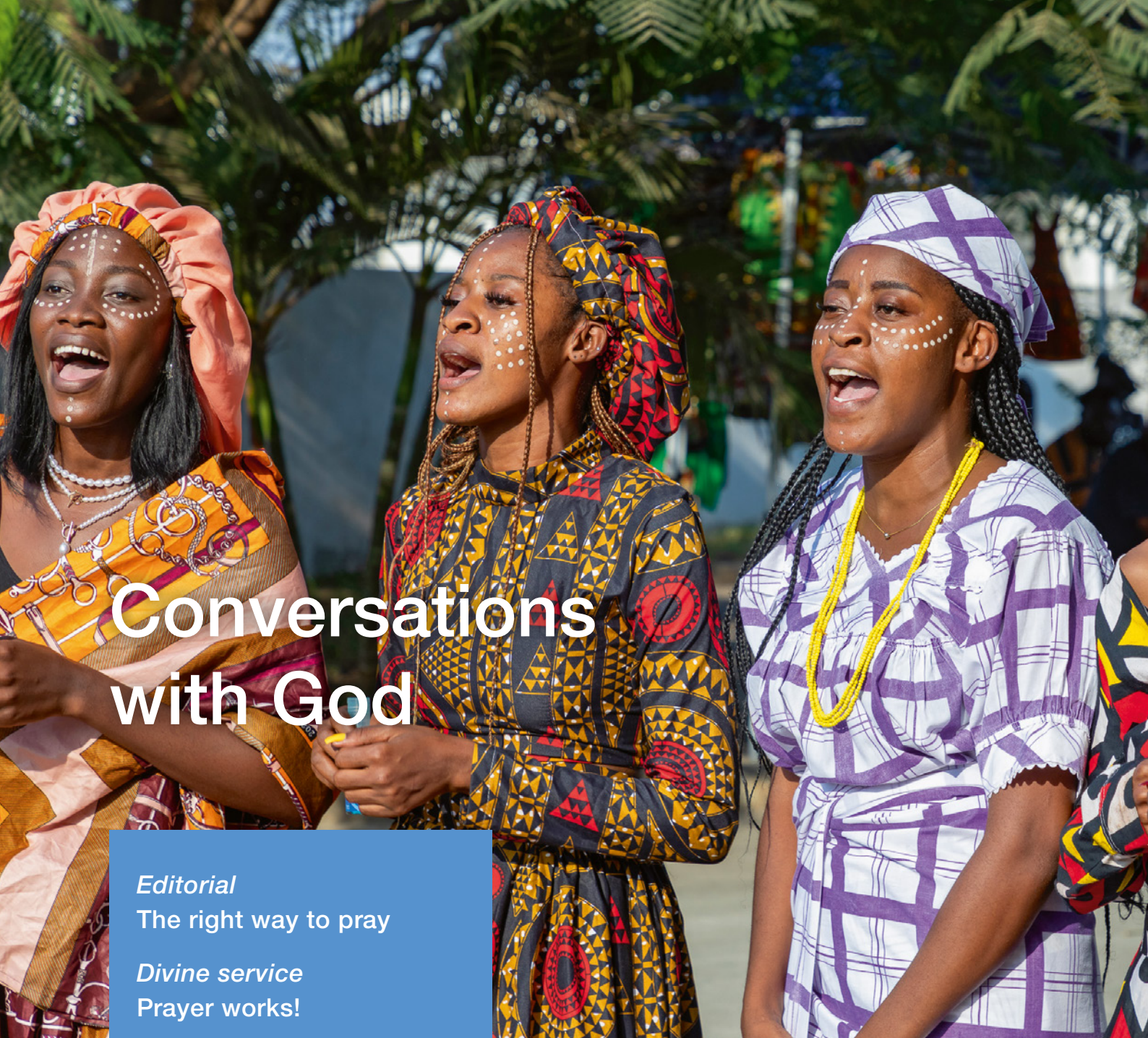


community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

02/2024/EN



Conversations with God

Editorial

The right way to pray

Divine service

Prayer works!

Doctrine

The image we have of God
and what He is really like

New Apostolic Church
International



■ Editorial

- 3 The right way to pray

■ Divine service

- 4 Prayer works!

■ A visit in Asia

- 10 We can do no greater

■ A visit in America

- 12 The power of a small seed

■ A visit in Africa

- 14 Examining our vow to God

■ Children's corner

- 16 Elijah and the widow
of Zarephath

- 18 At Edwin's in
Verviers, Belgium

■ Doctrine

- 20 The image we have of God
and what He is really like

■ Global news

- 24 Generation change
in the leadership

- 25 Changes in the circle of
the Apostles

- 26 Making the Church and
our faith young

- 28 Committed to a good cause

- 30 Churros instead of
Black Forest cake

The right way to pray



New Apostolic Church International

Jesus promised, if you gather together in My name and ask in My name, you will receive. Whenever we come together to pray in Jesus' name, He is among us and prays with us.

If we gather in Jesus' name and ask God for that which Jesus asks of God for us, then Jesus prays with us. But we must ask for the same thing that He asks for. So if anyone prays, "God, I want to be very, very rich," they cannot expect Jesus to join in their prayer. Because Jesus said something completely different about money and rich people. And if I pray, "Jesus, you must punish my enemy," I cannot expect Jesus to pray that with me because He will not agree. Such prayers are not answered because they are not in agreement with Jesus' prayer.

What does Jesus ask God for us? In John 17: 24 we can read: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me

may be with Me where I am." If we want our prayers to be answered, we must strive to ask God for that which Jesus asks of His Father for us.

Heartfelt greetings

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

Jean-Luc Schneider



NAC Switzerland

1 Thessalonians 5: 17

“Pray without ceasing.”



On 7 January 2024, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider conducted the first divine service of the new year in Basle, Switzerland

Prayer works!

Dear brothers and sisters, this prayer, into which we all joined, is indeed a very beautiful start into the new year: “Show us the way to the kingdom of glory.” We have one goal in our life, and that is God’s glory. Our goal is not only our own well-being, happiness, and success. We have set ourselves a much bigger goal. We want to enter into glory, into perfect fellowship with our God. This is what we have decided and this is and remains our goal also in the new year. On the day of the Lord, we want to enter the kingdom of God and have fellowship with God.

This is not a dream or wishful thinking: The return of Jesus Christ is not an eventuality. It is a divine fact and not a promise that just anyone has given us. When God and the Holy Spirit speak of the day of the Lord, they are describing something that is before their eyes. This is difficult to understand, but for God both the future and the present are equally current to God. He has everything in front of

Him. He is not bound to time. When He speaks to us about the return of Jesus Christ, He is describing something that He already sees and that has already taken place for Him. This is our consolation. It is not a vague promise: maybe it will happen one day. We do not know the date, but it is absolutely certain that it will take place. Hence this prayer to show us the way. How do we get there? How can we participate? Such a prayer the Holy Spirit will always answer. He points to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the way. If you want to enter the kingdom of God, if you want to be part of the return of Jesus Christ, then you must follow the path paved by Jesus Christ. His teaching and life is the way. Follow His example and His teaching. This is how we can prepare ourselves for the return of Christ and reach our goal. Whatever happens in the coming year, let us come to God and ask Him to show us the way. And the Holy Spirit will tell us to look up to Jesus Christ and to occupy ourselves with His gospel and put it into practice. That is the way.

An essential element of the teaching of Jesus Christ is prayer. Pray at all times, pray without ceasing. Jesus used many examples to explain this, such as the parable of the widow and the judge, when He spoke of the end-time. Pray always, do not let up in prayer. That is part of this journey. Prayer is an important part of our preparation for the day of the Lord and is therefore also our motto this year: “Prayer works!” The Holy Spirit will always show us the way. In fact, He goes even further. God not only shows us the way, He also gives us the promise: don’t worry, I will always be with you on this path.

Paul took a different approach. He spoke about Jesus Christ, who is now in heaven at the throne of God and who intercedes for us. No matter what happens, Jesus Christ intercedes for us. We imagine the Son of God going to the Father and asking Him, “You must help him now, please forgive him.” It is a bit difficult to reconcile this with our understanding of the Trinity. We think the Father has something in mind and then Jesus comes and says, “No, don’t do that; have mercy on him or help her.” That would mean, however, that the Father changes His mind and His plans because Jesus Christ intervenes on our behalf. We know and believe that the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is completely one. This simply means—and that is what Paul wanted to express—that God is always willing to help and forgive us. When he said that Christ, the Son of God, makes intercession for us it means nothing other than that this year too, God will always be willing to help and forgive us—unconditionally and always. He is always ready and there for us. This is what this means.

Paul also said that the Holy Spirit prays and intercedes for us when we cannot find the words. The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity. This means nothing other than: God will always hear the cry, the longing of our soul. He will always sense our pain, our suffering, even if we cannot find the right words. We can be sure that God knows us, that He hears our prayer even if it is just a sigh. God will always hear it. He is interested in how we are doing. He understands all our troubles. Every worry is important to Him. He is always there for us. God not only shows us the way, but also gives us confidence and the promise: don’t worry, I will always be there for you. I am here to help you, to forgive you, and to listen to you.

Back to our Bible text: “Pray without ceasing.” That does not mean that we should pray every hour, all day, and all

night. Nobody can do that. At least I can’t. Every now and then I must do something different. Pray always means that we pray in every situation. This means nothing other than that our prayer is not dependent on our situation, our circumstances, our needs, our fears, nor on our difficulties: our prayer is the result of our relationship with God. That is the difference.

Many people pray when they are in a crisis. All of a sudden, they remember that there is someone they can call on. Pray always means that our prayer is based on our relationship with God. We pray because we believe in God and know that He is almighty. Nothing is impossible for Him. We believe in His love. He loves us. We believe that He will redeem us, which is why we keep coming back to Him. We love Him from the bottom of our hearts and feel the need to talk to Him, to come to Him, and have fellowship with Him in conversation and prayer, simply because we love Him. We need to keep in touch with Him. Let us pray always, regardless of our situation, but simply out of faith and love for God. This is what our prayer is based on.

*This year, too,
God will always be
there for us*

Prayer works. Prayer is effective. This can now keep us busy all year round. I do not want to elaborate on this subject any further now. Let us look at the different elements of prayer and think about how prayer can work.

Adoration is an important element of prayer. Brothers and sisters, I know this has not always been part of our tradition. I can remember that this was not a focus when I was young. That only came later with Chief Apostle Fehr and Chief Apostle Leber. They brought this subject up. The adoration of God is a very important aspect. This year too, let us take the time to think about God and take an interest in His nature. This takes time and we need to take a step back and think about it. Who is God? This is how we can occupy ourselves with His omnipotence. What does that mean? God is the creator and He is omnipotent. God is perfect. People tend to be quick to say that, but there is much more to God’s perfection. He never makes a mistake. Everything He does is perfect. There is no need for improvement. What He says and does is simply perfect forever and ever: the omnipotence, the perfection of God, the majesty of God, the love of God. God is not just someone who loves us. He is love. He cannot help but love us. That is His nature. It is worthwhile to take a closer look at this every now and then. This will then also have an effect on us. It helps us to have the right relationship with God, and it gives rise to the fear

of God and respect. One realises how big He is and how small we are. The people who are so powerful and shout so loudly are very small.

On the other hand, a deep sense of trust grows: God is almighty and perfect and He loves me. I have every reason to trust Him completely. What this aspect alone can produce in us! On the one hand humility, fear of God, and respect, and on the other hand trust and confidence. Prayer works. Adoration has an influence on us. Something happens in our hearts.

Dear brothers and sisters, we do not need to do this every day, but let us regularly take time to worship God and occupy ourselves with His nature. This has a positive influence on us and is a wonderful preparation for the return of Jesus Christ for those who love God, who trust Him, and who follow Him in faith.

Another element of prayer is gratitude. Giving thanks is very important. I don't want to lecture you now, but perhaps we could thank God a little more intensively this year and focus on what God has given us, what He has done for us, what He is doing, and what He will do. I know that people are always inclined to first see what they don't have, what they still don't have, what they no longer have, and what they lack.

When you visit other countries like I do, you realise that discontentment is independent of people's financial situation. There are people who have a lot and are constantly dissatisfied. I see people who have nothing and are very happy. The bottom line is that contentment and discontentment have nothing to do with what we have or don't have. Satisfaction is the result of our heart's attitude. There are people who have a lot and are never satisfied. Applied to the spiritual, I recommend that we occupy ourselves with what God has given us.

Adoration means: everything comes from God. And if everything comes from God, then everything we have also comes from Him. Gratitude for this creates joy in our hearts, something that has become rare in this world. This joy creates contentment and also ensures our emotional balance. We become stronger in our lives. Those who are grateful are stronger than those who are ungrateful. They are not easily shaken, because they remember everything

that God has already given them. Their life is stable. Gratitude therefore has a huge impact on us and becomes a blessing for us. Let us take the time to be grateful this year.

We also come to God with our requests. In our opening hymn, we sang together that we can come to God in prayer to tell Him everything. This is something I think about a lot. I am afraid that prayer life has diminished here and there and that people no longer talk to God so much. A prayer does not necessarily have to be said on your knees, in front of your bed, or kneeling in front of the altar. You can also have a conversation with God in your thoughts. Brothers and sisters, let us take advantage of this opportunity to talk to God. So much is said and posted about everything and everyone on social media. What about prayer, what about our dialogue with God? Brother, sister, you can always come to God and tell Him everything, absolutely everything, without shame, without fear, without shyness.

We can talk to Him freely about everything. Whether you are happy, angry, annoyed, or unhappy, just come to God and tell Him in your thoughts and in prayer. Dear God, there is something that troubles me. I am all worked up about so-and-so; she has insulted me; it is unfair. Pray to God and tell Him about it openly. It works. God always has time. Other people usually do not have time to listen to you and after five minutes you realise they are not interested in your worries at all. The good Lord always has time. It is so good to know that. You can come to Him any time, no matter when. He has time for you. He listens to you and understands you.

When worship and gratitude work together, then something comes of this prayer. We speak to God, to the Almighty, to the Perfect and Loving One, and realise: He understands us. And because He is almighty and perfect, because He is love and because He is the Saviour, He will do the right thing. And He will help us. It is impossible for Him not to help us. He knows better than we do what we need and what is best for us.

Adoration: He is the Saviour. But what does God want? When we ponder about this and bring our worries and concerns to Him, we will realise that He wants us to be with Him forever. Jesus Christ wants us to be where He is. The more we think about this, the more we realise that His will must be done. And then we no longer resign ourselves to His will, but do it out of conviction, even enthusiasm,

*Let us always take time
to worship God*



“Dear Lord, Your will be done. I know what You want. You want to save me. You want to give me eternal happiness. You want to lead me into Your kingdom, where there will be no more suffering, no more death, no more pain.” And then this prayer, “Your will be done,” becomes a wonderful source of comfort and strength. We come to God after expressing our adoration and gratitude, and now we speak out and tell Him everything that is not good and entrust it to Him, and then the answer comes from the Holy Spirit. Remember who He is and what He wants: His will be done.

When Jesus Christ was on earth, He was absolutely certain that God would give Him what He asked of Him. This was a wonderful assurance. He had this guarantee: what I ask of the Father, He will give Me. And that is what happened. Why is that? Because the Lord Jesus always asked God for that which God wanted to give Him. And I think that is a simply fantastic idea. God always heard Jesus because Jesus always asked Him for what God wanted to give Him. Let us do the same. Above all, let us ask God for that which He wants to give us, namely salvation, redemption, and blessing. Then we can be sure that God will hear us.

So let us come to God with our requests, worries, fears, and needs and tell Him about everything openly. We can be cer-

tain that He will help us. And His help is the best we can receive.

Now to the last point: intercession. This is an important point in this day and age. I mean, we are not blind. When we look around us—in our families, in our congregations, in the world—we see a lot of suffering. Before the divine service, the ministers told me that here in the congregation and in the district, too, there are brothers and sisters who are in great distress. This really is the case everywhere, and it is a big concern of mine. One cannot be indifferent and say, well, that is just the way it is. What can we do about it? Well, we can pray for our family, we can pray for our congregation, and we can pray for our fellow human beings. Intercession is very important. It is a very important part of our preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. Jesus will take those to Himself who follow Him and do His will. And His will is: love your neighbour as you love yourself. This commandment alone gives rise to the need for intercession. We have just prayed for ourselves and we love our neighbour as we love ourselves, so let us also pray for others. We want them to thrive too. We pray for them and share in their well-being, their worries, their fears, and their needs. Because we love others, we share in their fate and come to God and pray for them. And intercession works.



I can already hear those who say, “Yes, but not always.” And I can understand that. I prayed for many brothers and sisters, and yet they still died. God did not heal them. I think of certain countries for which I have been praying for peace for decades and it is getting worse and worse. People are living in great distress and hardship: God, do something. But nothing happens. People die of hunger and so on. The thought then arises: intercession is all very well, but it is totally useless; it doesn’t work. That is human experience and human reason.

Let me come back to worship. How do we picture this? You pray, the congregation prays, and when the congregation prays, the good Lord intervenes. That would mean that the Lord has a plan for how it should happen and because you now come to Him in prayer, He changes His mind and His plan? It is difficult when you really begin to think about it. Do we think that because of our prayers God says, “Because you are all praying now, I will help her and turn the situation around.” That would mean that we love our neighbour more than God loves him or her and because of our intercession, God has changed His mind and brought about a change in the situation. Experience teaches us that intercession is not always helpful. Our mind tells us, with your

faith this is not possible. But then we must tell our mind and our experience: “I cannot understand it, and it is contrary to my own experience, but I believe in it.” The Lord Jesus prayed for us when He was on earth. The first Christians prayed for one another, and so did the first Apostles. Paul often appealed to the churches to pray for him. If that were complete nonsense, it would not be in the Bible and the Lord Jesus, Paul, Peter, and the church in Jerusalem would not have done it this way. Therefore, intercession works! It is written in the Bible. We should pray for others and we do this in faith and trust. Even if we do not understand how it works, and even if our experience tells us otherwise, let us pray for others. Out of love for others we feel a need to pray for them. Intercession first influences the person offering the prayer. When we make time and take an interest in others, we suddenly realise that their difficulties are far greater than ours, even though they deserve the same kind of well-being we have. Let us think about this. When we see our brothers and sisters or our fellow human beings in the world, we realise that they are at least as good as we are, but they do not have what we have. Then you begin to understand what grace really means, and you become even more grateful and realise: “This is a gift of grace given to me by God. I do not deserve this. I cannot understand why I



received it and not him or her. Thank you, dear Lord.” This helps us to better understand what grace means. Then we pray to God in trust, in adoration. God is love and He loves my neighbour as He loves me. God knows what he or she is doing and He will help them. This is not a possibility or a probability; no, this culminates in certainty: God will help! That strengthens us. We have complete trust in God. God will help my neighbour too, and His will will also be done on my neighbour. And then we realise that the only solution for our neighbour, for humankind, is the return of the Lord, salvation, and the new creation. The more we concern ourselves with what is happening on this earth, the greater this conviction becomes. The only way, the only solution is really God’s plan of redemption and for God to deliver humankind from this evil once and for all. Then you really understand God’s plan of redemption and why He is doing all of this. This is the only solution for humankind: to enter the new creation and to be able to live again with God forever. We draw consequences from this. One consequence of intercession for us is gratitude, a better understanding of grace, trust in God that He will help, and focussing on God’s plan of salvation.

Intercession helps us, but intercession also helps our neighbour. We have been given the promise of God and are confident that He will answer these prayers. He will help our neighbour. For those who know that someone is praying for them it is comforting. They can feel that there is still someone who is interested in them, who sympathises with them. It is very important. There are not that many people who still do that. It is comforting to know that someone is praying for them and sharing in their suffering. Comfort also strengthens trust. We trust God to help them and that strengthens them in their trust. And then something very mysterious happens. I cannot explain it, but I experience it every day. You feel like you are being carried on hands of prayer. It is a beautiful image and it cannot be explained by reason. But if there is one person who experiences this, it is me. I know that many brothers and sisters are praying for me. I do not know who. I do not know how many. I do not know where. But I know one thing. I feel the support from the prayers of my brothers and sisters. I cannot explain it. It is a fact. And I know of many brothers and sisters who are in a very distressing situation, who say, “Fortunately, we know that our brothers and sisters are praying for us. I feel the support from the prayers.” Intercession works! And added to that is our confidence that God will help.

Adoration, gratitude, petition, and intercession are effective. Let us occupy ourselves with this intensely and pray together. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer together, for example, it strengthens the unity of the Church. We should think more about this. When we pray together, it underlines the fact that we are all dependent on God’s grace together. We say to God, “Have mercy on me.” This strengthens unity. We all have the same goal and the same request: show me the way, strengthen our unity. Let us place even more emphasis on praying together in the future. Prayer works.

CORE THOUGHTS

- The Holy Spirit inspires us to pray.
- The Lord prays for us.
- Praying in the name of Jesus contributes to our salvation.
- Our collective prayer strengthens the unity of the Church.

| We can do no greater

The works of God are great. Well yes, that is how we praise God in prayer and song. But the Most High has no need of such praise. “We do this for ourselves, not for Him,” the Chief Apostle recently said and went on to explain that those who believe in God will experience the greatest work of God upon themselves.



New Apostolic Church Bangladesh

During his first visit to Bangladesh, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider conducted a divine service in Dhaka on 10 November 2023. He said, “Together we can praise and worship our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ today, and that is exactly the meaning of our Bible text today. That is why we gather together in every divine service. Every service gives us the opportunity to remind ourselves how great the works of God are.”

Jesus is victorious

The Chief Apostle went on to list the works of God that He has accomplished through His Son Jesus Christ.

- Jesus did His Father’s will: “Nobody could stop Him: they hurt Him, they killed Him. But He remained faithful, He fulfilled His Father’s will perfectly and managed to remain without sin until the end.”
- His love was perfect: “He not only loved those around Him, He also paid attention to the weak, the marginalised, the poor, and the sinners. Even in His final hours of suffering, He never stopped loving.”
- He had deep thoughts: “He did not give the people what they wanted. They wanted Him to do miracles, they expected Him to drive out the Romans and restore the kingdom of Israel—but He brought them redemption.”

“That is why we worship and praise God in every divine service,” the Chief Apostle explained. But not because God needs it. “We do this for ourselves, not for Him.” The Chief



Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider with brothers and sisters (right)



Apostle pointed out, “The works and the victory of Jesus Christ are the most important things in our life.”

What God does for salvation

Next, the Chief Apostle focussed on God’s offer of salvation.

- He does much more than just help us in our everyday lives. Many people expect God to heal them. They hope God will solve their problems. “But the idea, the plan of God, is a much bigger one. He wants us to be completely freed from the evil one.”
- He transforms completely: “He takes us poor and imperfect sinners and transforms us into the perfect image of Jesus Christ. He makes it possible for us sinners to become like Jesus Christ, who was simply perfect. This is something no human being can do.”
- His actions are beyond anything humanly imaginable. “God’s actions are beyond our understanding, but we have the guarantee that He is at work.”

And although these great works come from God, we often only think about what we as human beings do for God. “Let us change our way of looking at things,” the Chief Apostle continued. “Let us think about what we receive from God, what we will become through the transformation.”

God wants to save all human beings

The redemption of God includes

- the salvation of all human beings: “All human beings are included in His plan of salvation. No one is excluded. He wants to lead them all into His kingdom.
- fellowship with God and with one another: “He not only

wants us to be saved, but He also wants us to become one people. He wants us to live in perfect fellowship with Him, but also with one another. Jesus wants us to become one, just as He and His Father are one.”

- an action of God that defies human understanding: “The members of the Church will not be perfect by the time Christ returns. But don’t focus on people’s weaknesses. Remember that it is God’s work, and He can use the weaknesses of human beings to do great things.”

The Chief Apostle reminded the congregation once again that it is God who directs His church, not human beings. That is why God’s will is done, not ours: “Let us trust in Jesus Christ and follow Him until the end. Then we will all praise His name in His kingdom and sing ‘How great Thou art’ for all eternity.”

CORE THOUGHTS

Psalm 92: 5:

**“O Lord, how great are Your works!
Your thoughts are very deep.”**

We thank Christ for His work on earth. We value what God does for us more than what we do for Him. God will bring His work to completion.



The power of a small seed

Even a tiny seed can develop great power and grow big. Regardless of one's gifts, shortcomings, and personal past, everyone can be a source of blessing.

Chief Apostle Ernst Streckeisen was the last Chief Apostle to visit Misiones, an isolated province in the north-eastern part of Argentina. This was back in 1978. Forty-five years later, it was time for another visit by a Chief Apostle. On 13 October 2023, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider visited the town of Montecarlo and ministered to around a thousand members from the region and from the neighbouring country of Paraguay.

When Christ came to earth, the Jews had a certain notion of what the kingdom of God was like. Using parables, Jesus explained aspects of the kingdom of God to them. In this divine service, Chief Apostle Schneider interpreted the parable of the mustard seed.

This mustard seed is much smaller than many other seeds you plant in the garden, Chief Apostle Schneider said, and yet it grows into a large shrub: "The growth of a seed does

not depend on its size. It depends on the life, on the power that is contained in the seed."

Small seed – Jesus Christ

The image of the mustard seed first of all refers to Jesus Christ, the Chief Apostle said. "And that is easy to understand. He came on earth as a baby. He was placed in a manger. A small, a tiny seed, it was nothing. And even when He began His activity, He entered Jerusalem riding a donkey, not as a great king, not with a powerful army, but in a humble way."

Even so, no one could hinder Him from fulfilling His mission. Because this little seed was full of divine life. "This divine life lived in Him, and guided by the Holy Spirit He was able to fulfil the will of God. And that was the power that brought about this wonderful growth in Him."



A lot of love and preparation had gone into the visit of the Chief Apostle. There was even a miniature version of the province of Misiones as a souvenir

Christ did not live up to their idea of the promised deliverer: “He Himself was a mustard tree, not a great, majestic cedar tree, because even at the end of His journey He was still a humble man. They hung Him on a cross and He was weak. He was alone, abandoned. This was far removed from a majestic tree.”

Human beings will only be able to see His power and glory when Jesus returns.

Small seed – the church of Christ

Again and again, the kingdom of God is compared to the church of Christ. The image of the small mustard seed also applies here, Chief Apostle Schneider said. “To establish His church on earth, Jesus called a few disciples, a small flock. They were not educated. They were fishermen or something else. They were actually the lowest level of society.”

But as soon as the Apostles began with their mission, the power and life in this seed unfolded. During all these centuries, the church of Christ continued to grow and many, many people from all nations came to believe in Jesus Christ and decided to follow Him. This development was only possible through the presence of the Holy Spirit and because the Apostles carried out the commission given them by Christ.

The Chief Apostle pointed out that the church of Christ is a mustard tree and not a majestic cedar: “The only thing I can see are imperfect sinners.” The visible part of the church reflects the shortcomings of its members. The full glory of the church will also only be revealed in the new creation.

Small seeds – the believers

“From the beginning, God used tiny seeds to fulfil His mission.” The image of the small mustard seed also applies to the believers. Chief Apostle Schneider cited two examples from Holy Scripture:

- Moses was a criminal who couldn’t speak properly.
- Paul was initially an opponent of the church and also not a great speaker; and he was sickly.

Both could be described as a tiny seed, but once they allowed themselves to be guided by the will of God both became a great source of blessing for all believers, right up to the present day. Even believers will initially remain anything but perfect. Their glory will only be revealed after the resurrection.

CORE THOUGHTS

Matthew 13: 31–32:

“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.’”

Jesus Christ was able to fulfil His mission because He was filled with the Holy Spirit and did the will of the Father. The Holy Spirit prepares the bride of Christ in the church, where the Apostles work according to the will of their Sender. Though imperfect, we can be a source of blessing by allowing ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit and by doing God’s will.

Examining our vow to God

Baptism, Holy Sealing, confirmation ... Many of us made our vow to God a long time ago. And that is why it is important to examine ourselves and see where we stand today in terms of the promise we made. The Chief Apostle recently explained in a divine service which vows this applies to and how we should examine ourselves.



New Apostolic Church Zambia

A lot of preparation had gone into the visit of the Chief Apostle and the divine service in Namwala, Zambia, on 10 June. “Now you might think: we are done. The divine service has started and we can relax and listen,” Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider said at the beginning of his sermon. “Sorry to disappoint you,” he went on. “Today marks the beginning of new work that awaits us: we have to listen to the word and then we will all, I am quite sure, have a lot of work to do in the days and weeks ahead in order to carry out what our heavenly Father expects of us.”

Jesus used the parable of the two sons to criticise the Jewish religious leaders, who although they had said yes to God and adhered to the laws of Moses had not accepted the message that Jesus was the Saviour. Conversely, many sinners did not observe the law but believed in Jesus, changed their minds, and were saved.

“Let’s see what this tells us today,” the Chief Apostle continued. “It means that we should examine ourselves.” He said that New Apostolic Christians had made their vow to God, Jesus, and the apostolate. “Now we must take a critical look to see what has become of our promise.”

Introspection: am I still trying to overcome sin?

“We promised God: I renounce Satan,” the Chief Apostle reminded the members. “Let’s examine ourselves to see where we stand in terms of our determination to overcome sin and renounce the devil.” The trend today is to consider some sins more serious than others. “Especially the sins of our neighbour are considered far more serious than our own.” Sometimes people think that God will be merciful and forgive their sins. “But that is not how it works. Your



Thousands came to hear Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider conduct the open-air service in Namwala, Zambia

sins will only be forgiven if you see their seriousness and if you repent,” the Chief Apostle said. And some people have other priorities in life than the fight against sin. “We have promised God that we will fight against sin, so let us do some introspection in the days ahead.”

Introspection: do I still agree with Jesus’ message?

We said yes to Jesus Christ and we want to follow Him. “But do we really agree with the message of Christ?” the Chief Apostle asked, and listed the statements of Jesus so that everyone can check for themselves:

- “Salvation means eternal life and not earthly wealth.”
- “The point is not about keeping rules and laws, but about being motivated and loving God.”
- “We cannot earn salvation. We can only be saved by grace.”
- “I did not come to punish sinners, but to save them.”
- “I did not come to be saved but to serve.”

Introspection: is the apostolate still important to me today?

The Chief Apostle reminded the brothers and sisters that we said yes to the apostolate. The Apostles proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments, and interpret the Bible. Do we still agree with that or do we want to enforce our own interpretation and our own ideas, the Chief Apostle asked.

The Chief Apostle asked the congregation, “What has changed in your heart? Is there more love in your heart than there was two or three years ago? Are you able to forgive faster than five years ago? Are you more like Jesus

than you were five years ago?” He reminded the brothers and sisters, “We made a promise, but if we realise, ‘Oh, I’ve changed my mind a little bit,’ it is still not too late to do anything about it.”

Help for this comes from God, the Chief Apostle said and explained:

- “Jesus helps us. He gives us His word.”
- “If something unpleasant comes up in our life, it is not a punishment but an offer from God. He just wants us to become aware that things are not yet perfect.”
- “God gives us role models for whom I am personally very grateful. I have met brothers and sisters who I admire for their faith and the way they handle their situation. And I realise that I could not do what they do.”

CORE THOUGHTS

Matthew 21: 28–31a:

“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, ‘The first.’”

We have renounced sin and promised to follow Christ and the apostolate. Introspection is essential to our salvation. Christ helps us to know ourselves better and to amend our ways.

ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

ACCORDING TO 1 KINGS 17: 1-16

There was a drought in Israel; there had been no rain for a long time. God provided for the prophet Elijah in the desert by unusual means. Ravens brought him bread and meat, and he drank water from a nearby brook. But then the brook dried up as well.

God instructed Elijah, "Go to Zarephath. Live there. I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."

He set out for Zarephath.

When he reached the town gate, he saw a woman who was gathering wood for a fire.

He asked her, "Please bring me a little water to drink."

As she was going to get his water, Elijah said,

"Please bring me a piece of bread, too."

The woman answered, "I do not have any bread left. All I have is



a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I came here to gather some wood. I will take it home and prepare a last meal for myself and my son. Then we will die.”

Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid. Go and do as you have said. But first, make something for me. Then you can make something for yourself and your son. God promises you that the flour in your jar will never be empty and the jug will always

have oil in it until the Lord allows it to rain again.”

She did as Elijah asked of her. And Elijah, the woman, and her son had enough food every day. As long as the drought lasted, there was always flour in the jar and the jug of oil was never empty, just as God had promised.



AT EDWIN'S IN VERVIERS, BELGIUM

My name is Edwin and I am five years old. I am the youngest in the **family**. I have two sisters, Regine is 15 and Brisette is 14, and my brother Benjamin is 11. We live in Verviers, a town in the Walloon region of Belgium, which constitutes the southern half of the country. Belgium is a bilingual country. In the south, we speak French and in the north, people speak Dutch.



My father's name is Bernardo. He is a Priest and the rector of our **congregation** in Verviers. My mother's name is Laurette.



This is a picture of **me**. I have been going to pre-school since I was three. When I started preschool, the first cases of Covid appeared in Europe, and my class was not spared either. I was afraid of catching it, but with God's help my family came through the pandemic in good health. We often think of the families who have lost someone and of all those who have been hit hard by this disease. May God help them.

In the meantime, I have grown quite a bit, as you can see from the photo with my **father**. I finished preschool with very good marks and started school this past September. I now go to the same school as my two sisters. I can already read and even write a little.

I love to play football. I have even been to the **Bielmont Stadium** in Verviers.



My favourite dishes are pasta with meat sauce, pizza, chicken nuggets, or **Makayabu**, which is a dish of dried and salted fish.



Our congregation in Verviers has an excellent **children's choir**. I love to sing in this choir and attend all the rehearsals.



The image we have of God and what He is really like

How is this possible? In the Old Testament, God is angry and in the New Testament, He is love. What has changed is not His nature, but the way humankind sees Him. This is what the Chief Apostle explains in the following doctrinal text.

As stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4: 1), the Apostles have the commission of drawing the attention of believers to the revelations of God. Human beings are incapable of recognising God on their own. All that we can know about God is what He reveals to us.

God revealed Himself to humankind in a progressive manner. First, He made Himself known as the Creator, then as Lord in the history of Israel. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the revelation of God that surpasses all previous revelations. On Pentecost, God sent His Holy Spirit to reveal additional knowledge about Himself and His plan of salvation. The Holy Spirit is also at work today, especially through the apostolate, namely in the proper dispensation of the sacraments and the proper proclamation of the word of God. At the return of Christ, God will reveal Himself in perfect measure to those who will be caught up to Him: they will see Him as He is (1 John 3: 2).

In Holy Scripture, the revelations of God are attested by human beings who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The authors of the biblical books used their language and knowledge to impart that which the Holy Spirit had revealed to them. In this context, let us remember that many of these texts were written long after the events to which they refer.

The accounts of creation came into being long after the events of which they relate. And it is no different with the story of the great flood. The gospels were likewise written long after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (Luke 1: 1–4; *Catechism of the New Apostolic Church* 1.2.4.1).

It is only with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that readers of the Bible can recognise the divine will in these texts written by human beings. The Apostles in particular—under the guidance of the Holy Spirit—have the mandate to interpret Holy Scripture in a binding and authoritative manner for faith, in order to recognise and reveal the divine will.

God in the Old and New Testaments

The Old Testament is a collection of sacred writings of the people of Israel. The manner in which the authors of these writings describe God reflects the cultural and religious context of their time. They often ascribe human qualities to God. For example, God is offended—His honour and dignity are violated. He becomes angry and punishes. On another occasion He regrets what He has done, and thus resolves to do something new.

God is angry with Adam and Eve. He punishes them: the man is to suffer in order to earn his bread, the woman is to suffer when she gives birth, and the woman is to be ruled by the man. Both are expelled from Paradise. Angered by the wickedness of humankind, God regrets having created human beings and so decides to destroy everything He has created, mankind and beast alike, in the great flood (Genesis 6: 5–7). All the calamities that befall Israel are seen as God's punishment for the people's disobedience. And in order to defend His people, God is capable of being incredibly merciless to the enemies of Israel.

Jesus Christ reveals the true nature of God to humanity. He speaks of a God of love who does not seek to punish sinners, but rather to save them. The misfortune that befalls human beings is not a punishment imposed by God, but simply a consequence of the dominion of the evil one. Jesus Christ is perfect, without sin, and yet He had to suffer and die as the worst of sinners—indeed, as a criminal.

The Old Testament in the light of the New Testament

Jesus Christ interpreted Holy Scripture—in particular the Torah, the prophetic books, and the Psalms—in relation to His own person and activity. From this we conclude that we must interpret the Old Testament from the point of view of the Son of God. In CNAC 1.2.5.2 we read the following concerning this: “The significance for faith and doctrine of any statements made in the individual books of the Old Testament—or in the later writings of the Old Testament—can be determined by the agreement of their contents with that which the gospel teaches.”

Jesus Christ expressly states that God does not desire to punish the sinner. For this reason, we cannot regard the events depicted in Genesis 3: 14–19 as a punishment imposed by God: just because they had made a single mistake, would God really have condemned both the man and the woman to suffer—the man while labouring and the woman during childbirth—and also cause the man to rule over the woman? In light of Jesus' teaching and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are of the view that God merely announced to Adam and Eve the consequences of their fall into sin. Incidentally, if this were not the case, any initiative aimed at making work less arduous would be contrary to the will of God! The message we derive from this account is that God continued to love human beings even after their transgression and promised to send them a Redeemer.



it is conveyed varies depending on the respective writer and recipient.

This applies in particular with respect to the manner in which the texts speak about the death of Jesus Christ. In order to explain the significance of His sacrifice for salvation, the biblical authors alternately make reference to the Old Testament sacrificial cult (atonement), the customs of war (a ransom must be paid to set prisoners free), or criminal law (a debt must be paid).

Now let us consider the flood. How could God, who is omniscient and perfect, regret having created human beings after having suddenly “discovered” their wickedness, according to Genesis 6: 5? How would the destruction of most people on earth eliminate sin if He nevertheless allowed Noah and his family, who were sinners by nature, to survive? The Holy Spirit guides us to see the account of the flood in terms of deliverance, not punishment (1 Peter 3: 18–22). God loves human beings and gives them the opportunity to be saved through obedience to Him. The same conclusions apply to the entire history of the people of Israel.

In the Old Testament, salvation was conditional on obedience, which was understood as strict observance of the Law. Jesus Christ revealed to us what true obedience is. God wants us to believe in Jesus Christ, and to love God and our neighbour.

The New Testament in the light of the Holy Spirit

Like the writings of the Old Testament, those of the New Testament were also written by people who were rooted in their time and their traditions. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they used their words and knowledge to give an account of the life of Jesus and record the revelations of the Holy Spirit. They also took into account the culture of their addressees in order to be certain that the latter would understand them. In the writings of the New Testament, the message of the gospel is always the same, but the manner in which

A literal interpretation of these texts would present God in the same image as that portrayed in the Old Testament. In this scenario, God behaves like a human being whose honour and dignity have been violated. He demands punishment or compensation. Therefore someone must die for the sake of righteousness, and Jesus Christ is the one who must atone on our behalf.

This perspective on the death of Jesus Christ is difficult to understand for Christians today, especially young people. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to speak about the death of Jesus Christ without necessarily emphasising the notion of punishment.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is above all an act of love (John 3: 16). Since the fall into sin, mankind has lived in a condition of remoteness from God. Humanity’s sufferings are thus not a punishment imposed by God, but rather a consequence of this distance from God. God has never stopped loving human beings. He resolved to become a human being Himself, to suffer and to die, in order to show human beings that He is connected with them. Far from wanting to punish them, He stands by them in suffering, in death, and even in the realm of the departed. He agrees to be treated like the worst of evildoers in order to show that He loves all sinners, without exception.

In His love, God desires to lead all human beings into fellowship with Himself. However, human beings can only be in fellowship with God when their will is perfectly aligned with the will of God. As a human being, Jesus

Christ remained without sin. Even though the powers of evil raged against Him, He was able to resist temptation, maintain His trust in God, and remain firm in His love. His perfection allowed Him to enter into fellowship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit as true man—not only as the Son of God. No other human being can attain His perfection, but in His love Jesus Christ is prepared to share His victory and merit with those who believe in Him and follow Him. Such a message touches the heart!

The interpretation of the book of Revelation by the apostolate

Read on a superficial level, the book of Revelation speaks of the end of the world, the wrath of God, and the punishment of the ungodly. However, the Holy Spirit allows us to understand that it speaks above all of Christ's victory over evil and of His unconditional love for humankind.

The book of Revelation picks up on Jesus' revelations about the future course of the plan of salvation and develops them further. Jesus Christ Himself announced His return. He revealed to Apostle Paul the events surrounding His return (1 Thessalonians 4: 15–17; 1 Corinthians 15: 51–52). Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles then listed the various stages in the plan of salvation: the first resurrection, the thousand-year kingdom of peace, the Last Judgement, and the new creation.

The mission of the Apostles is to prepare the believers for the return of the Lord. Those who are accepted will be able to enter His kingdom as firstlings. But what will happen to all the rest? For example, what about those who have never heard of Jesus before? Can they be saved

without following Jesus? The love of God wants all human beings to have access to His kingdom. His righteousness wants all of them to pursue the same path in order to reach it: one can only come to the Father through Jesus Christ (John 14: 6). Everyone must therefore know Jesus Christ and be able to make the decision to follow Him. To this end, Jesus Christ will establish His kingdom of peace on earth. Only once everyone has been able to make a free decision for or against Jesus Christ will God complete His plan of salvation.

This teaching is a special feature of the New Apostolic faith. Many churches assume that the return of Christ will go hand in hand with the Last Judgement. This is rather a shame because they are overlooking an essential step in the plan of salvation—one that attests to both the love and the righteousness of God. We are happy to share the gospel of Christ with many Christians of other denominations, and willingly work with them in order to promote it. However, we remain firmly attached to our teaching, as attested in the Catechism, because we are convinced that it was revealed to the Apostles by the Holy Spirit.



Publisher: Jean-Luc Schneider, Überlandstrasse 243, 8051 Zurich/Switzerland
 Verlag Friedrich Bischoff GmbH, Frankfurter Str. 233, 63263 Neu-Isenburg/Germany
 Editor: Simon Heiniger

The District Apostles and their assistant at the District Apostles' Meeting on Pentecost 2023 in Cape Town, South Africa



Generation change in the leadership

The generational shift has begun at the highest levels of the New Apostolic Church: in 2023, two District Apostle Helpers were appointed as District Apostles and a new District Apostle Helper was assigned—all according to plan.

The increasing number of District Apostle Helper assignments follows a clear strategy: the demands on the District Apostles are immense, especially in a world that is becoming more and more complicated. For this reason, one cannot simply throw new leaders into the deep end and see whether they sink or swim. Rather, it is important for future District Apostles to have the opportunity to familiarise themselves, to become acquainted with their working area and its people, and to gain some initial experiences in working together in the District Apostle Meeting.

In North and Central America

A man of faith and a man of love, a wise leader and a leader filled with courage—and above all, a true friend: these were laurels that Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider bestowed

upon American District Apostle Leonard R. Kolb. The 67-year-old retired at the end of September after 50 years of ministerial activity.

His working area stretched across the entire USA, but also incorporated the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Venezuela.

The man now responsible for this region is John Schnabel. The hitherto District Apostle Helper was appointed a District Apostle in the same divine service. The 59-year-old lives just outside New York, has four children and four

grandchildren, and was an investment manager. In addition to his mother tongue of English, he also speaks Spanish.

In Southern Africa

Leadership strength in a mixture of wisdom, love and determination, strong faith and great trust in God, as well as infectious joy and enthusiasm: it was with these laurels that the Chief Apostle showered South African District Apostle John L. Kriel. The international Church leader retired the 67-year-old at the beginning of December after 46 years of service in various ministries.

The latter was responsible for the entire country of South Africa, as well as Botswana, the Falkland Islands, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mozambique, Namibia, Réunion, the Seychelles, St Helena, and Swaziland. This region has now become the working area of the hitherto District Apostle Helper Peter Lambert, who was appointed District Apostle in the same divine service. The 59-year-old is well-known across the Regional Church. From 1989 to 2017, Peter Lambert served as head of music of the Cape and South African Regional Churches, during which time he composed hymns for the hymnal and choir hymn collection.

Upcoming changes

Further changes are already becoming apparent in the leadership of other New Apostolic Regional Churches too.

Thomas Deubel was assigned a District Apostle Helper in September 2023. He is expected to succeed District Apostle Jürg Zbinden in Switzerland in the second half of the year 2024. In addition to the country of Switzerland, this area of responsibility includes Austria, Bulgaria, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Gibraltar, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.

Stefan Pöschel was already assigned as District Apostle Helper for the Regional Church of Western Germany on 12 December 2022. He is to take over its leadership from District Apostle Rainer Storck in June 2024. This German Regional Church also incorporates the countries of Albania, Angola, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cyprus, East Timor, Egypt, France, French Guyana, French Polynesia, Gambia, Georgia, Greece, Guadeloupe, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Jordan, Kosovo, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Martinique, Mauritania, Morocco, New Caledonia, the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles, Niger, Portugal, Senegal, Suriname, Syria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Tunisia, and Turkey.

Changes in the circle of the Apostles

The year 2023 saw the ordination of a total of thirty Apostles, while twenty-four Apostles went into retirement. The following ordinations took place in the second half of 2023.

In a divine service on 2 July 2023 in Luanda in Angola, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider ordained Bishop Ricardo Kiaku Simão (1987) as an Apostle. On 16 July 2023, three ministers were ordained Apostles in a service in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Priests Giresse Mata Manzala (1984), Roger Nzambiwisi Ndonga (1972), and Shepherd Henri Tshetshe Ngoy Ngoy (1974). All three assist District Apostle Michael Deppner.

In a divine service in Neunkirchen in Germany on 30 July 2023, the Chief Apostle ordained District Evangelist Carsten Denker (1972) as an Apostle. He is active in the Regional Church Western Germany. The district formerly cared for by Thomas Deubel of Switzerland will be taken over by Reto Keller (1965). He was a Bishop and was ordained as an Apostle in a divine service on 17 September 2023 for Switzerland.

The Chief Apostle ordained District Evangelist Pedro Ramis (1973) and Shepherd Omar Pablo Piñeyro (1969) as Apostles in a divine service in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 15 October 2023. The working area of District Apostle Rainer Storck received two new Apostles on 29 October 2023: Bishops René Follmann (1978) and Gerd-Günter Kisselbach (1970) were ordained as Apostles in a divine service in Bad Sassendorf in Germany.



Making the Church and our faith young

Songs of praise fill the streets in Nigeria, ring out in a retirement home in South Africa, and come from the mouths of children at a special service in Spain. When young people are involved, there is always something going on in the congregation and in society. Here's a glimpse of what the younger generation is up to.



New Apostolic Church Nigeria



For three days, around 250 young people from the Apostle Area West in Nigeria celebrated God and being together. They praised and glorified God in song, talked about their faith, and enjoyed various activities and each other's company. The highlight was a divine service on 12 November, which Apostle Oscar Nwanza conducted for the young sisters and brothers in Ikeja. He read Luke 15: 18–19: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no

longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" In his sermon on the parable of the prodigal son, the Apostle reminded the young people that no matter how far you move away from God, He is always very happy when you return to Him. God always welcomes all those with open arms who recognise their mistakes.

Meeting the District Apostle to be

Speed dating with the District Apostle Helper. This was one of the activities offered after a youth service in Frankfurt in Germany on 10 December 2023 to give the young people the opportunity to get to know the designated District Apostle of the New Apostolic Church Western Germany better. After the youth service, District Apostle Helper Stefan Pöschel first answered a round of quick questions on



Jessica Krämer

Young people talk about their faith, get to know their ministers, and help shape the Church's future



Involving children

The children of the congregation of Vitoria in Spain left only the preaching and the liturgy to the ministers. For a divine service on 12 November 2023, they decided to take on all the other tasks that need to be done before, during, and after a divine service. With help from the Sunday School teachers, they decorated the altar and set it up for the service. The children's choir sang all the songs during the service. The officiant conducted the sermon in a child-friendly and interactive way. After the service, the youngest participants happily stood next to the officiant in front of the altar to say goodbye to the members of the congregation. The day ended with games and other activities.

his preferences, such as “The sea or the mountains?” and “Sports or the sofa?” This was followed by lengthy questions in which the District Apostle Helper told the young people about his profession and how he celebrates Christmas with his family. After lunch, each young person had one minute to speak personally with the District Apostle Helper. He very much enjoyed the conversations with the young people and was impressed by their faith, Stefan Pöschel said afterwards.



New Apostolic Church Spain

Young voices in a retirement home

It doesn't take much to do good. This is what the young people of the Riversdale South congregation in South Africa thought at the beginning of November last year. A few hymns, a recorder, and a bit of their time—that's how they delighted the seniors in one the local senior homes. Part of the audience was made up of patients from the dementia ward. Everyone was delighted with the cheerful sounds that rang through the retirement home that Sunday.



New Apostolic Church Southern Africa



Committed to a good cause

Men in dark leather jackets on motorbikes that make a throaty growl – and pink cuddly toys. Sometimes you come across images in the context of the Church that at first glance don't seem to go together. But they do and there is a good reason for it all. It is all for charity.

Apostle Antoine Katalayi travelled through his working area in the south-eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 5 to 19 November last year to visit and look after his brothers and sisters. The Apostle started in Kananga, from where he continued on to Bilomba to conduct the divine service for the departed. He continued to Masuika, where he had a meeting with the local ministers and conducted a divine service. At his next stop in Riza, his programme was the same.

There was heavy rain in the region at the time, making it almost impossible for him to continue on to Luiza. The Lulua River was very swollen due to the rain, so the ferry had difficulty crossing. The Apostle helped to dislodge the ferry from the silt so that in the end he was able to make it to Luiza and conduct two divine services there. More than 800 people took part.



New Apostolic Church Southern Germany



More than 500 wooden crosses for churches in southern Germany

The New Apostolic Church Southern Germany commissioned the carpentry workshop of Mariaberg to make 512 wooden crosses for the sacristies of its churches, thereby supporting young people with disabilities and social disadvantages who are being trained in the carpentry workshop. Five wooden crosses were made from fir wood, while the remaining 507 wooden crosses were made from oak wood. The crosses now adorn the sacristies of our churches in the south of Germany.



New Apostolic Church Congo South-East

Despite heavy rain and swollen rivers, a divine service in Luiza (Democratic Republic of the Congo) with Apostle Antoine Katalayi was able to take place



The Annual Toy Run is a tradition in South Africa, and it is all for charity. Bikers rally together to help needy children

New Apostolic Church Southern Africa

Cuddly toys and motorbikes

The NAC bikers from Pretoria and Cape Town in South Africa collected toys and money for the Annual Toy Run. As every year, the group of New Apostolic bikers rode through the cities with cuddly toys, games, and books before presenting their donations to this year's beneficiaries. This time it was the Algoa Frail Care Centre, the oncology unit of the provincial hospital, and the St Francis Hospice. This year's Toy Run took place on 11 November. The next day, Sunday, the group attended the divine service in Rosedale-Uitenhage, where they donated 5,000 rand to needy congregations. Apostle Gerome Mintoor expressed his gratitude to the bikers.

Clean drinking water in N'dadibikro

A visit by representatives of the Jörg Wolff Foundation to N'dadibikro in Ivory Coast was welcomed with great joy. On 4 November, the village received a water pump after years of having to deal with water scarcity. The foundation had financed the pump with help from the New Apostolic Church so that Apostle Kouadio Konan Jules was also there for its inauguration. He conducted a divine service in N'dadibikro based on the theme of Christian love. The well was inaugurated in a special ceremony.



A new well was inaugurated in a special ceremony in N'dadibikro, Ivory Coast



New Apostolic Church Ivory Coast

Niklas in an agave field in Mexico (below) and at his wedding in 2022 (right)



Niklas Hurst

Churros instead of Black Forest cake

Job opportunities, the love of one's life, or dissatisfaction with the way things are at home are sometimes reasons why people want to make a new life somewhere different. Making a living and living one's faith in a foreign country can be challenging.

Niklas Hurst (31) moved from the tranquil town of Titisee-Neustadt in the Black Forest region of Germany to Santiago de Querétaro in central Mexico. Querétaro means “place of many people”. The capital of the state of the same name is home to 1.2 million people. Niklas works there as a process engineer at the Mexican site of an international manufacturer of gear and transmission technology.

When he had finished his degree in 2016, at the age of 24, he shifted his focus to Mexico, which lies between the USA and Central America. About 9,561 kilometres as the crow flies, an ocean, and seven time zones lie between his old and his new home. And the two cultures are also very different. There are a lot of positive things to be said about both worlds, even though he has experienced the negative sides of both countries too.

Being a Christian 24/7

Compared to the area where he lived in Germany, Mexico is complicated because there are few New Apostolic congregations and members. There are 19 congregations in a coun-

try that is six times larger than Germany. In comparison, the German capital Berlin has twenty congregations, not to mention the approximately 1,700 congregations in the city of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Niklas feeds on all the experiences of faith that he was able to make in the past. The fact that video services were launched during the Covid pandemic was great. But it was strange to watch the YouTube services alone, to watch a large congregation with all the trappings—many ministers, a large choir, organ music, and the celebration of Holy Communion—have a divine service. “I poured myself a glass of red wine and put a loaf of bread next to it, to be part of it all,” Niklas explains. He is aware that this is not the body and blood of Christ, but empty food, so to speak. “But still, that's how I handled it in the beginning.”

Creating a house congregation

When the restrictions were lifted, Niklas visited the small house congregation of Irapuato about 120 kilometres away. However, he hardly spoke any Spanish then. “That means I

went there, did not understand a word, and then left again.” And yet, “I had to go. It is part of me, part of my life. At some point you begin to miss it.” However, due to relocations a short time later, divine services could no longer be held in Iraquato. Since his uncle and his family also moved to the same area in Mexico in 2020, he made his living room available for divine services and, after speaking with the Apostle in charge, divine services have been held in Querétaro once a month since January 2023. On one or two other Sundays, Niklas and his uncle take a bus to a congregation in the north of Mexico City, some 200 kilometres away. It is a long ride, some two-and-a-half hours each way on one of the most dangerous motorways. An average of 16,700 people are killed every year in traffic accidents on Mexico’s roads.

When asked how big the congregation in northern Mexico City is, Niklas answers with a grin: “So last time, there were three of us. The Priest, my uncle, and me.” His longing for fellowship and Holy Communion prompts Niklas to put up with the long bus trip. Because church services are also held in his own living room, he always has a box of wafers at home. “I could munch communion wafers to no end,” he says. But as long as they are not consecrated, it is completely meaningless, he says. It was only once he was in Mexico that he really became aware of the value of the priestly ministry. Even though there was usually only one Priest available in his home congregation in Germany, there were always services with Holy Communion. It’s a given there.

I am at home here

When asked if he has never thought of joining another local Christian denomination so as not to be alone, Niklas’s answer is quick: “That the New Apostolic Church is the right church for me was clear to me fairly quickly.” Those who ask themselves this question should be quite open about it and talk to their Priest about it. That is how he found a sense of security, too, “I am definitely in the right church. I feel at home here.”

But is it really that easy when you are alone, with no one else around? “Well, this requires that I become active,” he says. “I can’t just say, well, God, there is no church here. So what can I do?” He himself made the experience that when God sees

the desire and effort, He also creates opportunities and strengthens your faith. But it is not easy and the decision to live without God is very, very easy when moving away from home and leaving one’s familiar church environment behind.

What Niklas wants to take with him

One thing is sure. Sooner or later he would like to move back to his old home with his family. But he has already learned a lot about himself and his faith. He has come to really appreciate the value of a congregation however small it may be. “When I eventually go back to Germany, I cannot take for granted that there will be an active congregation there either.” He says, “At some point you have to ask yourself the question, what is important to me? And if I then come to the conclusion: my faith is important to me, then the congregation and the fellowship will automatically be important too. I’m touched when I hear a choir and then I join in and sing in the choir.”

What is also important, he says, is that topics concerning our faith are discussed more openly within the congregation. “You can’t say after a divine service: so what’s for lunch today?” The focus should automatically be on what you and the others experienced. One should talk about experiences of faith, how we can support one another, how we can edify each other in faith. “That is the interesting thing I have found out for myself here,” Niklas says.



The house congregation in Querétaro



Coming up

- 4 April 2024 Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 5 April 2024 Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 7 April 2024 Montevideo, Uruguay
- 3 May 2024 Cuando Cubango, Angola
- 5 May 2024 Luanda, Angola
- 12 May 2024 Borkum, Germany
- 19 May 2024 Lucerne, Switzerland
- 31 May 2024 Dili, East Timor
- 2 June 2024 Dili, East Timor
- 4 June 2024 Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia
- 7 June 2024 Papua New Guinea
- 9 June 2024 Papua New Guinea
- 23 June 2024 Niederrhein, Germany
- 28 June 2024 Harare, Zimbabwe
- 30 June 2024 Mzuzu, Malawi

