

# community

The New Apostolic Church around the world

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## Going to church

### *Editorial*

Why we go to church

### *Divine service*

Everyone is free to go through

### *Doctrine*

True faith has a future

New Apostolic Church  
International



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# Why we go to church



New Apostolic Church International

Every time we gather for divine service, we express our desire and resolve to be with Christ.

We all experience different things during the week. But on Sunday we come together for divine service to profess, “I want to be with Jesus.”

This is what we tell ourselves, what we tell others, and what we tell the devil. We also testify and profess that we belong to Christ and want to model our lives on His. Many things can happen during the week, and the devil wants to use them to create distance between us and God. But then we come together for a divine service to demonstrate clearly, “No, we are always looking to be close to Him. You can do whatever you want. You will not divide us. We want to be together in Christ and enter the kingdom of God together.”

And every time God sees our desire and determination that we seek this closeness, that we want to be with Christ, He grants us a special blessing. He grants us His peace and strength.

With warm wishes

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

Jean-Luc Schneider

# Everyone is free to go through



John 10: 9

*"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."*

Beloved brothers and sisters, we are very grateful to our heavenly Father that He made it possible for us to gather here this morning. I am really happy to experience this divine service with you. I take the opportunity to express my deep respect and my profound gratitude to you for your faithfulness and your work. For the work you do steadfastly and faithfully for your own salvation and in serving the Lord in His church. Honestly, you are doing a great job as disciples, as ministers of the Lord. And I am absolutely convinced that God will complete the work you are doing for your salvation and for the church. The Lord Jesus will complete the work that He has begun in you and in the church.

Our Bible text is an extract from a well-known passage of Holy Scripture. Jesus introduces Himself here as the good shepherd, but He also says, “I am the door.” It is a little complicated because the two images are mixed up. On the one hand He says that He is the shepherd of the flock, and on the other that He is the door of the sheep pen. To make it a little bit easier, we will deal with the image of the door today, and not with the shepherd.

Jesus says that He is the door to salvation. That is a very important statement of the Lord and constitutes the foundation of our Christian faith.

To be saved means to be able to enter the kingdom of God and to have eternal fellowship with God. And there is only one possibility, which is to believe in Jesus Christ. We must believe that He is God the Son who came on earth. We must

believe in His sacrifice and believe that we cannot be saved without His sacrifice. We must believe in His teaching, the gospel. It is not enough to just believe that this is the truth, we must also act in accordance with the gospel. We must believe that He will come back to take us with Him. Without Him we cannot enter the kingdom of God. Only those who believe and follow Jesus Christ can have fellowship with God. Jesus is the door. There is no other door.

## *Jesus opens up the possibility for us to enter the kingdom of God*

Then Jesus says that anyone who believes in Him, will go in and out. This image describes the freedom of the Christians. Through faith in Jesus Christ and through Holy Baptism and Holy Sealing, those who believe have been delivered from the dominion of sin. They have become free in Christ. And that is not a theory. That is something very important and meaningful for us because Jesus told the believers, “See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it” (Revelation 3: 8). Those who have been baptised with water and the Spirit can enter the kingdom of God, and no one can prevent them from doing so. No human

being, no power, no spirit can close this door. As a matter of fact, that means that our salvation depends on us alone. Those who have been baptised are free in Christ and have the possibility to enter the kingdom of God—and everything depends on us and our own

decisions. We can therefore not say, “We are victims of the evil one. He was so aggressive that we just could not remain faithful.” No, no one can close this door. If so, it was we ourselves who decided not to go through it. This is one of the most important passages of the gospel.

Once you have answered the call of Jesus Christ and have been baptised, you are free and can be saved—if you wish.





It is up to us. It is so comforting to know that as long as we want to remain faithful, God will help us to do so. That is the liberty of believers. And then Jesus says, “If anyone enters by Me, ... he will go in and out and find pasture.” We must go through the door, through Jesus Christ, to find food. And I guess in Japan it is the same as everywhere else in the world. There are plenty of doctrines and theories and they are in competition with the gospel. But it is not the task of the Chief Apostle of the New Apostolic Church to approve these theories or to say, “This one is good, that one is bad.” There are many theories on how to become rich and happy in life, how to become wise, how to become successful. And I am quite sure that if we were to talk about this subject we would never come to an agreement. Everyone has their own idea of how to become happy on earth.

What does wealth consist in? For some it is money, for others it means happiness in the family. And for someone else it is something else. That is definitely not the business of Jesus and not the business of the church. But when it comes to our salvation, the only way to obtain the food to be able to enter the kingdom of God is to go through the door of Jesus Christ. That means following His gospel. So when it comes to our private life, we can do whatever we want. But if we want to enter the kingdom of God, there is only one way to obtain the food we need, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Believers will go through the door of Jesus Christ

and find the food they need for their salvation. This door opens the possibility for us to enter the kingdom of God. Because even despite all our efforts, we will not manage to become worthy to enter the kingdom of God.

To enter the kingdom of God, we must become like Jesus Christ. He is the first man, the first human being, to enter the kingdom of God. And the only solution for us is to become like Him so that we can enter the kingdom of God. But we cannot make it on our own. We are poor sinners and cannot be as perfect as Jesus Christ was. So let us put all our hope in His grace, which He will grant us when He returns. And this also puts us in the right frame of mind. The only possibility to enter the kingdom of God is for Jesus to grant His grace to those on His right hand (Matthew 25: 34). Without His grace, we cannot make it. He is the door.

Maybe one last thought about salvation. Jesus is the door, and He will be the judge. On His return, He will decide who can enter the kingdom of God, who will receive the grace to do so. He will consider our decisions, our longing, and our determination. He will not consider our sins, but He will consider our guilt. He will look at our love and our faith. And He will be the only one who decides whether to accept us—or not. As a matter of fact, don't worry about what people say about us. Don't worry about the opinion of the majority. We don't care. The only thing that matters is



## *Please use the door of prayer*

what Jesus thinks about us and what He tells us. Everything else is just not important. It doesn't even matter what your Apostle thinks about you. Because the ministers are only human too. They have their ideas, their cultural backgrounds. What is important, however, is Jesus Christ. He is the judge. Don't worry, He will not ask the Chief Apostle who should be accepted or not. And for some that is comforting. He looks at our love, our sincerity, our longing for salvation. He is the door to salvation, nobody else. To be saved, we must go through the door of Jesus Christ. We must believe in Him. But we are free.

We must decide anew each time whether we want to go through this door. Nothing and nobody can prevent us from entering the kingdom of God. The decision is ours alone. The only way we can obtain the food we need to enter the kingdom of God is through the teaching of Christ, which He gives us through the apostolate and Holy Communion. Because Jesus said, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6: 54). We must go through this door in



order to be saved: the preaching of the gospel and the celebration of Holy Communion. Don't worry. Let us put our hope in the grace He will grant us when He returns. And we don't care about what other people think of us. What matters is the opinion of Jesus Christ.

So that is the aspect: Jesus is the door to salvation. I would like to mention another aspect. Jesus should also be the



District Apostle Edy Isnugroho from South-East Asia spoke about deciding for God

door in our daily life. You know, sometimes there are situations that seem hopeless, and you see no way out. You may find yourself in a difficult situation and it looks like a dead end. And you just do not know how to get out of this situation. Here too, let us use Jesus as the door. What does that mean in concrete terms? When we go through trials and face difficult situations, we should remember that the ultimate and true solution is the return of Christ. God wants to save us. He wants to deliver us from all afflictions, from all tribulations, and take us into His kingdom.

It is normal that we ask for His help when there are difficulties. But let us take a closer look at Jesus as the door to salvation. First of all, His help consists of making sure that we can enter the kingdom of God despite these tribulations. That is His help. When we are sick or when our wife, husband, or child is sick, it is normal that we ask the Lord for help. And we hope. Sometimes God answers such prayers, and sometimes He does not. And to be honest, I have no idea why He answers prayers in one case and not in another. But I can tell you from my own experience that He always provides the help the soul needs to remain faithful despite these trials and afflictions. May we be aware of this.

God's help therefore consists primarily in helping us to remain faithful. When Jesus was on earth He too found Himself in situations in which there was no way out. And it is striking that He used the same door each time, so to speak. He withdrew and prayed to His Father. And going through the door of prayer helped Him each time. Because

He prayed, He received the help, comfort, and wisdom He needed to go carry on.

Brothers and sisters, every time we are in a difficult situation and there seems to be no solution, no way out, please use the door of prayer. It is always worth going through this door. Praying always helps. Let us also use the door of Jesus Christ to solve our problems. Let us remain faithful and keep His commandments. I know I preach that almost every Sunday. And I never tire of repeating it. Today, the world offers so many doors to get us out of difficult situations. And from a human point of view, these doors are a solution. But these are solutions that solve our earthly problems. And they pose a risk to our salvation. Let us not go through a door that implies that we no longer keep God's commandments. Whatever situation we may find ourselves in, let us use the door of obedience to the commandments. It is a small door and a difficult path. But our salvation is a priority. We want to be saved, so let us not be satisfied with another door. You know that that can become very concrete very quickly: a small lie and then everything becomes much more comfortable. Let us go through the door of the commandments of God.

The crucifixion was definitely a dead end for Jesus Christ. He could not understand the will of His Father. And for Him there was just one door that remained open: He trusted His Father. I will say it in my own words, "My God, I don't understand You. Why have You abandoned Me? But I trust You. I surrender myself to You. I accept Your will." Brothers



Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider with ministers



and sisters, in many difficult situations this is the only way to get out of a dead end: let us simply accept the fact that we cannot understand God's actions. And the only way we can move on is to trust in God without understanding Him, without asking any questions. I know. I have experienced this too. It is not easy to go through this door. But this is definitely the best way to leave a difficult situation behind.

There is another door: the door of love for our neighbour. Jesus used it several times. Remember the disciples who failed Him? Jesus used the door of forgiveness. And that solved the problem. Let us use the door of forgiveness. Each time you decide to forgive somebody, you can be sure that you have made the right decision. To forgive is never wrong. Use this door of Christian love and forgive your neighbour. Use the door of Jesus Christ and do good things instead of repaying evil with evil. For many people it is normal to seek revenge when someone offends or hurts them. Revenge is the easy way. Let us use the other door instead. It is a smaller, but much better. Answer evil with good. This is the door that leads into the kingdom of God and leads us out of difficult situations.

The door of Jesus is a door of neighbourly love. Even at the end of His own life, Jesus went through this door. He wanted to go back to His Father, but He did not want to go back alone. He did not forget us. He did not forget His

neighbour. He even cared for the criminal who was condemned with Him. He cared for His family, for Mary, for John. He prayed for those who killed Him. And He died for us. He did not want to go through the door of salvation alone. He wanted us to come with Him. Let us follow this path too and go through this door. Let us not just claim God's help for ourselves. Let us not be selfish. Whatever happens in our lives, let us always look out for our neighbour. And let us be aware that we do not want to be saved alone. We want others to be saved with us. Jesus has saved us, and we want to use His door. And each time we use this door we will be blessed.

## CORE THOUGHTS

**Jesus Christ is the door to salvation. He delivers us from evil, nourishes us, and grants us grace. In trials and afflictions we follow the example of Jesus.**



The Chief Apostle visited the brothers and sisters in Portugal last November



# The individual counts

For God, it is the individual who counts: every single person. The example of the Ethiopian treasurer shows on whom, how, and why God bestows His salvation. Here are some extracts from a divine service for the departed.

The Bible text for the divine service on 5 November 2023 in Portimão in Portugal was taken from Acts 8: 30–31. Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider went on to explain:

*The Ethiopian said that he did not understand what Isaiah was saying. So Philip began and explained the whole gospel to him.*

We read the book of our life, we read in the book of world history. I must say, “My God, I don’t understand anything any more! The only true and definitive answer is the message of the gospel, the teaching of the Apostles who interpret the Bible for us and proclaim the gospel in the proper manner. The Apostles always tell us, “You must see the whole picture, the whole plan of redemption. And you must see your life and what is happening in the world in this light. That is the only key to understanding God.

*The Ethiopian did something very clever. He asked Philip to join him in the carriage and travel with him.*

Let us take this message of the Apostles, the whole gospel, with us into our everyday lives. Think about what God has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. Then you will be strengthened and comforted.

*The treasurer was from Ethiopia. He was not a Jew and therefore not one of the chosen people. Through him God showed that salvation is truly for everyone.*

It does not matter where a person comes from, what their cultural background is, or what their past was like: salvation is for everyone, here on earth and in the beyond.

*He was a ruler, was rich, and someone very important.*

Salvation is for the poor, for the insignificant ones, but it is also for the powerful and for the rich. No one is excluded.

*As he was castrated, the Ethiopian was not allowed to enter the temple. He was excluded.*

In this world and in the beyond there are so many souls who are rejected by others because for one or another reason they are not like them. But this is not the case with God! He loves everyone equally and wants to offer them all the same salvation.

*At the time, people imagined that if a person had no children, he or she would disappear into nothingness. They wanted to show the eunuchs: you are worthless. You are only there because you are of use to me.*



Unfortunately, this is often the case in our society. We no longer see people as human beings. When they are no longer of any use, they are thrown away. God is perfect. He needs no one; but He loves everyone and wants to give salvation to everyone.

*The Ethiopian treasurer had no future, no hope. He knew: when I die, I disappear.*

How many people live on this earth today who do not have the slightest glimmer of hope for a better future. God says, yes, there is hope for you. He wants to offer salvation to all human beings.

*Why could God offer the Ethiopian salvation? Because this man had the right attitude. He had power and was rich. But he was looking for something else. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship God in the temple, where he brought his sacrifice and read the Scriptures—and then he was still searching.*

Let us think about the souls in the beyond. Many thought: I have money, I have power, I am fine. Then they arrived in the beyond and realised: all of this is useless. Let us think of the believers. They believed in God, read the Bible, and did good deeds. Then they arrived in the beyond and realised: that's not enough! They lacked the rebirth out of water and the Spirit, the sacraments dispensed by the Apostles.

*The treasurer's reaction was good. He allowed himself to be taught.*

However, we do not know who in the beyond is chosen by

God to hear the Apostles' teaching. The important thing for these souls, however, is that they accept this message. They can receive baptism with water and then they are no longer on the fringes of the church, but members of the body of Christ. Those who are sealed are given the great hope of entering the kingdom of God as firstfruits. Souls can celebrate Holy Communion and have perfect fellowship with Jesus Christ.

What is true for them is also true for us: Jesus loves you and wants you to be with Him forever, and He makes sure that all human beings have the opportunity to achieve the same.

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Acts 8: 30–31*

**“So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.”**

# The Saviour and His helpers at work

God the Father sent His Son into the world to save all who believe in Him. And Jesus Christ still sends His disciples into the world today to help along. The Chief Apostle recently explained how this works.



NAC USA

The divine service on 24 September 2023 in Buffalo, New York, was transmitted to the entire working area of District Apostle Leonard Kolb. The District Apostle, who is also the president of the New Apostolic Church USA, retired on that day. Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider appointed District Apostle Helper John Schnabel as his successor.

## The Son of God was sent into the world

The Chief Apostle based his sermon on John 3: 17. He explained that the “world” in this Bible text is a reference to the sinful human beings who have rejected God, who are hostile towards God, or at least indifferent to God. God has also sent His Son to them, the Chief Apostle said.

And then comes this great message: “God loves these people. He loves them even though they have rejected Him, left Him, and distanced themselves from Him—and do not accept Him.” But God sent Jesus to them, who told them, “God loves you.”

## God wants to save humankind

“And that was something quite new,” the Chief Apostle pointed out. “Because in the Old Testament, God was seen in a different way.” He was seen as a judge who was kind to the righteous, but punished sinners with calamities such as the flood, droughts, or famine. This was also how the contemporaries of Jesus would have perceived God. “But Jesus said, ‘No, I have not come to punish them. I love the



The retired District Apostle Leonard Kolb, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider, and District Apostle John Schnabel

world. I love the people who have rejected God, who are indifferent to Him, who are hostile to Him. I have come to save them.”

The Chief Apostle went on to describe how God wants to redeem human beings. Through forgiveness of sins: “When God saves human beings, He forgives their sins, He cleanses them.” Through sanctification: “The work of the Holy Spirit is to transform people into the image of Jesus Christ step by step.” And through glorification: “The entire human being—body, soul and spirit—can enter the kingdom of God and can have fellowship with God and one another.”

Salvation will be bestowed upon those who believe in Jesus. And that means

- one must believe in His divine sonship: that He is truly the Son of God, not just a prophet, not just a preacher. He has been sent by God and He is the Son of God.
- one must believe in His teaching. He tells the truth. He can do more than bring about miracles.
- one must believe in His person, in all that He has been through.
- having true faith in Jesus which results in deeds motivated by love.
- one must believe in His Apostles whom He has sent, in the church which He has established, and believe in the sacraments which He announced and instituted.

### Jesus sent His disciples into the world

“Allow me to go one step further,” the Chief Apostle said. “Now we come to ourselves.” God has sent us, His children and disciples, into the world. We have been sent into a world dominated by sin and evil. And we have to suffer and deal with the consequences of the fall into sin like all other human beings. In this context, Christians are called to contribute to the salvation of others.

God is aware of the rejection, indifference, and hostility towards Him, but He says, “You have to deal with all of these things. I have sent you into these conditions on purpose. Now, here, I want you to serve Me. I want you to proclaim My true will. I want you to help others experience My love and tell them that God wants to save them. I want you to commit yourself to make sure that forgiveness and sanctification remain possible and accessible for humankind.”

In conclusion, the Chief Apostle addressed the congregation as follows: “You have been sent into this world, into these conditions, to serve the Lord and to contribute to the work of salvation so that human beings can continue to have access to forgiveness and sanctification and be glorified.”

## CORE THOUGHTS

*John 3: 17*

**“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”**

God sent His Son into the world to save those who believe in Him. Christ sends us into the world to contribute to the salvation of humankind.

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider is welcomed by children and a choir in Kibungo in Rwanda



# Earthly and heavenly Jerusalem



“Leave Jerusalem,” the Chief Apostle urged the congregation. Shifting one’s perspective and actively seeking eternal life was the focus of a recent divine service in Rwanda.

On 21 January this year, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider conducted a divine service in Kibungo, about 100 kilometres south-east of the capital, Kigali. Approximately one thousand people attended. The Bible text he read served as a reminder that one day everyone will have to leave this earth. This is not a very pleasant thought, the Chief Apostle said. We might even think, “It’s terrible to be told that we all must die.”

However, this fact should not frighten us, but rather make us aware once again that we need to prepare for what comes after our earthly existence. “Our life on earth is a very small part of our existence. There is an afterlife. But what we do while we live on this earth determines the rest of our existence in the afterlife.”

The Chief Apostle said that none of us know how much time we have left on this earth and urged the brothers and sisters, “Don’t wait! If you want to do something good for your loved ones, do it now. You don’t know how much time you have left.”

## God’s will

Even if our body and earthly life will pass away, this does not mean that Christians must be out of touch with reality. “He gave us our life, our body, and our strength for us to use, and He wants us to benefit from this life.” He wants us to take our place in society. He wants us to work towards our happiness and success on this earth. And He wants us to contribute to the well-being of our fellow human



NAC Rwanda

beings and our children. But always in a way that God's will is fulfilled.

Because only those who have learned to do the will of God will then also be able to enter the kingdom of God, the city to come.

## Leaving the old Jerusalem

In verse 13 of Hebrews 13, the author urges the people to go outside the camp, to leave Jerusalem, because Jesus is to be found outside. The Chief Apostle then went on to explain why it was important to leave this city.

Jerusalem is the city that rejected Jesus. The attitude of the people in Jerusalem was: the Messiah must solve our problems here on earth. Jesus, on the other hand, said that His kingdom was not of this world and that He wanted to bring eternal life. So even today's believers must give up the idea that Jesus is here to perform miracles and improve our earthly existence.

Jerusalem was also the city that demanded that Jesus punish sinners. To enter the city to come we must leave this old city, this point of view. The Chief Apostle exhorted the congregation, "Leave the Jerusalem where Jesus is expected to perform miracles and punish the sinner."

## Seeking the city to come

"This city is yet to come. We can't see it yet. The only proof we have is the word of God and the promise of Jesus," Chief Apostle Schneider pointed out.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you," Jesus says. To be able to enter this city, we must seriously seek it, Chief Apostle Schneider said. "Jesus said that He would give eternal life only to those who hunger and thirst for it. In other words, those who really want it."

This is why we must implore God in prayer: "Pray without ceasing."

We can ask the Lord for this in prayer because we know that the Lord will answer this prayer because He is praying the same thing. This request is in complete harmony with God's will. "We ask for it for ourselves and for our neighbour. And we ask God to bless His church and complete it because it is in the church of Christ, through the apostolate, that He wants to give human beings eternal life today."

Those who seek in this way, need fellowship with God already now: "We need to talk to God every day, on a regular basis, and entrust our joys and sorrows to Him."

Perfect fellowship with God also includes our fellow human beings: "We learn not to wait for others to change so that we can love them, but to love them as they are. Because we must prepare ourselves for eternal fellowship with others, we must learn about eternal fellowship today."

## CORE THOUGHTS

*Hebrews 13: 14*

**"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."**

We believe in eternal life and make it the goal of our lives. Our preparation consists of praying, doing the will of God, worshipping and praising Him, seeking fellowship with Christ and His own, and serving Him until His return.

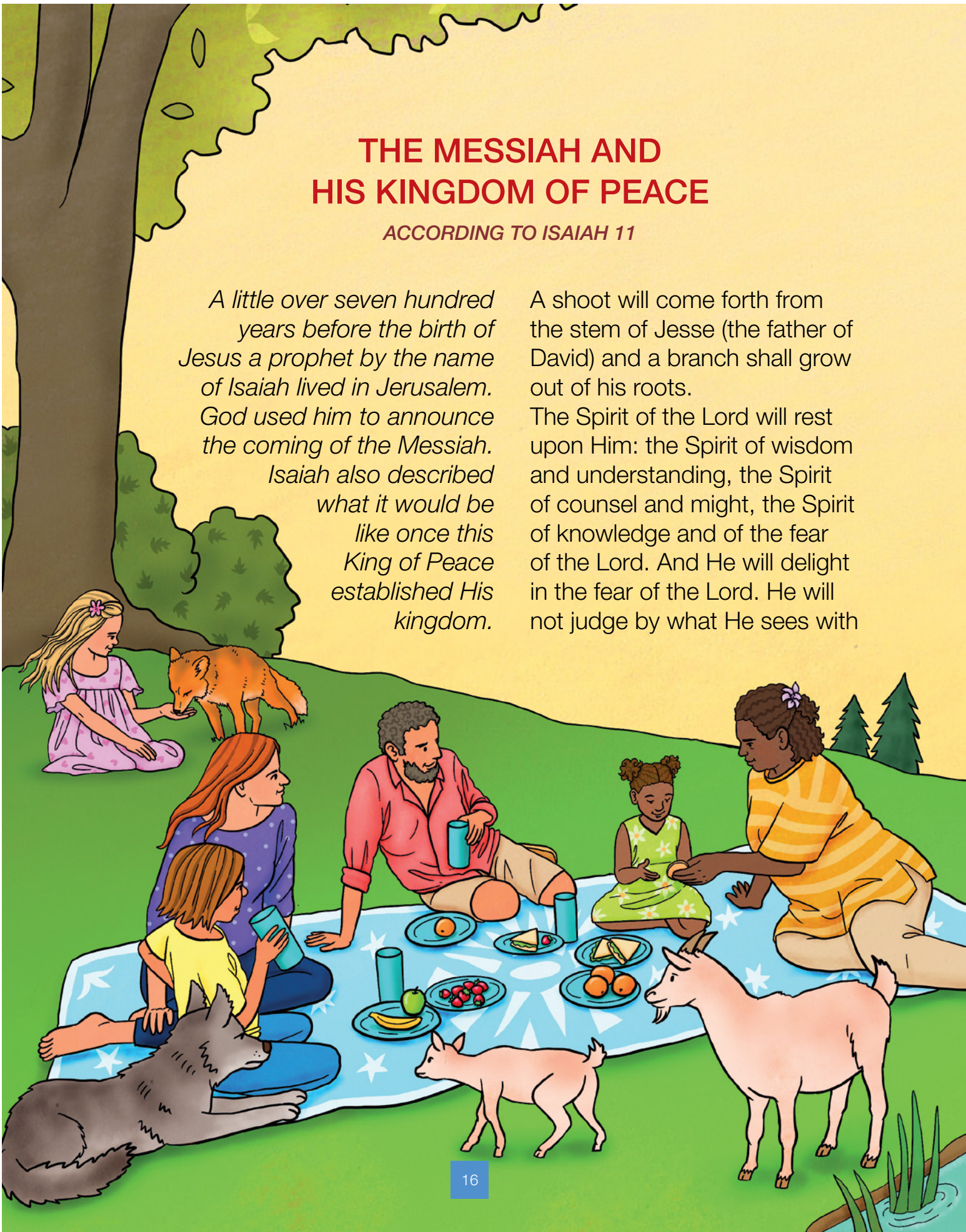
## THE MESSIAH AND HIS KINGDOM OF PEACE

ACCORDING TO ISAIAH 11

*A little over seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus a prophet by the name of Isaiah lived in Jerusalem. God used him to announce the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah also described what it would be like once this King of Peace established His kingdom.*

A shoot will come forth from the stem of Jesse (the father of David) and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. And He will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what He sees with





His eyes or decide by what He hears with His ears.

He will judge the poor with righteousness and bring justice to the poor of the land. He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be His belt and faithfulness the sash of His waist.

The wolves will live with the lambs, and the leopards will lie down with the goats. A little child will herd calves and young lions and cattle together.

Cows and bears will graze together and their young ones will lie down together. Lions will eat

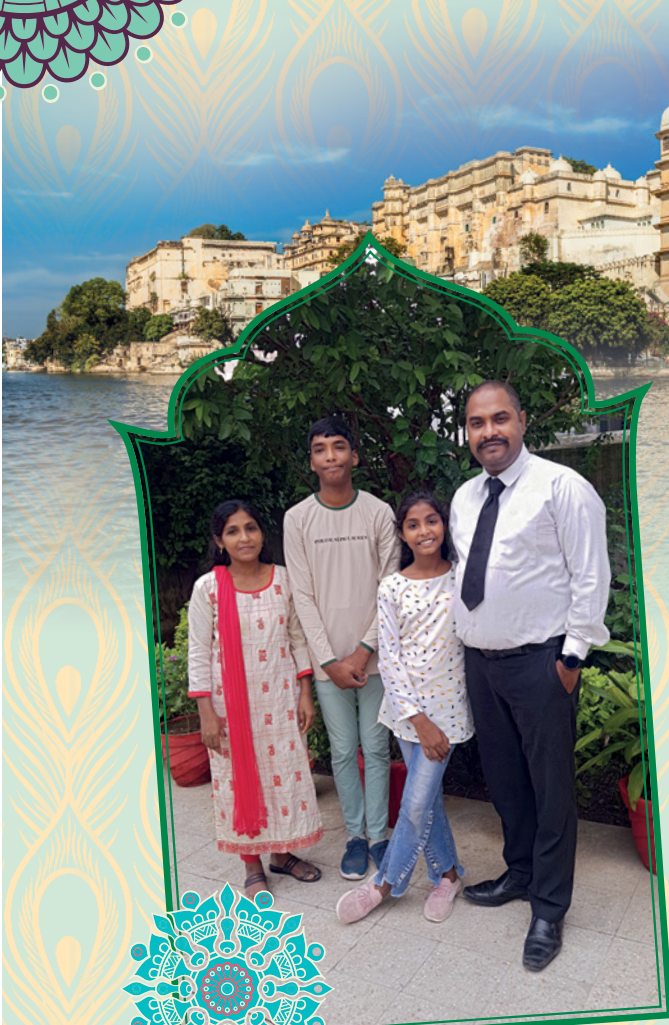
straw like the cattle.

An infant will play by the cobra's hole, and a toddler will put his hand in the viper's den. No one will do evil. There will be no more sin on God's holy mountain. The land will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is full of water. It will come about at that time that the shoot from the root of Jesse will stand as a sign for the nations. The Gentiles will seek Him, and His resting place will be glorious.



## AT LOWREANA'S IN ABU ROAD, INDIA

My name is Lowreana, but everybody calls me **Ruchi**. I am thirteen years old and live in Abu Road, a small city in the state of Rajasthan in India.



**India** is one of the largest countries in the world, with a population of 1.4 billion people. Most Indians live in rural areas. Of every one hundred Indians, 67 live in rural areas and 33 in urban areas—like my family.

My **father's** name is Bhaskar. He serves as a Shepherd in our congregation. My **mother's** name is Aagnesh. She is a primary school teacher and is very strict about our school work. She is also our Sunday School teacher. I still have an elder **brother**. His name is Richard. He loves to play cricket and is a district level player. I don't like cricket, but I love my brother very much.

Our congregation is one of the oldest New Apostolic **churches** in India. The Church was started from here, and the first members to be sealed in India were from here. I find that the best part of church is Sunday School where we get to learn about God. We are eight children and two teachers.



I go to a private school which is very close to our house. I have many friends, but only a few are my best friends. I love to **roller skate** and recently I got second place in a school skating competition.

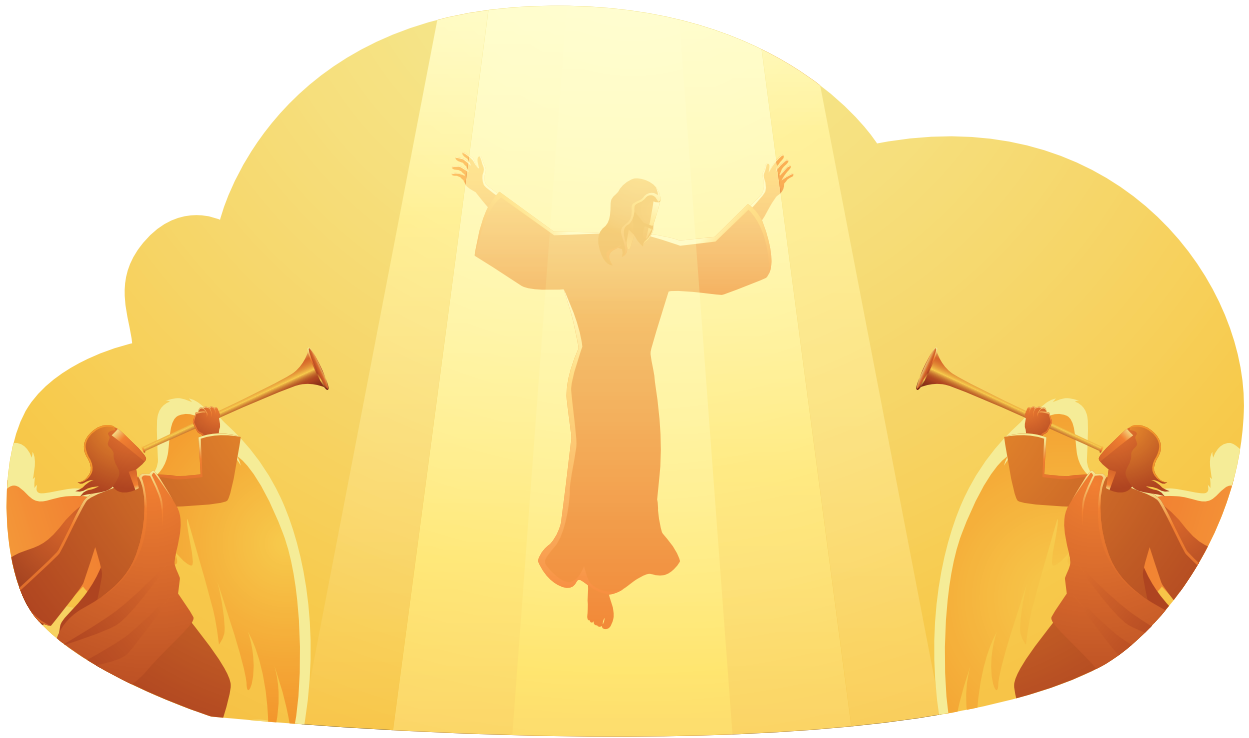


Most Indians eat little or no meat. Indian dishes are flavoured with lots of spices and sometimes they are very spicy. We are used to this and like it. Although I like all vegetables my favourite is **ocra**. In India we call them lady fingers.



My father works in a factory. He is off on Saturdays. I always look forward to this because we go on outings. My favourite place is **Shantikunj Park** because it is a very big garden and there are also some rides.





Art: rudal30/stock.adobe

# True faith has a future

“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18: 8) Obviously Jesus was not afraid that there would be no one left to believe in Him by the time He returned. He had absolute trust in His Father, and He knew that the future would be perfectly in line with the divine plan of salvation. In posing this question, Jesus simply wanted to underline the importance He will assign to faith upon His return. In order to be accepted as firstfruits in the kingdom of heaven, it will not suffice to be born again out of water and the Spirit. We must also be animated by true faith.

## Faith in the word

In order to be saved, we must believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came to earth to bring us eternal life. Belief in Christ implies belief in our own resurrection, in eternal fellowship with God, and in the new creation. Without this eschatological dimension, the Christian faith has no reason for being. Unfortunately, eternal life at times plays a secondary role for Christians. For some, Jesus Christ is primarily a person who can solve their problems. For others, He is merely an ethical point of reference, and His teaching is simply one way—among others—to do good.

Faith in God consists of having unconditional, unshakeable trust in His word. Adam and Eve fell into sin because they did not believe the word of God. Abraham was blessed because he was able to believe without having seen. Because they were incapable of believing without seeing, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was reproached by the angel, just as Thomas was reproached by Jesus. To believe is also to adhere to the divine truth, even without understanding it. God is not asking us to give up all human knowledge, but He does suggest that we take the path of faith in order to access truths that elude human reason.

## Faith in the return of Christ

In order to be accepted by Christ at His return, we must obviously believe in His return! Unfortunately, this belief is not shared by everyone. A significant part of Christendom no longer regards the return of Christ as a real event, a divine intervention at a specific point in history, but rather as a spiritual process unique to each believer. For proponents of this teaching, the idea that human beings living on earth could suddenly be transported to heaven is not-

ing short of utopian. We are strongly opposed to this interpretation. He who brought about the incarnation of the Son of God, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the ascension of Christ can also bring about the first resurrection!

In order to be genuine and true, faith in Christ's return must be based on His word alone, not on signs. The prophets of the Old Testament foretold the birth and activity of the Saviour in great detail. But the fulfilment of these prophecies did not elicit faith among the Jews. On the other hand, those who believed Jesus' word later came to understand that everything the prophets predicted had come true.

The Bible makes quite a number of statements concerning the return of the Lord, but it would be foolish to try to determine when the return of Christ will occur, or to try to describe how it will take place, on the basis of these predictions. The important thing today is to believe in the promise. When He comes, the firstfruits will be able to say, "Indeed, everything has come to pass exactly as God has told us!"





## Faith is put to the test

In his determination to separate us from God, the evil one seeks to destroy our trust in the word of God. That was how he approached Adam and Eve in Paradise, and how he dealt with Jesus in the desert. He also attacks us, especially when we are in trouble, in order to make us doubt the word of God.

God allows such temptations because they can contribute to our salvation. God is omniscient—He does not need to test us in order to know our faith or to choose who will be saved. The trials permitted by God are designed to enable us to appreciate the strength of our faith on our own, to be aware of our limits, and to make the necessary adjustments.

This process can be seen all along the history of salvation. In the Old Testament, God tested the people of Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8: 2–5) to strengthen their faith in the word they had received. He allowed them to suffer hunger in order to teach them that man does not live by bread alone, but by the word of God. He deprived them of water in order to teach them to trust in His word. The New Testament tells us that the early Christians were tried and tested so that their faith could be strengthened (1 Peter 1: 6–9).

It is in this light that we must understand the difficulties we face today. Concerning this, Paul states: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10: 11–12). Our trials do not herald the Lord’s return—they prepare us for it. They are to enable us to take the measure of our faith.

One of the greatest tests that God imposes upon human beings is that of patience. Abraham had to wait for decades before God’s promise to give him a son was fulfilled. Centuries passed before God sent human-kind the Saviour He had foretold to them.

The Lord has promised us that He will return soon, and still He has not returned. Is our trust in this promise still intact? True faith is resistant to the erosion of time.

## Faith without visible proof

Like Abraham, let us trust in God’s promise and in His goodwill regardless of the way things seem. We have been taught that it is indispensable for our salvation to receive Holy Communion. And yet God has permitted all of us to be deprived of it for quite some time. How do we explain this paradox? We do not know. But is this a reason to give up our trust in the teaching we have received? True faith is not affected by unanswered questions.

Jesus was able to resist the tempter in the wilderness as a result of His absolute trust in the word of God. He expects His own to have the same trust in His word. He does not approve of the attitude of those who ask for signs in order to believe in Him (Mark 8: 11–12; John 4: 48). It is easy to believe in the apostolate when the number of sealed believers is continually growing. But what happens to our trust in the apostolate when we see that the attendance in some of our churches becomes smaller and smaller? True faith has no need of visible signs. It relies solely on the word of Jesus. And Jesus has promised to be with His Apostles to the end!

## Faith is very personal

Faith creates a particularly strong personal relationship between the believer and Christ. Christ lives in those who live by faith in Him (Galatians 2: 20; Ephesians 3: 17). Our attachment to Jesus is decisive for our salvation. We value and appreciate our encounters with other believers, we take pleasure in the activities we share with them, and we enjoy participating in major events organised within the Church. All of these things bind us to the Church and to one another, but what saves us is our connection with Christ. At times God puts us to the test to allow us to verify that our connection is indeed with Christ. For example, He can make it so that we can no longer gather together, participate in activities, organise large events, or attend divine services. At times He even allows us to be disappointed by members of the Church. It is in such circumstances that we can examine the strength of the personal bond that unites us with Christ!

Once again, God does not test us in order to make us fail or to humiliate us. He wants us to have a proper appreciation of our faith and wants us to be able to react before it is too late. The right reaction consists of coming to Him in humbleness and saying: "I believe! Help my unbelief!" (Mark 9: 24). God will always respond favourably to this prayer!

Let us always recognise our afflictions as trials permitted by God. They give us the opportunity to verify the strength of our faith. Let us examine ourselves without complacency, and let us humbly ask God to strengthen our faith. He will do so. After all, as Apostle Paul wrote: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10: 13).



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# Prayer works everywhere

Prayer has always been an important part of our lives, but this year it became just a little bit more so thanks to our motto. Here are some stories on how our brothers and sisters from different countries have implemented this year's motto "Prayer works!"



NAC Ghana



The children of the Accra East and West districts in Ghana came up with something special for the New Year service: they welcomed the Apostles Benjamin Ohene-Saffo and Addo Charles Asare as well as the ministers of the two districts by presenting a short play on the annual motto. The members from the congregations of the two districts gathered in the Accra Central church on 7 January 2024 to celebrate the divine service together. Here, as in many congregations around the world, the sermon focused on the Bible passage: "Pray without ceasing!" (Thessalonians 5: 17). "For most of us, prayer is part of our salvation," the Apostle said. "We need to talk to our Lord in heaven with-

out ceasing. In order to reap the benefits and results from praying, we need to know how, when, and where to pray." He reminded the large congregation that Jesus always intercedes on our behalf.

## Prayer works together

Members of different denominations gathered to pray for Christian unity on Friday evening, 19 January 2024 in the New Apostolic Church in Harburg, Germany. Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the New Apostolic Church met with the managing director of the Council of Christian Churches Bavaria (ACK), along with many believers. During the devotional, the managing director of the Council of Christian Churches emphasised the importance of ecumenism. Diversity is enriching, not only between Christian denominations, but also between individuals. There were songs of thanksgiving and blessings. Donations were collected for Christians in Burkina Faso. After a final prayer, everyone stayed to enjoy some food and conversation.



NAC Southern Germany

## Prayer works at the interdenominational level

Christians of different denominations came together in Emmeloord and Apeldoorn in the Netherlands to pray together. As part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,





NAC Emmeloord

Christians from Emmeloord were invited to the Nieuw Jeruzalem Church. About thirty people had come and were led through the evening by the pastor of the Protestant Church and a Priest from the New Apostolic Church. The theme was: we open our hearts to those we do not see. Afterwards there was still time for conversations while enjoying a cup of coffee or tea. On Saturday evening, 20 January 2024, there was an ecumenical celebration in the Lutheran Church in Apeldoorn. Music was provided by members of the New Apostolic Church. After the interdenominational prayer, people stayed on to get to know each other better.

### Prayer means connecting with God

Children from the Cologne East district in Germany learned about the importance of a good connection with a conventional corded telephone. On 28 January 2024, children aged six to fourteen met in the church in Cologne Rath for their first children's service in 2024. The officiant explained how a telephone call works and then transferred this image to prayer. He emphasised that God can be called upon at any time and that He is never busy.

Two children were allowed to try out a string telephone to show how important a good connection is. A model ear drum was intended to encourage the children to tell God everything. Together, the young congregation worked out the effects of prayer and how one feels afterwards. It is important to trust in our prayers, even if we may not always like the answers to our prayers. After the service, everyone stayed for a special lunch.



NAC Western Germany

### Praying together has a unifying effect

Protestant, Catholic, and New Apostolic Christians met for a day of prayer in Schwetzingen, Germany, on 28 January. It was the seventh time this year that the Christian churches in Schwetzingen celebrated the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The 2024 motto of the New Apostolic Church fit in perfectly with the motto of the ecumenical Week of Prayer: "Praying moves, praying unites, and praying works". In the joint divine service, a minister of the New Apostolic Church also gave a short talk on the Bible passage 1 Thessalonians 5: 17: "Pray without ceasing." Then prayers and intercessions were recited together. The hosting church not only provided a delicious lunch, but also a worship element on the topic of "Praying with modern songs" afterwards. In the Protestant community centre there was a meditative dance lesson on the theme "Dancing in prayer", and in the New Apostolic Church there was a devotional that focused on our annual motto. Priest Uwe Lang used the Lord's Prayer to explain the motivation behind prayer to the numerous guests. The choir of the congregation sang some songs.



NAC DRC Congo South-East



Frank Schuidt



# Wafer bakery reopened

The bakery has moved. The new facility is only 150 metres down the street from the old one. Technologically, though, it was a leap into the future. The new facility in Bielefeld, Germany, was reinaugurated in March. It is one of several bakeries owned by the Church and produces communion wafers for congregations in around sixty countries.

“Wafer bakery parcels to be collected at Kammerratsheide No. 8 from now on”. This is what the sign said in the window of the old bakery, directing collection and delivery drivers to the new building next door.

## Making wafer production future-proof

The production facility which had been in use since 1990 was getting on in years. “It was simply worn out and technically obsolete,” Michael Block says to explain the reason for the new building. He is the production manager of the wafer bakery. The Church was faced with the question: should we reconstruct and modernise or build a new bakery? Although the previous property had been leased, it was decided to build a new bakery on the property of one of our decommissioned churches in the immediate vicinity.

Construction of the new facility began at the end of March 2023. In addition to a modern production hall and logistics area, office, storage, and social spaces for the employees

were also needed. The baking machines and storage silos were already installed in November 2023.

The move to the new facility took place in January 2024 and test production began. It was high time. “Our pre-produced supply of wafers was running low,” Michael Block says.

The new facility is also sustainable: heat is supplied to the building via heat pumps and electricity is produced via a photovoltaic system on the roof. The three employees are looking forward to working in the new wafer bakery, “With new equipment and a new building the wafer bakery is optimally positioned to supply congregations in many countries with wafers for decades to come,” Michael Block says.

## How flour becomes a liturgical element

Water, flour, and a little lecithin. These are the only ingredients. The batter is mixed for 45 minutes and then applied

to the baking trays in thin strips. Fully automatic and software-controlled, the engraved top plate lowers itself onto the batter and ensures that the familiar letters A and Ω (alpha and omega) are visible on the wafers. The sheets then move into an electrically heated oven.

To prevent the brittle wafer sheets from breaking after baking, they are exposed to steam before they are punched out. In between, the wafers receive their characteristic three drops of red wine in the sprinkler. “We use real wine for the wafers,” Michael Block explains. “It is an everyday wine from the discounter, nothing fancy.” What is important is that it is a dark red colour so that the three drops of wine are clearly visible on the wafers.

The wafers make their way to the packing station where they are deposited in standard-sized boxes by an automatic weighing system. There are around 1,650 wafers in a box. When there are twenty boxes, the shipment is ready for dispatch. They weigh around eight kilograms and are shipped to sixty countries around the world.

## Wafers for the whole world

“We need wafers for the celebration of Holy Communion. They are a very important material element of the liturgy,” District Apostle Rainer Storck says. He manages the New Apostolic Church Western Germany, to which the wafer bakery belongs. Before outsourcing production to external companies that cannot fulfil the specifications, we prefer to

do it ourselves, he says. This is why there has been a wafer bakery in Bielefeld since 1919.

The biggest customer is the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the country with the largest New Apostolic population. But not all countries in which the New Apostolic Church is represented can be supplied from Bielefeld. Today there are wafer bakeries in Bengaluru in India, Lusaka in Zambia, Cape Town in South Africa, and two facilities in Uruguay.

## Fixing problems

The Church management and the tradespeople involved learned all of this and more at the opening ceremony on 4 March 2024, and shortly afterwards the Apostles and guests attending a service the Chief Apostle conducted in Minden, Germany. They were given a tour of the new facility and Michael Block also explained some of the challenges that have arisen. For example, the wafer sheets had to be made thicker because the wafers were too brittle when they were punched out, or the amount of batter had to be adjusted. “We have to make sure that the wafers arrive in the congregations in one piece, even after many thousands of kilometres,” Michael Block says.

It was a new experience for District Apostle Rainer Storck. “I have already dedicated many churches during my time as District Apostle, but never a wafer bakery,” he said in his speech.



Michael Block, the manager of the bakery

Celebrating the reopening of the wafer bakery





# Between trauma and resilience

It was the deadliest natural disaster in the history of the Philippines. Super typhoon Yolanda left deep scars. Here is a look back by the aid organisation NAC SEA Relief and a look at what remains of the distress caused and the aid that was provided.

The super typhoon, also known internationally as Haiyan, slammed into the archipelago on 8 November 2013. More than 6,000 people were reported dead while another four million people lost their homes and livelihoods. These figures are cited by the NAC SEA Relief Fund, the humanitarian agency of the New Apostolic Church South-East Asia.

“I can still remember the smell ... death all around,” Marlene Holman recalls, then still Datario, who was on the front-lines in those days for the aid organisation. “Most of the people I spoke with were in shock. I remember panicking inwardly because I felt I wasn’t doing enough to help the people around me,” she says, describing what many first responders experience.

## The community of aid workers

Such memories were brought back recently when a delegation from NAC SEA Relief made a visit to the island of Leyte, which was hit first and hardest by the cyclone. Numerous memorials and mass graves keep alive the memory of the suffering of those days. At the time, professional organisations and countless NGOs flocked into Leyte from all over the world.

“Enormous work was done. Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist organisations showed solidarity, and governments—local, national, and international—were part of rebuilding,” the retired District Apostle Urs Hebeisen says, who is president of the aid agency. “At NAC SEA Relief we tried



to identify those who had not been reached by anybody,” he explains.

### Emergency aid and reconstruction

Emergency aid was provided in the first weeks and months. Dozens of volunteers distributed emergency parcels containing rice and other essential food and hygiene products to the people.

The reconstruction phase soon followed: building a village for a Christian community and rebuilding public schools. Livelihood assistance and equipment for health centres was provided. The organisation’s biggest project was accomplished in Sitio Codilla near Ormoc: thirty residential units in around 20 sturdy houses. People who had lost everything in the storm found a new home there and were able to go back to farming.

NAC SEA Relief was only able to shoulder this with help from NAK-Humanitas of Switzerland and NAK-karitativ

of Germany, who were involved in rehabilitation and relief work “with unprecedented investment”, as District Apostle Hebeisen points out. “We feel humble pride to be part of a team that goes to the grassroots and starts working from there towards the community,” Marlene says.

### Still in resistance

The stench of death has long since vanished and people have rebuilt their lives. Nevertheless, life is still full of challenges for most Leytenianos: “Those who survived continue to survive each day,” as Marlene puts it.

Indeed, talking to villagers reveals that the traumatic experience of that fateful November day is still alive in their memories. “But Filipinos would not be Filipinos if they would not have come to terms. What a resilient people,” Urs Hebeisen says. Since Yolanda, six more typhoons have hit the region.

Afua in front of our church in Birmingham (left) and with other members (right)



Afua Ampong

# Cold weather, warm hearts, and open doors

Far from home, but at home in faith: Afua Ampong moved to England to study. It is so different to Ghana, where she has lived most of her life. Fortunately, the members in the New Apostolic congregation opened their hearts, and she has found a spiritual home.

It is 9.34 a.m. on a Sunday morning and the church doors in Birmingham are not open. Afua Ampong is confused. Did she get the service times wrong? It is cold, only 15 degrees Celsius. With cold fingers she taps away on her mobile phone to call someone. Fred Quansah-Haylse laughs when she tells him why she is phoning. “The door is not locked, open it.” Because of the cold weather in England, the church doors are kept closed, but they are not locked.

Afua is not used to this from her home congregation of East Legon in Ghana. The doors are always wide open there, whether the sun is shining, it is raining, or the harmattan—a dry wind—is blowing. This is not the only difference Afua has had to get used to in her new home.

## The road abroad

Afua lived with her family in Ghana’s capital Accra, where she was a member of the East Legon congregation until about a year ago and was a Sunday School teacher. She

studied political science at the University of Ghana from 2017 to 2021 and attended the campus congregation for the duration of her studies, where she was also very active. After her compulsory year working for the National Communication Authority of Ghana, she enrolled to study international relations at the University of Birmingham.

## Something familiar in a strange place

Afua did not have to make a new beginning in Birmingham all alone. “I have relatives in Birmingham whom I visited from time to time” And her faith also gave her security. When she moved in with her relatives, she found that the church was less than a 20-minute walk away. She also knew someone from another congregation in Ghana who had moved to the United Kingdom: Fred Quansah-Haylse. “His family has basically known me since I was born,” she says. “Before I came here I got in touch with him and it turned out he actually lives in Birmingham. It was really nice to see a familiar face here.”

## “I was blown away by the brothers and sisters”

The first time Afua went to church in Birmingham with no expectations at all. “And the brothers and sisters just blew me away,” she says with a smile. “The way I am treated in the congregation, the way we respect each other as family, that makes me always want to do my best.” She feels loved in the congregation. “They want me to be happy because they understand that I am far from home. That’s why they make sure I don’t feel sad or lonely.”

That is why she let herself be persuaded to sing in the choir, although she had never intended to do so. And she is involved in youth work and plans excursions. In the process, she has learned about one of the main differences between England and Ghana. “When I say in Ghana, ‘Next week I am planning this and this,’ then everyone will be there. Here in England I have to plan something months in advance to make sure everyone will have time that day.” Why is that? “For Africans, religion is part of our core, an integral part of society. It is something we grew up with.” In Europe, she has noticed, that faith has a different status. It is not such an important part of peoples’ lives.

## Foreign yet familiar

Asked about the differences between Ghana and England, Afua says, “I think everything is different. In Birmingham it’s usually cold and in Ghana it is usually hot and sunny. The culture is different and how people relate to each other.” But one thing is the same, she says. “The way we love to go to church and worship together, it is the same in Ghana and England. There’s no difference.”

Of course, there are differences, for example in the size of the congregation, when to wear black and white, and calling the rector by his first name. Afua says she would never do that in Ghana. But the most important thing, faith, is the same both here in England as well as in Ghana.

## Eating together

“One thing I miss about Ghana is the food,” Afua says. Waakye is a typical Ghanaian dish with rice and beans. “Recently I saw a video online of someone having that at home and I was like, I really miss that,” she says. She also misses her home congregation, especially the children whom she taught in Sunday School. “Teaching the children, learning from them, and interacting with them was one of the good experiences in my life.”

And then there are our Christmas parties. “On Christmas Day or a few days after we usually have a party outside the church. Just cook, eat, and laugh.” She was therefore worried about being lonely on her first Christmas in England. But the rector of the Birmingham congregation and his family invited her and a few others from the congregation. He is South African, his wife French. Afua enjoyed the multicultural food and spending time with friends and his family.

## “You have to make a conscious decision”

Birmingham is a multicultural congregation, and food is not the only tell-tale sign. People are constantly talking about how something is done in their home country. “It has taught us to respect one another and one another’s culture,” Afua says. “We understand that we are different people, but we have come together in one church and we believe in one God and we worship the one God together.”

Afua says she has learned to become independent and wants to live her life in England in a positive manner. Her faith and the members in her congregation have contributed to this. She has a tip for anyone who moves to a foreign country. “Surround yourself with people there who can help you grow in faith. Pray so that the Lord can direct you.” And aside from the conscious decision that one has to take, she says, “You yourself must want to live your life in this positive manner and work towards it.”



Afua in Ghana with her youngest sister (left) and a good friend (right)



# Coming up

- 7 July 2024 Kyiv or Lviv, Ukraine
- 14 July 2024 Lubumbashi, DR Congo
- 19 July 2024 Yerevan, Armenia
- 21 July 2024 Tbilisi, Georgia
- 28 July 2024 Memmingen, Germany
- 16 Aug. 2024 Mwanza, Tanzania
- 18 Aug. 2024 Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- 14 Sept. 2024 Kinshasa, DR Congo
- 15 Sept. 2024 Kinshasa, DR Congo
- 22 Sept. 2024 Ostermundigen, Switzerland
- 27 Sept. 2024 Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia
- 29 Sept. 2024 São Paulo, Brazil

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