from comfortable with the idea. But there is no danger of that. We want to follow the Holy Spirit. He creates new things that were previously unknown. Don't forget, the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son. He does not talk about Himself, but makes the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, known to us. He will always work within the parameters of the gospel, the teaching of Jesus Christ. He will work within the parameters of the church established by Jesus Christ, with the sacraments and the apostolate given by Jesus Christ. He will not create anything that is just His work. He is one with the Father and the Son. Let us allow this Spirit to guide us. This Spirit will lead the Church to completion and to perfect unity.

One last thought. We can contribute to the completion of God's work by proclaiming the gospel. Here too, we are able



District Apostle Michael Deppner (left, Democratic Republic of the Congo-West) and District Apostle Leonard R. Kolb (top, USA) were called to assist

to create something that previously did not exist. Inspired by the Holy Spirit we are not restricted to what already exists. Sometimes we think that we can only talk about Jesus with other Christians. But remember, the first Christians proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles and the Jews. These people had a totally different understanding of God, of life, of salvation. If we allow the Holy Spirit to inspire us we can do that too. We can proclaim the gospel to people who don't even believe in God, who have a different faith, a different religion, and talk to them about Jesus. We cannot just assume they will never accept our witness just because they are not Christians. Just allow the Holy Spirit to guide you! Some will accept it, many will not; but that is not our business, that is God's business. Let us have the courage to follow the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and proclaim the gospel to everybody. That is this year's Pentecost message. Our goal is to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, who wants to change us and to work within us. He is a spirit of creation, a spirit of power, and a spirit of movement. Let us trust Him and allow Him to guide us. He will always find a way to bring us peace, joy, and salvation.



## CORE THOUGHTS

- God saves those who accept guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit creates hope and persistence.
- He urges us to work on our own salvation and that of others.
- He equips us so that we can bring things into being that previously did not exist.

A small congregation gathered in Zurich



NAC International

# Every perfect gift is from God

There is nothing unusual about a divine service being broadcast to several countries. What is unusual, however, is a divine service being broadcast from several countries. The topic was: perfect gifts of timeless value.

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider conducted a service in Switzerland on 9 May 2021 in the conference centre of the New Apostolic Church International in Zurich. Active and retired members of the staff had been invited. District Apostle Peter Schulte (Western Pacific) co-officiated directly from Australia. And the musical items—both choir and orchestra—came directly from South Korea.

The congregations receiving the service were in South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan either in their congregations or at home in front of the screens. “And everything worked perfectly!” the Chief Apostle wrote in his circular to the Apostles.

## Perfect in purpose and manner

God gives us perfect gifts in a perfect way, the Chief Apostle explained, referring to the original Greek text.

God gives in a perfect way: He gives out of love and unconditionally.

- “When He created man, He gave him fellowship with God, He gave him responsibility for the entire creation. Man was nothing and He was given everything for free, out of love.”
- “Israel had not deserved to be the elected people, but God gave them everything for free and out of love.”

District Apostle Peter Schulte co-officiated from Australia and the music came from South Korea



- “Jesus Christ died for all human beings, without stipulating any conditions.”
- “God chose us before the foundation of the world. We could not earn it because we did not even exist yet.”
- “And when we were born, He called us and we could be reborn out of water and the Spirit. We could become a new creature in Christ. The only thing we were asked was: are you ready to believe?”

The perfect gifts are:

- “Jesus gave His life for us, and this sacrifice is definitely perfect. It is valid at all times and for all people.”
- “The doctrine of Christ is valid for all eternity. No matter the conditions you live in, if you believe in God’s word and do it you will be saved.”
- “The Church as an organisation, human beings as Apostles—they are definitely not perfect. But God’s gift is perfect: we will get everything we need to become perfect.”
- “In our personal lives, God gives us His gifts, His blessings, and His help. In looking back we can say: He always gave us what we needed to overcome the situation and to remain faithful.”
- “As long as we are on this earth, we will not be perfect. But when He comes back, Jesus will give us the perfect gift of His grace.”

### Unwavering in love and teaching

God gives us perfect gifts; this will never change, the Chief Apostle emphasised. God never ceased to love man, even after his fall into sin: “God does not change. He remains love and wants to save us.”

Nor does His teaching change. “Since we only know and understand God in part, the teaching about God is also influenced by human knowledge.” But, the Chief Apostle said, our salvation is not dependent on our knowledge and understanding of God. Our salvation is based and dependent on our love for God and our love for the neighbour.

“Let us therefore read the Bible, remember the teaching of our forefathers, and listen to the teaching today,” the Chief Apostle said in conclusion. And above all: “Let us continue to love God and our neighbour.”

## CORE THOUGHTS

*James 1: 17–18:*

**“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”**

Everything we need for salvation God gives us for free. His love for us is unchanging. His truth endures forever. We remain firm in faith and love.



# Jesus dries our tears

The sermon was about weeping, but the situation was anything but sad! On the contrary, those who weep are to be consoled. This was the message of the Chief Apostle during a divine service in Strasbourg in France on 15 November 2020.

Chief Apostle Schneider had actually planned to be in Buenos Aires in Argentina on that Sunday, but the pandemic had thwarted his plans. So he decided to conduct an online service for the congregations in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. “I wanted to have fellowship with you and to experience this divine service with you,” he said in his opening words.

## **On the subject of weeping**

The divine service was based on the events around Easter when the risen Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene. She was a close disciple of the Son of God, “out of love for the Lord”,

as the Chief Apostle put it. Even after He had died she still wanted to do something for Him by anointing His body. But the tomb was empty. “She must have been desperate when she could not find her Lord. Instead she encountered the gardener.” Only gradually did it dawn on her who was actually talking to her!

## **The Marys of today**

Even today there are many such Marys, the Chief Apostle said. “They follow the Lord out of gratitude and love, serve Him, bring their offerings and sacrifices, and are faithful even when afflictions and other trials strike.” This also



The divine service for the brothers and sisters in parts of South America was held and broadcast from our church in Strasbourg, France

applies to the brothers and sisters in South America: despite all kinds of difficulties, illness, great economic hardship, in spite of violence and crime they remain faithful to the Lord. “I would like to make something clear: I really admire that and have great respect.”

#### Tears in distress

Of course the question sometimes comes up: “But where is the Lord now? Has He become powerless? He can no longer help Me. I have no strength left,” is how the Chief Apostle put it. Precisely in such situations the Lord wants to know: “Why are you weeping?” The Chief Apostle said that the Lord does not blame us for having become weak. This question is not an accusation, but a sign of His love and devotion. “Jesus wants to show us through this question that He cares about us and takes part in our suffering.” At the same time, He exhorts us: “Tell me what’s on your mind. Open your heart. Keep talking to Me.”

#### Tears of remorse

“Why are you weeping?” Peter also cried in his time. When Jesus had been arrested, Peter denied Him three times. The cock crowed and Jesus looked at Him, the Bible tells us. And then Peter wept bitterly. This did not change His love for the Lord, the Chief Apostle remarked during his sermon.

“We are weak, we fall into temptation, and sin. And then we weep. And the Lord asks us: ‘Why are you weeping?’ True remorse is born out of love for the Lord. And the Risen One tells us: ‘I am here for you, I defend you. I died for you. I forgive you.’”

#### Tears of grief

There are many other reasons why people weep, for example when grief strikes. But Jesus Christ can understand such situations, the Chief Apostle said. “Think of the scene at the tomb of Lazarus. The shortest phrase of the Bible says: ‘Jesus wept.’” Anyone who has experienced such a loss knows that such deep sadness does not go away fast. You can always come to the Lord Jesus and cry on His shoulder. He understands you. He comforts us: death cannot separate us forever. There will be a reunion.

#### Tears for those close to us

There are still other tears that Jesus can understand very well: “When we weep over those who no longer attend the services.” Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the Chief Apostle said, because they did not come when He wanted to gather them. “His consolation also applies here: ‘I will not give up on them. I am the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep.’ I would like to pass on this consolation to the many brothers and sisters, to the many parents. Continue to love your loved ones, pray for them, and trust in the Lord. He will not give up on them and will not abandon them.”

## CORE THOUGHTS

*John 20: 13:*

**“Then they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’”**

God is on the side of those who love Him. He forgives those who sincerely repent. He loves and cares for those whom we love. His love makes it possible for us to share in the joys and sufferings of others.

# Who is God?

Jesus answered this question by his contemporaries by showing them what God is like. Today the believers must do this. Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider explained how in a recent divine service.



Christian Deubel

On Palm Sunday Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider conducted a divine service in Kaiserslautern in Germany.

## Jesus revealed the nature of God

Jesus went to Jerusalem to glorify God and to be glorified by God, or, in other words: “The Lord Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to publicly and unequivocally reveal God’s nature and His own.” Through His death on the cross Jesus revealed the greatness of His Father.

He revealed the glory of God: “He showed that God is so great that it is worth suffering and, in spite of everything, remaining with Him. The relationship with God, the fellowship with Him is much, much more important than our lot on earth, than suffering and death.”

Jesus revealed that God is love and the truth and that He trusts Him one hundred per cent: “There could not have been a better demonstration of how great the love and the power of God are: ‘I have absolute trust in Him, even if I don’t understand at all what is happening now; I trust Him!’”

Jesus’ sacrificial death also showed who He Himself was: “He revealed: I have been sent by God to bring you His love; and the love of God for you is so great that I will give my life for your salvation. I am the good shepherd who gives His life for the sheep.”

God, for His part, glorified His Son. “Through the resurrection He showed: ‘This is my Son, He will not die; I am with Him. I have given Him the victory.’ Later, through



Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider conducts the divine service in Kaiserslautern



Bishop Friedbert Kreutz urged the brothers and sisters to use the time to glorify Jesus Christ



District Apostle Rainer Storck posed the question: "Who am I!" and reminded the brothers and sisters that we are all sinners

the resurrection, God led Him into His glory, where Jesus Himself said: 'And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.'

### Believers proclaim the nature of God

Now it is the believers' task, the Chief Apostle said, to glorify God. "The time has come, today, now, here to show who God is and who we are." The faithful fulfil this mission by proclaiming

- that Jesus is active in His church: "Jesus Christ is active on earth, granting salvation, grace, forgiveness, and blessing. We bear witness to this by going to divine service, for example."
- that Jesus is love and truth. "We trust Him completely. We are not afraid and do not worry unnecessarily. We have absolute trust in God."
- that they glorify Jesus Christ. "We can glorify Jesus Christ by keeping His word and showing: Jesus Christ is right; we live according to the gospel."

Believers must show who they are.

- Those who have received mercy from Jesus Christ: "And because we have received grace and still receive it, we are ready to forgive our neighbour."
- Those who love Jesus Christ: "We serve the Lord because we love Him from the bottom of our hearts."
- Those who have been sent by God: "We have a mission to fulfil, namely to do good in the name of Jesus Christ and to help our neighbour obtain salvation."

Believers do not always win the acclaim and approval of their fellow human beings, the Chief Apostle warned: "When we want to show who God is and who we are, it is not always well received." Yet this is precisely the time to show who God is and who Christians are. The Chief Apostle promised those who are carrying out this mission that God would glorify them: "We will experience the resurrection, receive the resurrection body, and will be led into the kingdom of God, into eternal glory. This is our future."

## CORE THOUGHTS

*John 12: 32:*

**"But Jesus answered them, saying, 'The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.'"**

Jesus came to Jerusalem to glorify God and to be glorified by Him. Through His Passion Jesus revealed both God's nature and His own to the people. God raised Him up and let Him enter His glory. We are called and chosen to proclaim Jesus Christ and His work of redemption.

## ABRAHAM PLEADS FOR THE CITY OF SODOM

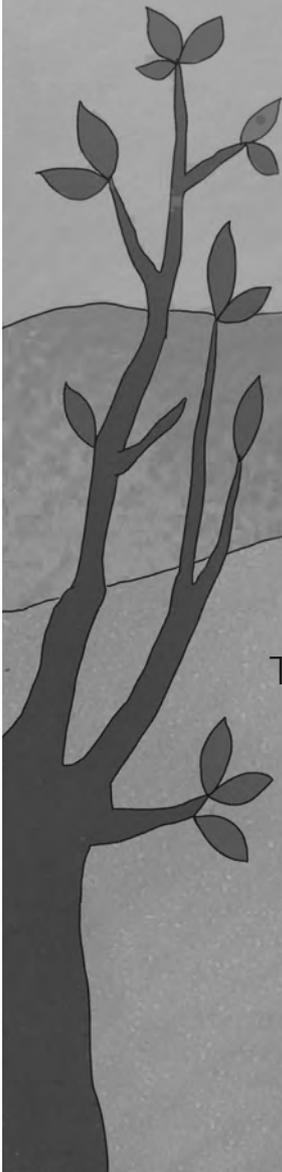
ACCORDING TO GENESIS 18: 16–33

*Three men were visiting Sarah and Abraham in Mamre. They promised them that they would have a son even though they were both very old. The men headed off in the direction of Sodom; Abraham accompanied his guests for a while. Abraham's nephew, Lot, lived in Sodom with his family.*

God did not want to hide His intentions about the city of Sodom from Abraham. Abraham was to have many descendants.

His children, grandchildren, and their children were to become a great and mighty nation and were to follow God's ways. God said to Abraham: "There have been a lot of complaints about Sodom and Gomorrah. The people there are said to be committing serious sins. I want to find out whether it is true, whether they really are such terrible sinners or not."

The two other men continued on their way; they were angels. Abraham, however, stayed with God and asked Him: "Do You really want them all to die, the good as well as the bad? Do you want the righteous, who have lived according to Your will, to die together with the godless? There may be fifty righteous people in the city. Are they to die as well? That is not right! Will You not spare the city for the sake of those fifty people? Shouldn't the judge of the whole world be a just judge?" God replied: "If I can find fifty righteous people in Sodom then I will forgive the whole city for their sake."



Abraham asked further: "I am just dust of the earth, but I have to say these things. There could be five fewer than fifty righteous people. Would you destroy the city because of these five people?"  
God replied: "If I can find forty-five righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the city."  
Abraham continued: "And if there are only forty?"  
God replied: "Then I will spare the city for the sake of those forty."  
Abraham said: "Please don't be angry, but what if there are only thirty good people to be found?"

God replied: "If I can find thirty then I will do nothing to harm them."  
Abraham asked: "And if there are only twenty?"  
God replied: "Then I will spare them all for the sake of the twenty."  
"Oh Lord, don't be cross with me," Abraham pleaded, "but perhaps there are only ten good people there."  
God replied: "I will spare the city of Sodom for the sake of those ten."  
God then went away and Abraham returned to Mamre.



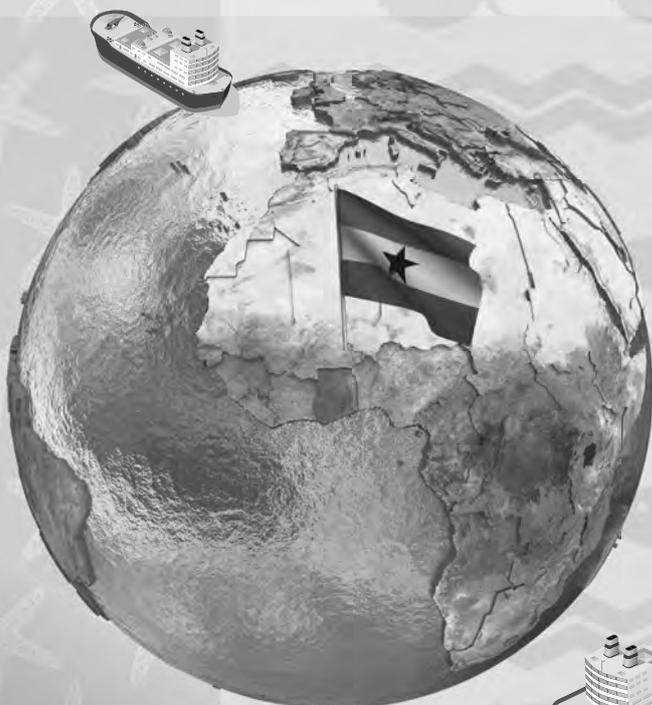
## AT TABITHA'S IN TEMA (GHANA)

This is my **congregation**. We are one big family: always friendly and ready to help whoever needs help. Just recently we moved into a beautiful new church building.

My name is **Tabitha**. I am 12 years old and am in grade 6. When I grow up I would like to become a doctor so that I can save lives. My family and I live in Ghana, in the city of Tema.

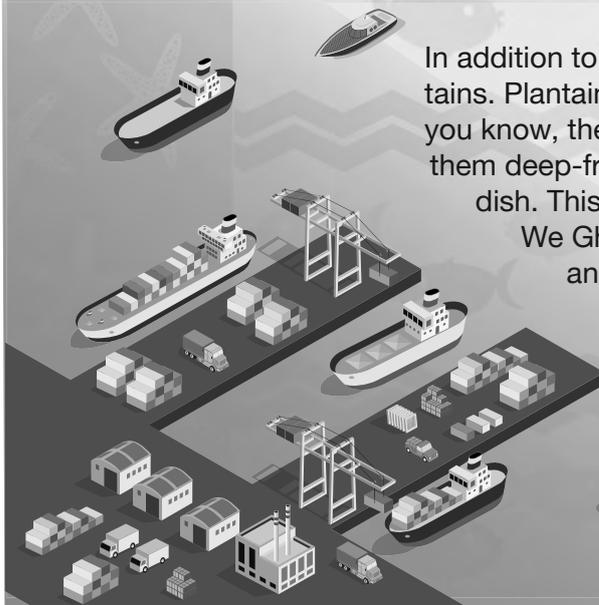


**Tema** is a big city near our capital, Accra. Tema is best known as a seaport. From there ships bring cocoa and other goods all over the world. Maybe you have already eaten chocolate made from Ghanaian cocoa.



In addition to cocoa, Ghana also grows tea, coffee, and plantains. Plantains are cooking bananas, and unlike the bananas you know, they are not sweet. We prefer to eat them deep-fried as a snack or as a side-dish. This is then called **kelewele**.

We Ghanaians love spicy food and season the bananas with ginger, chilli, and cayenne pepper.



I spent most of last year with my grandparents. Some of my cousins live there too. Since I am an only child, I love to be together with them. Here you can see me with my favourite **cousin**, Vivian.

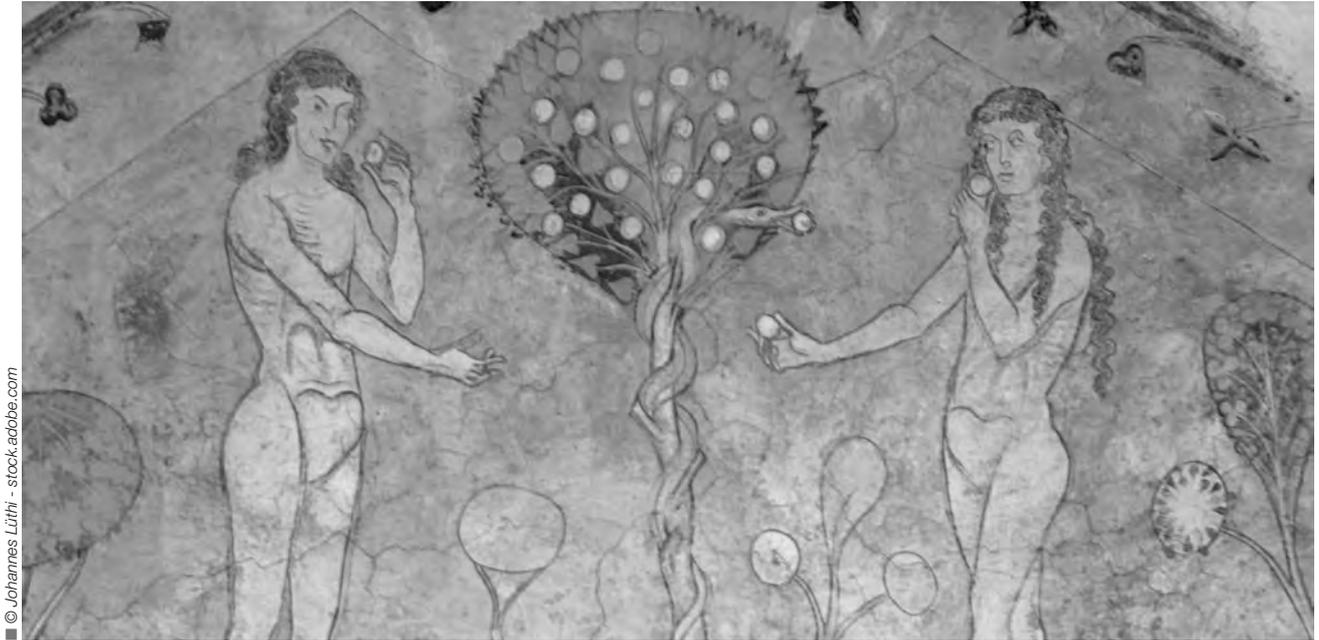
I really like it when we all go to church together. The younger ones go by car with grandpa, we older ones walk. My grandfather used to be a District Elder and my **dad** serves as a Priest. Some of my relatives sing in our church choir.



I recently started confirmation classes. When the photo was taken, I was still going to **Sunday School**. Here you can see us Sunday School students with our Apostle Benjamin Ohene-Saffo. Can you spot me?

I love to sing. In the **children's choir** we practised "Amazing Grace". Our teachers explained the text to us, and it really touched me when we sang the song at the confirmation service in Osu.





© Johannes Lüthi - stock.adobe.com

# Man and woman in the image of God (Part 2)

An essay discussed by the District Apostle Meeting explains and expands the Catechism's statements on man and woman in the image of God with respect to the equality of man and woman. Part one in *community* 3/2021 illuminated the biblical foundations in the two creation accounts, part two now examines the doctrinal implications.

With regard to the first account of creation it can be summarised that not only the duality of human sexuality, but also the equality of man and woman, are based on God's creative will. Both genders together comprise the image of God, and both are imbued with equal dignity. According to Genesis 1, any subordination of the woman to the man must be described as contrary to the will of God and the creation: it is not part of the good creation of God.

Also the second account of creation does not imply any sort of subordination of the woman to the man. According to Genesis 2, the man initially exists alone and has not yet been sexually differentiated. He is lacking a counterpart similar to himself. For this reason, God creates a counter-

part of equal rights and dignity in order to overcome human loneliness. Man and woman are created for one another in order to help one another, and to act in such a way that the other can lead a good and divinely pleasing life.

## Remarks concerning the fall into sin

Since the time of Augustine, ecclesiastical tradition has regarded Genesis 3 as the story of the fall into sin and thus the basis of original sin (*peccator originale*). In the process, the woman—who is drawn into conversation by the serpent—is often assigned the role of the gender most easily seduced and particularly susceptible to sin. This view of the woman can already be found in early Judaism and is

also evident in 1 Timothy 2: 14: “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” Here Adam is practically absolved, and all the blame for transgressing the divine commandment is heaped on the woman. Nevertheless, Paul speaks quite differently in Romans 5: 12. There he speaks only of one man who has sinned: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Both man and woman are part of this “man” in equal measure. Both Adam and Eve are equally responsible for man’s separation from God, and both must bear the punishment for it.

Accordingly, CNAC 3.3.3 also speaks of mankind in general, without making any differentiation of gender, when it discusses the subject of the fall into sin. It is man—the prototype of all humanity—who is addressed by the serpent and led astray: “Through the influence of the evil one, mankind entered into temptation and succumbed to it by contravening the law given by God: sin thereby became part of mankind’s existence. It is associated with separation from God, spiritual death. This became clear to the first human beings in the recognition of their nakedness before God, which caused them to be ashamed (Genesis 3: 7–10). This shame is a sign that the trust which man had originally placed in the Creator was now destroyed. The disobedience of the first human beings led God to exclude them from the fellowship with Him which they had previously enjoyed.”

## The perfect image of God

CNAC 3.3.2 not only talks about man and woman, but also of Jesus Christ as the image of God: “Beyond that, mankind’s likeness to God points to the fact that God became Man in Jesus Christ, the ‘image of the invisible God’ (Colossians 1: 15). Jesus Christ is the second ‘Adam’ (1 Corinthians 15: 45, 47), in whom the image of God becomes evident in perfect fashion.” For Christians, Christ is thus the true image of God, the standard for the manner in which their own likeness to God is to be realised.

In Romans 5: 12–19, Adam and Christ appear as contrasting figures: while Adam represents sin, punishment, and death, Christ stands for righteousness, grace, and life. Nevertheless, Adam is described as “a type [an image] of Him who was to come” (Romans 5: 14). Despite his sinfulness, Adam—that is, man in general—is a reference to Christ, in other words, to Him who represents the perfection of divine life.

Beyond that—and this is of great significance for the present train of thought—1 Corinthians 15 deciphers the eschatological-futuristic meaning of the image of God.

Jesus Christ, the new Adam, is also the firstfruits of the resurrection. In Him, the resurrection of the dead has been decided, and has become a certainty for those who believe in Him. While Adam is of the earth and dies, the last Adam—that is, Christ—is from heaven and gives life. Concerning this, Matthias Konradt remarks: “Just as earthly human beings are essentially ‘characterised’ by Adam’s transience, so those who belong to Christ will share in the nature of the exalted Christ.”<sup>1</sup> The resurrected will receive a spiritual body that corresponds to that of the risen Christ, and thus they will be given a form of existence that allows perfect communion with God. The resurrected will “bear the image of the heavenly Man”, that is, the image of Christ, and will thereby attain the perfect image of God. This idea also comes to practically normative expression in Philippians 3: 20–21: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

## Doctrinal implications

On the basis of the biblical testimony, man and woman, woman and man, are equally created in the image of God. Martina Bär quite rightly remarks that Genesis “guarantees the fundamental equality of man and woman on the basis of the creation”<sup>2</sup>. When the Catechism states that man and woman are “different”, this refers to their differing biological constitutions, their distinct genders, and not any sort of inequality affecting the person as a whole. “Being human in a concrete gender form signifies being a ‘protagonist’, an individual with intellectual abilities and talents, who possesses freedom and language, the ability to act, a story of one’s own, and the ability to live and love in relationships.” Man and woman are thus partners of equal dignity, even though they are biologically distinct from one another.

The discussion of man in the image of God is not intended, by any means, to level out the infinite qualitative difference between God and man. The Catechism clearly references how impossible it is for human beings to fathom the nature of God: “That man has been created in the image of God does not imply, however, that one can draw any conclusions about God’s nature from human nature. This is only the case with Jesus Christ” (CNAC 3.3.2). Any discussion of man in the image of God can only occur with reference to God. Man as the image of God can only be recognised and understood by way of reference to the God who reveals Himself and speaks. The self-declaration of God is the prerequisite for properly understanding man, his creatureliness, his nature, and his mandate in the world.

One can only speak sensibly about man as the image of God if this is understood, on the one hand, as complete orientation to God, and on the other hand, as a divine gift and mandate. Man's likeness to God is always a reference to God as his prime and absolutely loving counterpart, in the sense of an interlocutor. Accordingly, the Catechism states: "God enables human beings to recognise the Creator, to love Him, and to praise Him. Thus human beings are oriented to God..." (CNAC 3.3.2).

Some key aspects of this discussion of man's likeness to God will be considered in the following.

### The image of God: manifestation in history

The realisation of the image of God in man and woman succeeds in different ways in prehistory, secular history, and in the eschatological objective of history.

- To begin with, man is part of the perfect creation depicted in Genesis 1–2: 3. This is the creation before the fall into sin, of which it states: "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1: 31). In this respect, man in his original state is a true and intact image of God.
- Man as a part of the fallen creation is no longer capable of manifesting himself as the image of God in perfect fashion. Here man is characterised by a structural deficiency which manifests itself in malice, sin, and destruction. This prevents man from living up to, and manifesting, all aspects of his likeness to God. In the context of human history, with all its failures, the image of God in humanity seems an unreachable ideal.
- Through his sacramental and believing connection with Jesus Christ, man leads an eschatological existence, namely a life geared towards the return of Christ and the new creation. He strives to become more and more like Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of God. With the resurrection body, the human likeness to God will come to its perfect realisation—starting with the firstfruits, and ultimately extending to all those who come to share in the new creation. Here the notion of man and woman will no longer play a role, because those who are resurrected will be genderless in their spiritual body, that is, they will be "like angels in heaven" (Mark 12: 25).

### The image of God: personhood and fellowship

God is a God in three persons. Thus there has always been a relationship of "I and you" within God Himself. God is not

alone in Himself, but has always existed in the communion of the three divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "The three names stand for divine persons who are different from one another in their being. The Father is actually not the same as the Son, and the Son not the same as the Father. The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Father or the Son. This is because the Father is the begetter, the Son the begotten one, and the Holy Spirit the one emanating from both" (CNAC 3.2.4). The triune God is thus dynamic within Himself, namely begetter, begotten, and the one emanating forth. This dynamic existence of God is also reflected in the image of God, that is, in man and woman. The personhood of God is thus the source and guarantor for the personhood of man.

- God is not only communicative within Himself, but also communicates externally. Among other things, this is evident in the fact that He calls reality into being through His word. As the first account of creation makes clear, God constitutes reality through speech. God is not only the one who creates reality through speech, but also the one who addresses His creation. God addresses man in both accounts of the creation. He tells His image: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1: 28), and "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (Genesis 2: 16). By addressing man, God becomes the counterpart of mankind, and mankind becomes the counterpart of God. God's "I"—the fact that He calls man "you"—constitutes the personhood of man. Personhood is thus not rooted in the person as such, but first and foremost in God. This is why the Catechism states: "It is by hearing the divine call that a human being perceives himself as a person—it is through God's address of a human being as 'you' that the person becomes 'I'" (CNAC 3.3.2).
- Man is designed for human fellowship. That is why God creates a "helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2: 18). That the woman is a "helper" to the man does not mean that she is to make his life easier or take work away from him, but rather refers to the fact that man can only be complete when he has a counterpart. It is only through the face-to-face relationship between person and person—that is, between man and woman—that "I" and "you" become reality. It is in the interpersonal encounter that personhood and individuality have their essential foundation. If the woman is "comparable" to the man, then the man will also be "comparable" to the woman, and the implications of this are that they are interdependent, and that they are of the same nature and dignity.
- If man is indeed designed for fellowship, and if this fellowship is directly associated with his personhood,

then this not only applies to the fellowship of man and woman, but for human community in general. Jürgen Moltmann's remarks on the subject speak to the heart of the matter: "The isolated individual and the solitary subject are thus deficient forms of human existence because they fall short of the standard of likeness to God. Nor is there any precedence of person over community. Rather, person and community are two sides of one and the same life process."<sup>3</sup> It is for this reason that partnerships, families, clans, tribes, nations, and societies form, all of which are characterised by interpersonal encounters and communication.

### The image of God: the mandate to have dominion

In addition to personality, the Catechism also mentions other outstanding divine characteristics conferred upon man as the image of God, including love, liberty, and reason (CNAC 3.3.2). Man and woman thus have emotional and intellectual characteristics that enable them to carry out the mandate to have dominion over the other creatures and represent God in the creation. The mandate to have dominion does not "entitle them to deal with creation in a reckless way, however. Rather...it is their duty to treat creation in a manner befitting divine nature: with wisdom, kindness, and love" (CNAC 3.3.2). Arbitrariness, despotism, and the absolutism of one's own interests are thus contrary to the divine will.

The Catechism expressly points out that man and woman have both received the same mandate to "have dominion over the earth, in other words, to shape and protect it" (CNAC 3.3.2). In terms of substance, the dominion of man and woman is not in any way distinct. Therefore they do not each have their own assigned domains, as a traditional understanding of gender roles might suggest. It is not as if the whole wide world is reserved as the man's sphere of influence and activity, while that of the woman is confined to the microcosm of home, work, and family. Having been created in the image of God, the full potential of the earthly creation as a whole has been entrusted to both genders. It can only be protected and shaped by both of them together. It is thus impossible for any one individual to fulfil God's mandate to have dominion over the earth. This can only be achieved in community and solidarity.

The act of protecting and shaping comes to its first concrete expression in the cohabitation of the genders or in the raising of children. Matrimony and family life are defined and supported by man and woman in equal measure. Beyond that, part of the mandate to protect and shape the earthly creation is that both man and woman accept responsibility in the state, the church, and in society together. Refusal to perceive, deal with, or participate in social reality contradicts the commandment to love one's neighbour, as well as the mandate given to all human beings in the creation. Ultimately, both man and woman are called upon in equal measure to be aware of their responsibility to protect the creation, which includes the plants and animals, and to exhibit corresponding behaviour.

### Summary

- Man and woman are both equally created in the image of God.
- Man and woman are interdependent. They are of the same nature and dignity.
- Man and woman are both called to have dominion. The mandate and responsibility to protect and shape the creation applies equally to both genders.
- In no way can it be inferred from the biblical accounts of the creation that men and women have been assigned different areas of dominion or activity.
- The duties of men and women are understood differently owing to social and political developments within human society, among other things.

<sup>1</sup> Konradt, Matthias: "Schöpfung und Neuschöpfung im Neuen Testament" [Creation and new creation in the New Testament]. In: Schmid, Konrad [publisher]: Schöpfung [Creation]. Tübingen 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Bär, Martina: *Mensch und Ebenbild Gottes sein. Zur gottebenbildlichen Dimension von Mann und Frau.* [Being man and the image of God. On the male and female dimension of likeness to God]. Würzburg 2011 (Erfurt Theological Studies 101)

<sup>3</sup> Moltmann, Jürgen: *Gott in der Schöpfung* [God in the creation]. Munich 1985.

District Apostle Rainer Storck retired Apostle Agostinho Indami (below on the left) and ordained Jorge Gomes as a new Apostle (right)



Frank Schuidt, CC Spindler, Thomas Prybylka, NAC Switzerland

# Changes in the circle of the Apostles

Again the Chief Apostle was hardly able to travel in the first half of the year and could therefore ordain and retire only a few Apostles. Instead, he asked the District Apostles to perform these ministerial acts on his behalf. At the end of June 2021, 337 Apostles were active around the world.

On 30 June 2021 the international Church registered a total of 246,500 ministers in diaconal or priestly service. They look after 57,500 congregations across the globe. Currently, there are 313 Apostles, 8 District Apostle Helpers, 15 District Apostles, and the Chief Apostle.

## Ordinations

On 24 January 2021 Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider visited the congregation of Zofingen in Switzerland, where he ordained District Evangelist Matthias Pfützner (1977) as an Apostle for Austria, the eastern part of Switzerland, and Slovenia.

On 28 February the Chief Apostle was in Gaggenau in Germany and assigned Apostle Helge Mutschler as District Apostle Helper for Northern and Eastern Germany.

The Chief Apostle assigned District Apostle Rainer Storck with the ordination of a new Apostle for Guinea-Bissau, which he performed on his first pastoral trip outside of Europe since February 2020. The ordination of Apostle Jorge Gomes (1973) was carried out on 19 June in Bissau, the country's capital

## Retirements, resignations, and a leave of absence

During a divine service in the congregation of Zofingen in Switzerland, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider retired Apostle Philipp Burren (1955).

Further retirements were carried out by the District Apostles. On 13 March District Apostle Kububa Soko from Zambia retired the Apostles Michael Moses Chipanda



Chief Apostle Schneider assigned Helge Mutschler as a District Apostle Helper (above at left) and ordained Matthias Pfützner as an Apostle (above centre). District Apostle Wolfgang Nadolny (above left) retired Apostle Sergey Bastrikov on behalf of the Chief Apostle

(1955) from Malawi and Aggrey Kafunya Singanda (1955) from Zambia.

District Apostle Wolfgang Nadolny retired Apostle Sergey Petrovich Bastrikov (1955) on 6 June in a divine service in Moscow (Russia).

District Apostle Rainer Storck retired Apostle Agostinho Indami (1955) on 19 June 2021 in Bissau (Guinea-Bissau).

Apostle Mário Tchinvula (1963) from Angola resigned from his ministry. The Chief Apostle accepted his resignation on 13 January

On 18 March 2021 Chief Apostle Schneider discharged Apostle John Parus (1960) from his ministry. He had been an Apostle in Pakistan since 2015.

Apostle Jens Lindemann (1963) resigned for personal reasons. The Chief Apostle accepted his resignation on 1 June.

Apostle Marc Diedricks (1960) from South Africa will not be able to exercise his ministry for some time because of health issues. Chief Apostle Schneider granted the Apostle a leave of absence. Apostle Peter Lambert (1964) will look after the Apostle's district for the time being.

## Deaths

Apostle Pedro Benga Luyindula (1967) from Angola passed away on 3 January 2021 aged 53. He had been admitted to hospital with stroke symptoms. Two other Apostles passed away in January: Bonifacio Afonso Semba (1956) from Mozambique died on 20 January of liver cancer and Jean Koiyoumtan Blague (1962) died on 29 January. He had been on his way home from a divine service when he

started feeling unwell. Since he was not stable enough to be transported, and there was a lack of medication, he died in a regional hospital. Apostle Ingombe Muyunda Ananyatele (1956) from Zambia passed away on 8 February 2021 as a result of an illness.

## District Apostle Areas

The New Apostolic Church is structured into 15 District Apostle Areas. These are led by the following District Apostles:

- Michael David Deppner (1961) – Democratic Republic Congo-West
- Michael Ehrich (1959) – Southern Germany
- Joseph Opemba Ekhuya (1969) – East Africa
- Edy Isnugroho (1963) – South-East Asia
- Leonard Richard Kolb (1956) – USA
- Rüdiger Krause (1960) – Northern and Eastern Germany
- John Leslie Kriel (1956) – Southern Africa
- Enrique Eduardo Minio (1960) – South America
- Wolfgang Nadolny (1956) – Berlin-Brandenburg
- Peter Schulte (1963) – Western Pacific
- Kububa Soko (1969) – Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe
- Rainer Storck (1958) – Western Germany
- Tshitshi Tshisekedi (1972) – DR Congo South-East
- Mark Woll (1959) – Canada
- Jürg Zbinden (1958) – Switzerland

Some of the District Apostles are supported by District Apostle Helpers who as a rule work in specific countries:

- David Devaraj (1959) – India
- Frank Stephan Dzur (1959) – Canada
- John William Fendt (1957) – USA
- Arnold Ndakondwa Mhango (1957) – Malawi
- João Uanuque Misselo (1965) – Angola
- Mandla Patrick Mkhwanazi (1963) – Southern Africa
- Helge Mutschler (1974) – Northern and Eastern Germany
- Robert Nsamba (1962) – Zambia



■ Oliver Rürten

# Ordination of women: the decision-making process

The deliberations on the topic of women in ministry are entering the next round. This is what the Chief Apostle says in his annual interview of 2021. He gives a concrete roadmap and an update on the current status of the discussions.

This is a vast and multifaceted topic, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider says. But the decision-making process is being guided by very clear fundamental questions:

- What does God say?
- What does the Bible say?
- What does our Church say?
- What is the situation in the individual countries?

“Only once we have found reasonable answers to all of these questions will we know what decision we are able to make,” the international Church leader says.

## Processed: the Old Testament

The first question—the question of the will of God—has already been answered on the basis of the biblical accounts of creation. The District Apostle Meeting discussed that point in November 2020 and subsequently published a doctrinal

paper “Man and woman in the image of God”. Its core statements:

- Man and woman are both equally created in the image of God. They are interdependent and of the same nature and dignity.
- Man and woman are both called to protect and shape the creation. God has not assigned them different areas of dominion or activity.
- The duties of men and women are understood differently owing to social and political developments within human society, among other things.

## In progress: the New Testament

The second question—based on further biblical record—is being looked at from two angles. “We have established two essential substantive considerations to explore,” the Chief Apostle explains: what prompted the Lord to call only



The District Apostles discuss the ordination of women



men to the Apostle ministry, and how does the early church—for example, in the New Testament’s pastoral letters—talk about the matter?

That was the topic at the most recent conference in May 2021. The decisions are pending. “The District Apostles will first bring the content of our discussions to their respective Apostle Meetings.” The Apostles then have the opportunity to express their thoughts and submit statements. “At the coming District Apostle Meeting in November 2021, we will resume the discussion thread.”

### At a crossroads into the future

An answer to the third and fourth questions cannot be predicted. “It is still too early for this,” the Chief Apostle says. However, for him the decision tree is clear:

- Is it the will of God that women should not be ordained? If the answer is yes, there is no need for further deliberations. If the answer is no, we go on to ask:

- Does the fact that Jesus only called men to the Apostle ministry automatically mean that women cannot be ordained? If the answer is yes, there will be no ordination of women. If it is no, then the following question must be asked:
- Do the relevant statements in the letters of the Apostles in the New Testament make it impossible to ordain women? If so, then there would be no biblical basis for the ordination of women. However, if the answer to this question is no, we must ask:
- Does the Church, or the District Apostle Meeting, want to ordain women into ministry or not? If yes, there are regional and societal implications that must be considered:
- Is there a need to ordain women in a particular area, region, or country? If the answer is no, then there can be no ministry conferred upon women there. In the event the answer is yes, the question is:
- Will the congregations and the society of this region accept the idea of ordaining women into ministry? If the answer is no, there will be no women ordained there. If the answer is yes, the conclusion is:
- Women can be ordained in that particular area, country, congregation.

“Thus we have a rather lengthy process ahead of us,” the Chief Apostle made clear. And the same applies here as at the time of the preliminary result on our concept of ministry, when he said: “I can understand that there may be some impatience on this subject here and there. I am also aware that the expectations are very different, however, I insist that we be thorough in our efforts concerning this matter. Naturally, this will require some time, but this is indispensable for the unity of the Church.”

Robert from Germany works as a project manager in aircraft construction. He volunteered with Doctors Without Borders and went to the Democratic Republic of the Congo



# On a humanitarian mission in South Kivu

Sunshine, palm trees, reggae music. The three-minute clip on WhatsApp definitely looks like someone is enjoying a nice holiday. But Robert is not on holiday. In fact, he is working for Doctors without Borders and helping to build a clinic.

Robert is 27 years old, lives in Hamburg in Germany and works as a project manager for Airbus in aircraft construction. He is a Priest in the congregation of Eimsbüttel and loves paragliding and kite surfing. In the period covered by this article, however, he was unable to do any of these things, because he was working for the international aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF/Doctors Without Borders) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

What is a project manager doing working for a movement that provides medical aid? “Doctors Without Borders needs

people who see to the logistics,” Robert says. “Vaccines have to get from A to B, the cold chain has to be maintained, and you have to make sure that there are enough drivers and guards.”

## The idea

Robert had been thinking about volunteering to work in humanitarian aid for a while already. What finally clinched it was an accident in March 2019 while paragliding in Denmark. “It was very painful and life-threatening. At the hospital, I was patched up in an emergency operation.”

While he was recovering, he had a lot of time to think. He realised that life can change from one moment to the next and that one should not hesitate to live one's dream. "I also realised how important emergency medical care is," Robert explains. "It is not a given that you will be treated in a well-equipped hospital within thirty minutes after an accident."

### The decision

He started to research the requirements under which an assignment with Doctors Without Borders would be possible. Would they even need someone with his skills? "I visited their website, and by chance there happened to be an info session in Hamburg a week later."

He applied to the organisation and informed his employer about his plans. Fortunately, his superiors supported him and approved a leave of absence at short notice. For Robert this was a sign that his decision was blessed. "I have felt God's hand on so many occasions. It was an amazing experience."

Then came the call from Doctors Without Borders: did he want to help build a hospital in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo? He would be responsible for logistics, staff and finance planning. Robert did not even have to consider the question—he was ready.



### The hazards

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is not a safe country. For example, it is not advisable to travel to South Kivu province, where Robert would be deployed to. There and in many other parts of the country armed conflicts between the Congolese security forces and armed rebel groups are frequent.

Yet, Robert was not afraid to go there. "I myself was surprised how calm I was. I had a lot of trust in the Doctors Without Borders organisation, which has been providing very professional humanitarian and medical emergency aid for decades. When you are interested in such a mission, it is clear to you that you will be sent somewhere where people are in real distress."

Would Robert be able to attend church while working in the DRC? It did not look like it at first. Although the New Apostolic Church is very strong in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and there are congregations in many places, he was told that there is no congregation in Baraka, the town in which he would be based. So he prepared himself to stay in touch with the Church mainly through the internet.



Left: When Robert arrived in Baraka it was the rainy season. Some 20,000 people lost their homes and roads were impassable. Above: While out jogging, Robert came across a New Apostolic church; it kept getting fuller and fuller in the course of the morning

# A pastoral trip ends fatally

Four dead, two survivors: a boating accident on the Kahamba River leaves a huge void. There is deep sadness in many congregations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those killed were their ministers.

On Monday, 21 June 2021 six ministers from the New Apostolic Church were on their way home from a pastoral trip, when they got caught in a storm on the river.

## The accident and the search

They were travelling in a dugout near Kazimiya, in the district of Baraka, which is situated in South Kivu. The boat capsized, throwing the occupants overboard. Not all of them were able to save themselves. Four of the brothers drowned in the choppy river.

Shepherd Lupotea Elias and Deacon Eya, the two survivors, immediately informed a rescue service and their District

Apostle Tshitshi Tshisekedi. He arranged for the search and recovery of the missing ministers. Apostle Daniel Massiya Kassongo heard about the accident and asked the brothers and sisters to pray for the victims and also that their bodies might be recovered quickly so that they could be given a dignified burial.

The search and recovery mission lasted several days. The body of Shepherd Andolo Bwenge Norbert was found on Tuesday. He was 57 years old and leaves his wife and eleven children. On Thursday the body of Shepherd Kakile Ferdinand was found. He is survived by his wife and eight children.

Finally, on Friday, the last two missing men were found. District Evangelist Kiza Rajabu Amour, who leaves his wife and eight children, and Priest Elema Saidi, who is survived by his wife and five children.

The District Apostle had four coffins built for the dead ministers and brought to Baraka, where a memorial service took place for them.

## The funeral service

Apostle Kimbere Kitaka conducted the memorial service and based it on Revelation 20: 6: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Afterwards the four men were taken to their home villages for burial.

On Sunday, 27 June, New Apostolic congregations across the world prepared for the impending divine service for the departed. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo this service was especially touching for the brothers and sisters. For Baraka, a special service was spontaneously organised and conducted by Apostle Kimbere Kitaka. He assigned Priest Mukonge to lead the orphaned district as district rector.



■ NAC Congo South-East

The six ministers were travelling in a typical dugout in South Kivu

# Rays of hope amidst the pandemic

People across the world are suffering as the pandemic drags on, whether it is physically, financially, or mentally. How beautiful when charity is not just an expression but is manifested in action. Here is how brothers and sisters have helped each other.

## Practising charity

Cambodia was also hard hit by a third wave of Covid-19. Depending on Covid levels, the capital was divided into three zones. In the red zone the government ordered a hard lockdown, meaning drastic measures for the inhabitants: businesses and factories were closed and the whole area was cordoned off. The hardest hit by these measures were those who lead a-hand-to-mouth existence.

Apostle Sophal Keo lives in one of the suburbs of Phnom Penh that was declared a red zone. He is still relatively well off, but he experienced the hardship of his neighbours first hand. He helped where he could. And he had an idea. Via Facebook he contacted his friends and acquaintances and asked them to collect donations. And they quickly did what they could: this way, the Apostle managed to collect 3,000 US dollars and was able to help more than 350 families in the red zones with groceries.

## An offer for the soul

Many churches are still closed. Where divine services can take place, often only a few can come together and then only with the required distance between them. Many people are suffering from the isolation. They miss being together with their brothers and sisters.

In Öhringen in Germany some of the brothers and sisters saw the need and wanted to create an opportunity for the members to get in touch with each other. They put up an encouragement box in the church's garden. The wooden cabinet contains many elements that stimulate thoughts and create joy and connect people. There is an inviting bench in front of the cabinet for people to sit down, relax, and do some reflection. This little oasis in the church garden offers a new form of fellowship and provides encouragement and new impulses in faith.

## National Youth Day goes online

Due to the pandemic, the National Youth Day could not take place as planned in a large setting. District Apostle Edy



Although the National Youth Day in Indonesia could only take place online, the participants had a lot of fun

Isnugroho and the Indonesian Apostles, however, wanted to offer their young people something special. They had already suffered enough under the pandemic and the restrictions. So they invited them to a virtual but interactive national Youth Day from 24 to 26 May. The youth simply got together online, and everybody was able to participate via YouTube and Zoom, whether at home in front of the screen or with other young people in the church.

Everyone was able to get involved. In the run-up, films were made on faith in everyday situations, which were then screened. Music videos were produced, ranging from traditional Indonesian to NAC classics and modern music. Young people sang, danced, or played various instruments. A pair of presenters, there were different ones every day, announced the different performances and switched live to the young people in their homes or congregations. And in addition to all of this, the young brothers and sisters could also chat via YouTube and Zoom.

The programme included online games, presentations, and discussions with the Apostles and the District Apostle. For the discussions, the young people were connected live so that they could ask their questions directly. The Apostles not only took time to answer the questions, but had also prepared short spiritual impulses and said a prayer at the beginning and end of the online sessions.

The Youth Day, which the young people had really enjoyed, ended with a video montage of the various events, which also provided a look behind the scenes. And of course there was music.

## DISTRICT APOSTLE MICHAEL EHRIK: Shaping our Future

Being interested in our future likely lies in our nature. There is even the scientific discipline of future studies, which is the systematic study of how people will live and work in the future. No one knows what the future will bring in detail. For example, at the beginning of 2020 no one could have guessed what upheavals would be triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The great promises

God is the constant in our lives (Malachi 3: 6). We have every reason to be confident, because God has been with us up to now and will be with us in future too. This certainty is based on the promise of God's Son: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28: 20). His promise to return is an absolute certainty for us, and this is the focus of our lives. The future will bring us the lasting union with God.

This is also a comforting thought when it comes to our loved ones who have departed this life. Each one of us has links to the beyond: grandparents, parents, spouses, children, other relatives, brothers and sisters of faith. "Christ, our future" also means that we have a future with the Father of lights together with those who have gone into the beyond ahead of us and can share in His glory together.



### Shaping our future

It is up to us to proclaim God's activity and specifically His message: "Jesus Christ is with us! And He will return to complete His work!" The more we are aware of this, the calmer and the more confident we can be, and the more our joy of being able to help along in God's work will come to the fore. Everything we do in God's work is future-oriented.

We do not simply wait for our future, but make a point of shaping it by making sure that Jesus' nature fills us more and more and by serving with the gifts which God has given us. And for this we seek His nearness, for example in prayer, in the

divine services, by keeping the commandments, and by a constant and inner connection to Jesus Christ. If we notice a deficiency we can remedy it with Christ's help. If our love, for example, has diminished, we can give the Holy Spirit more room. If our joy of faith has suffered or if we have become somewhat weary, let us take new strength out of the word and the sacraments. Where necessary, let us make a new start with the Lord's help; He acknowledges our faith and trust in Him.

We see that Christ is already present in our lives, and we can have joy in Him no matter the circumstances. He has everything we need until His return

## NIGERIA: Trust in God

**At times it is difficult to comprehend the ways of God, but our trust and believe in Him grants us certainty and a future.**

A reflection from our 2021 motto from Jeremiah 29:11 is not intended to give us the idea that the Lord will spare us of our earthly cares, disappointments, failures and trials rather to strengthen and encourage us of a promising and fulfilling future with Christ.

We are to trust God wholeheartedly in all circumstances of life, knowing that with Him our future is assured.

After going through the year 2020 with so much difficulties occasioned by the ravaging corona virus pandemic, the year 2021 became a year of strongly trusting only in God.

The 2021 new year message became very comforting and reassuring as we were told that; "life is like a new book where we do not know the content in it" and "Every day is like a page and the next page is known only to the writer"

We were exhorted to put our trust in God who knows the full contents of the year 2021, hence our motto: Christ, our future. No matter what happens, God is in control and He will continue to draw us back to His plan of salvation with which the main focus now is on Christ's coming.

With our future assured in Christ, church activities in Nigeria remained active in the circle of the children, youths, choir, men and women fellowships.



Joyful brothers and sisters of the congregation Ibeshe in West Nigeria



Lead Apostle Nwogu (right) during the youth Bazaar in Lagos



Apostle Rotimi (Northern Nigeria) with Sunday school children in the central church Abuja



*District Apostle dispensing Holy Communion for the dead*



*Young people rejoice at the beach meeting with Apostle Olou*

## SIERRA LEONE: Ready for the Future?

**We humans can lose our earthly future from one moment to the next.** For example: On Friday, November 5, 2021, more than 100 people accidentally died in a devastating tank truck explosion in Freetown. Everything seems to be lost.

Every Sunday, the Chief Apostle and District Apostle dispends the Holy Communion for departed souls; they should also be able to have fellowship with Jesus Christ. We always pray for the unredeemed so that in the divine service for the departed they also experience redemption and death is not the end of all future. Our goal is to be ready when the Lord Jesus Christ returns - our future!



*Freetown fuel tanker explosion*

## BENIN: Safe in the Future

**Jesus Christ – the same yesterday, today and forever!**

This is a particular theme for young people, especially in this world prone to various changes. "The future is a subject of great concern for young people. The spiritual future, however, is assured by Christ for His church. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Let us be imitators until he returns.

Accordingly, 'Christ is our future' was the theme under which various activities were organised.



*Spiritual concert by the Kpakouta youth choir*

## GHANA: Our Future starts Today!

**The youth are often referred to as, "The future of the Church".** For the year 2021, the New Apostolic Church sought to imbibe in its members the thought and conviction, "Christ, Our Future" as its motto. On both ends, there is a future to guard. Undoubtedly, there is no future without a present, and if this is true, then the future begins today and now!

Shepherd Solomon Gottah sought to drive home these thoughts when the youth gathered for a hike and fellowship for the youth at Liatu Daforunu in the Hohoe District of the Volta North Apostle Working Area. Participants were drawn from Hohoe, Daforunu, Ve-Koloenu and Ve-Agbome.



*A section of the jubilant young people*

## GHANA: Christ, is our Future

**The motto of the year 'Christ - our future!' set the tone for a lot of activities in the Takoradi district.**

The district focused on rebuilding the Sunday School, Confirmation Class and Youth as its top most priorities among others. This was achieved with the organization of children divine services, mini youth services and meetings were organized at district levels based on this year's theme.

Apostle Sam, also facilitated intensive seminar trainings throughout the working area of sessions focusing on Sunday School and Youth Care.

The motto has been very timely, especially in these times of COVID-19 where businesses and life almost came to a standstill.



*Sunday School service at Tarkwa District*



The confirmands receive a Bible and the catechism in preparation

**CAMEROON:**

## Investment in the Future

Coming closer to the end of this year, we often look back to the past – but also, even more to the future.

“Christ – our future!” Guided by our yearly motto, also in the English speaking regions of Cameroon Bibles and Catechism “Questions and answers” were distributed to the confirmands for the year 2022.

This “spiritual investment” in the future of the young brothers and sisters will also help them to prepare themselves for the return of Christ – our common future!



Children are the future of our congregations

**TOGO:**

## Portable Water

**Clean water is important for the earthly future.**

In order to bring and make available to the population this rare commodity, the New Apostolic Church of Togo has provided the community of Biankouri, located in the region of Dapaong, in the extreme North of Togo, with a borehole.

Apostle Kloutsè Kossivi Edoh officially handed over a borehole to the people on 27 July 2021.

The Church has also provided other localities with other basic social amenities in recent times.



Humanitarian aid: Clean drinking water for the people of Biankouri



The children of the Sunday school of Agnondjé visited children in social difficulties

**GABON:**

## Joyful Pastoral Activities

Several activities on our annual motto marked the year 2021. Here are 3 examples: The Sunday School visited children at the Social Reception Center of Angondjé, bringing them clothes and food items.

The youth organized pastoral activities to revive two congregations in villages suffering rural-urban migration.

A guest service, organized by mothers in Libreville and Port-Gentil congregations, was held for the community folks so they can also be saved by our Lord Jesus.



The youth organized pastoral activities to revive two communities in villages

**GUINEA:**

## Vigilant and Persistent

On the occasion of a working visit to the south of the country, Apostle Lèno conducted a divine service in the Central Congregation of N'Zérékoré, with the presence of district leaders and their deputies who had come for the quarterly meeting. In his address, the Apostle encouraged the brethren to be more vigilant and persistent as they await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was followed by the quarterly meeting, the farewell ceremony of Apostle Beavogui and the introduction of the future Apostle, Millimouno Tamba Sosso Wolle.



Joyful brothers and sisters after the divine service



Group picture with the Apostles and Bishops



Apostles' and Bishops' Meeting



District Apostle Ehrich



Address before the retirement

GHANA:

# Great joy about the visit of our District Apostle

**From 20 to 22 August 2021, District Apostle Michael Ehrich travelled to Ghana and visited the brethren in faith in the capital city of Accra.**

The divine service, which he conducted on Sunday, 22 August 2021, in the Accra-Central Church, was experienced by over 1,000 divine service participants.

In this divine service, which could also be viewed nationwide via national television, the District Apostle retired Apostle Edward Hayford Nzimah. As his successor, the District Apostle ordained District Evangelist Augustus Adika-Lavoe as an Apostle. In addition, 26 District Ministers were retired in this divine service, and 44 District Rectors and 46 Deputy District Rectors were equipped by the District Apostle for their future work.



The orchestra

The day before, on Saturday 21 August 2021, the District Apostle held a meeting with the active Apostles and Bishops from Ghana. Afterwards, the wives of the active Apostles and Bishops and the retired Apostles and Bishops from Ghana and their wives joined them for a get-together.

On Saturday morning the District Apostle visited the "Chance for Children" day centre for street children in Accra, which has been financially supported by the relief organisation of the New Apostolic Church of Southern Germany for some time.



The centre "Chance for Children"

In this facility, children who live on the streets without shelter find a safe place to rest, play, and do laundry. They also receive medical and psychological care and a hot meal every day.

## Retirement

GHANA



**Apostle Edward Nzimah** served for 33 years as a minister and 5 years of those as an Apostle. During the District Apostle's visit, he retired the Apostle on 22 August 2021 in Accra.

## Ordination



**Apostle Augustus Adika-Lavoe** was ordained into the Apostleship by District Apostle Ehrich on 22 August 2021 as Apostle Nzimah's successor. He served previously as a District Evangelist.

The following three ministers were retired by our District Apostle in Freetown on 31 October 2021:

GUINEA

**Apostle Martial Bangura** served as a minister for 34 years and 28 years as an Apostle.



**Apostle Jules Beavogui** served as a minister for 32 years and 11 of them as an Apostle.



**Bishop Tolno** Was a minister for 26 years and served as Bishop for 15 of those years.



**Apostle Jacques Néma Conde** was ordained into the ministry of Apostle by our District Apostle on 31 October 2021 in Freetown. He previously served as a District Elder.



**Apostle Tamba Sosso Millimouno** was ordained as Apostle for Guinea in the same divine service. He previously served as a District Evangelist in this working area.

# East and West Africa: Divine service with the District Apostle

District Apostle Michael Ehrich, accompanied by Leading Apostle Hans-Jürgen Bauer, from South Germany, conducted a festive divine service in Freetown Central Church, on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021. It was transmitted via YouTube to many congregations in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, the divine service was also be received live on the radio.

**Bible text:** “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ”  
(Ephesian 4:15)

**Core thoughts:**

## **Difficult Circumstances**

The condition of Ephesians is experienced now - philosophies / ideas, sickness, death, false prophets etc., but the District Apostle encourages us to be stable, strong and grow in faith. Jesus (real God/man) and the Holy Spirit make us understand/trust the true image of God – our loving father; who will make everything understandable in future fellowship with Him.

## **Truth and Life**

In reference to Jesus, John 14:6 “... *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*”

We are to speak truth in love – they work together. When we talk with our children, friends, husband/wife etc., there should be good attitude to speak in truth and love. We stand by the conviction to believe, follow the examples in love and grow in the nature of Jesus.

## **The Nature of Jesus**

Humans hardly live without food and growing requires nourishment. The food for the soul is the word of God, the grace, Holy Communion, inspiration of the Holy Spirit out of a festive divine service or normal one. Oneness is emphasized (no rejection), good heart to help especially the poor, promote justice, resist the devil, bring peace everywhere, be humble in bringing out our gifts, serve willingly in Christ’s manner. The District Apostle reminds us about the gradual process in growth like a child / plant. We do not stop growing in faith despite the age so as to be worthy for eternity.

During the divine service there were still retirements and ordinations (see page 35).

