



Worldwide online divine service planned for Pentecost

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[Home](#) > [Church](#) > [Bulletin board](#) > [Worldwide online divine service planned for Pentecost](#)

Foto: F. Schuidt

Zurich. "Anyone who can attend a divine service in person on Pentecost Sunday should do so," was the clear view of Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider. Nevertheless, there are many Church members for whom this will not be possible. It is for their benefit that the Church leader wishes to organise a collective divine service online.

Usually it is only every two years that Pentecost services in the New Apostolic Church are celebrated as global divine services. It is the Church's publishing house that takes responsibility for these events using its ample technical infrastructure. In many countries, the service is transmitted by satellite, either live or with a time delay. The publishing house has already had many years of experience in this field. Pentecost divine services of this kind have already taken place in various congregations in Africa and Europe, for example, last year in Goslar, Germany.

Divine services as a live stream

However, many things are different now as a result of the corona pandemic. Since curfews and social isolation protocols still prevail in the vast majority of the countries of the world, the usual kind of satellite transmission will not be possible. They will instead be replaced by internet or telephone cable transmission. Since the outbreak of the crisis, Sunday divine services have been streamed—most of them on YouTube—aired on television, or broadcast by radio, specifically in those areas where the Church has made corresponding arrangements with radio stations.

For example, on Easter Sunday, Chief Apostle Schneider preached from a reception area which had been converted into a small chapel in the Bischoff publishing house in Neu-Isenburg. This divine service was streamed digitally, and is estimated to have reached over six million viewers and listeners. And every Sunday since Palm Sunday, the international Church leader has found himself behind the altar in the New Apostolic congregation of Strasbourg, France. There he conducted two sermons in French and one in English. These sermons were likewise circulated online.

Pentecost in English and German

On Pentecost the Chief Apostle will once again preach in English, with German translation at the altar. Many other languages will be mixed in simultaneously. "Primarily," said the Chief Apostle, "this divine service is intended for those members who will not yet have been able to attend divine services in person. Concerning this, the Chief Apostle stated: "Whoever has the opportunity to attend a divine service in person in his own congregation—and celebrate Holy Communion in the process—should definitively give preference to that option!"

After all, the live stream with the Chief Apostle will take place without the celebration of Holy Communion, as is unavoidable at the present time. The Church leader has already made mention of this on several occasions. He too would much prefer to have a divine service that includes the celebration of Holy Communion. He is therefore in agreement with the District Apostles that Holy Communion should be made possible again as soon as possible, even if it is within the framework of very strict guidelines. And in the Easter divine service, the international Church leader expressed the following: “I promise you: as soon as it is possible to celebrate Holy Communion again, we will do so! I long for this too!”

At the same time, however, He made it clear “that Holy Communion is a sacrament which Jesus Christ Himself instituted. He Himself is present in the consecrated wafer. He determines how we are to celebrate Holy Communion worthily.” The Apostles are supposed to administer the sacrament, but they cannot simply manipulate it as they please, or adapt it as they see fit. Jesus instituted Holy Communion as a meal of fellowship—and this condition cannot be met at the moment. That is also how it is stated in our creed, “and this is something we should not change.”

Instead, God is reminding the Church that Holy Communion is a gift of grace that He grants us. We have no right to it. For as long as God’s will dictates that Holy Communion cannot be celebrated, He will nevertheless give us what we need.

Both local and online services in parallel

At the moment it appears that state authorities in some countries might allow the Church to offer a limited range of divine services in the local congregations. This will require a series of hygienic guidelines, which the District Apostles are currently crafting with their respective work groups. It may therefore be possible for members to attend divine services in certain locations on Pentecost. For as long as it remains impossible to have regular divine services everywhere on a congregational level, however, online services will be offered in parallel.

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