

# community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

02/2023/EN

## Serving God

### *Editorial*

Overcoming old things

### *Divine service*

Serving and reigning  
with Christ

### *Doctrine*

Ordination of women:  
Old and New Testament

New Apostolic Church  
International



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# Overcoming old things

Dear brothers and sisters,

At our baptism or our confirmation, whichever is the case, we made a vow to rid ourselves of the old Adam. We openly declared our determination to follow God in faith and obedience and to renounce evil.

This becomes possible when we commit ourselves to follow the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus adhered to the word of God and remained obedient even when the devil tempted Him in the wilderness. He trusted His Father to the very end, and even when His suffering was greatest on the cross, He was convinced: "My Father loves Me."

Let us listen obediently and trustingly to what Christ has to say to us today. For example, the Lord urges us to seek first the kingdom of God. Earthly things must not become too important to us because the goal is not life on earth, but eternal life.

What's more, there must be a personal development. We have received gifts from God which we must make use of. We must work and fight to keep our faith until the end.



New Apostolic Church International

This does not mean being bigger and better than our neighbour. People often want more than the next person. There is no room for that in the kingdom of God.

Brothers and sisters, let us open our hearts to Jesus Christ and to what He has to tell us.

Heartfelt greetings



Jean-Luc Schneider

# Serving and reigning with Christ



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.*



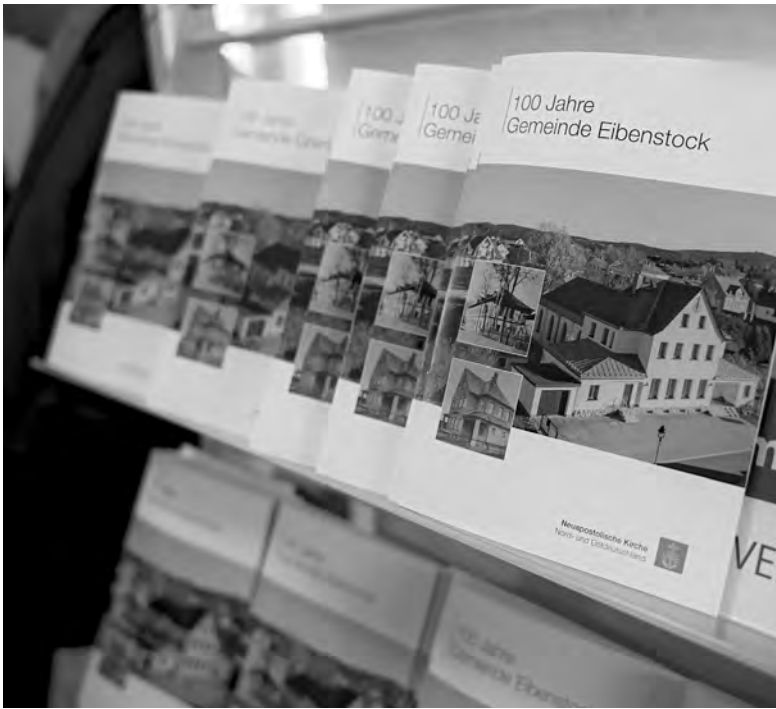
The Chief Apostle visited the congregation of Eibenstock in Germany to mark and celebrate its one hundredth anniversary with the members

Michael Monzer

Dear brothers and sisters, we are very grateful to God that we can experience this special celebration here. Exactly one hundred years ago, the first rector was appointed for this congregation. Moreover, it is quite rare that a congregation can celebrate a centenary in such a large circle. We are grateful to God for all the blessings, for all the good and beautiful things He has provided for the congregation in the course of these one hundred years. One hundred years of congregational life... You can imagine that there were a few ups and downs over this time and that things were not always easy. But God was good and faithful and was always

with His own. It was not always easy for the congregational leaders during these one hundred years. But they always found a reason not to give up and keep going.

Dear brothers and sisters, I would like to warn you. Every generation—and I get the impression that our generation is especially prone to this—thinks that things have never been more difficult than they are today. That is not true! Who of us would want to go back a hundred years and live in those conditions? It was always a struggle to remain faithful. It always required effort and overcoming to remain faithful.



The congregation was excited at having the Chief Apostle come and officiate at its centenary and put a lot of preparation into the special day

But if our ancestors managed to remain faithful and saw no reason to give up despite all the difficulties, why should we say today: “Yes, but we just can’t remain faithful.” There is no reason to give up! Let us just keep on following the Lord. What He did a hundred years ago He will continue to do for us in the future. He will always give us the strength to remain faithful until the end. Let us stop our eternal complaining and whining. It is no more difficult today than it was for our ancestors. The Lord is faithful. He will give us the strength we need to remain faithful until the end. And all those who really want to reach the goal will reach it.

*The Lord is faithful. He will give us the strength we need to remain faithful*

God started to pursue His plan of salvation immediately after the fall of man. Out of love for human beings. Human beings did a very stupid thing: they fell for sin. And immediately God said: “I will do something. I want to lead you back into fellowship with Me. You are to have fellowship with Me and with one another.” This is what we call the plan of redemption, the plan of salvation. And the almighty God will pursue it right to the end. What is the end of God’s plan of salvation? The perfect fellowship of human beings with God and among one another in the new creation. Then everything—the

creation, human beings, the relationship between people, our relationship with God—will be just as it should be, just as God wanted it to be. This is the goal of the plan of salvation. And the year 2023 is simply one stage of this plan of salvation. No matter what will happen this year, and I have no idea what is going to happen, but I do know one thing: every day of the year 2023 is part of the plan of salvation of our God. And He will make sure that no matter what happens He can continue to press ahead with His plan. With or without us, it is up to us.

God wants to make it possible for human beings that they can once again have fellowship with Him and

with one another. He has already taken concrete steps to do so. A first very concrete step was the incarnation of the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the first man who was exactly as God wanted Him to be. He is the first human being to have been clothed with the resurrection body and was able to enter into perfect fellowship with God.

And what will human beings do once the plan of salvation is completed, once they are in the new creation? They will serve God forever and they will reign with Him, it says in





Revelation. In the new creation, human beings will serve God and reign with Him. How will they serve the Lord? They will praise and worship Him forever. Our thanks and praise will never be exhausted because that which God will give us will be so great that we will have reason to praise and thank and worship Him forever.

And how will they reign with Him? This has nothing to do with a government as we know it. This has nothing to do with exercising power. They will share in Christ's victory over sin. When we talk about the crown of eternal life, we are not talking about the crown of a king or queen, but about the crown of victory of the one who defeated evil and sin. They will reign with Him because they have mastered sin with the help of Christ, and they will share in the glory of God. Thus, they will serve the Lord for all eternity. This is God's plan and this is the goal of His activity.

The next great stage of this plan of salvation is the first resurrection, which will be followed by the thousand-year kingdom, which in our tradition we call the kingdom of peace. What will happen there? The Lord will come again to take His own unto Himself and as firstlings lead them into this fellowship. Not into the new creation just



yet, but into fellowship with God and with one another. And the bridal congregation will enter this fellowship as firstfruits, of whom Jesus Christ was the first man. In the thousand-year kingdom of peace they will reign with Him as priests of God for a thousand years. And how will they serve God in the kingdom of peace? They will praise and worship Him forever. When the Bible speaks of a servant of God, it means he worships the almighty God. Service and ministering in the Bible have nothing to do with serving as we see it. A servant worships God, he trusts God, he praises and glorifies Him. The people of Israel were a servant of



*The divine service is the perfect opportunity to serve God*

God because they were to worship the true God, and praise and glorify Him. So service in the thousand-year kingdom of peace consists first and foremost of worship and praise. Moreover, the priests of God and of Christ will proclaim the gospel and will help human beings find their way to God and follow this path.

Here it also says that they will reign with Him. And how will they reign with Him? Don't worry, this has nothing to do with the government as we know it in our countries. Jesus clearly said: "My kingdom is not of this world. That is where human beings are responsible. How they organise themselves on earth is their business." Jesus will not come and say: "I am going to set things right." That will continue to be the task of human beings. They will not reign because they are much better than the others. They have this victor's crown because they have defeated sin with the help of Jesus Christ. They have the same resurrection body as Jesus Christ, they share in the glory of God. They also have the authority of Jesus Christ because they have been sent by Him. As messengers of Jesus Christ they have the power and authority for their commission. In other words, no one can stop them from carrying out their mission.

This is God's plan of salvation. He will continue to pursue this plan also in 2023. And whoever wants to be saved can be saved. But it is up to us to prepare ourselves for it. And that is why we have issued this motto for 2023: serving and reigning with Christ. This is what we must learn today. May this be the programme we follow every day in the coming year so that we are always motivated and focused: serving and reigning with Christ.

The first service we render is the divine service. In the Old Testament already serving God consisted of worshipping and praising Him. In the new creation this service will be pure worship and praise. The first service believers should render to God is divine service. That means they leave their everyday lives and the comforts of home behind and go to worship God. This is the meaning of divine service. We bring to God the worship and praise due Him. We have been called to serve God eternally, to worship Him eternally, and to glorify Him eternally. And the divine service is the perfect opportunity to do so. When we come to divine service, we worship God and praise and glorify Him. When we celebrate Holy Communion together, we give thanks for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.



We serve the Lord in the same way as the ancient Jews did: by sacrificing. This has nothing to do with monetary offering now. This is a matter of spiritual sacrifices. When we come to divine service, we forgive our neighbour and thus surrender all thoughts of revenge, retaliation, and accusation. This is a sacrifice that pleases God. Why do we do this? Because we want to have fellowship with God and such thoughts are just out of place. God is not a god who accuses us. This does not square with the God whom Jesus Christ revealed to us.

We come to divine service to hear the will of God knowing that in order to enter into the new creation we must correspond to God's will completely. And that is why we must give up everything that is not compatible with the will of God. And when we come to divine service we hear the will of God. And then we realise, Oh, this is not compatible with the will of God. God will not agree with this. I must give up my opinion in this respect. I must give up this character trait and change in this or the other respect. This is how we serve the Lord in divine service.

We also serve the Lord by serving our neighbour. Jesus Christ said: "If anyone wants to serve Me, let him do good to his neighbour." He exemplified this Himself when He washed His disciples' feet. He did not come to be served, but to serve. Rendering service to God is also rendering

service to our neighbour. Let us do this. I have noticed lately that brothers and sisters say that they go to church because they want to get something. That bothers me a bit. I can understand that, but is that not selfish? I only come to divine service when I need something or when I can receive something. What about serving? That has totally disappeared. We also come to divine service to pray with our brother. We also come to divine service to show our sister: "I am on your side; let's pray together now." We also come to divine service and contribute to it so that our brother and our sister can experience a divine service. Because alone they cannot do it, it will not work. There must be a congregation to be able to experience a divine service. And even if for once there was maybe nothing in it for us personally, we nevertheless did contribute that our neighbour can experience a divine service. This too belongs to serving God. I serve my neighbour by proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. This is what it means to serve God: we help others, we comfort them, we strengthen them, and we work together. This is how we serve God. And we serve with Christ because we know exactly that no matter what we do the biggest part was contributed by Jesus Christ.

Sin is lurking at your door, but you should rule over it. This is what it means to "reign". We are to rule over sin. Of course, we are exposed to temptation. But the Catechism already says that no one is involuntarily subject to temptation.





A moving moment in the divine service: Holy Communion for the departed

Sometimes we have the impression that we can't help it. We are so caught up in things that we just move along with the human flow. No, we are not forced to do everything that others suggest or do everything that everyone else is doing. Just say no. Sin is lurking at your door. Rule over it! With the help of Christ, you can say no to sin. All you have to say is: "No, I won't do that. I don't care about the consequences for me, I won't do it. It is a sin and contrary to the will of God." Let us rule over our own lives and get a handle on it and ourselves. Sure, there are many people who say that people today are just puppets. Somebody else is pulling the strings. And you can actually do with them what you want. Maybe, but not with me. The devil cannot do what he wants with me. With the help of Christ I can rule over my own life and my nature.

Dear brothers and sisters, our goal is perfect fellowship with God. We can reach this goal if we want to. Let us take control of our own lives and decide for ourselves what our future should be. Our future is not a bleak dead end. It is a glorious future: fellowship with God, the completion of the plan of salvation. No matter what is happening in the world. No matter what the majority thinks. No matter how our fellow human beings behave. It should have zero impact on our relationship with God. Chief Apostle Leber often said: "Let's act with a superior ease." No matter how I feel, whether I am sick or healthy: my illness must not define my

relationship with God. Whether I have money or not: my bank account does not determine my relationship with God. I have decided that I want to have fellowship with God and I will allow no one to meddle with that. I wish every child of God would see it this way. My fellowship with Jesus Christ is the most important thing to me, no one can touch it. This is how we want to reign. It seems like it is absolutely impossible, but reigning with Christ is possible. Absolutely! Because Jesus Christ gives us the strength to do so. He proves His love to us again and again, which motivates us to have fellowship with Him. His love is so great. He offers us His grace again and again. And if we don't succeed, He gives us the opportunity to start again: "You can start all over again." Through His Holy Spirit He gives us the wisdom to discern the spirits. But with the help of Christ we can rule today already. Let us keep this in mind. We can master sin. And we can master our own lives, our person, and

our future. Let us serve God with Christ and let us reign over our lives with Christ already today. And then when the Lord comes He can lead us into His kingdom. Then we will be able to serve God and worship, praise, and glorify Him, and reign with Him. And then we can say: "Thanks to the help of Jesus Christ and thanks to His sacrifice, we have gained the victory over sin. We have mastered sin."

## CORE THOUGHTS

- God has chosen us to serve and reign with Christ.
- In the new creation we will serve by worshipping God.
- We will serve and reign with Christ in the kingdom of peace.
- We serve Christ today by participating in the divine service and doing His will.
- Christ helps us to maintain control over our own lives.

# The invincible power of good

Overcoming evil with good, is that possible? In a divine service in Kolda in Senegal on 23 September 2022, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider showed how we can do this.



"In every divine service we celebrate something," the Chief Apostle began his sermon. "We celebrate the victory of Jesus Christ." The reason, he said, is that Jesus was stronger than evil and no one could stop Him from loving God and human beings to the end. He conquered evil and death because He rose from the dead.

We also benefit from this victory: "When we come to Jesus, He will give us the strength to gain the victory," the Chief Apostle said. "There is evil in the world, but don't let it defeat you. Overcome evil with good. Evil is very powerful, but with Jesus you are stronger than evil and you too can become an overcomer."

To begin with, evil is everything that is contrary to the will of God. It is God's will that human beings have fellowship with Him and with one another. The Chief Apostle said that evil consists of all those powers that want to destroy the fellowship that human beings have with God and the fellowship that human beings have with one another. And, he said, "Evil is everything that makes us suffer." Illnesses,

death, injustice—the consequences of the fall into sin. "And finally," he continued, "evil consists of all the powers that oppose Jesus Christ."

To resist temptation means to not allow ourselves to be defeated by evil. Adam and Eve listened to the evil one and were separated from God as a result. Jesus too was subjected to temptation, but He resisted it. "Dear brothers and sisters, the devil also comes to us to tempt us. We must recognise him. His only aim is to separate us from God," Chief Apostle Schneider warned. But when we trust in God we can resist temptation. "Tell Him about your doubts and questions, and with the help of Jesus you will be able to overcome these doubts and resist temptation."

## Overcoming evil with good

Those who suffer tend to get angry with God and then distance themselves from Him. "Even if we do not understand what God is doing, let us trust in Him," the Chief Apostle recommended. "Don't answer evil with evil, overcome it



District Apostle Joseph Opemba Ekhuya (above, on the far right) ministering to the congregation. He is pictured here with interpreters

District Apostle Kububa Soko was also called to assist (below)



with good.” More specifically this means that we become aware of our responsibility: “Overcoming evil with good means first asking ourselves about our own responsibility for what happens to us.” And we need to recognise that we ourselves are sinners: “We cannot afford to condemn others, otherwise we would have to condemn ourselves, because we are all sinners.” We must also be patient: “Respond to evil with good and continue to do God’s will, even when we suffer.”

No matter how hard we try, we will not be able to eliminate evil entirely, the Chief Apostle admitted. “But we will one day be able to escape from evil and enter the kingdom of God, just as Jesus was able to ascend and enter the kingdom of God.”

### Inner battles

“I spoke about the kind of evil that comes from outside and makes us suffer. But evil does not only come from outside,” the Chief Apostle said. It also dwells within us. “Here too, let us not be overcome by evil, but let us overcome evil with good through Jesus Christ.” He went on to explain what doing good means in this regard. He said that if we are humble and come to Christ with faith and repentance, He can erase our sins. And through Jesus Christ and His power, we can become like Him and eliminate the old Adam—the evil that dwells within us—and truly become a new creation in Christ that corresponds to the will of God.

### Overcoming evil together

“We live together in Christ,” the Chief Apostle reminded the congregation. We are not alone. We have our brothers

and sisters who also suffer on account of evil. Some were not able to resist temptation and strayed from God. Others suffer greatly because of evil. Dear brothers and sisters, the Chief Apostle continued, we can help them to overcome evil by sharing their pain, by showing them that we love them even if they have wronged us, and by helping them to defeat the evil that they are currently experiencing and the evil that dwells within them.

“When we endeavour to overcome evil with good, we are no longer an instrument in the hand of the devil that continues to do evil and increase it in the world, but we become witnesses for Jesus Christ and prove to the world that no one is obliged to do evil—and that thanks to Jesus Christ everyone can say no to evil and yes to that which is good.”

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Romans 12: 21*

**“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”**

In trials and temptation we are reminded of the love of God and trust in Him. In suffering we refuse to repay evil with evil, but rather continue to do the will of God. Let us fight the evil within us and help others to resist evil.



■ New Apostolic Church El Salvador

# Pour out your heart to God

What is the best way to pray? When we connect with the Lord we should be prepared to tell Him everything. We need to prepare for it and be honest enough with ourselves to accept His answer. Here is a practical guide on prayer from a divine service by the Chief Apostle.

In August last year, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider conducted a divine service in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. “Today we have a Bible text with a special piece of advice,” he said at the beginning: “Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us” (Psalm 62: 8). He went on to say that “this is about our prayers. When we talk to God we have to pour out our heart to Him.”

Sometimes people ask why they should bother to pray at all, seeing that God knows everything anyway. “Our prayers are not for God,” the Chief Apostle explained. God does not need to be thanked or to be flattered. These prayers are for us.

God gave human beings a soul and gave us the ability to listen to God and to talk to Him, the Chief Apostle said. “Trees, cows, or fish cannot listen to God and cannot talk to Him.” But the soul needs to talk to God for it to be content and healthy, he said. Prayers are also a wonderful way to measure the intensity of our faith, our love, and our hope.

## We can tell God everything

“When we pray to God we can and should, in fact, we must tell Him about our sorrows, our fears, and our worries, and talk to Him about our doubts, our questions, and our problems,” explained the Chief Apostle. After all, God is omniscient and almighty. So, God is definitely the best address



Many brothers and sisters enjoyed the beautiful opportunity to be together before and after the divine service

for our worries and cares: things we feel we cannot tell anyone else because we fear they will laugh at us or criticise us. “There’s no need to be ashamed, because we know God loves us as we are. God is love.”

We can even tell Him about things we might feel are too insignificant to approach God with: “We can come to God with even the smallest concerns, the smallest question.” For God says, “I take care of everything, I’m interested in you.” In fact, Jesus even said, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Nothing is too small or not important enough not to tell God about it. “Pour out your heart. Tell Him everything that is going on in your heart. Whatever happens, tell God about it.”

### Accepting God’s answer

Some don’t talk with God because they do not want to hear His answer. “Remember, you promised something,” the Chief Apostle reminded the congregation. “To follow

Christ in faith and in obedience.” So pour out your heart to God, the Chief Apostle encouraged the congregation, and accept His answer. “You promised,” he said.

Sometimes we have wishes that we hesitate to tell God about because we are fairly sure that God will not fulfil them anyway. “Are you really sure that what you are asking of God is good for you?” the Chief Apostle asked. “If we hesitate to tell God something, it is not a good sign. That means there is something wrong with our relationship to God, our wishes are not the right ones, and we are trying to hide our weaknesses.”

### Preparing our prayers

“These kinds of prayers need to be prepared,” the Chief Apostle said. There are several stages to this preparation:

- worship: “We do not need to flatter God. Rather, we must be aware to whom we are talking. And the more we worship God, the more we will realise that He is the Almighty, the perfect one.”
- gratitude: “We then realise that we have much more than we thought.”
- praying in the name of Jesus Christ: “Let us try and find out what Jesus would pray in our stead. What would He ask for in my situation?”

“If we take delight in the Lord, God will give us the desires of our heart,” the Chief Apostle said with reference to a psalm. “In other words, if you ask God to give you what Jesus would ask for you, you can be sure you will get it. If we come to God and tell Him about our weaknesses, then He can help us. And then our prayers will contribute to our spiritual health.”

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Psalm 62: 8*

**“Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.”**

Prayer is essential for the well-being of our soul. We can tell God everything. He is almighty and He loves us. He answers those who confide in Him and helps those who yearn for salvation.





Left: More than 3,000 people participated in the divine service in Madang in Papua New Guinea  
Below: District Apostle Mark Woll (left) ministering to the congregation



# Five dangers and how praying can help

Believers can look forward to a wonderful future with God. However, we first of all have to get there. And there are dangers along the way. Jesus Christ shows us what these are and how best we can deal with them.

“It is important that we come together to pray because we know that when we come together in the name of Jesus Christ and pray in His name, God will always listen to us.” These were the opening words of Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider in the divine service in Madang in Papua New Guinea in May 2022. He based his sermon on the passage from Luke 21: 36.

## God is above time

“As human beings we do not really know the future,” Chief Apostle Schneider admitted. It is a bit like a weather forecast or a specialist who can predict the outcome of a country’s elections, for example. But these are only forecasts, which may or may not come true. God, on the other hand, knows the future because it is as real to Him as the past and the present are. “When He speaks about the future, He does

not predict something that will likely happen, but describes a reality that is already present for Him,” explained Chief Apostle Schneider.

God reveals the future to mankind: “At least the most important part of the future, His plan of salvation.” And for the rest we have to trust in God. He does not reveal when Jesus Christ will return. “No, God only tells us the plan of salvation and what we have to do and know in order to be saved.”

## The dangers

There are certain risks on the way to God’s promised future. “And Jesus, who knows everything, warns us.” There is the danger of placing too much importance on earthly riches. Jesus warns us: “Be careful, you risk missing out on sal-



Chief Apostle Schneider and District Apostle Peter Schulte with leading ministers of Papua New Guinea

vation if earthly life becomes too important to you.” There is also the danger of false prophets. “Many today present the gospel as a recipe for success in life,” the Chief Apostle warned, referring to false prophets. Then there is the danger of being lulled into a false sense of security. Some overestimate their own strength, while underestimating the power of the evil one: “Be aware of the power of temptation.”

There is also the danger of drowsiness. “Be careful, because Christ will return when you least expect it.” Some have already been waiting for a long time, and others say, “When you look at the church, Jesus just cannot come back now.” We then run the risk of not being ready for His return. The last danger the Chief Apostle mentioned is that of division. He said that Christians need one another to be able to persevere until our redemption: “They can only resist temptation if they are one.”

### Praying helps

The Chief Apostle said that Jesus tells believers how to deal with these dangers: “Pray so that you are strong enough to avoid all these dangers.” The Chief Apostle went on to mention five ways we can do this.

Namely by praising and glorifying God: “To avoid focusing on earthly matters we must praise God, Jesus Christ, and His glory,” the Chief Apostle stressed. Then we become

aware of God’s love. “When we know how great His love is, we love Him in return. If we are aware of His glory, we realise that there is nothing more important than the glory of God. We want to be there!”

By pleading for His word: to resist false prophets we can pray to God and ask Him to give us the true word of God, the word of life.

By begging for His grace: “I know I cannot earn salvation. I need Your grace,” is the prayer of humble believers who recognise that they must not allow themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security.

By pleading for His return: “Because we love Christ we pray, as the Bible says, day and night: ‘Come Jesus, we want to be with You,’” the Chief Apostle reminded the congregation.

And by pleading for unity. Anyone who is isolated cannot be saved. That is why we pray: “Please help us to remain together in Christ. Because we need to be together in Christ to be saved.”

“Let us take these warnings seriously and act accordingly,” was the Chief Apostle’s appeal at the end of his sermon.

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Luke 21: 36*

**“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

God reveals the course of His plan of salvation to us. He reveals to us what we need to know and do to be saved. Let us always watch and pray that we can escape the dangers that threaten our salvation.

## JESUS HEALS TEN MEN WHO HAD LEPROSY

ACCORDING TO LUKE 17: 11-19

*Jesus healed many people. The fact that they were healed is a sign of His power. People will be saved when the kingdom of God comes.*

On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through a small village. Not far from the village He met ten men who suffered from leprosy. They stood at a distance. They called to Jesus, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

Jesus heard them and said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."



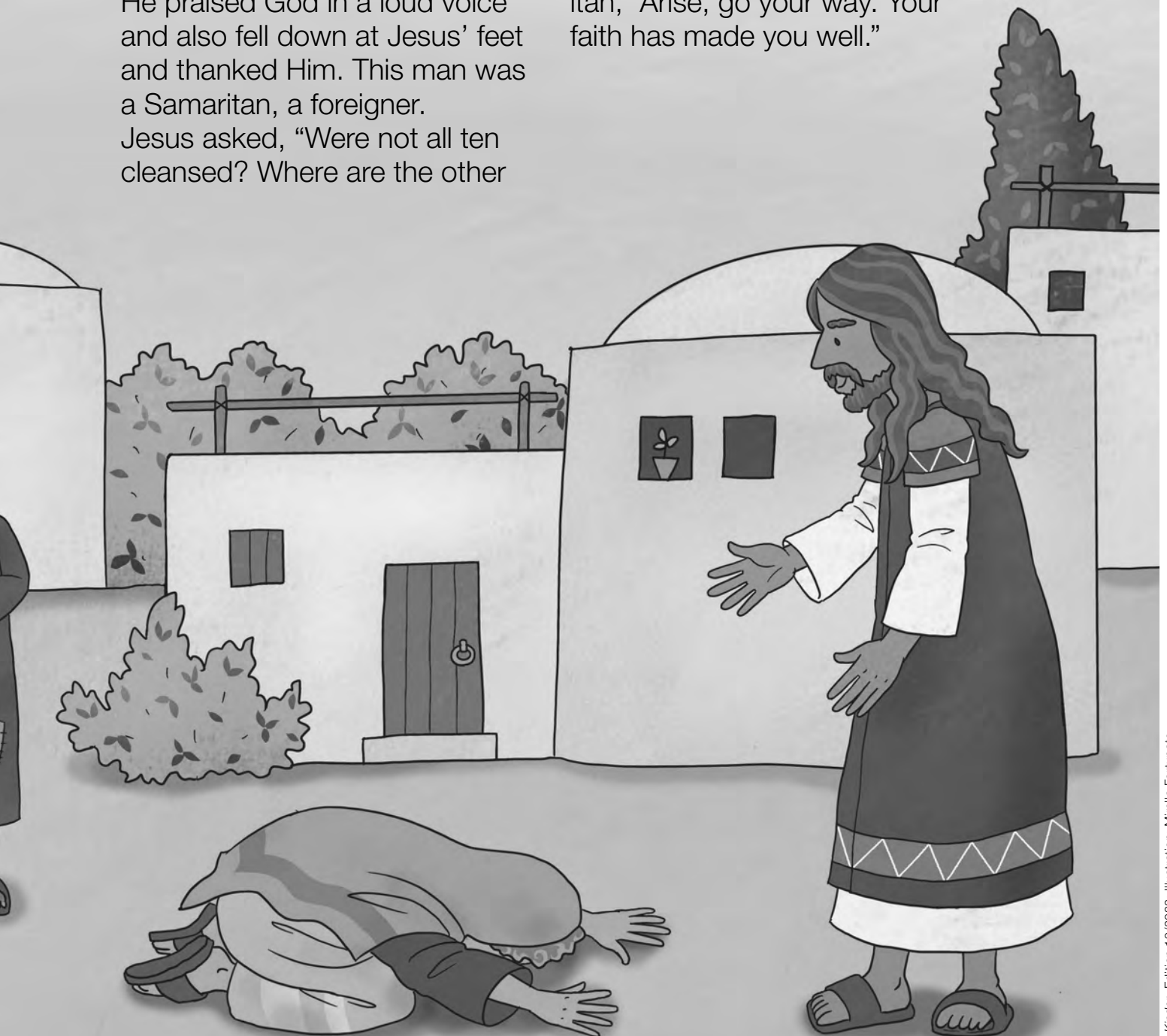
The men went to see the priests and they were healed.

One of the men, when he saw he was healed, turned around and came back to see Jesus. He praised God in a loud voice and also fell down at Jesus' feet and thanked Him. This man was a Samaritan, a foreigner.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other

nine? Why did they not also come back to praise God? Is this foreigner the only one who came back to thank God?"

Then Jesus said to the Samaritan, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."



## AT BRENO'S IN VARGEM GRANDE PAULISTA, BRAZIL

*Olá*, my name is **Breno**. *Olá* is Portuguese and means "hello". Brazil is the only country in South America in which Portuguese is spoken. The reason is that it was a Portuguese colony for more than 300 years once upon a time.



I was born in the city of **São Paulo** eight years ago. It was established in 1554 by Christian missionaries who had come from Portugal. They built a mission and named the place for Apostle Paul. Today the city's population is more than eleven million. São Paulo is the biggest city in Brazil.

When I was still a baby, my **parents** attended divine services in the congregation of São Bernardo do Campo. A few years later, we moved to Santo André and started to attend services in the congregation there.

In the meantime, we have moved again and now live in Vargem Grande Paulista, which is near São Paulo. There is no New Apostolic congregation there yet. So every second week we drive to Santo André and take part in the divine service there. If we cannot go, we watch the service on TV. We also join online services on Wednesdays. During the **Covid pandemic** the online services really helped us a lot.

My **sister**, Giulia, is six years old. Like me, she goes to Sunday School. The lessons are interesting and we





are taught in a playful way. We enjoy that very much. Our **Sunday School teacher's** name is Selma. We love her. We also like the other members of our congregation very much.

Before we moved to where we are now, I was worried about what the new school would be like. But they made me feel welcome and I quickly found new friends. My best friend is João. I am in grade three now. Here I am sitting at my desk doing **homework**.



I am learning to play chess at school and I also have music. I am learning to play the recorder. At home I sometimes play on my mom's old **keyboard**. I can play simple songs quite well already.

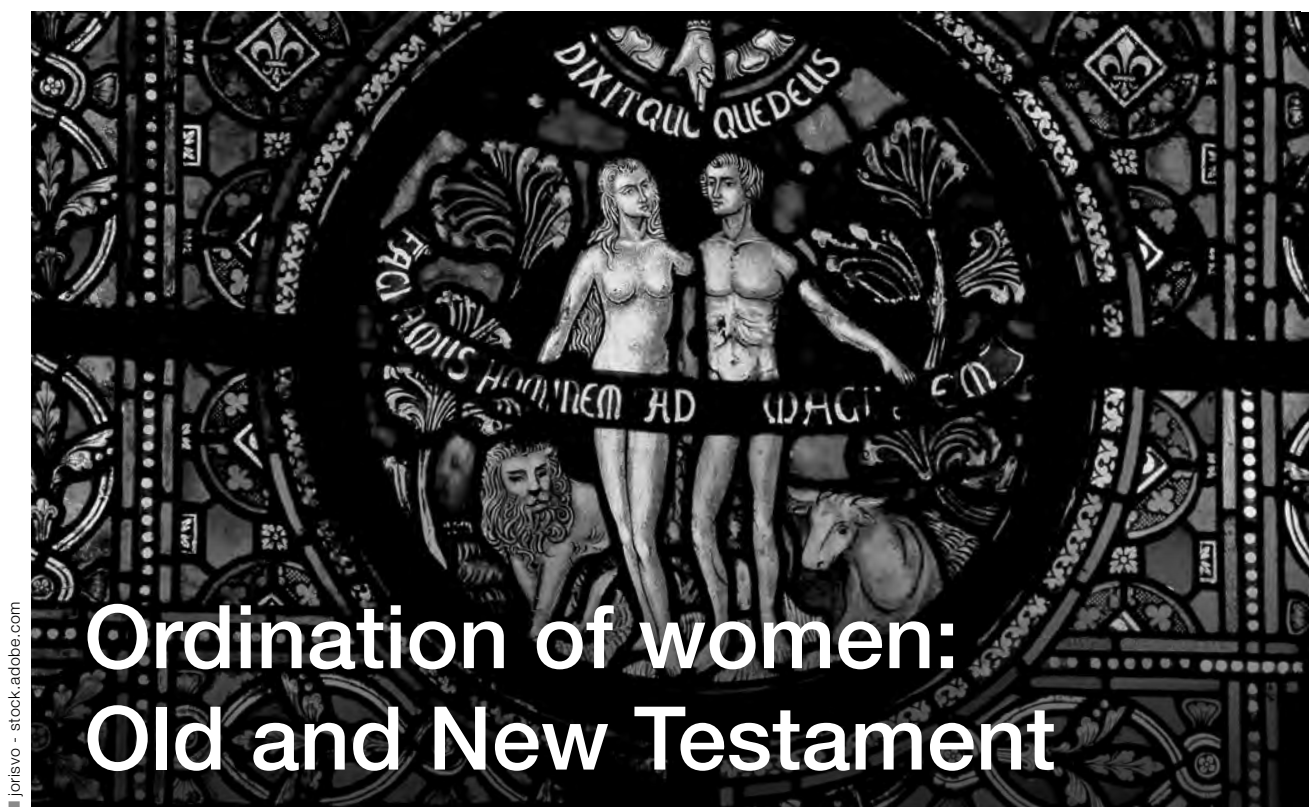


I play **football** at a sports academy. I love going to training. Football is the most popular sport in Brazil and

our national team is considered one of the best in the world. It has already won five world championships! I want to be a professional football player when I grow up.

I have a small dog, whose name is **Tininha**. I take good care of her. I also like to help around the house a bit: I make my own bed, set the table, clear away dirty dishes, squeeze fresh orange juice, and I can even bake pancakes. Sometimes we watch movies with our parents and then we get to eat popcorn. Yummy!





# Ordination of women: Old and New Testament

The biblical record shows that man and woman are both equally created in the image of God. What theological conclusions does the Church draw from this? And how did early Christianity see this? Here is part two of the doctrinal text on the ordination of women.

On the basis of the biblical testimony (refer to *community* 1/2023), man and woman, woman and man, are equally created in the image of God. 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.

## God reveals that man is the image of God

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.

## Man and woman have the same mission

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 though God has defined that 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, even if this is not always realised due to cultural and religious traditions. 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 equally.

Refusal to perceive, deal with, or participate in social reality also contradicts the commandment to love one’s neighbour, which has been given to all people. 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:** The New Apostolic Church teaches that both woman and man are created in the image of God and are therefore of the same nature and dignity. Both have been equally called to have dominion: they are to protect and shape the creation. The fact that man is created in the image of God is therefore an element of the order of creation, because it constitutes man’s irrevocable orientation to God. The mandate to protect and shape the earthly creation also entails that women and men assume equal responsibility.

## Women in the New Testament

The fact that human beings are created in the image of God is the foundation for the essential identity of man and woman. It is on the basis of this finding that both can be equally entrusted with ministry and service, both in the church and in the respective local congregation. No clear

picture emerges if one looks at the New Testament record. The role of women in the church is quite diverse in the course of the first century, that is, in the New Testament period.

## Women in the gospels

The Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) and the gospel of John alike relate that Jesus spoke with women, taught them (Luke 10: 38–42), healed them, and took care of their needs. Luke 8: 1–3 relates that, in addition to the men in Jesus’ immediate surroundings, there were also several women. Jesus had healed some of them, but there were also many others, that is, those who had been persuaded by His preaching about the nearness of the kingdom of God, who had joined the community of His disciples, and who supported Him out of their own means.

John 4: 5–42 even relates that a Samaritan woman with whom Jesus had a conversation professed her belief in Jesus as the Messiah not only to Jesus but also to the Samaritans who lived in her town. It is expressly emphasised that many of the Samaritans came to believe on the basis of this woman’s preaching (verse 39).

Several women belonging to the community of the disciples were also present at the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27: 55–56; Mark 15: 40–41; Luke 23: 49). The gospel of John relates that, rather than observe the crucifixion and death from a distance, the women stood in close proximity to the crucified Christ (John 19: 25–27).

Women were also witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, and it was they who first reported this event to the disciples. Within the accounts of the resurrection, women are assigned a significant task, namely to spread the proto-Christian kerygma of the resurrection of Jesus. The message of the resurrection of Jesus is the essential prerequisite that allows the church to emerge with its preaching of the gospel.

## The testimony of the Pauline epistles

It is of note that men and women are equally mentioned and greeted in the closing of the letter to the Romans (chapter 16). The first to be mentioned is “Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea” (Romans 16: 1). Phoebe is a servant of a congregation and is also an important person who has helped the Apostle and the church.

In Romans 16: 3 Paul asks the Roman congregation to extend his greetings to two fellow workers, Priscilla and

Aquila. Paul praises both of them for having risked their own necks for his life (Romans 16: 4). They presided over a house church (Romans 16: 5). Both of these individuals are also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16: 19, on which occasion Paul extends greetings both from them and their house church.

In Romans 16: 7 greetings are likewise addressed to both a man and a woman—presumably a married couple in this case as well: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the Apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” This passage has attracted a lot of attention in recent times, especially because several exegetes are of the view that Junia was a woman, who is designated here as an Apostle.

The aforementioned examples make it clear that women certainly played an important role in the Christian churches with which Paul had contact: they held congregational leadership functions and were actively involved in preaching the gospel among the Gentiles.

## Prophetic speech

The first epistle to the Corinthians contains statements pertaining to the proper conduct of both men and women in divine service. According to these, both men and women are active within the service: they pray and they speak prophetically. Prophetic speech plays a significant role within Paul’s argumentation against purely ecstatic glossolalia, which is incomprehensible in itself and in need of interpretation: “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men... but he who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Corinthians 14: 3–4). Prophetic speech has a similar function to that of the sermon, namely to impart the gospel in a comprehensible manner.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Wolfgang Schrage notes: “Since 1 Corinthians 12: 1 et seq. deals primarily with the activity of the Spirit, who bestows gifts indiscriminately to all Christians..., this has nothing to do with offices to be delegated or denied, or even their gender-specific divisions, [therefore] any differentiation between specific functions of the man and the woman are completely foreign. Nowhere before is there even any suggestion that specific talents and criteria can only be for men.”

## Rejection of women’s activity

The Pastoral Letters, written at the end of the first century, seek to preserve the legacy of Paul and carry it over into the present. This clearly tends to diminish the role

of women, who were by this point to be largely excluded from the activities of church life. The organisation of the congregation was now based on that of the Roman family, which was typically led by the father of the family, while the women receded into the background. At the same time, the intent was to combat the influence of heretics, because it was assumed that women, who sometimes also led house churches, were particularly susceptible to false teachings.

## The commandment for women to keep silent

Curiously, an early piece of testimony reflecting criticism of female activity in the church is found in 1 Corinthians 14: 33–36. This passage, which requires women to keep silent in the church—and thus not help shape congregational life—appears to contradict the remarks found in 1 Corinthians 11: 5. Most New Testament scholars are in agreement that this passage was a later insertion. It is similar to the position taken in 1 Timothy 2: 11–15, a document of the later Pauline school. The commandment for women to keep silent in 1 Timothy 2: 11–15 is similar to the one in 1 Corinthians 14: 34–35 and also takes up motifs from 1 Corinthians 11: 7–12.

The text in 1 Timothy 2: 11–15 generally distinguishes itself by taking on a relatively rigid tone with regard to women: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”

It was with this reference to Eve, who was generally considered the first sinner, that women were excluded from many activities in the congregation. In the context of the congregation they were not permitted to ask questions about faith. Women were to be instructed in faith outside of the congregation. Beyond that there was discrimination against childless women. Women were also to ensure that their children did not turn away from the Christian faith. If this were to happen, then even their own salvation would be in question. It was forbidden for women to preach the gospel publicly. The men were the teachers, while the women were the recipients of their instruction.

However, a closer comparison of 1 Timothy 2: 11–15 and the passage in 1 Corinthians 11: 2–16 (women and men in divine service) draws attention to two essential differences: first of all, Apostle Paul does not argue on the basis



of the temptation of Eve in 1 Corinthians 11, nor does he oblige women to remain silent in the congregation (as was admonished in the later Pauline school, according to 1 Timothy 2: 12).

### Did Eve bring sin into the world?

The author of the first epistle to Timothy positions himself with the apostolic authority of Paul: “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” This reference to the second account of the creation (Genesis 2: 4–25), namely to Adam and Eve, cements the role distribution as an expression of the immutable order of creation.

While Paul only alludes to the second creation account in 1 Corinthians 11: 8–9, the mention of the names Adam and Eve makes this account the express focus. The relationship of subordination is justified with the statement that the man was the first be created, while the woman was created afterward. The ensuing argument shows that the thinking of Paul—as it comes to expression in the Adam-Christ typ-

ology of the letter to the Romans, for example—is rather foreign to the author of this letter: “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2: 14). The first epistle to Timothy borrows from a late Judaic interpretative tradition of the fall into sin, in which the blame for transgressing the divine commandment is assigned to the woman.

Paul, on the contrary, states: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5: 12). For Paul, Adam is the collective image of mankind mired in sin and death, in which gender does not play any role.

**SUMMARY:** The testimony of the New Testament is not clear. There are accounts that make reference to the intensive involvement of women in missionary work, congregational life, and even divine service activity. On the other hand, there are statements from the end of the first century indicating that women are forbidden to take an active part in congregational life. It was thus also impossible for women to participate in missionary work and divine service activities. Therefore, it is impossible to derive any clear standards for the present from these divergent accounts in the New Testament.

Accordingly, the District Apostle Meeting passed the following resolution in fall 2021: “Individual negative statements found in some New Testament letters concerning the active participation of women in divine service and the congregation cannot serve as sufficient grounds for excluding women from ministry. Consequently, the apostolate—which is endowed with teaching authority and charged with establishing the order of the Church—has a decision to make.”

The accounts of creation in the Old Testament attest that man and woman are of the same value and the same dignity. Some apostolic letters make distinctions nevertheless. And it is not only because of this that we need to ask the question, What does Jesus have to say about this? This is what we will look at in the next edition of this magazine.



The youth from the Buffalo City district in South Africa came together for team building activities (below)



■ New Apostolic Church Southern Africa



■ New Apostolic Church Argentina

The children are greeted with sweets

# Together we are strong

Love, friendship, and sharing the same faith... These are things that make us strong. And this is something that brothers and sisters from all generations and walks of life experienced over the last couple of months in various countries. Here are a few examples of how people lived last year's motto "Together in Christ".

On a Saturday in October last year, young people from various congregations of the Buffalo City district in South Africa came together for a memorable weekend outing to Hobbiton Outdoor Education Centre. After a prayer, a meet-and-greet session, and a delicious breakfast they started their outdoor programme. The activities included outdoor endurance and personal development activities, as well as team building exercises. They learned to face fears, and to trust and respect each other. Later in the afternoon, they all gathered in the hall for choir practice in preparation for Sunday's service. This was followed by an evening of singing and dancing while preparing a scrumptious braai for dinner. On Sunday morning, the service was conducted by a Priest, after which the young people played a few games and then set off to explore a nearby waterfall. The weekend concluded with a delicious lunch.

That same weekend, the children, parents, and teachers of the congregations Villa Ballester and Parque Patricios in Argentina met for a children's service—each congregation separately. The churches had been colourfully decorated and there were welcome signs and sweets for the children. Apostles Pablo Basso and Jorge Franco based the services on Mark 10: 16: "And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them." The Apostles asked the children, "What makes a good friend?" Their answers were

influenced by everyday life and also by faith: "That he prays for me." or, "That He helps me with my homework." The children learned that Jesus can be their best friend because He is always there for them.

## A ray of hope in the war

Ukraine is still in a state of emergency since Russia invaded the country in late February 2022. But even there something as special as love is happening. Maria and Vladislav had met before the war. He kept inviting her to the New Apostolic Church. She felt at home there and especially so because of Vladislav. So the couple decided to get married despite, or because of, the terrible situation in their homeland. The wedding was on 17 July last year. "I cannot put into words the energy that I felt in the church. When the District Elder took my hand during the blessing, a warmth flowed through me as if God Himself was taking my hand," Maria shared afterwards.



■ Новоапостольская Церковь

A group of German seniors pose in front of an exhibit on Germany's biggest shoe mile



■ New Apostolic Church Southern Germany

The French seniors are treated to lunch by the young people



■ New Apostolic Church France

## Seniors on tour

In three different parts of the world, groups of seniors came together to enjoy each other's company. The bus for the seniors from the Heidelberg district in Germany left early in the morning, at 6.15 a.m. Their destination was the Palatinate, a forested area. First, they stopped in Hauenstein, a town known for its many shoe stores, then they were given a bus tour on which they could marvel at some of the beautiful natural scenery. They stopped at a vineyard where they were given a tour through the vineyards in a covered wagon. On the way, the vintner entertained the group with trivia and anecdotes about viticulture as the group tucked into fresh farmhouse bread and a glass or two of chilled wine. After some delicious ice cream, the excursion came to an end in the evening.

The seniors of the Strasbourg district in France met in Erstein for their first outing since the end of the pandemic. The group gathered in a banquet hall for a divine service, which also served to prepare the way

for the service for the departed the Sunday after. Then the seniors were treated to lunch by the youth. For starters, they were served an aperitif, which was followed by some delicious food. The day ended with old and young sitting together enjoying each other's company.

The seniors of the Erica East congregation in South Africa also met for a divine service. Evangelist Martin Mullins conducted a special divine for them on 29 October, which he based on Psalm 71: 18: "Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come." The take-home message for the seniors was: God's blessing lies in salvation, not in a happy life; we trust God, even if others think He has abandoned them; we need God's help even if we have gathered a wealth of experience over the years. They were also given a task to take home: to teach the next generation about God's love and to make sacrifices.

## Confirmation camps weld together

Enhancing the spiritual preparation of the final year confirmands and strengthening their understanding of the fundamental principles of the New Apostolic faith: this was the idea behind confirmation camps of the congregations of the Fernwood Park district and the Gelvandale district in South Africa. Eighty-one confirmands from the Gelvandale district travelled to Sumcay Camp Centre with their teachers on 14 October. Two weeks later, the 64 confirmands from the Fernwood Park district headed to the same camp. The young people had lots of fun. The activities included a Tik Tok challenge, games, swimming, and singing. In a morning devotion, they repeated what they had learned in confirmation classes. In each case, a divine service formed the conclusion.



Confirmands in South Africa were treated to a weekend of spiritual enhancement

■ New Apostolic Church Southern Africa

# It all starts with the recorder

The new school year has started in South Africa and so have recorder lessons. To the joy of some and to the annoyance of others perhaps, but in the end it will have a positive effect on all.



New Apostolic Church Southern Africa



Above: Children in the congregation Elnor in South Africa getting their first recorder lessons

Left: A recorder and a beginner's guide to learn to play the recorder can be bought as a combo package from the Church offices in South Africa for a small fee

A minister is called to assist during a divine service in a New Apostolic congregation in South Africa. Instead of the choir getting ready to sing, the children of the congregation scurry forward with a recorder in one hand and their *Bright and Beautiful* children's hymn collection in the other. Finally, they are all lined up. The sound is what it is when a whole bank of soprano recorders plays at once. But nobody minds because the children are so proud and happy. They are part of a community where everyone is equally important, regardless of age or social background.

The picture is very similar in all the congregations in the Regional Church of Southern Africa on this Sunday. In every congregation that has children, they come forward when a minister is called to assist and then they play the same song—whether the congregation is large or small, has a beautiful pipe organ in a modern church building or comes together for divine services under a tree.

## Getting in the swing of things for the Chief Apostle's visit

Recorders have existed in New Apostolic churches in South Africa since at least the 1970s. When the Chief Apostle then announced his visit to the country in 2019, it was clear to the Church's music department in South Africa: "We wanted to make the Chief Apostle's visit as exciting as possible." This is what Clarke Schilder reports, who works for the music department. So he and his colleagues bought about 20,000 recorders and he created a beginner's guide

to help children learn to play the recorder, and you could buy the two as a combo package for a small fee. They also created videos with the individual lessons and played them on NACTV and on YouTube, and in the divine service on 11 July 2019 the children delighted the Chief Apostle with recorder music.

The job of Clarke Schilder and his colleagues is to make sure that every congregation is functional in terms of music. And that is a big challenge because the composition of the congregations is very diverse. Sometimes congregations have a large choir and many organists, while other congregations do not even have an organ. Some do not even have electricity. The recorder can be played anywhere, it is easy to play, and does not need electricity. "This recorder project, I think, is a great way of achieving the goal because it is open to all the children in the Regional Church, whether they live in a rich or poor neighbourhood," Clarke says. And there is another reason: "If we already foster an interest when the children start Sunday School, we can get them excited about the Lord's work and to love His work. That is what we want to cultivate: the love to be in God's house, to sing, to honour, and praise His name."

## When talented children become successful musicians

At the end of January, the project will start all over: the new school year will start and the recorder lessons will resume on NACTV. In many places, joint rehearsals then also take place, depending on the local conditions. Clarke and his colleagues are also happy to help organise professional teachers for schools and other facilities.

Because one thing is clear: "Some of our professional musicians also started out on the recorder," Clarke says. For example, Brandon Phillips. The 43-year-old was principal bassoonist of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and artistic director, and conductor of the Cape Town Philharmonic Youth Orchestra until his appointment of winds and ensembles lecturer at the University of Cape Town at the beginning of 2022. When he started playing the recorder at the age of about nine, however, he was not so enthusiastic at first: "My father actually made me play the recorder," he says. But today he is grateful to his parents: "The recorder was basically my introduction to the world of music. Without it I would not have had the success I do today."

When he learned to play the other recorders as well, and the trumpet, violin, and viola on top,

Clarke Schilder, among others, recognised that there is musical talent. And he was able to encourage the young musicians at an early stage.

That is why Clarke believes it is so important today to identify young talent early and encourage it. The Covid pandemic has pretty much stifled the development. But now the music department wants to resume the programme and also promote singing, among other things. "We always try to create platforms for our children to perform," Clarke says. That is why twice a month it is the children's turn, and the plan going forward is set: one week they will sing, the other week they will play.

## A friend who does not fight back

"I think music has so many benefits," Clarke Schilder says. "Introverts come out of their shells and become more sociable. And music also helps you with your school work." And not only with reading, also with math. "And then music brings about a sense of calm. Like I said, the recorder does not need anything to power it. You simply blow into the instrument and there's a sound. If anyone upsets you, you can go into your room and play your instrument. The recorder is a friend that doesn't fight back."

That is why many children don't feel like Brandon Phillips, who ran to his first recorder lesson with tears in his eyes because he would rather have played soccer. "A teacher told me a beautiful story," Clarke says. "Rehearsals are on Friday afternoon because there is no school the next day. When she gets to church on a Friday afternoon, no matter how early, the children are always already at the church waiting for their lesson to start."



A special recorder piece was performed when the Chief Apostle visited South Africa in 2019. An estimated 60,000 recorders played simultaneously in all connected congregations

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider during the recording of his video message on the ordination of women



■ Andreas Rother

# Women in ministry: a doctrinal overview

The year 2022 will go down into the New Apostolic history books. For the very first time, the Church has provided a doctrinal answer to a 160-year-old question. And the resulting decision will begin to take effect in the year 2023—when women will also be given the opportunity to be ordained into ministry.

Traditionally, the New Apostolic Church has basically only ever called men to the ministries of Deacon, Priest, or Apostle. There was something of an exception in the first half of the twentieth century with the appointment of deaconesses. But neither the one nor the other was sufficiently substantiated as doctrine.

When work began on the Catechism, an answer slowly came due, because the Church was in the process of reviewing, concretely defining, and updating its entire teaching. Owing to time constraints, only our understanding of church and the sacraments could be fully elaborated before the Catechism was published in 2012. However, the Church's understanding of ministry remained fragmentary.

## Looking at the big picture

It was only in 2014 that work began on formulating the Church's understanding of ministry—and in a comprehensive manner at that. Elements that still needed to be cleared up included:

- first of all, what is a ministry?
- secondly, how does the ministry function?
- only after that would it be possible to answer the question of who is permitted to bear a ministry.

The results were elaborated in writing, and the Chief Apostle reported on these in the year 2017. And it was on Pentecost 2019 that the distinction between ministry and function took effect in the Church.



## Taking a closer look at the Bible

Now that the questions of what and how had been answered, it was time to address the question of who. And only a proper analysis of the Bible could provide the necessary answer. Here too, there were basically three questions that arose:

- what does God have to say about it?
- what does Jesus Christ have to say about it?
- what do the letters of the Apostles say?

The account of the creation makes the will of God abundantly clear: He created man and woman in His image to the same degree—with the same value, the same dignity, and the same responsibility for shaping life.

With Jesus Christ the situation is unclear: He said nothing on the subject. And His actions were likewise ambiguous. On the one hand, He treated women better than was usual at the time, but on the other hand, He only called men to be Apostles. But if one were to take this as an example, one would also have to follow Him by appointing only Jews as Apostles.

And the letters of the Apostles are quite contradictory in nature: on some occasions, women are supposed to speak prophetically in divine service, and on other occasions they are to be silent. In some epistles, the refusal to allow women to speak is justified by the fact that Eve brought sin into the world, whereas other letters regard Adam as the guilty party.

## A decision for all

What's the bottom line then? God's good creation establishes equality between men and women. Anything that might possibly be used as an argument against this in the example of Jesus or the letters of the Apostles cannot trump the will of the Creator.

Thus it is up to the apostolate to make a decision for the future of the Church. But are they allowed to do that? Certainly! Jesus Christ Himself gave the Apostles the power to loose and to bind, in other words, to make binding regulations for the Church.

In June 2022, for example, the District Apostle Meeting, in consultation with all the Apostles of the world, decided "that women can be entrusted with ministerial authority". However: "The associated ministerial mandate will only be given wherever it is accepted by society and the congregation." After all, cultural aspects are not only to be considered with respect to the past in the context of biblical analysis, but also in the realities of the present.

## Women in the spotlight

Women in Nigeria came together for a two-day programme called "Teach me to teach". Dressed in traditional dresses with Church logos and wearing convention T-shirts made from cloth that had been specially designed for this day, the women enjoyed one thing above all else: fellowship. In seminars, workshops, and health talks they learned a lot that they could also pass on to their congregations.

In between there was a lot of singing. Apostle Oscar Kabanga Nwanza conducted a divine service on Palm Sunday, which marked the end of the event. In his sermon, he put the focus on three special women from the Bible: Deborah, Esther, and Mary Magdalene.



■ New Apostolic Church Nigeria





District Apostle Woll presents the new Sunday School teaching material



## | Teamwork on a global scale

Work on the new children's teaching material is progressing well. An overview was given at the last International District Apostle Meeting in November 2022. Writers and teams from various countries are involved in compiling the various books.

Teaching material has existed in the New Apostolic congregations since about 1908. The first such book was a manual aimed at Priests and teachers to help them conduct religious instruction and Sunday School. Everybody in the German-speaking world referred to its simplified title *Hilfsbuch* (meaning something like “guide”) because of its cumbersome title *Hilfsbuch für die Priester und Diener der Neuapostolischen Gemeinde* [Guidebook for Priests and servants of the New Apostolic congregation].

However, not even its successors managed to reach every corner of the New Apostolic world due to costs and the lack of infrastructure. And then at the International Apostle Meeting on Pentecost 2015 in Zambia, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider said, “Instruct the ministers and organise Sunday School for the children in all congregations,” thereby launching a teaching agenda. And this mission is well underway.

### Childfriendly and individual

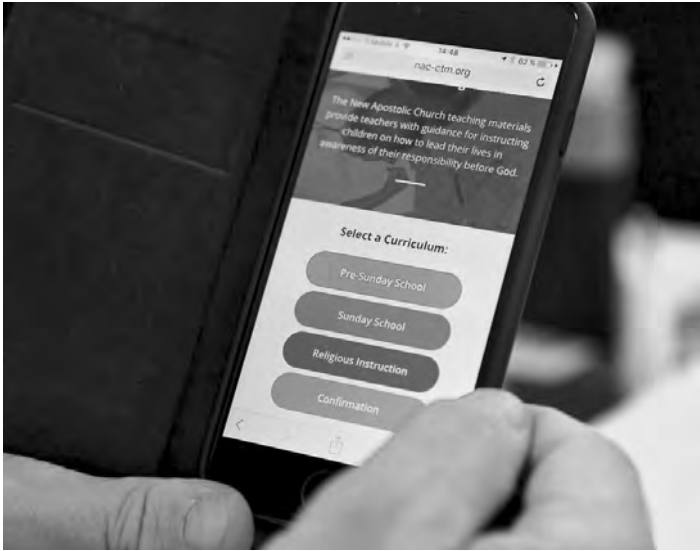
New teaching material is available and has been in use since

about 2019. The lessons have a modern design and contain child-friendly material to help introduce the children to their faith in an age-appropriate and contemporary way. The most conspicuous innovation are the many methodical parts of the lessons, the Activities, which playfully deepen the subject matter.

The aim was to ensure that the teaching material could also be used by teachers with no teaching experience. In addition, the specific media requirements of the Regional Churches are also taken into account so that the possibilities range from printed books to download portals and apps. But this is only a beginning.

### From little to big

In addition to Sunday School there are also—depending on the region—pre-Sunday School, religious instruction, and confirmation lessons for the older children. In this area, the Church is relying on the division of tasks, the standardisation of curricula, and the possibility of individual implementation.



Sunday School teachers can access individual lesson content via desktop PC, tablet, or smartphone

The work on the material for confirmation instruction is being led by the New Apostolic Churches Southern Germany and Switzerland. Development of the teaching material for religious instruction is being headed by the New Apostolic Church Northern and Eastern Germany. And pre-Sunday School material is being developed by Canada. How work on the material for our youngest members is progressing was presented by District Apostle Mark Woll at the conference in Zurich last November.

### Writers from 17 countries involved

About 30 Pre-Sunday School lessons are ready and have been posted on the English CTM website. A further 50 lessons are expected to be posted by September 2023, and the syllabus should be complete by June 2024. The Regional Churches will decide for themselves whether and to what extent the material, which was developed in English, will be translated into other languages.

The writing team which was recruited is definitely very international. Canada is receiving input from 17 countries to help write the lessons and activity sets: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Democratic Republic Congo, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

What had the Chief Apostle said back in 2015 in Lusaka? "I am aware that this is demanding, but I also believe that with God nothing is impossible!"

### Songs from pop oratorio performed

The pop oratorio "I Am – Jesus in Word and Wonders" was written and composed to mark the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the New Apostolic Church in 2013. The lyrics were translated into English for the International Youth Convention 2019 and performed there.

The music was performed again in a divine service marking the 125th anniversary of the Dortmund district in Germany, which was celebrated a year late in September last year because of the Covid pandemic. The approximately 100 choristers started rehearsing the pieces containing the "I am" statements of Jesus in April: "I am the bread of life", "I am the light of the world", "I am the door", "I am the good shepherd", "I am the resurrection and the life", "I am the way and the truth and the life", and "I am the true vine". These are words of Jesus taken from the gospel of John in which Jesus describes Himself. The choir performed the songs at a workshop concert on 10 September and in the divine service conducted by District Apostle Rainer Storck.



■ Günter Lohsträter, Frank Schudt

DISTRICT APOSTLE MICHAEL EHRLICH:

# „Here I Am“

A few weeks ago, many thousands of young brothers and sisters stood at the altar. They took their confirmation vows, promising to be faithful to the Lord. Afterwards they received the blessing for their confirmation.

Our District Apostle mentioned in a confirmation service: *“Let us work together to ensure that the young children of God find their place in the midst of the congregation. It is important to let them feel that we love them, take them seriously in their concerns, and are pleased when they take on tasks and responsibilities in the congregations.”*

Referring to a German youth choir song “Here I am”, he invited the young children of God: *“We are here, be part of it too!”*

Our District Apostle showed the young Christians how important it is to put Jesus Christ as the model in the centre of their lives in everything. In this way, God's blessing would accompany them on their journey of life and faith.

## THAT SAYS THE CATECHISM

### What is confirmation?

Confirmation (Latin *confirmatio*, meaning “reinforcement”, “affirmation”) is that act of blessing in which young New Apostolic Christians take upon themselves the obligations which their parents or guardians undertook on their behalf at their baptism and sealing. Confirmands vow to be faithful to God and publicly, that is, before the congregation, profess the New Apostolic faith. Once confirmed, these Christians, who have now reached the age of spiritual maturity, bear full responsibility before God for their life of faith.

*Questions and Answers – Question 663*

CATECHISM OF  
THE NEW APOSTOLIC  
CHURCH  
IN QUESTIONS  
AND ANSWERS



2023 confirmation in South South Nigeria

NIGERIA:

## The Confirmation Vow

The New Apostolic Church, is established upon the redemption work of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, manifested in His bitter suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension to His Father in heaven. He gave authority to his Apostles in the early Church as well as in our times to preach His Gospel and prepare believers for His promised return in order to take home His bride.

To this belief, every New Apostolic faithful vows, whether young or old, as well as to remain faithful to it till the very

end. For children and other people limited in terms of religious self-responsibility, the parents or guidance take this vow in proxy until the age of religious maturity. At the confirmation the young new apostolic takes this solemn vow by himself and thus becomes

a self-responsible New Apostolic Christian. Previous to this solemn moment, in Nigeria the young Christians have undergone a preparation period of two years to be able to grasp the essence of the act.



2023 confirmation in South Central Nigeria



*Group picture of the confirmands*

GHANA:

## Teach Me to Do Your Will

On Sunday 23 April 2023, 58 young brothers and sisters from Accra East and Accra West districts met at Accra Central Church to take their vows. The festive divine service was conducted by Apostle Charles Asare. He exhorted the confirmands to remain faithful to God, to do His will and thus to receive God's blessings in return. This includes always asking for and acting according to God's will. It also means to publicly profess one's faith. The young people should be actively involved in church life, e.g. by joining the choir and orchestra. After the confirmands had answered the question of whether they wanted to remain faithful to God with their "Yes", they underlined this with the confirmation vow.



*Confirmands ready to make their vows*



*The confirmands after the service in Kumasi*

GHANA:

## You Are Not Alone!

Thirty-two young brothers and sisters received the confirmation blessing by Apostle Amos Osei-Du at Kumasi Central Church on April 23, 2023. In his address to the confirmands, the Apostle reminded them of their responsibility for their actions henceforth. He however, assured them of the help of God in their new phase of spiritual journey. He further also promised them of the support of the ministers, the congregation and their parents towards upholding their confirmation vow. "Fear not, we are all here to support you to fulfil your vows, you are not alone!" emphasized the Apostle. He also reminded them to take active roles in the Church and thereby enjoy the full blessing of the Lord.



*The confirmands waiting to receive their blessings*



*Apostle handing over gifts to the children*



*The confirmands in front of the altar*



*Confirmation vow quote in Guéckédou*

GABON:

## Confessing The Faith

For the year 2023, Apostle Alain Serge Leghanza made the Confirmation divine service a special one, in which the New Apostolic Church was to be witnessed and presented. Three days before the divine service, which took place on 14 May 2023, in the congregation of Angondjé, the young people made a large invitation campaign in the neighbourhood. Many guests thus experienced the confirmation of the young brothers and sisters.



*Group photo with the Apostle*

GUINEA:

## The Battle Of Faith

Confirmands promise to renounce evil and surrender to God by putting their life of faith into practice, especially according to the teaching of the Apostles.



*The confirmands of Nongo with the youth*

They can count on God's help in this by contributing their talents to the Lord's work. God will help them to keep the promise.





*Joy for the confirmands in Hoky, Atomey district*

## BENIN:

# Joy Of Serving The Eternal

This year's confirmation feast was very beautiful and rich in teachings.

The young brothers and sisters were prepared to "commit themselves to serve and reign with Christ". It was a great joy and satisfaction for our confirmands to receive the blessing and to join the circle of young people. It was also with gratitude that the parents and the whole congregation listened to the confirmation vows.



*Apostle Olou and the confirmands at Comè*



*Several confirmands resolutely committed to remaining faithful to God*

## TOGO:

# Being Faithful To God!

Over a period of two years, young brothers and sisters were prepared for confirmation. In the confirmation services, the New Apostolic youths made their public vow before God and man to remain faithful on their journey of faith.

For the confirmation service, the Bible passage from the 143rd Psalm from verse 10 onwards served as the basis for a fulfilled life of faith: Learning the will of God, recognizing and understanding it and ultimately doing it.



*The happy and thankful confirmands after the divine service*



## TOGO / BENIN:

# Days Of Blessing In Togo And Benin

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider celebrated a divine service in Lomé/Togo on Saturday, 25 March 2023. He ministered to the assembled congregation with a word from John 16, verse 20. In the divine service he retired three Apostles and ordained five new Apostles for Togo, Benin, Ghana, and Gabon (see page 35, above).

The journey then continued to Benin. On Sunday, 26 March 2023, the Chief Apostle conducted the divine service in

Cotonou. His sermon was based on the Bible passage from 2 Corinthians 4, verse 5. Before and after Chief Apostle's visit District Apostle Michael Ehrich also conducted divine services in Lomé/Togo, and Kessahoudji/ Benin, in which 11 district ministers were retired. 10 district rectors have been newly commissioned and 18 delegate of district rectors appointed. In addition, the District Apostle used the days on site for an exchange with the Apostles serving in the countries of Benin, Togo, and Ghana.



*Address of the Chief Apostle to the three Apostles before their retirement*



*Address before the ordination of the five Apostles*



## GHANA / GABUN / BENIN / TOGO: Retirement And Ordination Of Apostles

Our Chief Apostle retired three Apostles in the divine service in Lomé, Togo, on 25 March 2023. He ordained five new Apostles in this divine service (see report on page 34).

Our District Apostle conducted a divine service in Cape Coast, Ghana on 18 June 2023. He retired one Apostle and ordained a new Apostle for Ghana (see report below, page 35).

### RETIREMENT



**Apostle Komlan Abalo**  
Date of ordination: 16/11/2008  
Date of retirement: 25/03/2023  
Working area: Togo



**Apostle Timothy Akubia**  
Date of ordination: 12/01/2016  
Date of retirement: 25/03/2023  
Working area: Ghana



**Apostle Benjamin Darko**  
Date of ordination: 11/07/2004  
Date of retirement: 25/03/2023  
Working area: Ghana



**Apostle Ashie Kotei**  
Date of ordination: 05/06/1994  
Date of retirement: 18/06/2023  
Working area: Ghana

### ORDINATION



**Apostle Ablam Degbe**  
Year of birth: 1975  
Date of ordination: 25/03/2023  
Working area: Togo



**Apostle Alex Poku-Akubia**  
Year of birth: 1963  
Date of ordination: 25/03/2023  
Working area: Ghana



**Apostle I. Annan Mensah**  
Year of birth: 1983  
Date of ordination: 25/03/2023  
Working area: Ghana



**Apostle Josias Houénou**  
Year of birth: 1985  
Date of ordination: 25/03/2023  
Working area: Benin



**Apostle Alain Serge Leghanza**  
Year of birth: 1977  
Date of ordination: 25/03/2023  
Working area: Gabon



**Apostle Emmanuel Quansah**  
Year of birth: 1968  
Date of ordination: 18/06/2023  
Working area: Ghana



## GHANA: A Long-Serving Apostle Retires

District Apostle Michael Ehrich conducted several divine services in various congregations in June. Over 1,000 brethren experienced the first divine service in Agogo. The following day, the District Apostle conducted a divine service in the Central Church in Techiman.

In both divine services, seven district ministers were retired, and eight district rectors and six delegate of district rectors were assigned to their duties.

On Sunday, June 18, 2023, the District Apostle celebrated a divine service in Cape Coast. This service was transmitted to all congregations in Ghana on public television.

In this divine service, he retired Apostle Ashie Kotei, who had served the church for many years. As his successor, commissioned by the Chief Apostle, he ordained District Elder Emmanuel Quansah as an Apostle. He is now responsible for the Cape Coast area in southern Ghana.



*The District Apostel thanking Apostel Ashie for his long years of services*



*District Apostle introducing the new Apostle, Emmanuel Quansah*

# South Germany: Divine service with the District Apostle

District Apostle Michael Ehrich visited the congregation of Memmingen, South Germany, for the Sunday divine service on May 14, 2023. The District Apostle was accompanied by the local responsible Apostel Hans-Jürgen Bauer. The message of the divine service was: *"God knows you and He knows everything"*. A children's choir welcomed the District Apostle with the song: "God's love is so wonderful". By this they also set an accent that the District Apostle also picked up in his sermon: God is infinitely kind and wonderfully great in his grace and love.

**Bible text:** "Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"  
(John 1:48-49)

**Core thoughts:** The District Apostle reminded the congregation of their mission to spread the Gospel. Just as Philip addressed Nathanael after he received the impulse to do so from Jesus. Jesus also spoke to us and we recognised him. The central point is that we are aware of the responsibility of faith. After the address by Jesus, a decision for faith must be made. The believers have the responsibility to cultivate this faith. If one accepts Jesus, then true discipleship is possible. God knows our needs, said the District Apostle. He cares for each one of us and is interested in our concerns. We are encouraged to formulate our concerns in prayer. However, we should also look at what priorities are driving us and whether these are in harmony with divine priorities. In the divine service, the District Apostle also addressed the concern that some experiences are not immediately apparent. He assured the congregation that God knows our limitations. Detours or difficult situations allowed by God can also have the intention that God wants to protect our soul.

