

# community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

01/2021/EN

A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, wearing glasses, is the central focus. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. In the background, other people in a church setting are visible, some holding books, but they are out of focus.

Christ,  
our future!

*Editorial*

Christ, our future!

*Divine service*

Everything is ready

*Doctrine*

The beginning of human  
life

New Apostolic Church  
International



## ■ Editorial

3 Christ, our future!

## ■ Divine service

4 Everything is ready

## ■ A visit in Africa

10 Five dimensions  
of freedom

## ■ A visit in Asia

12 A treasure that makes  
truly rich

## ■ A visit in Europe

14 The same help,  
here as well as there

## ■ Children's corner

16 Peter denies Jesus

18 At Lina's in Oslo (Norway)

## ■ Doctrine

20 The beginning of human life

## ■ Global news

24 Therapy and faith: partners  
on the path to healing

26 A once derelict church  
restored

28 Charities amid the pandemic:  
miracles and innovations

30 Challenge accepted:  
India celebrates

# Christ, our future!

My dear brothers and sisters,

The past year 2020 was characterised by the coronavirus pandemic. There is one thing that this crisis has not been able to take from us: our trust in God! He is and remains our heavenly Father, who wants only the best for His children.

This faith is also to define our future. Although we do not know what this new year 2021 will hold in store for us, we begin it in the certainty that Jesus is coming soon! That is the goal of our faith. Hence the motto for this year is:

## Christ, our future!

Christ is our future because He gives us certainty. In Him we find the energy and motivation required to endure on our path of faith. Neither the difficulties of life nor the conduct of others are to discourage us. Let us resolutely make our way to the goal.

Christ is our future because He is our salvation and wants to perfect us. His death and resurrection are the basis for this. He knows that we are capable of attaining salvation and provides us with everything necessary for this purpose. The promise of the Lord that He will bring His work to completion is certain. By remaining faithful to Him, we can hope in His grace. And we can be certain that His glory will outshine all of our sorrows.

Christ is our future because He is the solution for our future. Now it is up to us to decide how we live, how we



NAC International

act, and how we believe. In order to live with Christ forever we already today seek fellowship with Him. His gospel is the foundation on which we build our life as a couple, raise our children, and establish our relationship with our neighbour. Jesus Christ is the model we want to resemble.

I wish you all peaceful thoughts and experiences for this year. May the blessing of God accompany you, and may the peace of the Risen One be with you! Let us keep our trust in Jesus Christ, because our spiritual future depends on it. By keeping our eyes fixed on Christ we will reach the goal!

Heartfelt greetings

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'L' followed by a horizontal line.

Jean-Luc Schneider



Nearly 500 members gathered in the Country Hall of the Pullman Hotel in São Paulo (Brazil) on 4 August 2019 for a divine service with Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider

NAC Brazil



Luke 14: 16–17

*“Then He said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’”*

## Everything is ready

My dear brothers and sisters, we thank our heavenly Father for making it possible for us to experience this festive divine service in São Paulo today. I am aware that this is a special day for you, because your District Apostle will retire and a new District Apostle will take over. This is already something special, but above all, we will experience a divine service today. This is not only about a change in District Apostles. Rather it is about you, you and your relationship with God. He wants to strengthen you. He wants to comfort you. He wants to prepare you for the return of Jesus Christ. That is the most important thing today. God loves you, and He has plans for you: everything revolves around you and your soul. God wants our relationship with Him, our fellowship with Him, to be strengthened.

Then the second matter will naturally also involve a change in District Apostles. To express it figuratively: we will close one chapter in the history of the New Apostolic Church in Brazil, and begin a new chapter. But it is the same book, it is just another chapter. It is the same work, the same story, the same God, the same goal, and the same path we must follow to arrive at our destination. So do not worry: nothing will change. We will simply continue moving in the direction of heaven.

However, this day is also a good opportunity to look back and give thanks to our heavenly Father for the blessing that we have received over the past years. I cannot quantify this blessing, nor do I know its full measure, but I can say that God has blessed this country over the years in which your District Apostle has been at work here, and that you have been permitted to experience many great things over this period of time. Is it thus not appropriate to give thanks to God for His blessing?

Now let us direct our attention to our Bible text. It is taken from a parable of Jesus. A man prepared a great supper. In the gospel of Matthew it is described as a marriage feast. He invited many people to it. On the day of the feast he sent his servant to the guests to let them know: “You can come now. Everything is ready!” But no one came.

The first one said: “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.” Another said: “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.” And the next one said: “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” Then the master told his servant: “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.” Later he went on to add: “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14: 18–23).

The feast is an image for fellowship with God. In Judaism, a feast was traditionally seen as an image for fellowship between mankind and God, an image for eating and drinking in the kingdom of God.

God had chosen His people, the people of Israel, to have fellowship with Him, and He sent His Son, His servant,

in order to tell the people: “Come, for all things are now ready!” However, they did not accept His invitation. They did not follow Jesus. For this reason, God said: “Now salvation will be offered to all nations, not only to the chosen people.”

That is the historical background, the meaning of the parable. However, it also contains a message for us. We too have been elected. God has elected us to enter into His kingdom as firstlings. We have been invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19: 9). That is our future. And now Jesus says to us: “Come, for all things are now ready!”

Remember what Jesus said to His disciples when He told them that He would have to leave them: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to

Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14: 3).

This was how He announced His sacrifice. Then He went and gave His life. He brought His sacrifice and conquered evil and death. And doing that He prepared a place for us. His victory is final and perfect. Ever since Jesus conquered evil and death and ascended into heaven, all has been ready there. Nothing else needs to be

done. No one ever needs to wonder, therefore, whether Jesus has finished preparing this place yet. Everything is done. Everything is ready. Nothing more needs to be done in heaven for the return of Christ. There everything is already prepared.

And here on earth too, everything is ready. After all, Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit, He has sent the Apostles, and through the activity of the Holy Spirit and the activity of the Apostle ministry, everything has been made ready. Whatever is required in order to belong to the bride of Christ and to enter into the kingdom of God is already being imparted to us through the Apostle ministry: the rebirth out of water and the Holy Spirit, the word of God, the forgiveness of sins, and Holy Communion. All of this is available and is offered to all.

As it says in the parable, “the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind” (Luke 14: 21)—all people, whatever their situation may be, whether they are poor or rich, can receive everything necessary in order to enter into the kingdom of God. Through the Apostle ministry they can receive the sacraments, share in word and grace, and

*Ever since Jesus conquered evil and death and ascended into heaven, all has been ready there.*



become firstlings. This message also applies to our time: everything has been prepared for the return of Christ, both in heaven and on earth, for each one of us, whatever our situation may be.

I know there is a passage in Revelation which states: “Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads’” (Revelation 7: 2–3). We have to be careful with the interpretation of this passage, because God is not dependent on man. We cannot say that God has to wait until He has gathered all those He needs for the work in the kingdom of peace, or that the Lord cannot come until the number of this group is filled. We cannot say that He must wait until the last soul is sealed and prepared. This cannot be, because that would mean God is dependent on man! This would mean that everything is ready, but God has to wait until we are finally ready...

God is not dependent on man. The Lord could already have come twenty years ago and received all those to Himself who were ready at the time. And He could have fulfilled His plan perfectly well. That much must be clear to us.

Once again, God is not dependent on man! The Lord could have come twenty years ago. He could even have already come 100 years ago and taken those who were ready at the time. His plan of salvation would also have been fulfilled in that case. For Him everything is ready. It is not true that He has not sent His Son yet because He has to wait. This delay is solely an expression of His love and grace. He is simply giving us another chance to prepare ourselves.

Jesus Christ could come at any moment; everything is ready.

The meaning of this image with the servants to be sealed is that we will still have our work to do for as long as we are here. That is how we understand these words. Jesus can come at any time. God is not dependent on man, but in His



District Apostle Rainer Storck (left) from Germany with the interpreter



District Apostle Raul Montes de Oca



District Apostle Enrique Minio

love and grace, He still gives us another chance to prepare ourselves for the return of Christ. And He wants us to look for more souls who could still be sealed.

So now we understand these words a little better: “Come, for all things are now ready!” Come! Jesus is not going to wait for you! He is not dependent on you! But He loves you. Come now! Do not be so foolish as the guests in the parable!

Our priority should be to be prepared for the return of Christ. There is nothing more important for us. It could be any day, at any time. Once again: everything is ready. You can receive it! It is accessible to you. Whatever your personal situation might be, you can today receive everything you need in order to be ready for the coming of the Lord: His word, grace, and the sacraments. Come! Take it!

But come not only means to come to the divine services, to hear the word, hear the absolution, and receive Holy Communion. This come also means: follow Jesus.

In Matthew, this parable is supplemented by the narrative of the marriage garment (Matthew 22: 11–14). This gar-

ment is necessary if we want to enter into the kingdom of God. For this reason, come also means: follow Jesus and think as He does, speak as He does, and act as He does. This is what the word come means for us.

We have been invited to have eternal fellowship with God in His kingdom. There in heaven, everything is already prepared. Jesus could come at any time. In His love and grace, God gives us another chance. Whatever we are still lacking we can get through the Apostle ministry today and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

But this text also has another level of meaning. The meal is an image for fellowship with God: not only our future fellowship with God but also the fellowship that we can already have with Him here and now.

Jesus had fellowship with His disciples here on earth, in the supper, as they ate and drank together. Jesus would also like to have fellowship with us here and now, here on earth. And once again, the words apply: “Come, for all things are now ready!”

Jesus makes sure that everything that will enable us to have fellowship with Him is available for us already

*Whatever we are still lacking we can get through the Apostle ministry today.*



today. No matter what things we must experience—trials, tribulations, temptations, fears—they will never be greater than our strength, as Paul says: “But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able” (1 Corinthians 10: 13). He will always make sure that we receive the strength we need to master every situation and remain connected with Him. But we must recognise His help, and sometimes that is a problem.

There is a story in the Old Testament. Abraham had a child with Hagar, the maidservant of his wife Sarah. The boy was Ishmal, his first son. When Sarah then gave birth to Isaac, she had Hagar and her son Ishmael expelled from the household. So Hagar ended up wandering about in the desert, and at some point she ran out of water. She knew that she and her child would die without water in the desert, and so she put Ishmael down under a bush and sat down opposite him, and wept. Then God sent her an angel who opened her eyes, and suddenly she saw a well of water nearby. It was already there beforehand, but she had just not seen it. The well was only a hole in the sand and hard to see. I don't know, maybe she had been looking for something else. The fact was that she now had water and was saved.

We also find ourselves in difficult situations at times. We seek the help of God, but perhaps do not see His help. We do not recognise it because we have our own ideas about what God should do. But the highest priority for God is to

grant us fellowship with Himself. For Him that is priority number one. It is this fellowship that He wants to maintain. He wants us to remain connected with Him. That is the purpose of His help. He wants to help us to remain connected with Him in all situations. But at times we just do not see His help because we are waiting for something else.

Let us trust in God! He will see to it that we have everything we need in order to remain connected with Him: through the word, the sacraments, the ministers, our brothers and sisters. God sees to it that each one receives what is necessary remain faithful.

Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, so that we may recognise His help and perceive it. Everything we need for salvation is ready.

To receive His help we must fulfil a number of conditions. Here too, a story from the distant past will help to illustrate this. You will surely remember Moses and the people of Israel. They were in the desert and likewise had no more water. The people complained and turned against Moses: “We will die of thirst here” (Exodus 17: 3). God ordered Moses to strike the rock with his staff, and promised that water would come out of it.

Moses struck the rock, and water came out—so much that all were able to drink. I think it is quite obvious that the





Above: Chief Apostle Schneider appoints District Apostle Minio to lead the new District Apostle Area South America  
 Right: After placing District Apostle Montes de Oca into retirement, Chief Apostle Schneider thanks him wholeheartedly



water was already there beforehand, but Moses had to be obedient. Only then could the people be helped. As soon as Moses did the will of God, it worked. In order to experience the help of God, we must obey God—but not in the sense of obeying an order for fear of punishment. When we obey God, it is all about our relationship with God. We obey God and do His will because we want to have fellowship with Him. Obedience means agreement with the will of God: “His thoughts are my thoughts. I will make His will my will.”

All those who are firmly resolved to remain connected with God in this manner will also experience His help, and certainly receive everything they need in order to keep their faith. It depends on our determination to be one with God.

Everything is ready. Everything you need is available. The grace of God is available for all. There is no sin that God could not forgive. Everything is ready, but we must come to Him. We must examine ourselves and admit to ourselves that we have done something wrong. That is not always easy.

Nevertheless, we must be prepared to recognise: “Yes, that was wrong.” We must realise that we could have acted differently: “No one forced me to commit this sin. It was my decision—and it was the wrong decision.”

We come to Jesus, we are remorseful. We repent and receive grace. Grace is available and ready for all. Come! Come with a repentant heart. Come with a remorseful heart. Come with an upright heart. And you will receive grace.

As you can see, the message is very simple. God sees to it that everything needed in order to enter into His kingdom is available. He sees to it that we receive everything we need in order to remain in fellowship with Him already today. All we have to do is come to Him and take what He has prepared for us. Those who strive to enter into the kingdom of God will succeed. That is a divine promise: “Come, for all things are now ready!”

## CORE THOUGHTS

**The Lord can return at any moment. Through the apostolate the Holy Spirit gives us the gifts necessary for our salvation. God will make sure that we can remain faithful to Him no matter the circumstances.**



Chief Apostle Schneider is welcomed in Angola



NAC Western Germany

# Five dimensions of freedom

Love, return, inheritance, responsibility, coping: these are five kinds of freedom that Jesus Christ has available for us. It was in Nzagi in Angola on 11 January 2020 that the Chief Apostle presented the key to all of this. And that is being a child.

“The baptism of the Spirit has liberated the believer from the yoke of the Mosaic Law,” explained Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider. After all, this is what has caused them to become children of God. They are now able to address God in the exact same way that Jesus did, namely by using the word “Abba”, which means “father” or “dad”. And that liberates a human being in several respects all at the same time.

## Love instead of fear

The people of Israel had no choice. They had to be obedient. As long as they were obedient, things went well for them. And when they were not, punishment loomed, said the Church leader as he recalled the biblical events surrounding the brazen serpent and the band of Korah.

Jesus, on the other hand, obeyed the will of God because He loved God and wanted to remain in fellowship with Him. In the same way, we do not obey as slaves in order to avoid punishment. We obey out of love, because God is our Father. We love him, and we want to have fellowship with Him.

## Returning home instead of fleeing

When Adam committed the first sin in Paradise, he hid from God. And when Jonah acted against the will of God, he tried to flee.

But with His parable of the prodigal son, Jesus sent a clear message: “Do not hesitate to come back to God. Ask Him for His grace and forgiveness.” Returning home to God

More than 3,300 people attended the divine service in Nzagi. Of these, more than one thousand were children



means: I recognise that I have done something wrong, and I do want to change.

### Inheritance instead of slavery

“We are not slaves of God. He made us into children of God,” the Chief Apostle said. “If we serve Him, then we do so out of gratitude.” After all, He has made us so rich.

We are not rich in the sense of a reward, because that which God grants us would be impossible for anyone to earn by their own merit or power. Rather, we are rich because we are heirs: “Through the Holy Spirit we have received the promise that we will inherit the kingdom of God.”

### Responsibility instead of submissiveness

A slave only has to do what he is told. He is not responsible for anything more. However, an heir knows that he is partly responsible for the affairs of his father.

Therefore we serve the Lord because we are grateful for His heritage and are responsible for it. And we are aware that we *can* contribute to the work of God, and we *want* to contribute to the work of God.

### Coping instead of suffering

Joseph was sold by his brothers, yet remained true to God. And in the end he became a blessing for them. Apostles Peter and Paul were thrown into prison, and nevertheless praised the Lord and became a blessing for many. This goes

to show, said the Chief Apostle, that believers are not simply victims of circumstance who must endure their suffering in silence.

“We have been sent by God into this time in order to serve Him and to be a blessing for others,” stressed the Chief Apostle, “in order to give testimony under these special conditions and situations—and that makes all the difference.”

To summarise, Chief Apostle Schneider said: “We are grateful to God that He has made us His children and heirs of His glory. We trust in His love and grace. We fulfil His will despite adverse circumstances.”

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Romans 8: 15*

**“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”**

We are grateful to God that He has made us His children and heirs of His glory. We trust in His love and grace. We do His will despite adverse circumstances.

Nearly 300 participated in the divine service in the congregation of Laying Suh in Kalaymyo



NAC South-East Asia

# A treasure that makes truly rich

Last year in October, the Chief Apostle visited New Apostolic congregations in Malaysia and Myanmar. His travel itinerary included two meetings for ministers, a meeting with the Apostles of South-East Asia, two concerts, and three divine services. On Wednesday, 30 October 2019 the Chief Apostle set off for Kalaymyo, one of the most rapidly growing provincial towns in Myanmar.

The Chief Apostle based his sermon on the parable of the hidden treasure and said at the beginning: “Some commentators are of the opinion that the treasure in the field symbolises the human soul. Hidden from our eyes, it can only be seen by Jesus, who gave His life to save it.”

“However, most exegetes believe that both the treasure and the pearl represent salvation in Christ, eternal fellowship with God.” According to this understanding, some would have access to salvation without really having sought after

it. Others, by contrast, would have had to seek a long time before finding it. “In either case, in order to gain access to eternal fellowship with God, it will not suffice to merely receive the sacraments. We must also sell all that we have. In other words, we must deny ourselves.” Such was the clear statement from the Chief Apostle.

Human beings must...

- renounce evil, and cannot define for themselves what is right and wrong.



Apostle Samuel Tansahtikno, District Apostle Edy Isnugroho, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider, District Apostle Helper David Devaraj, and Apostle Fred Wolf

- obey the will of God without circumventing it.
- heed His commandments without attempting to diminish those that do not suit them.

### Trusting and denying ourselves

Instead, it is important to trust in God, even if we do not always understand His actions. Often enough, this is difficult to achieve:

- “We do not expect God to reward us for our good deeds. Salvation is an expression of grace. We cannot buy it by bringing offerings. We cannot earn it by doing good works. Our self-denial, our sacrifices, and our good works reflect the significance we assign to our salvation. They express our sincere desire to enter into fellowship with God.”
- “We dispense with the notion that every guilty person should be punished by God. We are not indignant if God loves our neighbour exactly as He loves us, and grants him the same grace He grants us. We forgive our neighbour just as God forgives us. We would rather give up our own point of view than jeopardise the unity of God’s children.”

### Not poor, but rich

“We will not become poor by denying ourselves,” said the Chief Apostle. “Quite the contrary, we become rich in Christ!” God offers us the greatest treasure there is: eternal fellowship with Him.



## CORE THOUGHTS

*Matthew 13: 44–46*

**“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes out and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”**

God offers us the greatest treasure there is: eternal fellowship with Him. To be saved let us give up our pride and surrender to the will of God. Let us give up wanting to understand God’s actions, demanding a reward for our good works, and expecting that the guilty are punished.

# The same help, here as well as there

Whether here on earth or in the beyond, the sufferings are the same. And the solutions are the same too. Here are seven examples of how Jesus Christ alleviates our spiritual needs. Thoughts from a divine service for the departed in Zürich-Seebach (Switzerland) on 4 July 2020.



Bernhard Holdener

The biblical context is as follows: Peter had healed a man who was paralysed from birth on. And he had explained to an amazed crowd that this was not due to his own power, but that salvation was only possible through faith in Jesus Christ.

“The mission of the apostolate today is the same as what Peter did then,” Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider said. The Apostles are to proclaim: “Jesus Christ is the Messiah, only He can grant salvation, and He will come again to those who believe in the resurrection of the dead.”

“There is surely also great spiritual distress and great pain in the beyond. Jesus Christ can alleviate this pain in those who believe in Him,” he said and mentioned seven examples.

- Fear of punishment: “If I had to come before God now to be judged—good versus bad—what have I done in

my life?” However: “Those who believe in Jesus Christ know the nature of God. He is a God of love, and He is a God of grace.”

- Disappointment: “Many think that when they die and have led a good life they will enter paradise. But then they find themselves somewhere completely different, not with God.” There are people for whom life has become so impossible that they take their own life. But then they realise that things haven’t changed. “Death is not deliverance. The resurrection is the final deliverance. Believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him, then you will be delivered from suffering forever.”
- Reproaches: “When you look at the fate of some people you realise that their life was anything but beautiful; it was nothing but misfortune, suffering, hardship, illness, and worries. You could really run into a problem with God.” However: “That is why Jesus Christ came to liberate mankind once and for all from the dominion of evil.



Below: Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider dispenses the sacraments for the departed. Here he consecrates the water for Holy Baptism



Then you will receive so much that you will no longer even think about all that you experienced on earth: you will enter God's glory."

- Feeling unloved: "Some souls enter the beyond in great spiritual distress. They have never felt love." However: "Jesus Christ can heal even this. He can tell them: 'I love you, you mean so much to Me that I gave My life for you, for you personally.'"
- Remorse: "There are people in the beyond who are aware that they have done wrong. They have caused a great deal of suffering and have hurt many. And they have no possibility of making amends." However: "The fact that they themselves can receive grace and can trust in the love of Jesus Christ is something wonderful for a remorseful person. They know: He can make people happy in spite of my wrong-doing and my mistakes."
- Separation: "A pain we all know and can relate to is the pain of separation. Even here Jesus Christ can comfort and uplift us. He gives us so much peace with His presence, His grace, and His blessing that the soul has peace in spite of everything. And He creates hope: the separation is only for a little while."
- Ignorance: "There are so many people, probably the majority of humankind, who have never heard of Jesus Christ. This is something that really preoccupies me. That is why we are convinced that people in the beyond also have the possibility to get to know Jesus

Christ, are able to come to Him, and can receive salvation from Him."

"The rule is: there is no salvation outside of Christ," Chief Apostle Schneider confirmed. "Salvation cannot only be imparted on earth, but also in the beyond, also during the thousand-year kingdom of peace. This is our faith in His plan of salvation."

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Acts 4: 12*

**"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."**

It is our wish that many in the beyond can be baptised today, which signifies the end of separation from God. They will be able to recognise and experience that Jesus died for them and that they are not alone but are part of the church of Christ.

## PETER DENIES JESUS

ACCORDING TO LUKE 22: 24-62

*When Jesus was eating the Passover meal with the disciples, He told them that one of them was going to betray Him. The disciples asked Him who it would be. They began to argue about who was the greatest among them. Jesus told the twelve to serve one another.*

Jesus said to Peter, "Satan wants to bring you apart. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that you do not lose your faith. When you come back to Me, strengthen your brothers." Peter replied, "Lord, I am ready to go to prison and to death with You."

Jesus said, "I tell you Peter, before the rooster crows tonight, you will say three times that you don't know Me." After the Passover meal Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, accompanied by the disciples. He went off a little way to be by

Himself and to pray. The disciples were to pray too, so that they would not become weak. Jesus kneeled down and prayed, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me. Yet not My will but Yours be done."

An angel appeared and strengthened Him. Then He prayed even more urgently. His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. When He finished praying, He went to the disciples and found them asleep. Their sadness had made them tired. Jesus woke them and told them to pray.





Meanwhile, Judas, one of the twelve, had led the enemies of Jesus into the garden. Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest's house for questioning. Peter followed Him at a distance.

In the courtyard people were warming themselves around a fire. Peter sat down with them. One of the servant girls was watching him and said, "This man was with Him as well." Peter denied it and said, "I do not know Him." After a while someone else looked at him and said, "You are one of them."

Again Peter replied, "No, I am not!"

Then after about an hour had passed, another person insisted, "Surely this fellow was also with Him, for he is a Galilean."

Peter denied it for the third time, "Man, I don't know what you are talking about."

While he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. Jesus turned around and looked at Peter.

Peter remembered the words of Jesus: "Even before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you don't know Me."

Peter went out and wept bitterly.



## AT LINA'S IN OSLO (NORWAY)

My name is **Lina**, I am nine years old. My parents, my younger brother, Eliel, and I live in Oslo. My father and my mother come from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but my brother and I were born in Norway.

We have visited the DR Congo several times. The people there speak French. I speak French and Norwegian. The trip there by **airplane** includes a short stopover in Paris and takes a total of more than 14 hours.

Oslo is the capital of Norway. Tourists usually come to see the castle, where the royal family lives. Another point of interest is the **Akershus Fortress**, which consists of a medieval castle and a museum. It is also a popular recreation area in the city. The fortress and the castle are guarded by the royal guards.

The royal guards have a very unusual member: **Sir Nils Olav III**. Actually, he lives in Edinburgh Zoo in Scotland. When it was first opened in 1913, Norway presented the Edinburgh Zoo with its first king penguin. The Norwegian King's Guard has been taking part in the Edinburgh Military Tattoo since 1972, a drill display that takes place regularly in Edinburgh. It was the first time then that a penguin was accepted into the regiment and given the role of mascot. At every festival, the penguin, or its successor, receives medals and honours for outstanding service and good conduct. In 2016 Nils Olav was promoted to brigadier-general.



I love to spend my time with my family and my best **friends**. We love to take pictures of ourselves and then to edit the photos and add effects.

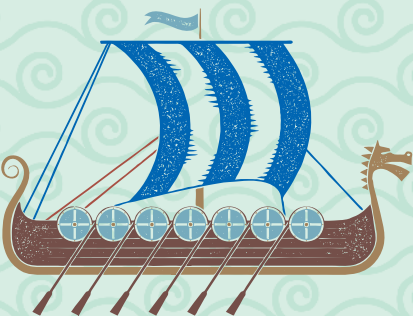
My **father** and I sometimes play football. We also used to play badminton, which I loved. I hope we can do that again soon. I like sports. At school I am part of the handball team. That is pretty cool because that way I can be together with my friends and we can do fun stuff. In our spare time we often go to the schoolyard to play. But I also like school. My favourite subject is Norwegian.

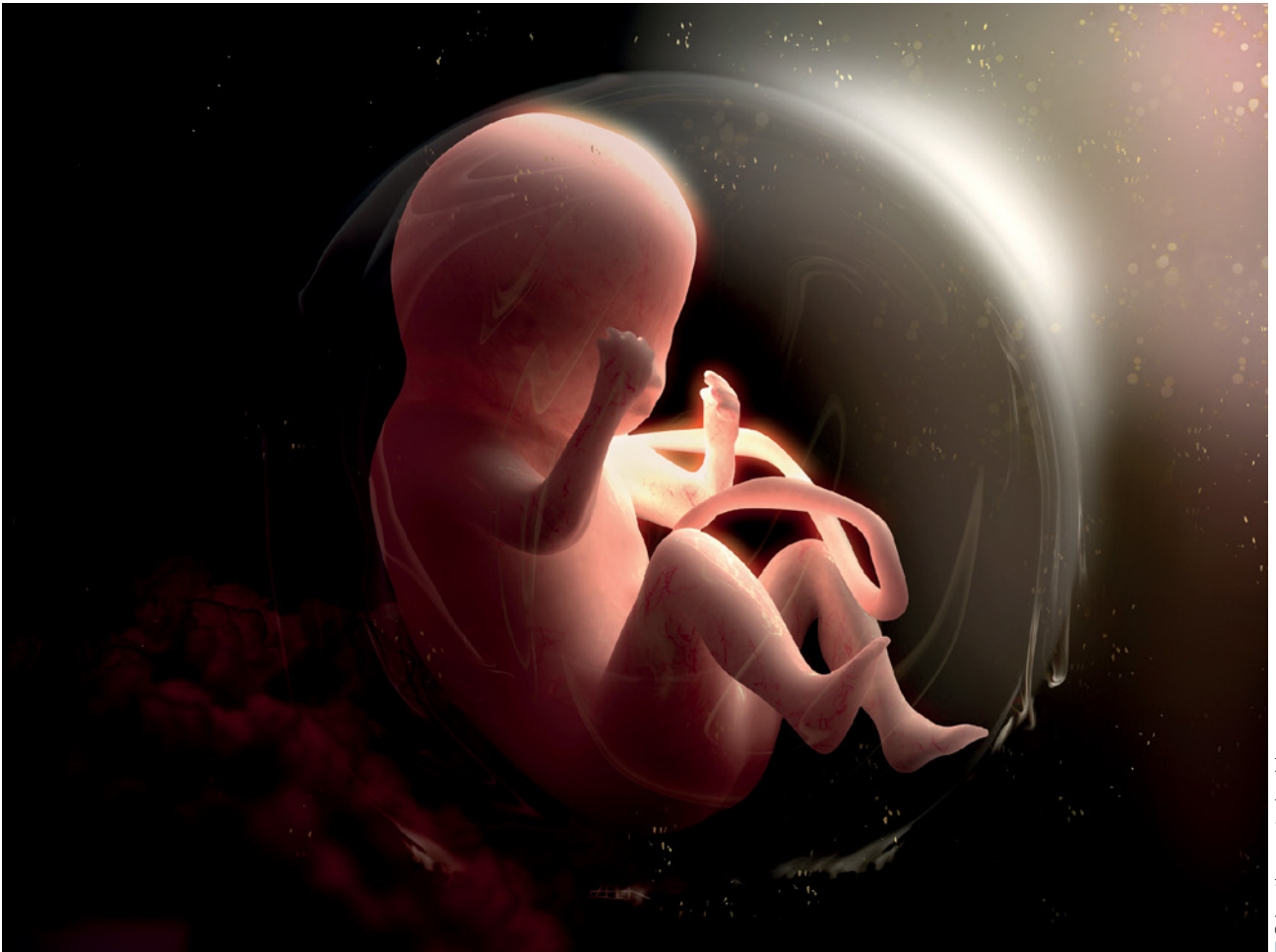


When it comes to **food**, my favourite dishes are lasagne and tacos.

My family and I belong to the Oslo **congregation**. My brother and I both go to Sunday School. What I like there most is that everybody has something nice to say and that we have a lot of fun together.

The **winter** in Norway is long and pretty cold. Sometimes it begins to snow already in October, and we may even still get some snow in May. I am always happy when it gets warmer.





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# The beginning of human life

Contraception and organ transplants, the wish for a child or even euthanasia... The question of life and death is something that affects everyone directly and very personally. To give New Apostolic Christians orientation and help them make a responsible decision, an official essay entitled “The Beginning and End of Human Life” examines the matter from the point of view of the New Apostolic faith.

The beginning of human life can be described from different points of view.

- The biological view is based on scientific knowledge.
- The ethical view is dependent on the fundamental values of the respective society and also on the disciplines in which ethical considerations are of importance (for example, theological ethics or medical ethics).
- From the perspective of the Christian faith, biblical witness and the gospel are authoritative.

## Biological view

From the biological perspective, human life begins with the fertilisation of the ovum. With the fusion of ovum and sperm into an embryo, a continuing development ensues that is primarily determined by the individual's genetic material. The well-known differentiation in stages is nothing more than a description of that which can be perceived. The approximate seven-day period between fertilisation of the ovum and complete implantation of the embryo in the uterus constitutes the span of time to be critically evaluated with regard to means of contraception and biomedical procedures, for example, artificial insemination.

In every developmental stage, some of the originally present embryos die, either because they are defective or lack the appropriate environmental conditions. The percentage of embryo mortality is particularly large before implantation in the uterus. It is assumed today that more than half of all embryos die naturally.

## Ethical view

Ethics deal with values and responsibility and try to rationally fathom that which is good or moral. Ethical considerations are often the basis for legal regulations in the area of biomedicine.

Religious ethics, on the one hand, are particularly concerned with the beginning of human life. They proceed from theological truths and try to develop universally valid standards. Medical ethics, on the other hand, are considered an important part of practical ethics. They try to provide morally based positions and answers to individual questions raised due to today's possibilities of intervention at the beginning of human life and its preservation.

## From the perspective of our faith

From the perspective of our faith, the beginning of human life is closely connected to the joining of body and soul (ensoulment), and the end of human life with the separ-

ation of body and soul. On the question of the process and the point in time of ensoulment, there are no biblical references to provide a basis for doctrinal statements.

The philosophical and theological discussion of ensoulment goes back to pre-Christian times. How one understands both ensoulment and the process and point in time of ensoulment are contingent on the respective concepts and knowledge of procreation and development in the mother's womb. Thus, throughout the centuries there have been widely differing concepts.

## Historical aspects concerning the term ensoulment

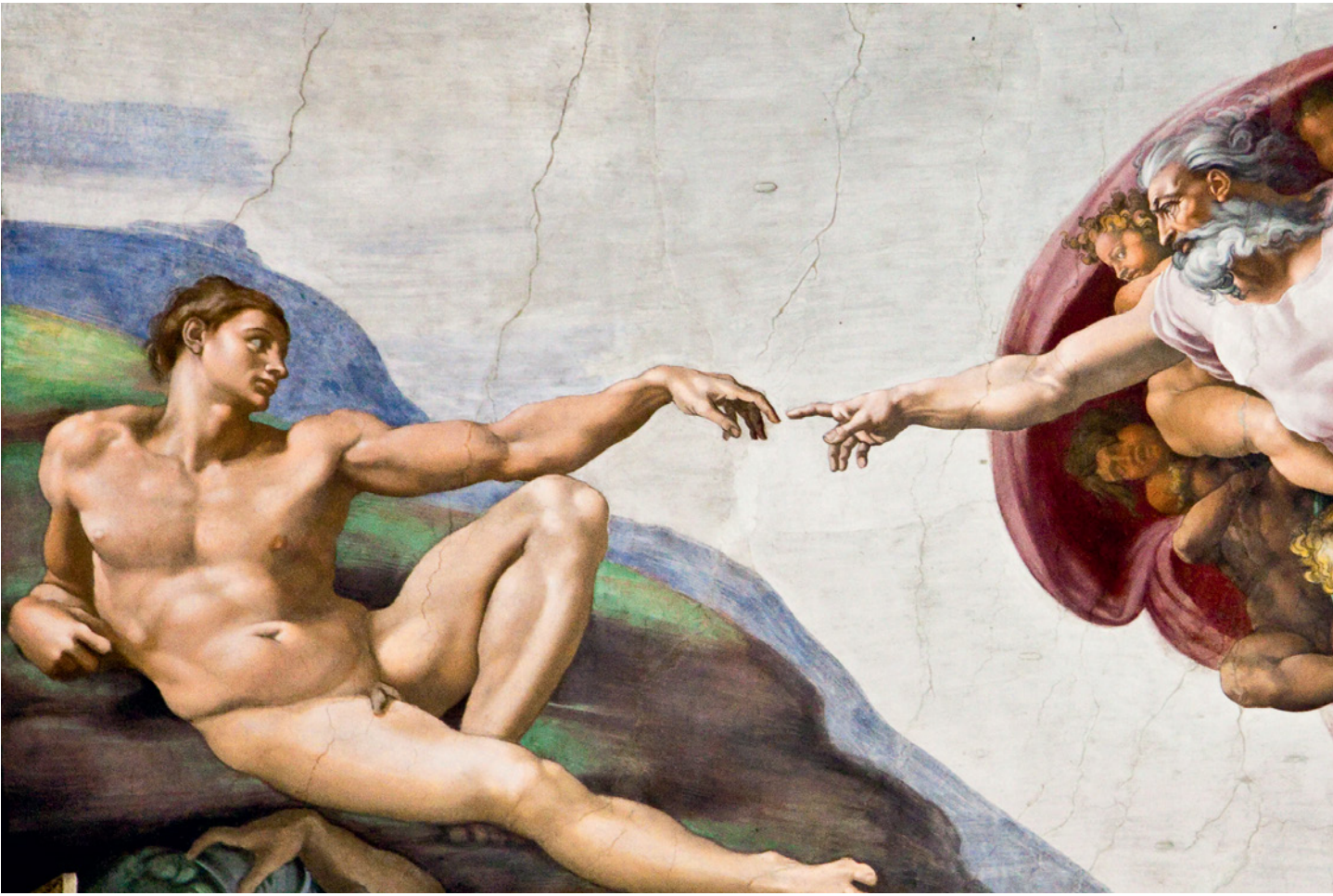
Early statements concerning ensoulment stem from Greek philosophy (Plato), where the term "soul" referred to that which forms the human body, gives it life and movement and, at the time of death, departs from the body.

Aristotle did not proceed from an immortal soul, but saw it as the principle that comes into existence with the body, gives life to the body, and comes to its end at death. Only that which man intelligently creates remains spiritually immortal. Parallel to the development of the body, he assumes various developmental stages of the soul. For him, ensoulment begins at conception with a "nutritive plant soul", which is replaced by an "animal soul with sensory faculties", and, from birth on, a "reasoning soul having consciousness". These stages of ensoulment are called successive ensoulment.

Christian tradition uniformly considers the soul as something purely spiritual. How and when ensoulment takes place is described in vastly different ways. Augustine leaves open the question whether the soul comes from Adam's soul and is transferred at the moment of conception by the parents, or whether it is created anew by God for every human being (creationism).

Thomas Aquinas assumes that the soul, as the most important part of man, is not passed on by man, but that each soul is created anew by God whenever a body becomes organised. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas thinks that the soul undergoes development. However, he believes this development concludes earlier (after 40–90 days). The highest level of the soul, the rational soul, is created by God and poured into the human body.

During Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, it was basically assumed that ensoulment took place late. Knowledge gained through developmental biology, particularly



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genetics, leads us to assume an ever earlier point in time for the beginning of human life and, in line with this, for ensoulment.

### The importance of the various views

From Antiquity to the Enlightenment, the Church has had, at least in Western society, comprehensive power of interpretation concerning questions of how people should conduct their lives. As a result of the Enlightenment and the medical progress of modern times, ethics, and particularly medicine, became significantly more important. Societal standards in the biomedical area are generally formed by what is technically possible. The Church's power of interpretation in the medical field is being diminished even by active Christians. They have been replaced by societal tendencies and ethical considerations.

Due to today's societal standards, which strongly deviate from each other, and extremely varied laws in a variety of countries, fundamental statements in the field of biomedicine can only be implemented on a limited basis in

everyday life. Here decisions increasingly need to be made by ethical committees and responsible individuals. From our Church's perspective, personal responsibility is not arbitrary, but is to encompass critical assessment of one's fundamental intentions.

### Area of tension

In connecting the varying views concerning the beginning of human life, areas of tension emerge.

Legal regulations based on ethical views are compatible with Christian values only in part. There are also methods, whether accepted or discouraged (though without penalty), which are contradictory to Christian values. Exemption from penalty for certain conduct creates the superficial impression that this conduct is allowed.

If ensoulment—which is important from the Church's perspective—is considered to take place at the same time as the verifiable fusion of ovum and sperm, then due to embryo mortality in natural procreation, a significant number of



ensouled humans would die without ever being born. A large proportion of ensouled life would die without the parents even being aware of it.

In the Church's view, it cannot be definitely determined at which point in time ensoulment takes place. It is important that human decisions or actions neither prevent human life from developing nor cause it to be killed, irrespective of the law. On the basis of this concept, the Church provides recommendations in the field of biomedicine that are intended to provide orientation to the believers for a well-founded but ultimately independent decision.

Since the point in time at which ensoulment takes place is unknown, one cannot conclude that the death of a fertil-

ised ovum (embryo) always results in a soul passing into the hereafter.

Ultimately, we do not know how ensoulment takes place; it is in the hand of God. Since this has no practical consequences for the everyday life of believers, the Church takes no position concerning this point.

Position of the New Apostolic Church on the beginning of life and ensoulment

- In order to best protect man, who is the image of God, the Church respects human life from the moment of conception and rejects any killing of this life. Such life is entitled to full human dignity.
- The exact time at which ensoulment takes place is in the hand of God and cannot be determined with certainty by human understanding. In order to provide the best possible protection to ensouled human life, the Church assumes, however, that ensoulment takes place at the moment the ovum and sperm are joined.
- The Church accepts biomedical methods and treatments through which no fertilised ova are intentionally destroyed (that is, no selection made by humans).
- The Church is aware that there is a natural biological selection through which no insignificant number of fertilised ova (embryos) die without any human interference.
- Adhering to the position of our Church may lead to limitations upon what is medically possible. These limitations should be accepted with trust in God, because human life is given by God and must be respected as a matter of principle.

*The second part of this essay explores "The end of human life", which we will feature in the next issue of community.*

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



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# Therapy and faith: partners on the path to healing

Anxiety, a sense of gloom, mood swings ... Surely there is no one who has not experienced a low. But sometimes life can run off the rails. And then it needs more than sensitive ministers and a kind and loving congregation.





Mental illnesses can affect anyone. They affect the individual as a whole, influencing the way the person thinks, feels, and acts. They lead to disorders such as depression and panic attacks or to obsessive-compulsive disorders. Sometimes they even result in physical symptoms. Often, family, friends, and colleagues suffer too.

The causes have to do with genetic predisposition, on the one hand, and certain events in the life of the affected person, on the other. One thing, however, may not be considered a cause: that it is a sign of deficient faith. The New Apostolic Church International makes this clear in its "Guide for the pastoral care of members with mental illness".

### The main thing is that it is unbiased

As with physical illnesses, faith alone is not the way that leads to healing, especially since the perception of the

affected often changes in such a way that they can neither draw joy nor hope from their faith. Mental illnesses absolutely need to be treated by qualified therapists and doctors.

The New Apostolic Church fully endorses scientifically established methods of treatment. For most therapeutic methods are value-neutral and respect the patients in their religiosity. There are concerns, however, about therapies which make ideological or spiritual opinions the focus of their therapeutic treatment, it says in the guide.

### Spiritual support

And what can and should ministers do for their sick brothers and sisters? They can support the therapy by showing them understanding, kindness, and patience, strengthening their courage and trust in God, and praying for and with them. "The minister must not intervene in the psychotherapy treatment," the paper says. This is the recommendation of the Church's leadership in abbreviated form. "It is beneficial to encourage the patients to continue the therapy."

The congregation can help along too. The offers of fellowship and applied love for one's neighbour provide security, which can help to stabilise the patient. "It feels good to be accepted in the congregation, and it helps members cope with the illness."

Ministers and members should not forget the affected families, for they often have to cope with many burdens ranging from conflicts to having to deal with too many demands. The families need loving care, and may at times also need support in order to cope with their daily lives.

### Working together

Within such a framework, psychotherapy and pastoral care become partners on the path to healing. At best, the treatment restores the ability to cope with everyday life again. And faith provides a perspective that transcends time.

In fact: "Today, all agree that it can be beneficial to the health of the patient if he/she belongs to a religious denomination," the paper emphasises. And conversely, psychotherapy may improve the experience of faith.

# A once derelict church restored

In 2014 the congregation in Somerset in Cape Town (South Africa) moved into a different place of worship. The congregation's new home is an old Dutch Reformed Church that was taken over by the New Apostolic Church and renovated. The building is over 200 years old.



The church building was dedicated in 1820 by the Dutch Reformed Church, was declared as a provincial cultural heritage site in 2000, and has been used by the New Apostolic Church since 2014

In 1817 some farmers asked their governor, Lord Charles Somerset, for permission to construct a church in the area of the mountain region of Helderberg and establish a village there. Their application was granted, and construction began in 1819. On 13 February 1820 the church building was officially dedicated.

In 1862 the structure was extensively renovated. However, the north gable collapsed on account of an unusually cold winter before the church could even be reopened. Fortunately it was possible to repair the damage before the building opened its doors to the congregation once again.

In the Second Boer War between 1899 and 1902, the journalist and politician Jan Hendrick Hofmeyr—also known as Onze Jan (our Jan)—fought for harmony between nations. When he died in 1909, he was buried in the cemetery of the Dutch Reformed Church in Somerset.

## Cultural heritage site saved from ruin

After over one hundred years in use, the church building became too small for the congregation, and its members moved into a new building. Since the old building was now no longer in use, it gradually fell into disrepair. At

Below: The church building has its own cemetery  
Right: The congregation of Somerset consists of nearly 500 members



the start of the 1960s it was restored and made available to the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church once again. Its members used the building until well into the 1990s, after which point it began to fall into disrepair again.

After a school was housed in the building for a while, it stood empty again for a few years and was damaged as a result. The proprietors then decided to convert the former church into office space. It was then that the New Apostolic Church submitted a purchase application to the authorities. The parties agreed on a twenty-year lease arrangement.

The building with its own cemetery was declared a national heritage site in 1963 due to its remarkable architecture, and in the year 2000 it was rededicated as a provincial cultural heritage site. The construction department of the New Apostolic Church in South Africa was therefore quite happy that the renovation work saved the historic building from deterioration.

### A large and growing congregation

The congregation that now occupies the Somerset building was established in 1925 through the missionary efforts of John Diedericks, who later became the congregation's rector. The congregation's first building, which was dedicated in the year 1931, quickly became too small. Various halls were rented for divine services in the course of the ensuing

years, but the number of members simply kept on growing—as did their wish to have a church building of their own in which to celebrate divine services.

In 2012 District Apostle Noel Barnes, together with the Apostles and Bishops, enjoyed a tour of the historic region of Somerset West in the context of a conference. In the process, they also came upon the vacant Dutch Reformed Church. At the grave of Jan Hendrick Hofmeyr, the group decided to sing a hymn—and in so doing, they noticed that Onze Jan had been buried there 103 years earlier, to the day.

The renovation of the building took twelve months. Various elements were replaced and others repaired without impacting the character of the protected heritage building. In addition, a security system now protects the church building from intruders.

On 19 January 2014 District Apostle Noel Barnes conducted a dedication service for the congregation of Somerset, together with all the Apostles and Bishops of the then Cape District, in the congregation's new church building.

The congregation, which consists of nearly 500 members, is very happy to once again have an actual church building of its own as a place of worship. In 2015 the New Apostolic Christians there even had occasion to enjoy a visit from Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider to their congregation.

Aid from the German organisation human aktiv (NAC Southern Germany) is distributed



NACRO, human aktiv, NAK-karitativ and NAC SEA Relief

A food aid project run by NAK-karitativ (NAC Germany) is helping people to get by



## Charities amid the pandemic: miracles and innovations

Aid organisations fight against poverty and suffering in the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has made this battle significantly more difficult for them, however. Following are some insights into the lives of helpers who have learned to master entirely new challenges.

Covid-19 has changed everyday life, society, and people in general. While the restrictions may not be as significant in some places, there are other areas where they are quite drastic indeed. And even weeks after the start of the pandemic, it has not yet become possible for people in most countries to return to their old, familiar ways of life and work.

However, the pandemic has also changed the face of need and suffering in the world. The editors of nac.today inquired with some of the fourteen New Apostolic relief agencies to learn how they have been dealing with new restrictions in their already difficult working environment, and how they have been forced to break new ground in some areas.

### Lockdown and travel restrictions

“How has the work of the project leaders and local assistants changed? And what strategies are the aid organisations developing in order to carry out their work despite these new obstacles?” In many cases local workers are confronted with some very basic restrictions: lockdown, the closing of public facilities, bans on assembly, and so on. If there

is no response from the authorities, if the planning team can no longer meet, and if people in need can no longer be contacted, then projects that thrive on cooperation are at risk.

“We are currently still quite restricted in our freedom of travel and movement, and we cannot travel to our project areas as usual. This means that project monitoring and evaluation are only possible to a limited degree,” explains Nadine Beckmann of NAK-karitativ (Germany). “However, we have managed to stay in contact with many of our partners through video conferencing. Our five volunteers have likewise prepared themselves for their next posting to Zambia, Malawi, and South Africa by way of video conferencing.”

The implications of the new security measures were not quite as problematic for human aktiv. The aid agency cooperates with other institutions and supports them financially on many projects. “It was not possible to transfer official donations during the lockdown period,” says Susanne Raible of human aktiv. Thus the projects continue, but their coordination shifts to online formats.



This building is going up with funds from NAC SEA Relief Fund (NAC South-East Asia)

## Video conferencing is effective

In South Africa, the lockdown has led to large-scale changes. Jacqui Naidoo, an employee with Masakhe Foundation based in Cape Town explains: “Before the coronavirus, we were still able to maintain our regular programmes (Skills Unlimited, After School Safe Spaces, Addiction Awareness, and Uthandiwe Children’s Home) in remote regions. When the president of our country announced that we were going into lockdown, we immediately shut down all of our centres and suspended our training courses because we didn’t want our volunteers to be infected.” The aid agency then intensified its efforts in projects pertaining to energy and food aid.

Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe have also clearly felt the restrictions: “The work environment and ways of engagement have drastically changed: as an NGO we believe in delivering services to mass populations—this cannot work any more. Work has become slow. Our training workshops, meetings, and all other gatherings now need limited numbers. This has affected our ability to reach our target numbers and meet the project milestones as planned. Also this means having more meetings and training which, in turn, surpasses the planned budgets,” says Tebuho Yubai, executive director of NACRO, the aid organisation headquartered in Lusaka in Zambia. New opportunities are also identified and used, however: “New methods of communication—for example, video conferencing—have also made working from a distance easier and more effective.” In fact, less time is wasted by using these platforms. Decisions are made quickly and are less costly in terms of travel logistics and time spent in meetings. On balance, Yubai is pleased.

## Quarantine promotes resourcefulness

Always react to the developments with flexibility—that is at the very top of the agenda for these aid organisations. Back in August, the team from NAC SEA Relief was looking back on 130 days of quarantine. Retired District Apostle Urs Hebeisen, president of the aid agency of the New Apostolic Church in South-East Asia, reports on one of the worst experiences, namely the uncertainty about what the future will bring. “Thankfully we have slowly begun to notice an easing of the situation, but the problem is far from over.”

Kim Kolb, who is responsible for the aid organisation re Charitable Ministry at the New Apostolic Church USA, describes similar procedures: “Within the USA, re Charitable Ministry continues to support local congregational initiatives (the re Charitable Ministry Grassroots Programme) through assistance with specific fundraising and logistical support. Some of the congregational food banks in various NAC USA churches were able to reopen within weeks after the original shut-down simply by modifying their procedures.” And a number of innovative ideas are also being put into practice: for example, within the framework of a regional food bank programme, the congregation of Sterling Heights organised a drive-through in its church parking lot. “Our members had packed food supplies that were then brought safely to the cars of the beneficiaries. The line stretched all the way up to the street in front of our church.”

## Crisis upon crisis

NAK-karitativ, the aid agency of New Apostolic Churches in Germany, is often asked how people are doing in the project countries themselves. Beckmann explains: “Many of the people there work as day labourers. As a result of the crisis, most of these jobs have been lost. This means no income, and therefore hunger!” In many countries there is no social network, which means people are forced to leave their homes despite the high risk of infection. Often, physical distancing rules are not even observed. “Here we cannot help think about the narrow spaces of the slums, for example in Mukuru in Kenya. For this reason, we support many countries by providing them with emergency aid packages that contain basic food and hygiene products such as soaps and disinfectants.”

And even in South Africa there are many questions from donors that need to be answered. Jacqui Naidoo (Masakhe Foundation) reports: “Since we cannot continue our regular programmes, we provide food aid (food parcels, virtual food stamps, or soup and bread). Our donors keep asking us whether we can continue providing food aid during the lockdown, as there is a tremendous need in South Africa. And yes, the aid agency has indeed been able to maintain that kind of support,” confirms Naidoo.

# Challenge accepted: India celebrates

It all began with a woman who became New Apostolic while on a trip to Denmark fifty years ago. Upon returning to India, she did not keep her faith to herself, but rather told many others about Jesus and living Apostles. And against all odds there are around 45,000 New Apostolic Christians living in India today.



NAC India



Angel Robinson was sealed in Denmark in 1968. After returning to India she told her family about her faith and the Church she had joined

In 1968, Angel Robinson, an Indian citizen, travelled to Denmark. There she met up with the family of Herbert Mauritz, who told her about the New Apostolic Church. Angel Robinson's interest was piqued, and so she began attending the divine services. A short time later she was sealed in Denmark by District Apostle Karl Weinmann.

After returning home, she told her son a great deal about the New Apostolic Church. He was very interested and soon had the desire to become New Apostolic as well. When District Apostle Michael Kraus travelled to India in May 1970, John Robinson was sealed and ordained as the first Priest in India.

With great determination, the first New Apostolic Christians in India set out to tell others about their faith. People gathered from near and far, in halls and open spaces alike, in order to hear the word of God from the altar. In divine services that took place in large halls, there were at times thousands of sealings at once.

This large number of New Apostolic Christians needed church buildings and ministers. The first church building in India was dedicated in Kamalnagar in 1972. Other church buildings soon followed. Some were built on land that had been donated by members. Throughout the country new congregations came into being, and new ordinations took place. On 20 July 1975 the then Chief Apostle Ernst Streckenisen ordained the first six Apostles for India. One of these was John Robinson.

## Christendom in India

Approximately 80 per cent of the Indian population today are Hindus, 13 per cent are Muslim, and only about two and a half per cent are Christian. Of these only a very small number are New Apostolic. In India there are many different languages: 22 main languages, and approximately 800 different dialects. Even though the New Apostolic Christians only come from nine of these different language groups, the language barriers are still quite a challenge. In

addition, the poor infrastructure often makes it difficult for the ministers to visit the members in all parts of the country. Apostle Christranjan Nanda (retired as of January 2019) relates as follows: “Some places are not very accessible, and in those areas it takes me about three hours to cover 80 kilometres by motorcycle.”

Despite this the Church’s members in India are confident. The New Apostolic Church there has members from all walks of life, as well as a large proportion of young and committed Christians. The young people are quite tech-savvy and speak English, so they manage to overcome the language barriers quite easily. It was also young people who recognised the opportunities in the Covid-19 crisis and took action.

In the year 2000, the New Apostolic Church in India was still in the care of five different District Churches. Today, the New Apostolic Church Canada is responsible for the New Apostolic Christians in India. Some 900 ministers take care of 45,000 members in 550 congregations. The country has one District Apostle Helper, and six Apostles who are supported by six Bishops.

### Activities despite the pandemic

For the anniversary year 2020 a calendar was created that offers a brief summary of the history of India every month. Many more details corresponding to the theme of the month will be published on Facebook all year round.

Numerous activities had been planned for the anniversary, but unfortunately, the government banned church gatherings on account of the pandemic. Young Priests from the northern part of India wondered how to reach the brothers and sisters despite this obstacle. They quickly came up with the idea of organising a virtual meeting. It turned out that this idea could be used for church services too. Not long after, services were being conducted every Sunday in several languages using video conferencing apps.

In Mumbai it was also young Priests who initiated the Members to Members Support campaign. It is intended to link members available to help with members who need help as a result of the crisis.

Robert Maier, our nac.today correspondent in India, has the following to say about this: “What began as a great challenge is now like the fulfilment of a dream we have had for many years: finally, our members throughout the country can transcend all state and language barriers to come together. The effort of bringing all of these people together physically in one place was always a huge logistical challenge in the past. Thanks to the enthusiasm of our tech-savvy youth in particular, we are now able to keep in touch despite this pandemic.”

There is great joy among New Apostolic Christians in India as they celebrate the Church’s fiftieth anniversary this year



