New Apostolic Church International

“Trusting in God during these difficult times”

OR

photo: O. Ruetten

An interview with Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider on the implications of the corona crisis

Zurich. The topic on everyone’s mind over recent days has been the corona pandemic. Every day, the reports bring us more bad news. What does the Chief Apostle of the New Apostolic Church have to say about this? He turns to his brothers and sisters with an appeal to trust in God.

Chief Apostle Schneider, the corona crisis is causing people around the world to hold their breath. To date, many people on all continents have been infected or even died. Do you have a message of comfort?

I take this crisis very seriously. According to global estimates, some 11,400 people have already died as a result of the corona virus, and approximately 275,000 are currently infected (as at 21 March 2020; for current figures see: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html). And unfortunately there will still be many more victims. We share in the suffering of those affected, and we pray for them! We thank all those committed individuals who are the front lines to help people. It is truly beautiful to see how many people are prepared to help others in such situations.

It is at such times in particular that we can learn from our members who have already experienced great suffering in the past:

- according to my original plans, I was supposed to be in Indonesia next week. In that nation, over 2,500 people lost their lives in the course of two earthquakes. The inhabitants of these islands had no way of protecting themselves from those invisible dangers.

- I sometimes complain a little because I have to stay at home as a result of the curfew in France. In Africa there are hundreds of thousands of people—among them also many of our members—living in refugee camps, where they are more or less detained as well.

- the corona crisis will unfortunately also have dramatic economic consequences in many places. And this will—as always—first and foremost affect those who barely have anything in the first place. This concerns me greatly! Here I cannot help but think of the 75,000 members from the Kasaï region (Democratic Republic of Congo) who lost everything—absolutely everything—within a single week in 2017, and who had to flee to another country or into the jungle.

- yes, it is true that we can no longer gather for divine service. That hurts. Yet even here, I think back to just a few weeks ago when I was in Western Africa. Christians there are being killed just for attending a divine service.

- and I am also reminded of our brethren—be it in Russia or in the remote islands of the Pacific—who only have the opportunity to enjoy regular divine services with the celebration of Holy Communion every few weeks or perhaps even months.

I am not saying this in order to downplay the corona crisis. Quite the contrary: I just want to call upon all of us to learn from our brothers and sisters who live in such circumstances in these countries. Why have they been able to remain so strong despite all of these challenges? It is because they are deeply rooted in Christ. Their love for the Lord—that is their secret! In these difficult times we experience today, we become aware that various matters which still occupied or burdened us a few weeks ago have suddenly become totally unimportant. Now the most important thing on our minds is to preserve our relationship with Christ!

Let us remain firm in our love for God. The Lord will always find a special way to help those who love Him. The promise of God remains: all things—even the corona crisis —work together for good to those who love God (see Romans 8: 28).

You yourself are not allowed to travel at the moment. What do the next two weeks look like for you?

Due to the limitations imposed on us by the authorities, I have had to cancel all planned trips until 10 April. At present, no one knows how the situation will unfold after that. I will thus have to adjust to the situation just like everyone else—but I am not without courage or hope: I know that God is with us and that He will not abandon His children, especially in difficult situations. Just have courage: things will go on.

Church life has practically come to a standstill. It is scarcely possible to have divine services. What do you advise our brothers and sisters?

Stay at home and make the best out of the situation. Wherever possible, the District Apostles have managed to arrange for our members to receive divine services at home by transmission. We do not know why God has permitted such a situation. But I am certain that this time of spiritual deprivation will help us recognise more than ever just how important the divine services, the ministers, and Holy Communion are to us!

And there is no celebration of Holy Communion in these central divine services by transmission?

That is correct. These divine services will be conducted in accordance with the usual liturgy, only without the celebration of Holy Communion. It would be inappropriate if only a small few of our members were able to celebrate Holy Communion, while

thousands of others participating in the divine service from home would have to do without.

Couldn't the sacrament still be celebrated according to our practice in divine services for the departed, in which two proxies take the wafers on behalf of longing souls?

A number of brothers and sisters have already suggested this in the last few days: the officiant could dispense Holy Communion to two ministers who could then take it on behalf of the members in the receiving sites. After careful consideration, and in consultation with the District Apostles of Europe—who were the first to be affected by this, after all—I have decided not to follow this suggestion.

Why not?

Holy Communion is a sacrament, the salvific effect of which is described in our Catechism (CNAC 8.2.20). We cannot simply change the manner of its dispensation pragmatically in order to suit our current needs. It is part of the responsibility of the apostolate—in particular of the Chief Apostle—to preserve the holiness of Holy Communion! As concerns Holy Communion for the departed, we are convinced that these acts of salvation can and must be dispensed to the departed. The only way to do so is to involve the living in order to represent the souls in the beyond. But this approach cannot be applied to the living. We must eat Christ's body and drink His blood by worthily receiving the wafer consecrated and dispensed to us by a priestly ministry (cf. the Seventh Article of the New Apostolic Creed).

And there is no other way to make consecrated wafers available ahead of time either?

For many years in our Church we have been familiar with this practice: believers receive consecrated wafers so that they can also celebrate Holy Communion even in the absence of a minister. For example, this is the approach used for those who receive pastoral care letters. However, this practice must also remain an exception. It can by no means replace, in a fully valid manner, the celebration of Holy Communion in the fellowship of the believers. It must be clearly stated: a celebration of Holy Communion that consists of a believer at home watching a person on a screen taking a consecrated wafer on his behalf, does not have the same effect for salvation as a true celebration of Holy Communion.

So what would you recommend to the members?

I know that many members will have to do without Holy Communion until the end of this pandemic. I share their suffering, since I am, after all, likewise confined to my home until further notice as a result of the curfew. However, particularly in these times of distress, let us trust in God. Let us put our trust in God—He always knows how to give those who love Him that which is indispensable for their salvation!

Chief Apostle Schneider, thank you very much for this interview (PDF).

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