desire to cautiously initiate return to normal congregational life, wherever possible

New Apostolic Church International

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Zurich. National governments are currently endeavouring to gradually normalise public life amid the new realities of the corona pandemic. Decisions concerning this will vary by country, and will depend on the extent of the pandemic's impact in each. All churches, including the New Apostolic Church, need to be cautious as they reopen their doors, and must create strict rules in the process.

At present, the regular church service sequence will only be possible on a limited scale. While Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider and the District Apostles are very impressed by the many good ideas that have helped strengthen the fellowship among our members on the congregational level, their desire nevertheless remains to initiate the first steps for a cautious return to normal congregational activity on a local basis. This is a step on which the Chief Apostle and the European Church leaders have agreed. Since the rules will vary depending on the respective national governments, however, it will not be possible to uniformly regulate the Church's approach everywhere. Yet there is one point on which all the Church leaders agree: it would be desirable to have regular divine services in which the congregation can physically assemble around the altar again. Naturally, this will not be possible everywhere, since all divine service gatherings are still prohibited for the foreseeable future in countries such as France, Switzerland, and numerous others in Africa and the Americas.

The District Churches are currently working on guidelines intended to show what things are possible now, and what things might still have to wait. They will adhere strictly to the directions of the respective public health authorities. The familiar hygienic and social-distancing protocols will remain of great importance. Members who have weakened immune systems or who display symptoms of illness are asked to refrain from attending the divine services in person for the time being.

Further decisions resulting from this discussion among the European District Apostles include:

Divine services with both physical and virtual attendance

For as long as it is impossible to offer regular divine services everywhere on a congregational level, online divine services should be made available in parallel. In those church buildings where divine services are indeed permitted, attendance restrictions and social-distancing rules will most likely remain in effect: depending on the respective state requirements, only a certain number of visitors will be permitted to sit in the church auditorium at any given time. This would mean that several divine services would have to be offered in succession. Owing to the different security regulations that will apply in the individual regions, the District Apostles will regulate the further procedure.

Yes to Holy Communion, but with a face mask

The most important news is probably that the various Church offices are working on making the celebration of Holy Communion possible again, albeit within a framework of very strict guidelines. The international Church leader, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider, expressed his feelings about this very topic in the Easter divine service: “I promise you: as soon as it is possible to celebrate Holy Communion again, we will do so! I long for this too!” However, this only seems possible under special conditions, and the exact form these will take is still a matter of discussion. In any event, it will be mandatory for ministers to disinfect their hands before dispensing the wafers, and they will also have to wear a face mask.

Classes to resume

The Church leaders are also very concerned about the resumption of Church instruction such as Confirmation Instruction, Religious Instruction, and Sunday School. However, these classes can only recommence once public school operations have resumed in the respective region, and even then, the well-known hygienic and social-distancing practices must remain in effect. Pre-Sunday School can only be offered again once kindergarten resumes in the local area.

Changes to the divine service schedule

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider regards the forthcoming relaxation of the current social protocols with both joy and respect at the same time. “Society currently finds itself in a critical phase,” he notes. “Nevertheless, I am happy that the opportunity to resume divine services is very cautiously and slowly moving back into reach.”

He has also had to change his personal divine service itinerary: on coming Sunday, 26 April 2020, he will conduct a divine service in the English language in the congregation of Strasbourg, France, which will be streamed to large parts of Africa. In South Africa, the service will be broadcast over the Church’s own television channel, known as “NAC-TV”, and in Zambia it will be broadcast via “ZNBC TV and Radio” (Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation).

A week later, on 3 May 2020, the Church leader will once again stand behind the altar in Strasbourg, this time with a divine service in the French language.

The Pentecost divine service originally scheduled to take place in Buenos Aires, Argentina will be cancelled. Chief Apostle Schneider has notified the District Apostles that the divine service, along with the District Apostle Meeting originally scheduled to precede it, will both be postponed.

23 April 2020