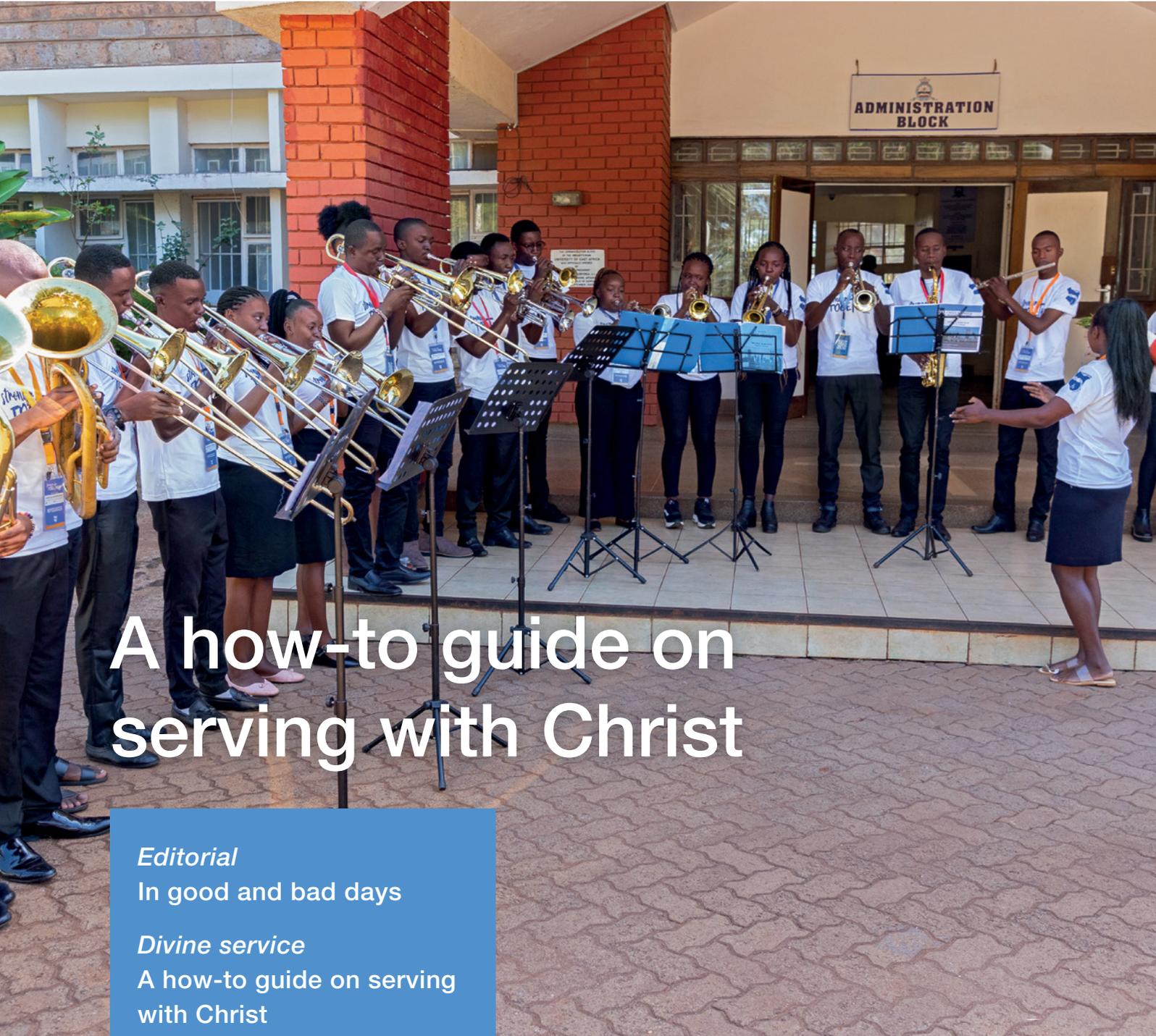


# community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

03/2023/EN



## A how-to guide on serving with Christ

### *Editorial*

In good and bad days

### *Divine service*

A how-to guide on serving with Christ

### *Doctrine*

Ordination of women:  
Jesus Christ and the church

New Apostolic Church  
International



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# In good and bad days

Dear brothers and sisters,

No one is forgotten by God. He knows your thoughts. He is aware of your problem. He shares in your pain. Trust Him: He will help you.

I would like to address this message of the Holy Spirit especially to those who are going through difficulties and afflictions. Many brothers and sisters have to live with illnesses, others have lost a loved one, still others are struggling with problems at work, in their families, or in their relationships. And then there are those who have financial problems.

I would also like to address this message to those who are on the other side. Those who experience many beautiful things. Those who are happy and cheerful. Maybe they are a little ashamed that they do not have any problems. They experience the blessing and presence of God. You have



New Apostolic Church International

nothing to be ashamed of. Jesus shares your joy. Thank Him in an appropriate manner and enjoy the blessing God has given you.

Heartfelt greetings

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

Jean-Luc Schneider

# A how-to guide on serving with Christ



Michael Owino, Timpany

About 800 people attended the divine service in Nairobi in Kenya



Joshua 24: 15b

*“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

My dear brothers and sisters, we had a wonderful time together here in the circle of the youth yesterday, and it was great for me to be together with all the Apostles from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Sudan. And how I wish that those who are connected with us can feel and experience the same joy we feel here! It really was a pleasure yesterday to be able to visit the different booths of the various Apostle districts and have the young people explain to me how they serve the Lord in the church and outside of the church.

You showed me what you do in church and what you do when you are not in church, and I really appreciated that because it shows something very important: as children of God, we do not have two lives—one when we are in church and another private one, when we are not in church. We

want to be true disciples of Christ and live according to the teaching of Christ when we are in church and when we are outside of the church. We want to behave as disciples of Christ both in the congregation and in our private life. At home, as husband and wife, this is something very important. Let us be true disciples of Christ as a husband and wife, true disciples of Christ in our family, in our student life, in our professional life, and in our life in society. There is no reason not to obey the commandments in any part of our life. Let us always be true disciples of Christ and true servants of Christ.

Our Bible text today is about Joshua. You know the story. He was a true servant of God. He was together with Moses as they crossed the desert. And like Moses, Joshua too believed in the promise of God. God had promised His people that He would deliver them from Egypt and lead them into the Promised Land. It is a complicated story, but Moses and Joshua both believed in the promise of God and they trusted God.

When Moses sent Joshua to spy out the Promised Land, he came back and said, “Do not fear the people. God has promised that He will be with us, and He will be with us” (cf. Numbers 14: 6–9). Sadly, the other spies did not have the same trust in God. Joshua, however, did not stop serving the Lord.

After Moses had died and Joshua had become his successor, he led the people into the Promised Land and conquered all their enemies. At the end of his life, he gathered all the people of Israel together to remind them that God had kept His promise. He told the people that they should be grateful for this and then said something to the effect of: “Now you can do whatever you want, but for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24: 14–15).

Joshua served God because He believed in His word and trusted in Him. Not all of God’s promises had been fulfilled by then, but He trusted in God’s word. And later on, when he saw that God had fulfilled His promises, he served the Lord out of gratitude.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is also true for us. God has given us a wonderful promise. He wants to lead us into His kingdom, where we are to serve and reign with Christ. In the new creation, we will serve the Lord. We will praise and worship Him. I often say that even after thousands of years we will still have reason enough to praise and thank the

Lord. What He will give us is so great that we will never stop praising and thanking Him for it. That is the way we will serve the Lord in eternity.

We will worship and praise His name and reign with Him. We will not exercise power over somebody, but will share in His glory and in His victory over sin and share in His domination over evil. That is the promise we have been given. And because we believe in His promise and trust Him, we want to serve the Lord already now. We want to learn now what we will be doing in eternity.

A number of things that God has promised us have already been fulfilled, and we have reason to thank God. We thank God for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We thank God for His election. We thank Him that we were able to become a child of God and that we can receive the sacraments.

## *Let us serve God, but let us serve Him with Christ*

Some say that the Christian faith is based on an already-but-not-yet sort of existence. When Jesus came on earth He preached the coming kingdom of God, but also said that it was already among us human beings (Luke 17: 21). Jesus defeated sin and evil. This He has

already achieved. This has definitely been done! But not all the consequences of this victory are yet visible, because evil is still powerful on earth. We are already children of God, but it has not yet been revealed what we will be (1 John 3: 2). We serve the Lord because we trust in God. Much of what He has promised us is not yet visible, but we trust in Him. But we also serve the Lord out of gratitude for the part that is already visible.

You know how we serve the Lord: we gather together in divine service in order to worship God and to praise His name. We serve the Lord by attending the divine services. We also serve the Lord by acknowledging Him as our Lord, as our Master. That is important to us. Those who want to serve the Lord must accept that He is the Master and we are the servants. That means that we accept His law and His commandments and accept that the will of the Lord is above our own will. Remember Mary, the mother of Jesus. When she was told that she would give birth to the Son of God, she told the angel in the end: “Behold the maid-servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1: 38).

We also serve Him by doing our part in His work of salvation. Let us help people find the way that leads to God



*We are to serve God  
out of love*

and help them walk this way. It is our wish that our neighbour can experience the love of God through us. And this is the way we want to serve the Lord: we worship and obey Him and contribute to His work of salvation.

Our motto for this year is “Serving and reigning with Christ”. My dear youth, my dear brothers and sisters, there is something very important: let us serve God, but let us serve Him with Christ. We do not want to serve God as Joshua did. We do not want to serve God as the people of the old covenant did. We are Christians. We follow Christ, so let us serve with Him. Christ made it clear that there is more to serving God than merely obeying a certain number of rules. The Jews at the time had a long list of what was to be observed and they believed that they would automatically receive God’s blessing if they just kept these rules. No! Jesus pointed out that the most important commandment is the commandment of love: “You shall love the Lord your God. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” (Mark 12: 28–34).

So we are to serve God out of love. That was the problem in the Old Testament. The people served the Lord and they kept His commandments, but they did this in order to be blessed. And if the desired effect failed to materialise they thought it might be better to serve another god, some idol. This is how they tried to get what they wanted after all. They served the Lord for personal benefit. They wanted a reward for their service. But Jesus exhorted people to serve God out of love.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, He said: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matthew 4: 10). Let us serve with Christ! We serve the Lord out of love and that is the only reason we serve Him. We do not need another god, another idol. We serve the Lord because we trust in Him.

We serve the Lord because we love Him; we serve Him for His glory, not for our own honour. You know, sometimes Jesus was very clear when He explained something. One



day He spoke about those who came to the temple and brought big offerings and then went out in the streets and announced it with trumpets so that everybody knew. They did not serve God, but were looking for their own glory: “Look how good I am, see what I have done for the Church and for the Lord.” Jesus said, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret” (Matthew 6: 3–4). From time to time, I would like to remind us of this advice of Jesus: let us serve God with Christ—not for our own glory, but for the glory of God!

Remember the case of the rich young man? He already served the Lord, kept all the commandments, and was very rich. When He asked Jesus what good things he should do to obtain eternal life, Jesus told him: “Sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19: 21). The young man just could not bring himself to do it. He was willing to serve God, but not to serve Him together with Christ. For those who serve God out of love for Christ it is more important to have fellowship with Christ than to be wealthy or successful. Serving with Christ means that fellowship with Christ is the most important thing to me.

Peter served Christ, but sometimes he did not serve with Him. When Jesus announced His suffering and death to him, Peter would not believe it. The Son of God who served God was to die? How could that be? Jesus said to him, “Get behind Me, Satan!” (Matthew 16: 23). This thought that we will be spared suffering and tribulation if we serve the Lord is not good. Jesus said that those who follow Him

would suffer as He did. Serving with Christ means that I am willing to serve God even if I have to endure affliction and hardship to do so.

Let me mention another servant of God. John the Baptist was a great prophet of the Old Testament and served the Lord. He fulfilled his mission and announced the coming of the Messiah, but he was not willing to serve with Christ. He wanted God to punish sinners and to restore order on earth. But that was not the mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus had not come to rule the world. His mission was not to solve the earthly problems of the people. Nor had He come to punish sinners. His mission was to save them.

Many people claim to be servants of God and are convinced that their mission is to punish sinners and restore order. But Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18: 36). Those who want to serve God should love sinners and not punish them. When the Pharisees wanted to kill the woman who committed adultery, they too thought that they were serving the Lord. Jesus, however, made it very clear to them that it was in no way their task to punish anyone (John 8: 2–11). Let us serve God with Christ!

Another time Jesus said that it was beautiful when people offered their gift to God. But if they were having trouble with their neighbour, they might as well not do it. He said: “Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5: 24). He wanted to say that you cannot serve God if you hate your neighbour. Let us serve God with Christ!

And a last point. The disciples were arguing over who was the greatest among them. The idea behind this was: maybe I am a little bit better than the others. Jesus called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9: 35). Serving the Lord also means serving your neighbour. Serving with Christ does not mean exercising power over others. There is no room for this in the church of Christ. Jesus said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 10: 45).

See, there are many aspects of how one can serve the Lord, but we have to serve Him with Christ according to His teaching.

Joshua says here in our Bible text: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” That means he himself but also all those who are entrusted to him. This probably makes us think of the ministers and the believers who are entrusted to them. We think about the parents and their children. And I think they all want to serve God with all those who are entrusted to them—but we cannot force anyone to serve the Lord. We have no right to force them, nor is it the will of God.

God wants everyone to be free to choose and decide for themselves whether they want to serve Him or not. So we must not force others to do so either. Sadly, many parents have experienced that you cannot force a child to serve the Lord. The only thing we can do is to motivate them, to awaken in them the need to follow our example.

Dear young brothers and sisters, this also applies to you. Later on, you too will become parents, but already today you can motivate your neighbour to serve the Lord. Don't try to convince them, don't try to threaten them, don't promise them something you are not sure will happen. Just try to motivate them to serve the Lord as you do.

And how can you do this? In the verse preceding our Bible text it says: “Fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth” (Joshua 24: 14). If we serve in sincerity and in truth we can motivate our neighbour and those who are entrusted to us to serve the Lord as well.

I said we serve the Lord out of gratitude. Let us prove that our gratitude is sincere. Remember the people of Israel. Every time they were saved by God, they praised Him and were grateful. And a few days later they had forgotten all about it. They started to complain again and were angry with God. Gratitude is sincere when it comes from humility.



District Apostle Edy Isnugroho



District Apostle Kububa Soko

Our gratitude is sincere when we are fully convinced that we owe everything to God; that everything we have is due to the grace of God and not to our merit, gifts, power, or whatever. Those who are humble know: “I deserve nothing; everything is a gift, a gift of God's grace.” Such people are very sincere in their gratitude and one can see and perceive it. May our gratitude be true and result from humility. For then it will last and motivate us to serve the Lord.

Let us be sincere and true in our trust towards God! Even if we have to wait for a long time before we can see the results of our serving, even if the blessing is not yet visible. We are confident, trust in God, and do not give up because we are convinced that God will keep His promise. There is no reason to stop serving Him.

There are many brothers and sisters in the world who serve God in this way. Their service does not seem to have any effect. There are no visible results. But they trust in God and continue to serve Him because their trust is sincere. I can tell you that such perseverance has a big impact on those around them.

Let us also be sincere in our love for God. We serve the Lord out of gratitude, out of trust, and out of love. Let us be sincere in our love for Jesus Christ.

I know I have said this quite often, but I repeat it deliberately: true love for Christ is not affected by what is happening on earth. Nothing that happens on earth can destroy true love for Christ. True love for Christ is not affected by the behaviour of other people. True love for Christ is not affected by majority opinion. People can say what they want, they can write and post what they want on the internet: this does not affect our love for Jesus, our relationship with Him!



Six Apostles were ordained: Julius Mathayo Msambula, Charles Godwin Anangisye, Obed Chisenga, Michael Macha, Maeke Njunju, and Ring Munkombwe Ndambo

Even my own situation—whether I am rich or poor, sick or healthy—does not affect my love for Christ. I love Christ because He loves me, and that is why I serve Him. I tell you that has an impact. Our love for our neighbour must also be sincere. Jesus' love for us is so great that He wants to share the merit from His sacrifice and His obedience with us. He did not commit a single sin. His love is perfect, and that is why He was able to enter the glory of God as the first human being. He does not expect the same thing from us because He knows that we are just not able to do the same thing He did. That is why He wants to share His merit with us.

Those who truly love others want them to receive the same thing they will receive. They do not want to be a little bit better or get a little more than others. Really, one cannot have more than perfect fellowship with God. You cannot get more and become more than being like Jesus Christ. But sometimes it seems that some question this. They would like to have a little bit more. They want a special reward. I would be very content if I could just become like Christ and enter into God's glory. If we truly love our neighbour we do not expect to receive more than he or she. Rather, we want others to receive the same thing we have received.

One last point. Our sincerity in sacrificing can be measured by the things we are willing to give up in order to have perfect fellowship with God. For example, giving up an

opinion that is not compatible with the teaching of Jesus Christ or forgiving my neighbour, because to be one with Jesus I must forgive my neighbour. Our sincerity is also measured by the sacrifices we make in order to be one with Christ.

When people see that their brothers and sisters, their parents, or their friends serve God with a sincere heart, when they see that we are truly willing to serve God with Christ and serve God as Christ did, then many will respond as the people of Israel answered at the time and said to Joshua: "We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God." That is my wish for you, my dear youth, and for all of us.

## CORE THOUGHTS

We serve God because we believe in His promise and are grateful to Him for all His favours.

We serve Him by following the example of Jesus Christ. Through the sincerity of our efforts, we can encourage the people around us to serve God.



# The fire must be kept burning

People celebrate Christmas and Easter. Is there more behind it than tradition? People are aware of the problems and know how to solve them. So who really needs a Saviour? There is, however, only one path that leads to lasting happiness and peace.

“The sensitivity for it is diminishing,” Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider said and meant people’s understanding, even among Christians, of really needing Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Some are doing well, he said. Others see problems and have a solution, yet God is not part of the solution. And then there are those for whom the idea of faith is merely an empty promise to give hope to the simple and the poor.

However: “You cannot attain perfect and lasting satisfaction in this world with earthly goods and earthly things.” There is only one way to achieve lasting happiness.

## The only way

“You can only have this once you have fellowship with God.” In order to achieve this you have to be exactly as God wants

you to be, the Chief Apostle made clear. “The problem is: we cannot do it. We cannot do it alone! We need a Saviour!”

We need a Saviour, and that Saviour is Jesus Christ, the Chief Apostle explained. The Son of God, who came to earth, conquered evil and created access to God. This is our Saviour. With His help we can become as God wants us to be so that we are fully in line with the will of God. And then we will be happy.

Indeed, God is love. God wants to save all human beings. And Jesus Christ is the Saviour for the whole world. But He has prescribed a path, and if you want to be saved you must follow that path. And that means believing in Jesus Christ and modelling your life on His example. “The Lord clearly said so.”



Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider assigns Apostle Stefan Pöschel as a District Apostle Helper for Western Germany

How serious can our effort be to do the will of God when perhaps for years we have been clinging to an opinion, a view, or an idea and know deep within ourselves that the Lord Jesus sees it differently, but we are adamant and still cling to it?

The Chief Apostle also asked: “How honest is your desire to serve God if you cannot bring yourself—excuse me for saying this so bluntly—to go to divine service to praise and worship God? You only come when you

get something, when you need something. But you could also come and participate sometimes so that others can experience a divine service.”

“The Saviour will complete His mission,” Chief Apostle Schneider said in conclusion. “Our mission is simply to ensure that salvation can continue to be offered, that the gospel can continue to be preached. And if people do not want to hear it today, they should have the opportunity to hear it tomorrow or the day after; but the fire must be kept burning. This is what we have been called for: to serve others.”

## Examples that characterise our role model

“Let me just name three points from the life of Jesus Christ, three characteristic traits,” the Chief Apostle outlined.

- He had a strong connection with God. Throughout His life, Jesus went to the temple or synagogue to meet God. And He always sought a connection with God in prayer.
- He always submitted to the will of His Father. He struggled and was willing to give up everything because oneness with His Father meant everything to Him.
- He did not come to rule, but to serve. He served without stipulating any conditions, without expecting anything in return, and without concern for success or failure.

“Indeed, Jesus Christ was perfect. We are not perfect. We are incapable of this.” The bottom line is: “There again we need a Saviour, a Redeemer.” What human beings cannot accomplish, Christ complements with His grace.

## Questions we need to ask ourselves

“He expects only one thing from us: that we are thoroughly honest and strive earnestly for this,” the Chief Apostle explained. “That’s where we all—starting with me, and I take this very seriously—have to always ask ourselves, Where do I stand?” What about our church attendance, for example? “You can do whatever you want. It’s up to you. You don’t owe us an explanation: not the Church leadership, not the Chief Apostle, not the rector, but Jesus Christ expects one.”

## CORE THOUGHTS

1 John 4: 14

**“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world.”**

We need a Saviour. Jesus Christ is our Saviour. He saves those who believe in Him and follow Him. We are sincerely connected with Him and are determined to do His will and to serve Him.

# Love, truth, unity: the weapons of God

Gideon did not need a huge army to win his battle. His sharpest weapons were his faith and his trust in God. Read on to find out why he is an example to follow, and not just for ministers.



The divine service for ministers in Sydney was attended by about 150 ministers and their wives



“I would like to express my gratitude and to thank all of you for your work and your service over the past months.” This is how Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider began the divine service for ministers in Sydney in Australia.

## The story

At the beginning of the divine service, the Chief Apostle summarised the story of Gideon. The people of Israel had been under the domination of their enemies for seven years when an angel came to Gideon and said: “The Lord is with you.” Gideon’s answer was all too human: “If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?” There was no answer, no explanation. Instead, the Lord told him to go and save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Gideon prayed for signs to make sure that God was with him. And the Lord gave him signs.

Gideon formed an army of 32,000 warriors. God told him though that this was far too many and told him to send those home who were afraid and not really willing to fight.

By way of an unusual criterion, namely the way they drank water, their number was eventually reduced so that in the end only 300 warriors remained. Even their weapons were unusual. With trumpets, empty pitchers, and torches they went to war. “Go and do what I tell you, and I will do the job for you.” That was the message. And God did indeed win the victory.

## What does that mean for us today?

This was the question with which Chief Apostle Schneider brought the congregation back to the present. “Today, God tells us, and that is His message: ‘You know, I love human-kind, I am on their side, I want to deliver them.’” Human beings suffers from sin, the Chief Apostle said. We can all see the consequences: injustice, suffering, and pain.

“I can understand Gideon,” the Chief Apostle said. “We too could say: if You love human beings, how can You allow so much suffering?” Not even today we have an answer. There is no explanation from God. What God does tell us through



why Gideon first sent home those who did not want to fight. “And this is why the number of believers is not that big, especially nowadays it is decreasing. God says, respect their will. God did not select the warriors based on their skills. How He chose them is something we cannot grasp with our human understanding. Even so, the Chief Apostle says: “Trust in God, and work out of love.”

### The weapons of God

There are plenty of ideas of what it takes to fight for Jesus and proclaim His gospel, the Chief Apostle said. If only we could do miracles, had political influence, or had money... But these are

not the weapons of God. “Which weapons did we get from God?” the Church leader asked and listed:

- the truth of the gospel
- love: love people and let them experience God’s love through you
- the unity of the people of God.

the Holy Spirit is: “I want you to contribute to My plan of salvation.” That means every Christian is urged to proclaim God’s love, to profess Jesus Christ, and be His witness. And the ministers have the additional task of supporting the Apostles in the mission that Jesus entrusted to them.

### Signs that give strength

The signs that God gives today are the sacraments. “Through these signs—baptism, Holy Sealing, Holy Communion—the message is always the same: I am God. I love you. I have called you.” And for the ministers the sign is ordination: “You have received the authority to dispense the sacraments and to proclaim the gospel,” the Chief Apostle reminded the ministers.

If we have enough faith and believe in these signs something happens: faith in these signs creates might and power. “As ministers we have received additional power, additional authority,” the Chief Apostle said. It is the authority to dispense the sacraments, the authority to teach the gospel. “That is our strength. On the one hand, we have our faith in God and in our mission, and our love for God. And if we want to become stronger, we have to grow and manage to have more faith, more love, and more trust. And, on the other hand, we have the authority of the ministry.”

### A small flock

“So now we are ready,” the Chief Apostle said. “We believe in the power and authority we have and now we want to serve as believers, as Christians, and as ministers. And we want to work together. And then we realise, oh, we are not that many.” God did not want to force anybody, which is

Equipped with these weapons, the ministers would be able to accomplish their mission, the Chief Apostle said. And that is not to deliver human beings from their sins, he said. “That is God’s work; something we cannot do,” he reminded the congregation. The mission of the ministers is to prepare the bride of Christ. And this can be done together with Christ. “And God will save humankind.”

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Judges 6: 14*

**“Then the Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?’”**

Let us believe in God and in our calling. United in Christ, we confess the gospel and make the love of Christ tangible. Our strength lies in our trust in God. It is He who will give us the victory!

# How Jesus helps us to bear up

Everyone is confronted with suffering one way or another. How do we deal with it? There are many questions, but few answers to be had. Yet there is one particular source of comfort and strength. And there is a role model whom we can follow.



NAC New York



More than a thousand people attended the divine service with Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider in New York (USA). The service was webcast within the United States and to countries in Central and South America

## How suffering can be understood

And what does the Passion of Christ teach us? Well, first of all how suffering is to be understood. On no account must it be understood as punishment, the Chief Apostle said, “Jesus was perfect, without any sin. There was no reason for Him to be punished by God.” Nor is it necessarily a consequence of bad decisions: “This is an explanation for a number of problems in this world.” But that does not explain an earthquake, the Chief Apostle said, “No human being can trigger the movement of tectonic plates.” Nor is suffering necessarily a test to help us mature spiritually. “That may be one explanation. But it does not explain why a child dies from cancer.”

“There is no answer, no good answer, no general answer for suffering.” We cannot understand God, the Chief Apostle said. Not even Jesus understood Him. “My God, My God,

“We all have to deal with suffering,” the Chief Apostle said. Many have to deal with pain, hardship, and trials. And others see the suffering around them. “So in a way we share the sufferings of others.” This raises questions, he said. “Why does all this suffering exist? Why doesn’t God intervene? What can I do?” He explained that the Holy Spirit will not answer all our questions, but gives us this piece of advice: “Look unto Jesus and remember His Passion.”

District Apostle Helper John W. Fendt was retired in this divine service and Chief Jean-Luc Schneider ordained Walter Peter Schmidt as an Apostle



why have You forsaken Me?” Ultimately, all we can do is trust in God as Jesus did: “Into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

### How we can deal with suffering

The suffering of Christ shows how we can respond to suffering: with love. In order to have fellowship with human beings, the Son of God left the glory of God and shared our human fate. “What am I willing to give up to have fellowship with God?” For Jesus the fellowship with His Father was more important to Him than His own suffering. The Chief Apostle advised: “Don’t focus on your suffering. Focus on your goal. Do not allow this suffering, no matter how great it may be, to control your life.” The Chief Apostle went on to say that when we go through difficult times “we have a mission to help others through our behaviour. In such moments we can be a special blessing for many”.

### Nothing can prevent Christ from completing His work

“We live in a time in which one might think that the work of salvation is no longer all that successful. Has Jesus abandoned His church?” The answer is: “No. No. No. No. He will remain with His church, with His Apostles until the end.” Because what counts, the Chief Apostle said, is not what we can see with our eyes, what we can experience as human beings in the visible world. What counts is the word of Jesus Christ, and He promised: “I will be with you until the end.”

“These are just a few thoughts on what we can learn from the Passion of Christ. It is not just a sad story, it is also a source of comfort, wisdom, and joy. Because we know that nothing and nobody can hinder Jesus Christ from accomplishing His work. That is our faith. That is our conviction.”



Left to right: District Apostle Helper John Schnabel, who is designated to succeed District Apostle Kolb later in the year, the retired District Apostle Richard Freund, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider, and District Apostle Leonard Kolb

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Hebrews 12: 2*

**“[Let us look] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

The suffering of Christ teaches us how to behave when we go through suffering. Let us trust God and continue to do His will and serve Him. Christ will give the victory to those who persevere until His return.

## JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

ACCORDING TO JOHN 4: 1-42

*Jesus was on His way to Galilee with His disciples. They had taken the road through Samaria and had reached the town of Sychar. He was tired after walking such a distance and sat down at a well that Jacob had once built.*

A woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus asked her, "Please give Me a drink." The disciples had gone into the city to buy food.

The Samaritan woman asked Jesus, "How is it that You, a Jew, would ask a Samaritan woman for a drink of water?" The relationship between Jews and Samaritans was not good at the time. Jews did not associate with Samaritans.

Jesus said to her, "If only you knew who is asking you for a



drink, you would have asked Me to give you living water.”

The Samaritan woman replied, “Sir, You do not have a bucket and the well is deep. Where can You get living water?”

Jesus told her, “If you drink from this well, you will thirst again.

Whoever drinks of the living water will never thirst again.”

“Sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty again.”

As the conversation continued, she realised that Jesus knew everything about her life. Then

she realised who He was. She went into town and told the people to come and see.

So when the Samaritans came to Him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days.

Then the people said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.”



## AT ROZEL'S IN SÉTUBAL, PORTUGAL

Hello, my name is **Rozel**. I am seven years old and live in Portugal, in the District of Setúbal. Here you can see me with my little brother, Evan. He is four years old. My parents' names are Cristina and Pedro.



We go to church in the congregation of Setúbal. On the photo you can see my girlfriend and me in front of the altar in our **church**. Setúbal is not only the name of the political district in which we live, but also the name of the port city by the sea.

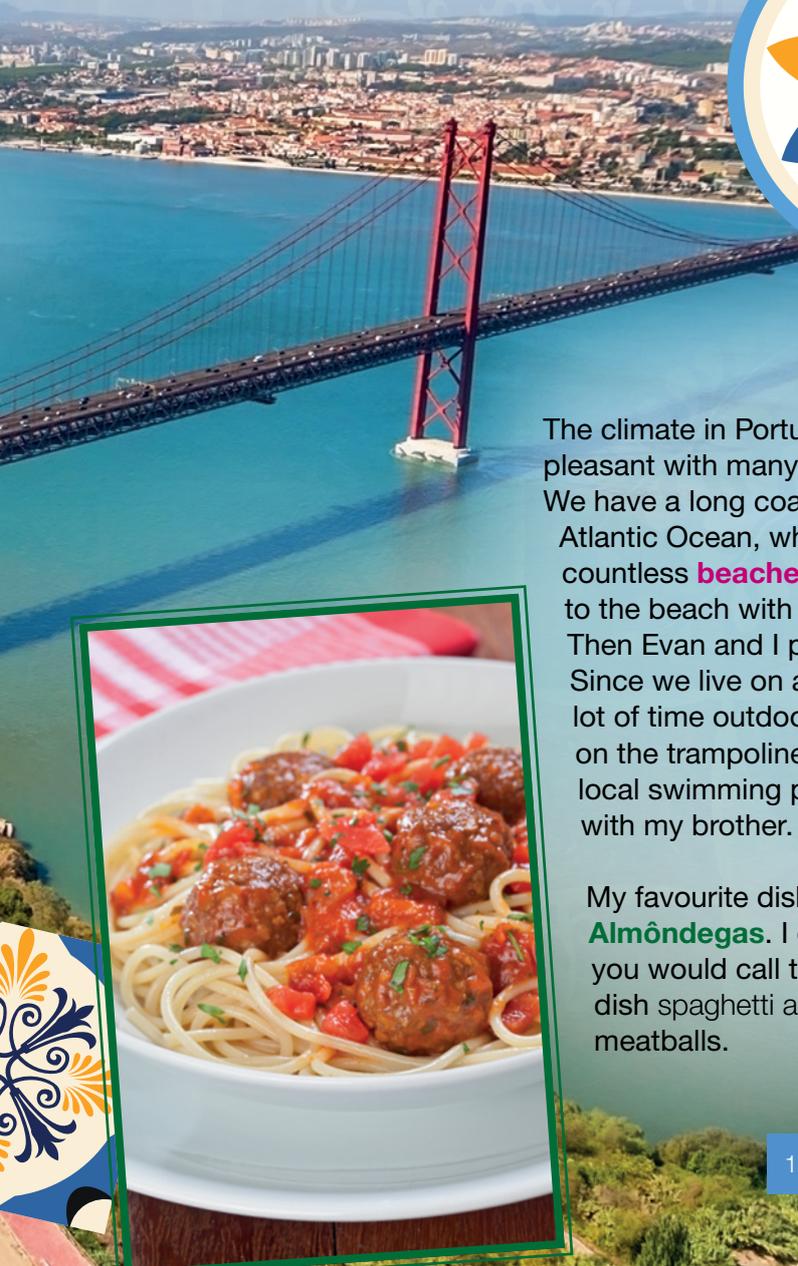
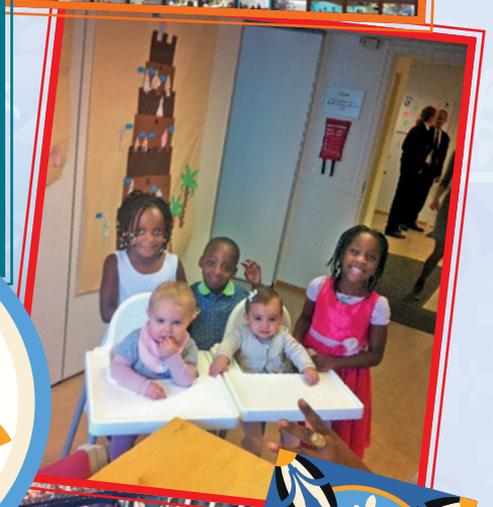
If we drive north for forty kilometres we come to Lisbon. This is the capital of Portugal. One of its landmarks is the **Ponte 25 de Abril**. It spans the River Tagus. With a length of 2,278 metres it is the third largest suspension bridge in the world. Its name commemorates the day in 1974 when Portugal's dictatorial ruler was overthrown.



This photo on the right was taken when my brother was sealed. It shows my parents and Evan and me with our **Apostle** Dimitrios Diniz.

Although we are Portuguese, Evan and I were born in **Norway**. My family lived there for seven years. This is a picture of my parents with the Chief Apostle when he visited his brothers and sisters in Norway. Are you wondering where I am? I was still in my mum's tummy then.

At that time we belonged to the congregation in Oslo. I also went to **Sunday School** there. Although I like living in Portugal, I still miss my friends from that time.

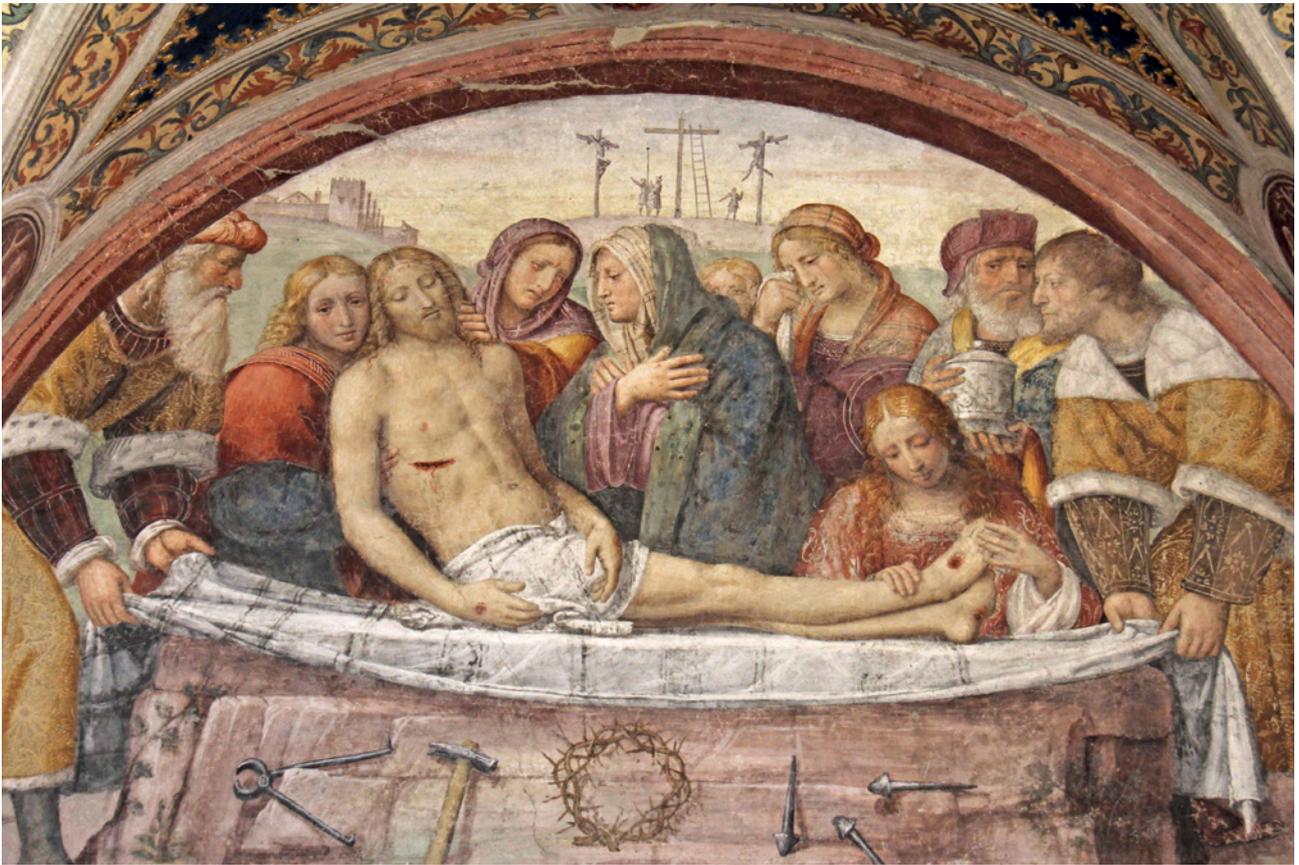


The climate in Portugal is very pleasant with many warm months. We have a long coastline on the Atlantic Ocean, where there are countless **beaches**. We often go to the beach with the whole family. Then Evan and I play in the sand. Since we live on a farm, I spend a lot of time outdoors. I love jumping on the trampoline, going to the local swimming pool, or dancing with my brother.



My favourite dish is **Almôndegas**. I guess you would call the dish spaghetti and meatballs.





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# Ordination of women: Jesus Christ and the church

The accounts of creation in the Old Testament bear witness to the equal value and the equal dignity of man and woman. Some of the apostolic epistles, however, make distinctions. What does Jesus Christ say about this? And how has the New Apostolic Church handled this? This is the third part of the essay on the ordination of women.

The Catechism of the New Apostolic Church points out that Jesus Christ “Himself directly gave His church only one ministry, namely the Apostle ministry” (CNAC 7.4). It goes on to supplement: “From among His disciples, Jesus Christ chose twelve men and appointed them as Apostles (Mark 3: 13–19; Luke 6: 13–16)” (CNAC 7.4.2). The apostolate therefore has a decisive function in defining the shape and meaning of ministry in the church. For this reason it is also necessary to inquire into the normative implications for ministry and church resulting from the fact that Jesus only called men to be Apostles.

## The election of the twelve Apostles by Jesus

Even though Jesus did not share the reservations of many of His contemporaries toward women, and even though many women followed Him and supported the disciples, He only called men to be Apostles. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—that is, the Synoptic Gospels—provide an account of the institution of twelve disciples as Apostles (Matthew 10: 1–4; Mark 3: 13–19; Luke 6: 13–16).

The question of why Jesus only elected men to be Apostles during His life on earth can therefore first of all be answered with a reference to the typological significance of the number twelve. The forefathers of Israel were also men, so in this respect as well a parallel had to be drawn between them and the “fathers” of the new and universal people of God—that is, the twelve Apostles.

However, some purely practical reasons for this election of men can also be identified, and these have to do with the societal conditions of the time. After all, the instruction to preach the gospel made it necessary, as it were, to entrust the office to men, especially since Jesus expressly commanded the Apostles when they were sent: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans” (Matthew 10: 5). They therefore had to confine their activity to the Jewish population and naturally also—as He Himself had done and as it was customary until the middle of the first century—proclaim the message of the imminence of the kingdom of God in the synagogues (Mark 1: 39; 6: 1–2; Acts 13: 14; 17: 17). Only men were permitted to participate in the service of the synagogue. Only they had the right to read from Holy Scripture and explain it. All of these things were impossible for women in the context of the Judaic community.

## Hallmarks of the apostolic ministry

If one dispenses with such an assessment of Jesus’ election of men as Apostles in chronological, cultural-historical, and salvation-historical terms, one might just as easily demand that the apostolate should consist not only of twelve men, but of twelve Jews—and then it would only be possible for it to consist of twelve men and no more.

Even the personal occupation of the Apostle ministry that began in the nineteenth century would then be called into question. After all, one of Jesus’ requirements of those called as Apostles at the time was that they had to “be with Him” (Mark 3: 14), in other words, they had to be among those who had accompanied Him on His journeys through Palestine.

If this requirement were also a hallmark of true apostleship, then not even Paul could have been considered a true Apostle any longer. Jesus Himself did not provide any reasoning for the choices He made. Therefore, no normative conclusions can be inferred from this for the church.

**SUMMARY:** In May 2021, the District Apostle Meeting resolved the following: “According to the testimony of the New Testament, Jesus called only men to be Apostles. It was to them that He entrusted the leadership of His church. We are not aware of any statement from Jesus concerning the question of whether a ministry can also be conferred upon women. From the words and deeds of Jesus it cannot be clearly inferred whether or not it is possible to ordain women. The decision is up to the apostolate which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is responsible for the order of the Church.”

## The story of apostolic Deaconesses

In both the Catholic Apostolic Church and the New Apostolic Church there were women who were active as Deaconesses. In the Catholic Apostolic Church the Deaconess was blessed for her service by the Angel—that is, the rector—of the congregation. They did not receive an ordination by the Apostle. It is presumed that Deaconesses were not ordained in the New Apostolic Church either, but rather that they also received a special blessing. It is not



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clear who performed these blessings. These Deaconesses were active in the congregation up until the 1950s, likely performing pastoral and charitable duties first and foremost. Deaconesses were no longer mentioned in the 1952 edition of *Questions and Answers*.

### Without doctrinal justification

In the time following, the question of ordaining women to ministry was treated with great hesitation. In an announcement by the Chief Apostle on the Church's understanding of ministry, published in 1999—that is, during Chief Apostle Fehr's time—the concluding lines contain the succinct comment: "Women do not bear a spiritual ministry in the New Apostolic Church. In this matter, the Church orients itself by the example of Jesus and considers itself in harmony with the statements of Holy Scripture."

Over the following years, Chief Apostles Fehr and Leber simply stated that the matter of ordaining women was still an open question. There was no official or theologically justified announcement by the apostolate concerning the matter of women and ministry.

### The role of women today and in future

Today, women are active in many different capacities within the congregation. They teach Sunday School or Pre-Sunday School, provide Religious Instruction and Confirmation Instruction, and are also active in working with the youth. Some of these activities have to do with proclaiming the

gospel and making it accessible to others. Together with ordained and non-ordained men, they sing in choirs and thereby bring to expression praise, worship, and supplications in the form of Bible texts and poetry. In this respect, there is a development here that certainly raises the question of whether women can be ordained.

The question of conferring authority on women also arises in light of the teaching that men and women are equally called to be firstfruits or part of the royal priesthood, and that they will all receive a new body like that of the risen Lord. The royal priesthood will reign with Christ in the kingdom of peace and proclaim the gospel. This eschatological vocation, which applies to the future, suggests that both men and women can already today serve for the salvation of their neighbour by way of ministerial authority.

**SUMMARY:** Up until the first half of the twentieth century, women were entrusted with the Deacon ministry. This ceased to be the case in later years, without any justification having been provided. Today, women serve as teachers and youth leaders in the congregation. The question of whether ministerial powers can also be conferred upon women also arises in view of the belief that both men and women are equally called to be firstfruits and thus to the royal priesthood.

### Theological assessment

An examination of the New Testament record from the perspective of ministerial authority and the ministerial mandate shows that it does not address the issue of ministerial authority and offers little argument as to why women should not receive this authority.

The few negative statements, which are mainly found in the Pastoral Letters, refer to the various activities in the congregation, and thus belong in the context of what the New Apostolic understanding of the spiritual ministry calls the ministerial mandate. The Pastoral Letters prohibit women from being active in the church without explaining why they cannot be entrusted with a ministry. The problem of ministerial authority is thus addressed neither explicitly nor implicitly in the New Testament context.

This is surely also related to the fact that the New Testament usually does not make any detailed statements on doctrine. At best, it merely offers hints about the Trinity or our understanding of sacraments, church, and ministry. The development of these subjects into doctrinal positions

only really began in the second century, that is, in the post-New Testament period.

## No distinction in Christ

A theological justification for the ordination of women into ministry can thus only be founded upon anthropological factors (that is, on the basis of human nature) and soteriological factors (that is, on the basis of the human need for salvation). The fact that man has been created in the image of God—this much should have at least become clear—is the hermeneutic key to the question of justifying the ordination of women. Being created in the image of God brings to expression the fundamental relationship of mankind with God and the relationship of God with mankind. Man and woman are both equally created in the image of God and are thus directly related to God Himself.

In anthropological terms, this means that man and woman, woman and man are of the same dignity and have received the same mission from God. “God gave His most distinguished creation a life force and also permitted them to share in divine characteristics such as love, personality, freedom, reason, and immortality” (CNAC 3.3.2). Although man and woman are perfect creations of God in terms of their origin, the fall into sin has damaged both of them equally, so that they are mired in original sin and the inclination to sin. Man and woman are both sinners and are in equal need of God’s gracious care and of redemption. Woman and man are thus also in equal soteriological need.

God’s devotion to fallen mankind applies to both: Jesus Christ died for men and women alike, and the salvation He has acquired applies to both of them together. If human beings can receive salvation irrespective of their gender, then they can also be involved in mediating salvation—insofar as this occurs through word and sacrament—irrespective of their gender.

According to Paul, there was no longer to be any distinction between Jews and Gentiles, nor slaves and free-men, nor man and woman in Christ (Galatians 3: 28). The fundamental fact that all the believers together form the body of Christ, as addressed here by the Apostle, must be clearly expressed as the principle and foundation of the

church and of the mediation of salvation. It must also be considered that the risen Jesus is neither man nor woman, because the resurrected do not possess the characteristic of gender, according to the words of Jesus (Mark 12: 25).

**SUMMARY:** The New Testament statements that speak against the participation of women in divine service and congregational life do not provide any valid theological justification for this. Most of these texts are of an expressly pragmatic character and are bound to their time. It becomes clear that a theological justification for the ordination of women into ministry can only be founded on anthropological factors (that is, on the basis of human nature) and soteriological factors (that is, on the basis of the human need for salvation).

Equal value and equal dignity before God the Creator, no statements from Jesus Christ, and contradictions in the apostolic epistles: this is the result of the biblical inventory. What doctrinal conclusions does the New Apostolic Church draw from this? This will be the subject of the next and final part from the essay on the ordination of women.



# Malawi struggling to recover after cyclone

Destruction, homelessness, hunger: of all the countries hit by the cyclone, Malawi was battered the worst. Relief efforts are underway also by New Apostolic aid organisations. What do the people need? District Apostle Kububa Soko wanted to see for himself.

It was one of the longest lasting and strongest cyclones ever observed: formed off the coast of Australia at the end of January, Cyclone Freddy made landfall in south-eastern Africa on 24 February and battered the region until 15 March. The storm first hit Madagascar, before crashing in to Mozambique and Malawi.

After lashing parts of southern Africa, the storm returned with a vengeance and triggered torrential rains that led to flooding, mudslides, and massive devastation in the southern part of the country. In the first 48 hours alone, the storm dumped as much rain on the region as would otherwise have fallen during half a year. The cyclone destroyed towns, fields, and pastures. It took a devastating toll on 14 districts, almost half of the country.

## Aid response

When we first reported about this in April, the death toll had risen to 700 and was likely to increase. Five hundred people were still reported missing. Weeks after the disaster, chances of finding missing persons alive are slim. Around 660,000 people have been displaced and are living in displacement sites, UN OCHA reports, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.



District Apostle Kububa Soko visits the affected region

Following the disaster, more than 1.1 million of Malawi's nearly 20 million people are dependent on humanitarian aid. Hundreds of thousands of hectares of crops were washed away or submerged and tens of thousands of animals were killed, destroying what the people in the region lived on. Because the infrastructure has been destroyed public health risks have increased. The country now fears a new cholera epidemic because of a lack of fresh water and sanitary facilities, which were destroyed in many places.

Relief operations and emergency programmes have long been underway. Neighbouring countries such as Zambia, Tanzania, and South Africa have sent rescue teams and emergency aid. But often the roads leading into the heavily hit areas have been washed away, making it difficult to reach the people who need the aid.

Europe and North America, as well as the United Nations and the World Bank, have released tens of millions of euros in aid. But UN OCHA estimates that at least 116 million dollars will be needed.

### Helping on the ground

The New Apostolic aid organisations NAK-karitativ from Germany and NACRO from Zambia have joined the many other organisations working to provide aid. For this purpose, a special fundraising campaign has been set up.

The two relief organisations are providing essential supplies to around 6,000 people in the districts of Blantyre and Phalombe. The distribution of food, hygiene kits, and mosquito nets in emergency shelters is being coordinated with other organisations on the ground.

Congregations in Zambia, who belong to the same Regional Church as Malawi, were also active. They donated mostly clothes, food, and medicine to be distributed to the most affected areas in Malawi.

### District Apostle visits affected families

How are the people holding up? And what do they need most? District Apostle Kububa Soko wanted to get a picture of the situation and understand the needs. He travelled to the region at the end of March and visited the city of Zomba and then Chilobwe in the Blantyre district.

It was there that he learned that churches had been destroyed. But above all, the District Apostle spoke to brothers and sisters who had lost loved ones or whose livelihood had been destroyed. He was able to get an idea of what the affected families needed most.

Corresponding donations were launched after his return to the Church offices in Lusaka, Zambia. District Apostle Soko accompanied the shipments to Malawi. They included food, clothing, household utensils, and blankets.



Help underway for affected families



# Good news from around the world

Reunions after a pandemic forced break, anniversaries galore, and a Youth Day chock full of biblical knowledge. These are some news flashes from New Apostolic congregations around the globe.

New Apostolic Church Philippines



When District Apostle Edy Isnugroho (right, on the right) visited Negros Oriental one of the church buildings could not accommodate all the people who had come for the service



## A long walk to church

For almost three years District Apostle Edy Isnugroho was unable to visit the province of Negros Oriental in the Philippines. Covid had made it impossible for him to be there in person and tend to the pastoral needs of his brothers and sisters and to conduct divine services. It was only at the beginning of February that he, accompanied by Apostle Samuel Tansahtikno and Apostle Sigfred Catan, was able to visit the region for eight days. He conducted divine services, met and talked with the brothers and sisters, and participated in organisational meetings.

In the congregation of Tayasan Poblacion, which District Apostle Isnugroho visited on 5 February, so many people had gathered for the service that the church building could not accommodate them all. So most of the participants had to stand outside. In Jimalalud some of the people had walked several hours to be able to attend the divine service there on 8 February. The District Apostle conducted the final divine service of his mission trip on 12 February in the central church in Dumaguete.

## Know how to protect yourself

The seniors and those living alone in the Kempten district in Germany invited a senior citizen advisor from the police



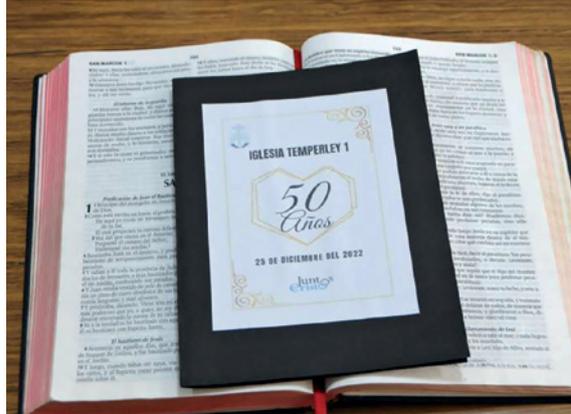
New Apostolic Church Southern Germany

A senior get-together in Kempten in Germany. Cake is always welcome

to their annual kick-off meeting at the end of January to give a talk and offer tips on how to avoid being tricked by a scammer. The officer played phone calls that highlighted how persistent criminals are in wearing down their victims to get at their jewellery, savings, and valuables. He explained the criminal tactics of shock calls, long-lost relative tricks, and promises of goods, services, or other benefits that are non-existent, and showed the seniors a real police badge so they could identify a fake one in case of an emer-

Five congregations in South America celebrated an anniversary in December

New Apostolic Church South America



gency. Then there was coffee and even cake. At the cosy get-together that followed they continued to talk about the advice given them.

### Five anniversaries in one month

As many as five congregations in South America had something to celebrate in December, namely various anniversaries. The congregations of La Calera and Sourigues in Argentina are now 25 years old. On 17 December 2022 Apostle Néstor Manzelli came to La Calera and celebrated the past as well as the coming years with the congregation. Apostle Claudio Videla visited the congregation of Sourigues on Christmas Day. Photo albums and a guest book held plenty of memories that everyone pored over.

The congregation in Cerro in Uruguay already looks back on a forty-year history. The 55 members celebrated their special day with Bishop Fernando Mendá.

Two congregations celebrated their fiftieth anniversary: Cerro Carmelo in Uruguay and Temperley 1 in Argentina. Bishop Fernando Mendá celebrated the special day with

the members of the Cerro Carmelo congregation in mid December 2022. Apostle Pablo Basso visited Temperley 1 on Christmas Day to mark their special anniversary. Here the brothers and sisters had come up with a beautiful idea for a giveaway: everyone received a small loaf of sweet bread to take home.

### Learning can be fun

Some 450 young people participated in a Day of the Youth in Pindegumahun in Sierra Leone at the beginning of December last year. Apostle Freeman Bob Saidu conducted the youth service and based it on John 14: 6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” For after the service, interesting activities had been lined up for the young people such as a seminar on the topic of “The triune God”—based on the Catechism—a Bible quiz, and singing competitions. The young people from the hosting congregation won both competitions, but everyone was a winner because even the second and third place winners received prizes. Everyone was delighted when the ministers distributed the then latest issue of *community*.

New Apostolic Church Sierra Leone



At the Day of the Youth in Pindegumahun in Sierra Leone



Mirco Ulfers



Daniel Rudolph



Oliver Rütten



Frank Schuidt



Oliver Rütten

# Focus on church life

nac.photos is the name of a new media product by the New Apostolic Church International. This is also its weblink. The website shows how the balancing act of evangelising with the camera can succeed.

There are plenty of subjects: children being baptised, couples getting married, people celebrating anniversaries, and all the well-wishers. Then there are ministers in the making and retirees, musicians, choir members, and choir leaders. And of course there are plenty of feelings in a congregation: joy, emotion, intimacy, and warmth.

However, a divine service is an encounter with God. This has to do with contemplation and sanctification, which flourish best in silence. And it also produces intimate moments, which one wants to savour in a safe environment. An inconsiderate photographer can quickly become a disturbing factor—and sometimes a nuisance.

Is it OK to take photos at all in a worship setting? That is a definite yes. “Photos are part of public relations work.” And: “Public relations work is missionary work.” This is what it says on the website which has just been launched. It is full of information how one can accomplish the balancing act of evangelising with the camera and at the same time respecting the sanctity.

## A treasure trove of experience

The expertise comes from Oliver Rütten, who has put all he knows into this manual: over two decades he has taken thousands of photos, has trained hundreds of photog-



Oliver Rütten



Robert Maier



Oliver Rütten



Keefe Seibboudi



Jessica Krämer

“What are some of your most beautiful pictures?” Oliver Rütten asked photographers who take photos in a church setting. The result: moving stories around church services and other events

raphers, and shared his knowledge with many while working as an editor for nac.today. His ebook *Photography in Divine Service* was first published in 2013. Five years later, the New Apostolic Church published an expanded edition—and for the first time an English-language translation. In 2020 a Spanish version followed. And now the same information can also be read in French—on the quadrilingual website nac.photos.

### Practical tips from the field

From communicating with the organisers to making a list of subjects to trouble shooting—this is a book full of practical tips from an expert. Jpeg or raw data? The book deals with technical questions as well as the basics of image design: from the golden ratio to playing with light and shadow.

Fair enough, other books on photography cover the same topics, right? True, but nac.photos does not only discuss

the technical aspects of photography, but also gives concrete tips on etiquette in a worship setting.

- How early communication with the organisers ensures that everything runs smoothly.
- Why it is better to have as few photographers as possible.
- How a good photographer blends in.
- How the camera respects the rights and feeling of those depicted.
- Why the altar area must remain sacred.
- When prayers, sacraments, and acts of blessing can be photographed.

This new media product of the New Apostolic Church has tips and pointers for everyone—both the photographer whose job it is to take good photos, and the congregation who wants to enjoy a divine service and then look back and do some reminiscing.



Laura Fischer (centre) has a farm in Africa (left). She also feels at home in her congregation there (below)



# Slogging away for the future

From Togo to Austria and back. Laura Johanna Fischer lives in two worlds. Several times a year, the 27-year-old travels to the African continent to advance her heart's project there. This is still a tender plant and needs a lot of care.

Laura is on her scooter riding through the city of Kara in Togo. She stands out with her white skin and is always asked for money and surrounded by children. But Laura is used to that by now, she is now in her second volunteer year for a German children's aid society called Kinderhilfe Westafrika e.V. Something else catches her attention: she sees the emblem of the New Apostolic Church. The next Sunday she drives to the building and it turns out that not only does the emblem fit, but so do the service times.

Already a year before graduating from high school it was clear to Laura that she would go to Africa. Just as others were drawn to Australia or New Zealand, she was drawn to this continent.

She applied to the aid organisation, which sent her to Benin. She began her volunteer service in Tanguiéta in the north of the country. Here she taught orphans in a private Protestant school.

She was also able to attend some divine services in the New Apostolic Church, even one with Chief Apostle Jean-Luc

Schneider in Porto Novo, the capital of Benin. "I experienced my faith differently there, more profoundly perhaps, and I realised just how important it is to have faith in God," she says.

She liked Africa so much that she did not want to come back home. She extended her volunteer service and worked in Taiacou at an orphanage.

## Between two worlds

Back in Germany eventually, Laura experienced a culture shock. "They're two completely different worlds," she says. "At first, I couldn't even look out the window while riding in the car with someone. Too many cars going way too fast, huge construction sites, and huge buildings." It took her six months to find her feet again in Germany. And she wanted to go right back. But being on vacation there is not the same. And live there? Rather difficult. "You can integrate as well as you want, but you realise the cultural understanding is different after all. I sometimes missed that exchange there."

## From the neem tree to twenty-four acres

Laura is back in Burkina Faso for her bachelor's thesis. Her topic is: "The neem tree as a natural insecticide in vegetable production (using cucumber and zucchini as examples)." In the process, Laura noticed that the Africans make the same mistakes in agriculture as the Europeans do.

"Europe is a role model there," Laura says. "And instead of avoiding our mistakes, the exact same thing is being done there." That is why the idea is maturing in her mind to push organic farming there now, while the soils are still good. Together with the local project leader Essodigue Igor Harenga, she bought a 24-acre plot of land near Koboyo in Togo, where they grow cassava, yams, millet, sweet potatoes, and much more.



The house that Laura shares with another volunteer in the small town of Tanguiéta in Benin



A street scene in Kra in Togo

The project is Laura's purpose in life. Several times a year she flies from Bregenz in Austria—where she now works in an organic food store—to Africa and brings back organic seeds. She puts all her money into it. The project still depends on donations. For example, the relief organisation of the New Apostolic Church Southern Germany, human aktiv, provided the funds for a solar well.

She would like the project to be self-sustaining soon. Through the harvesting of the vegetables and the processing of food, but also through ecotourism—that is, when others come to their farm to learn more about the project from her. Ultimately, the long-term goal is for more people to grow their crops organically.

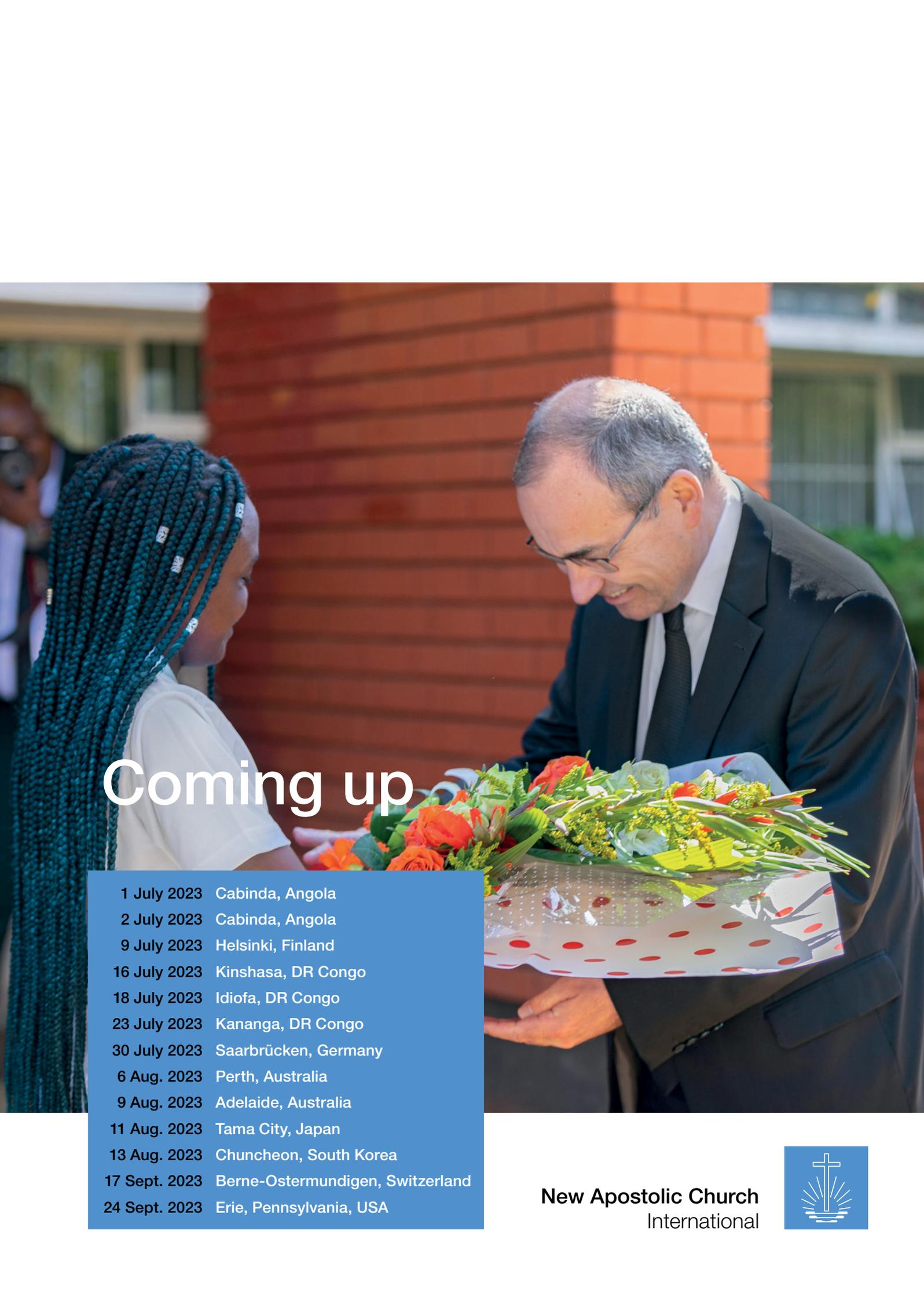
## The Church feels like home

She loves to attend church services in Lomé or Sokodé, which she usually understands quite well because she took French at school. And if she does not understand anything because the sermon is in Ewe, Mina, or Kabiyé, then she just sits there. "But that is fine," she says. The liturgy is the same, the faith is the same, and the songs are the same. "There is a lot of singing in the local language which is accompanied by drums."

When asked where she likes it better, her answer was clear: Africa. Europe, however, offers better recreational opportunities. "Recreational sports don't really exist in Africa yet. It is starting to happen slowly in the big cities, but in the villages people give you funny looks when you put on your running shoes to go jogging."



Laura during her volunteer service in Tanguiéta in Benin

A photograph of a man in a dark suit and glasses, smiling and looking down at a large bouquet of flowers he is holding. He is standing next to a woman with long, dark braids. The background is a brick wall. The text 'Coming up' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# Coming up

- 1 July 2023 Cabinda, Angola
- 2 July 2023 Cabinda, Angola
- 9 July 2023 Helsinki, Finland
- 16 July 2023 Kinshasa, DR Congo
- 18 July 2023 Idiofa, DR Congo
- 23 July 2023 Kananga, DR Congo
- 30 July 2023 Saarbrücken, Germany
- 6 Aug. 2023 Perth, Australia
- 9 Aug. 2023 Adelaide, Australia
- 11 Aug. 2023 Tama City, Japan
- 13 Aug. 2023 Chuncheon, South Korea
- 17 Sept. 2023 Berne-Ostermundigen, Switzerland
- 24 Sept. 2023 Erie, Pennsylvania, USA

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