

Health, growth, completion

Vision



New Apostolic Church USA

District News

www.nac-usa.org

Summer 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Wow! What an extraordinary Pentecost!

The Holy Spirit awakened many powerful impulses through both of our Chief Apostles bringing new understandings into our lives. Allow me to focus on just a few that introduce this edition's articles.

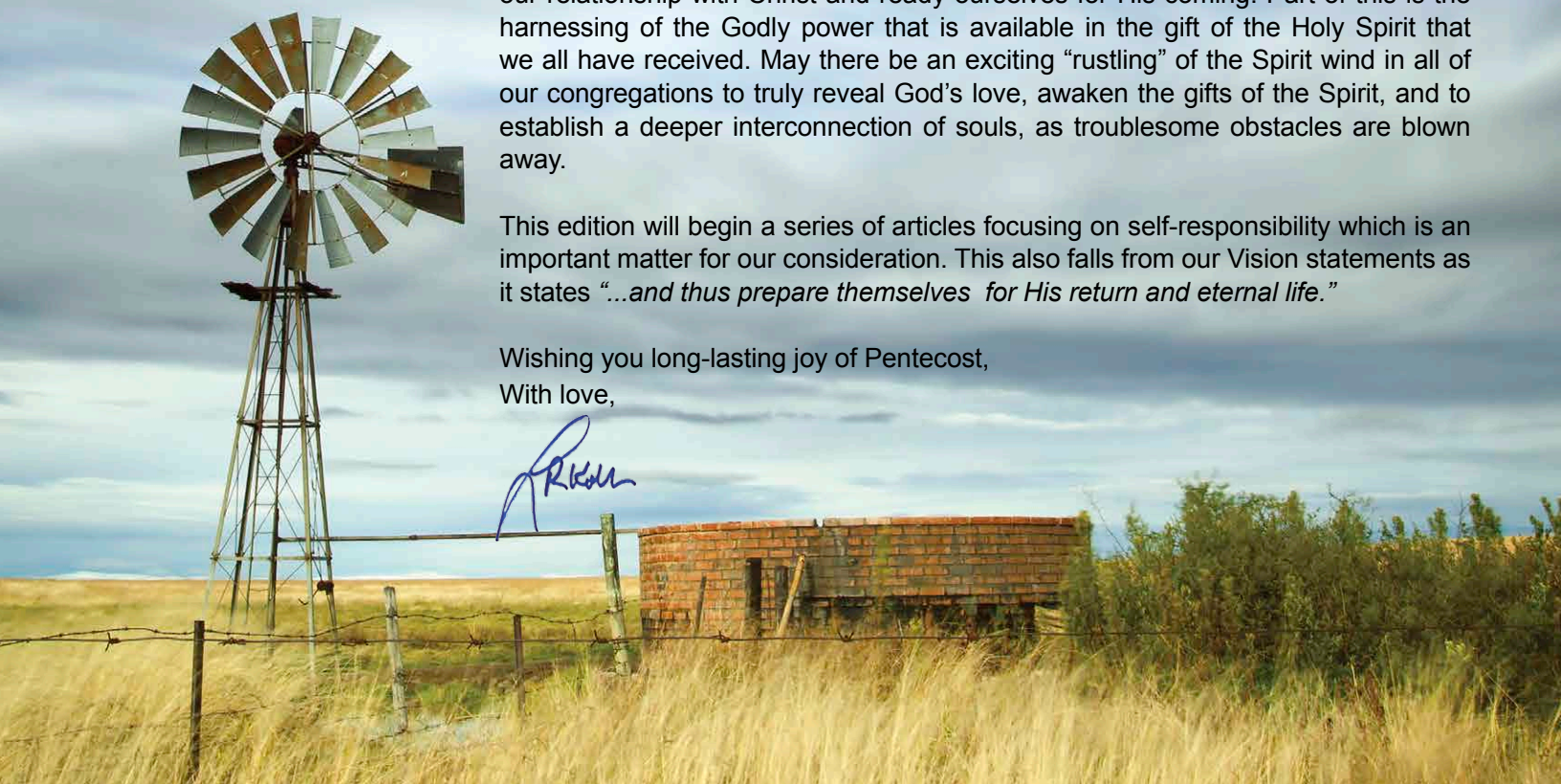
Taken out of Isaiah 62:11, Chief Apostle Leber proclaimed - *"See, your salvation comes!"* Let us hold firmly to this message about the Lord Jesus Christ; He will intervene! Perhaps not in a way we have planned, but nevertheless He will move according to His plan and we will then be able to perceive His actions and care. It is good for us if we can see this as a divine reality and look for the intervention of the Lord in our lives; in dark moments of loneliness and grief, in times of confusion and searching for solutions, in days of intensive activity and concern. In all times, let us be aware and watch how and when the Lord will come into our situations and bring His "salvation" or in other words, His resolution.

Further, Chief Apostle Schneider highlighted the Vision statement of our church and clearly stated this as our program for the future. As you well know, this simple statement is the foundation of our strategic plan, Stepping Forward. I am happy that our Chief Apostle will guide us further into this vision so that we all may deepen our relationship with Christ and ready ourselves for His coming. Part of this is the harnessing of the Godly power that is available in the gift of the Holy Spirit that we all have received. May there be an exciting "rustling" of the Spirit wind in all of our congregations to truly reveal God's love, awaken the gifts of the Spirit, and to establish a deeper interconnection of souls, as troublesome obstacles are blown away.

This edition will begin a series of articles focusing on self-responsibility which is an important matter for our consideration. This also falls from our Vision statements as it states *"...and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life."*

Wishing you long-lasting joy of Pentecost,

With love,



A JOURNEY OF SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

Recently, I was asked to write an article for the 2014 Our Family Yearbook on the subject of “peace”. This article contains an important thought that I also wanted to share with you in this edition of the Vision. It is prompted by the writings of Apostle Paul to the Romans. In the 12th chapter he gives advice that is now 2,000 years old but is remarkable in its freshness and relevance within our contemporary struggle to live and lead like Jesus Christ. I offer this article to you in its entirety as the first in a continuing series of perspectives with a common theme that revolves around our **self-responsibility** to transform our lives according to the gospel of Christ. -LRK

So much of peace is an attempt to resolve conflict requiring the reconciliation between two minds. For example, there is conflict in families as parents attempt to teach their children values and establish rules of the household. A form of peace may be attained when children conform to their parents' wishes. Naturally, the tension and conflict increase as children grow older and begin to assert their own minds.

Likewise, this can happen in a community where laws are established for the peace and welfare of the residents.

Interestingly, in the USA the police who enforce conformity to our laws are sometimes called “peace officers”. Sometimes there is conflict between the peace officers and those who assert the right to be “free minded” and who reject conformity.

This word conformity is quite interesting. In a sense, we acquiesce to the wishes or demands of another outwardly. Conformity does not require us to change inwardly; our mind can remain locked within our original thinking and often the very act of conforming against our will takes our peace away and leaves us with inner conflict. Indeed, we might raise a legitimate question:

Does conformity create peace or does it simply create order?

This leads me back to some of my early memories within the congregation where I grew up. We often sang during our fellowship: “Behold, O how pleasant when all

the brethren dwell, on earth in peace and oneness and love each other well”. This simple hymn links peace with Christian oneness or being of one mind; the mind of Christ. Now that is a wonderful ideal to strive for! But how does this unique “state of mind” take place?

Growing up, my youth leaders and ministers, motivated by their love for my soul, often used an excerpt from Romans 12:2 as an exhortation to keep us safely sheltered within the walls of the congregation. “Do not be conformed to this world!” they told us. But they defined “this world” as physical locations outside the church; places that we shouldn't visit and activities that we shouldn't engage in.

There is of course wisdom in avoiding influences that bring evil into our lives and I am eternally indebted to these faithful men and woman who, out of the love of Christ, counseled me and wanted to protect me. However, I am convinced that God intended a deeper understanding and a higher path when He prompted this writing from the Apostle Paul via His Spirit.

Firstly, the power of this Bible verse is found when read in its entirety:

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)*

To transform within the spiritual context is a much larger and complex process than to conform. It is the process of inner change; a self-responsible journey and a metamorphosis producing a new creature with a new mind, the mind of Christ. The old creature is Christ-less, the new creature is Christ-like.

Next, “this world” in this sense is not just an external location; perhaps the Apostle Paul was also describing the condition of our inner self, our “old mind” which is the product of our humanity. It has been tainted by sin and the influence of evil. It contains our inherited predispositions, as well as the biases, judgments and prejudices we have learned from our earliest days. Our old mind is self-serving and self-promoting. It is where our human arrogance and self-righteousness reside. Is it any wonder that peace and oneness are so elusive? Perhaps from this perspective we can also understand more clearly the enigmatic warning of Christ: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” (John 3:3)

So what is this journey of transformation; the process of “becoming Christ-like”? Perhaps it can be compared to the caterpillar that changes and “becomes” a beautiful butterfly also through a unique metamorphosis. Although gradual and continual, the scientists have charted the stages of this transformation. Likewise our transformation has necessary stages that together bring us to a renewed inner state:

- **Rebirth:** The first stage of being reborn is to receive the Spirit of God through Holy Sealing. It is the immeasurable gift of a divine new life and the seed of change.
- **Knowing, understanding and believing the Gospel of Christ:** We embark on a life long journey of discipleship that requires a thirst for knowledge and a source of Gospel teaching. Jesus gave us the source in the Great Commission: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.* The apostles are thereby charged with the task to proclaim and illuminate the Gospel.

- **Courage to struggle against ourselves and fight the good fight:** We must be brave to squarely face and recognize "this world" within us while perceiving the new creature described within the truth of the Gospel. We become dissatisfied with the way we are, renouncing the old and striving to become the new. Apostle Paul described the personal inner honesty required for this struggle.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

- **Absolution and Holy Communion with Christ:** In a remarkably intimate moment within each divine service, He grants us forgiveness and shares His body and blood of the new covenant, a combination of grace and the divine power that made Him victorious over sin and death. Thereby we too have the strength to be victorious over our old self.

Without this divine empowerment, we would be left to our human resolve and capabilities. At its best, mankind has proven incapable of changing in this way to satisfy God. But with this precious combination of grace and power, every soul can be assured that **they can change, according to the "perfect will of God"**! No inherited trait is too powerful, no cultural norm or tradition is too binding and no spiritual wound suffered in the harsh moments of life that has darkened our mind and shaped our thinking is too debilitating. The perfect will of God for you and me is a wondrous mystery. He has offered His grace for that which is truly beyond our capabilities. It compensates for our individual differences and the unexplainable injustices that we may experience during life.

What is the result of this transformation? It creates a visible change within all aspects of our life. We do not need to leave "this world" and live a cloistered existence. Instead we have renewed our minds and

transformed our lives in a very measureable way wherever God has placed us. Our story of a changed life becomes a personal, living testimony; a profession of the power of Christ's victory and its relevancy in today's contemporary world.

When we strive to become Christ like, are we not of one mind? Oneness with Christ creates oneness with each other. Let me conclude with one last excerpt from the writings of Apostle Paul. In Romans 12: 9-18 he describes how a renewed mind in Christ leads to peace with one another under the simple caption "behave like a Christian".

Let love be without hypocrisy... Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble... Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:9-18) -LRK

CREATING FLAGSHIP CONGREGATIONS

The purpose of this article is to provide a clearer understanding of the concept of flagship congregations. Please remember that the goal of our plans called Stepping Forward is to create healthy, growing congregations that prepare us for the return of Jesus Christ. It has four distinct and very spiritual objectives:

- Improving the quality of the **divine service experience**
- Improving the quality of our **pastoral care**
- Creating a congregational **culture** of leading and living like Christ
- Creating a sustainable **structure**

We are planning the formation of flagship congregations in every region of the NAC-USA district. It is an important tactic to better achieve these four objectives above **in every congregation, large and small**. Some have misunderstood our direction in creating these congregations. We are not abandoning smaller congregations. The flagship model is designed specifically to better support our smaller, more isolated locations in addition to providing a higher quality spiritual experience in locations where we have the greatest number of members.



For this reason, I ask that our members and ministers take the time and effort to correctly understand:

- the purpose of a flagship congregation
- the benefits they will create for all members in all congregations throughout their region and
- the thoughtful process that we must follow to establish them

Likewise, as in all matters requiring change, we must be willing to see our challenges with an objective and truthful eye as well as have the courage to journey beyond our traditions and cultural attachments that are comfortable but may hinder our future progress. This requires the “renewing of our minds” as described in further articles within this issue of the Vision.

Specifically, I strongly encourage each one to see beyond the physical buildings. Some flagship projects will require the relocation of smaller congregations. Some will require the sale of old buildings and the acquisition of new ones. It is easy to become overly fixated on property issues. As

a builder by occupation and engaged with the NAC-USA church construction efforts for many years, I must admit that this required a transformation of my own thinking. But we must ask ourselves the following question: Are we really grasping the full spectrum of what we should and could be experiencing within a healthy congregation? If we did, the significance of the physical building would diminish to its proper priority. It is a necessary and practical requirement that complements our journey towards salvation, but the building never overshadows nor defines our “church”.

Let me elaborate. The external building is not the church of Christ; it does not forgive one sin or transform one life into His mind and image. However, what you and I choose to do within these buildings; to experience the fullness of God’s word and sacrament, to give and receive divinely inspired pastoral care, to learn to love one another and to base the very fabric of our lives and leadership on the Gospel of Christ, has everything to do with our salvation and should be our overwhelming preoccupation!

After these introductory comments, let me now provide the details of our future plans:

The purpose of Flagship Congregations is to create:

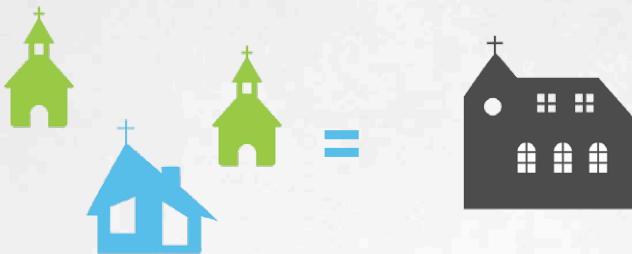
- **Larger, regional congregations that have the scope and resources necessary to support all the aspects of congregational health;** ministers, children, youth, young families, seniors, music, worship, technology and rich programs that support a culture of Christian living. These congregations should in most cases have a minimum size of 100 plus attending members. In this way our children and youth share their life with a larger cohort of friends. The music and worship team has the talent and scope to provide a rich and varied program. Effective and relevant pastoral programs can be created and supported by our ministers and members in a sustainable and balanced manner.
- **A broader shared leadership team that integrates the flagship with all the smaller congregations within the region** to better overcome the isolation and lack of resources found often within our current structure. Currently, our congregations operate in “silos”; they are connected vertically to the apostle and bishop and the resources of the NAC-USA district church via a long chain of ministers arranged in our hierarchy. However they tend to be disconnected from their neighboring congregations. A surplus of gifts and resources in one congregation can’t be easily shared with other regional congregations.

The flagship model will connect all the regional congregations into one entity with common leadership teams and shared resources. Instead of redundant congregations operating independently, think of one congregation with multiple locations. Even the problems caused by large geographic distances can be minimized in this way via advances in technology.

- **A more direct flow of all the value and goodness of the entire church to every member;** the leadership of the apostles and bishops as well as the resources of the national church office can come more directly into both the flagship and smaller congregations.
- **An engine for future growth** with sufficient vision to lead change and support greater integration with our communities. We must be relevant to our next generation of members; our children and grandchildren as well as the broader range of fellow Christians seeking salvation.

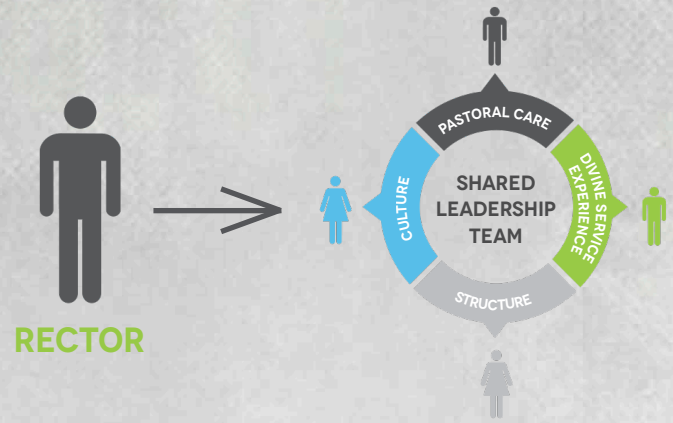
Flagship congregations will be:

- **Created intentionally** by merging existing congregations into one larger congregation where feasible even though they (the individual existing congregations) may seem viable currently. These will not be mergers of desperation nor evidence of failures! The new congregation will represent a leveraging of our strengths and opportunities.



Here we will have a challenge with our old culture. It will be natural for some to resist the process feeling that they will be “closing” a congregation unnecessarily; one that they or their family has worked faithfully to establish and sustain over years and decades. Under our old tradition, this would feel like a failure. We must transform our thinking and support one another in embracing a new model.

- **Led by a shared leadership team; a rector and a group of team leaders.** There will be one team for each Stepping Forward objective. This will allow each ordained minister to focus their time and attention upon one specialty. The result can be a higher level of quality combined with a more balanced and sustainable life.



The formation and ongoing development of these teams is of the highest priority. A flagship congregation can't be formed without this foundation in place. The chart above further explains this foundation and the necessary parts of each team. It makes clear just how many spiritual gifts are necessary to support a healthy congregation. Some congregational leadership roles are not restricted to ordained ministers. All members can feel encouraged to answer their calling to minister to the body of Christ. The Work of Ministry is the engine for the discovery and development of these gifts and I'm hopeful that this initiative is moving forward in every location.

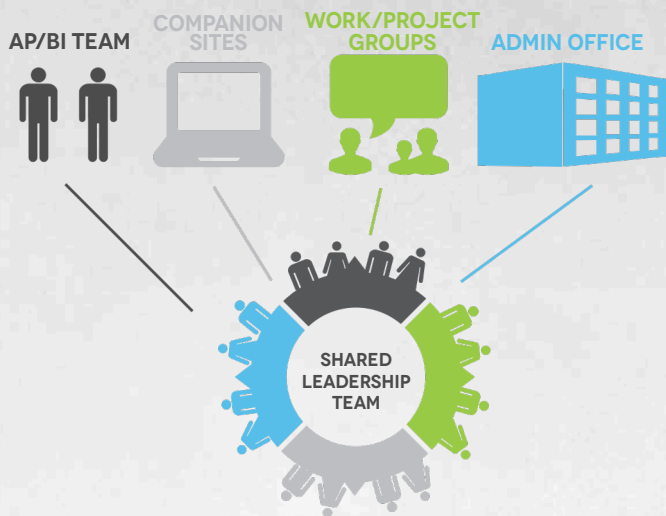


The chart above illustrates how this team will connect seamlessly with its counterparts (similar teams) in all the connected congregations within the region to create one entity. Every congregation, regardless of size, is integrated directly into the leadership of this entity and resources are more easily shared.

- **Connected directly to their apostle and bishop team.** The existing hierarchy of ordained ministers currently found at the district level will be integrated into the local flagship leadership teams where possible (see the Spring 2013 issue of the Vision). Like every member of the body of Christ, these ministers have unique spiritual gifts. We are not losing the power of their gifts or the zeal of

their ministry. Quite the opposite! They will pursue their calling to minister but directly within the congregation. Decision making and communication processes will be streamlined by this new model.

- **Connected directly to all the resources of the national church.** These resources flow directly to the leadership teams rather than through one, time challenged rector. For example, the local youth ministers can consult directly with the national Work Group Youth and directly access resources on the Youth Companion site. The best ideas from around the country, with the full approval and support of the national church office, can be shared freely within the flagship and all connected locations within the region.



Based upon our research, we plan to create roughly 50 flagship congregations across the USA over the next 8 years. Where possible we will remain within our existing buildings. If our existing property is insufficient for our needs, new capital expenditures will be authorized to purchase or lease new building space. However, the property discussion is only relevant when it follows and supports the spiritual objectives of congregational health and when it is realistic and sustainable financially.



The apostles and bishops will support and monitor the spiritual readiness of a new flagship congregation and the Executive Committee of the national Synod will analyze the financial readiness and authorize needed capital expenditures in a transparent manner.

I realize that for some these are unsettling times requiring change. We are on a journey to **become** the church described in our New Apostolic Vision statement (I was quite inspired when our Chief Apostle read it so emphatically within his message on Pentecost). Just like the first church, we believe in the continual inspiration of the Holy Spirit that leads us into new understandings. In the book of Acts, we can read about the divine inspiration of Apostle Peter to take the Gospel to the gentiles. In hind sight it seems quite easy to see that this was the correct direction for the church, but at that moment in time, this new understanding caused angst and dissension among the believers. I'm sure they had some shaky moments when traditions clashed with the urgings of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this caused them to prayerfully search their recollection of Christ's words and rediscover the truth of His gospel; *go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...*" (Matthew 28:19)

For those who "renewed their minds", it was a transformational event. And while they had no user's manual and perhaps made their share of missteps, those who were transformed became passionate in their love for Christ and their sense of mission. The church grew by God's grace in a wonderful manner contrary to all human expectations. This is a good model for us to continue. Let us be transformed also by the renewing of our minds, passionate in our love for Christ and His mission. By God's grace we also will become a healthy, growing church prepared for Christ's return. -LRK

UPCOMING EVENTS

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|------------|--|
| July 7 | Service for the Departed |
| Sept 27-29 | Synod in Detroit, MI |
| Oct 12-13 | Chief Apostle visit in Niagara Falls, CANADA
All are welcome. |
| Oct 18-20 | Flagship rector and Pillar Conference |
| Nov 3 | Service for the Departed |
| Nov 24 | New Apostlic Church USA Thanksgiving Sunday |





EXCERPTS FROM CHIEF APOSTLE SCHNEIDER **PENTECOST 2013**

God the Holy Spirit wants to reveal Himself through His power and its effect. The Holy Spirit is the power of God and this wants to reveal itself. **How is this going to happen?** The Holy Spirit gives us the power to believe even if everything goes wrong. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to follow the Lord Jesus no matter what circumstances we are in. And the Holy Spirit gives us the power to love whatever may come. It gives us the power to forgive even if others cannot do this. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to develop into the image of the Lord. Considering all this we see that we have a special responsibility. **God, the Holy Spirit, wants to reveal Himself through us: in our conduct, in our development.** This is how God wants to reveal Himself. Our contemporaries must see that something is happening there. They do what others cannot do: they continue to believe, continue to love, and they forgive. God the Holy Spirit wants to reveal Himself through us. **We are responsible that the people today know and experience that God not only exists but that He is active on earth.** Dearly beloved, this is our great responsibility. **People must be able to experience God through us.** And for this God has given us the strength and the gift of the Holy Spirit...

I was asked many times in recent weeks whether I had a programme. What is the programme of the Chief Apostle of the New Apostolic Church? **It is very simple for me.** I have got it here in my pocket. This programme was written down by the Chief Apostle and the District Apostles quite a while ago. Every New Apostolic Christian, every person, can read it on the first page of our Catechism. The programme which was specified by our Chief Apostle and the District Apostles consists of the following: **We want 'a church in which people feel at home and, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life'.** Brothers and sisters, that is our programme.

I repeat. **The goal remains unchanged.** We are preparing for the return of the Lord and eternal life with Him. And how are we going to achieve this? We want to allow ourselves to be filled and guided by the Holy Spirit. And what does the Holy Spirit do? **It leads us into the knowledge of Jesus Christ.** The Holy Spirit allows us to get to know the Lord better and better, to experience Him. And the more we allow the Holy Spirit to work the more we discover the Lord Jesus in His grace, His love, and in His power. And the more we will love Him. **And because we love Him—this is our motivation—we want to daily adapt our lives to the gospel of Jesus Christ.** We want to do this consistently. And if we do this then everyone in the congregation, in the church will feel at home. A very simple programme but demanding. And the wonderful part about it is that it can be done in all corners of the earth, in large congregations, in small congregations, in Europe, in Africa, in America, in Asia. Everywhere one can get to know the Lord better and better, and to experience Him more and more, and to grow in love to Him. **It is our programme that under all conditions we align our lives with the gospel of Jesus Christ** and thus guarantee that everyone can feel at home in our Church...

OUR USA DISTRICT

Historically, the NAC-USA district has supported a number of church districts outside the domestic USA. We sometimes called them “mission lands”. An entire generation of ministers dedicated their time and energies to the growth and development of these churches on the African, South American, and Asian continents as well as numerous island locations. Likewise, a portion of church finances were dedicated to this purpose over the years.

Over the last decade, the NAC-USA district in collaboration with the New Apostolic Church International, has implemented an ongoing policy of geographical efficiency, self-responsibility and independence. The results have been quite positive. We have witnessed the birth of the new District of East Africa comprising the countries of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania under the leadership of District Apostle Lubasi. This planned transition was conceptualized by retired District Apostle Freund and completed in 2012.

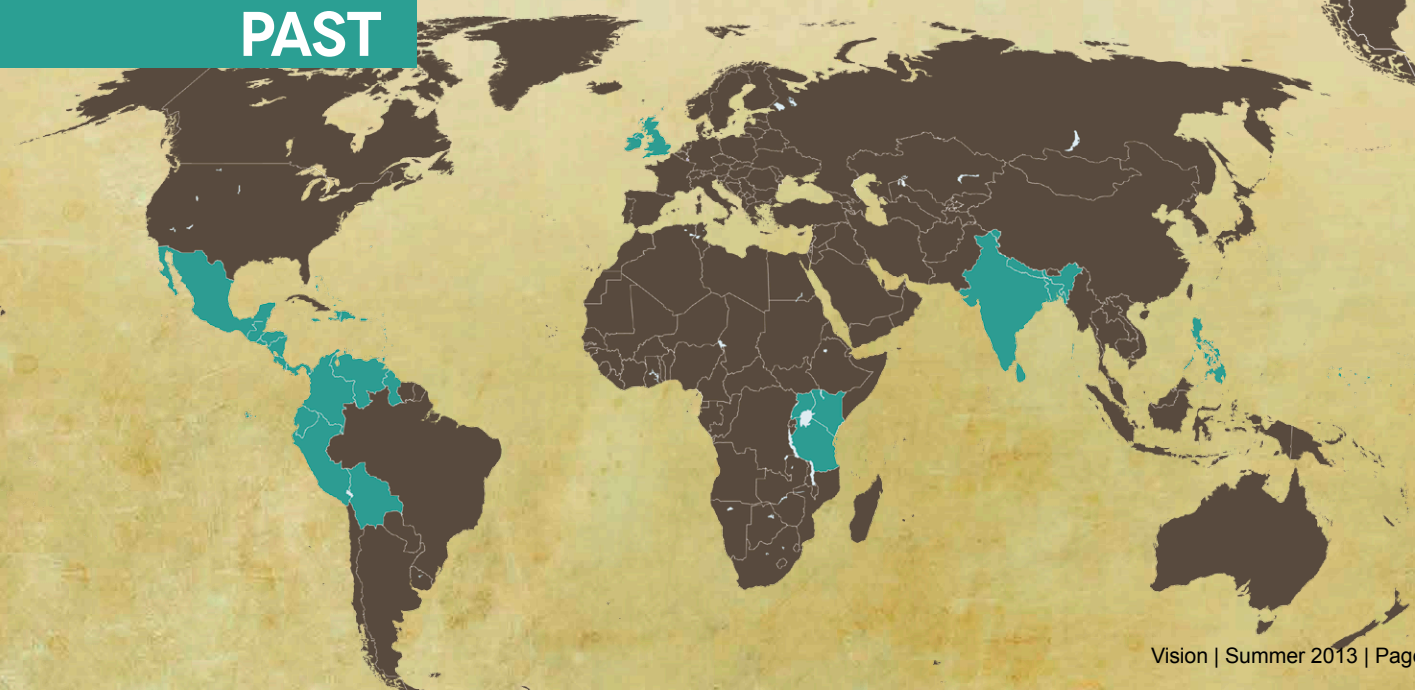
Likewise, the responsibility for the Pacific Island countries of Samoa and American Samoa was transferred to the district of Australia. This transition made sense given their geographic location. The same is true for the UK which was given into the care of Northern Germany.

Currently, the NAC-USA district includes congregations in 5 countries of South America, all of Central America as well as islands within the Caribbean with the exception of Cuba. District Apostle Helper John Fendt supports 6 apostles within the South and Central American areas. Apostle Karl Orlofski cares for congregations within the Caribbean islands as well as Guyana. Apostle Thomas Schmidt and Bishop Manfredo Stegmann care for our brothers and sisters in Mexico and Belize.

PRESENT



PAST





OFFERING & SACRIFICE

A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Dear brothers and sisters,

Over the past year I have shared various thoughts and writings with you regarding the subject of offering. My intent is not to create a mandate on how each member should give to the church. Rather, I would propose that this is a matter of personal responsibility where each member comes to a richer understanding of the biblical and theological foundations regarding:

- Worship, thanksgiving and praise
- Offering, sacrifice, and tithing
- Support of those in need based upon Christian charity
- The higher purpose of wealth vs materialism
- The practical financial realities of supporting the mission of the church

With this information, we can then give of free will and in a manner that reflects our personal feelings toward God as well as our perception of the value of the church within our daily lives.

So within this culture of continual learning, we have asked our New Apostolic Church International theologian, Dr. Reinhard Kiefer, to provide a synopsis of the theological basis for offering, sacrifice, and tithing. We have used his research to compile the following discussion points that we hope will fuel our small group and congregational discussions for the next months. Part two of this discussion will appear in the Autumn edition of the VISION. -LRK

In the Old Testament, we see offering as a sacrifice; a material gift as a means of atonement. Its purpose was to strengthen the fellowship between God and man and to remove the impairments/obstacles which have come into being through man's sinful behavior. Here a variety of offerings/sacrifices were carried out: the sacrifice (the offering of animals), food offerings (the offering of baked goods), burnt offerings (the burning of incense).

In a broader sense, material gifts were also included in offerings (precious metals, materials, money, food) for the purposes of

supporting the maintenance of the priests and the costs of the congregation (Exodus 30:10, Nehemiah 10:33, 38)

Tithing, however, was the tax of the Levites, who first exercised their priestly service among the tribes of Israel, but later became helpers to the priest at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 25:26). In Malachi 3:8-10 Jews were criticized for sacrificing incorrectly and for neglecting their tithes. The Old Testament saints who lead a God fearing life, also fulfilled these duties, which were understood not as a requirement of man, but as God's commandment.

In contrast to ancient Judaism and paganism, the early Christian congregation no longer recognizes the idea of a sacrifice for atonement given the context of Jesus' death on Calvary. His sacrifice is unique and has a lasting atoning function, making all other sacrifices unnecessary. It is eternally valid.

Sacrifice as surrender

Although through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Old Testament sacrificial system has lost its basis, the term "sacrifice" is not only found in connection with the death of Jesus, but also with the new spiritual life of the Christian. An example is Romans 12:1: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* Here, Apostle Paul requests in response to the mercy of God, the offering of a sacrifice by the believer and from those who are freed from sin. In the Greek translation it speaks of a "physical sacrifice", it is a sacrifice of myself, my person, my entire being. Further the sacrifice goes beyond the physical man; God's mercy urges man to devote all aspects of life to Him.

This devotion is spiritual, but also is expressed in concrete attitudes and behaviors towards others and has clear material aspects. Based upon this verse (Romans 12:1), we should ponder the consequences of a New Apostolic understanding of sacrifice.

Sacrifice as a category of Christian life

Romans 12:1 has a direct impact on the lives of Christians. In this verse, the concepts of sacrifice and service to the church as a form of divine worship are transferred directly to the life of the believer. "Sacrifice" and "divine worship" are now not only the responsibility of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, but have a prominent place in the midst of our everyday lives. The ritual sacrifice has been replaced within the Christian faith by a personal and voluntary self sacrifice.

Sacrifice as a material gift

The devotion of the body, of which Apostle Paul speaks in Romans 12:1 evolved in different ways in the early church. The first Christian congregation in Jerusalem contributed all their earthly possessions for the common good. The community property of the first Christians, which is reported in Acts 4:32-35, has its basis in the consciousness of the Christians of that time, that God is Lord also of the material goods and therefore the believer brings his belongings to the congregation for all to benefit: *Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.*

This concept of community property was not sustained and is believed to have been relinquished relatively quickly within the congregation of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the believer was not released from the obligation to contribute some of his property to the congregation. Apostle Paul organized a money collection for the needy congregations in Jerusalem in the Christian churches of Macedonia. Even the Corinthians were asked to contribute.

Here, Apostle Paul makes it clear that the wealth of faith and knowledge should lead also to generosity in giving and indicates the extent to which love works in the believer: *But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.* (2 Corinthians 8:7-8) The right kind of love, it is suggested here, is one of physical

sacrifice, material gift for others and for the needs of a functioning community. ... *but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.* (2 Corinthians 8:14)

Further, material possessions should not be used to fulfill selfish desires, but rather used responsibly:

- Personal responsibility with regard to myself, so that wealth does not destroy faith due to an unrestrained materialism.
- Personal responsibility to others that I perceive their need and decide to serve them in love. Material possessions cannot be separated from faith and from the focus on the Gospel of Christ.

The material sacrifice is one of good works, which by itself does not bring salvation, but all the same is an expression of faith and love. Therefore, Apostle Paul says, *"He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

Sacrifice as inner devotion to God


Lastly, sacrifice as written in Romans 12:1, represents an inner devotion to God. Proper sacrifice requires a "right attitude" towards Him. The requirement that sacrifice, behavior and attitudes are coherent, is already found with the Old Testament prophets. They called this sanctification.

When Christian life is understood as a "sacrifice" and "divine worship", an internal and systematic focus to the will of God is established. A life of sacrifice, divine devotion and worship is valid when lived according to the standards of God. In practice this means that the Christian "sanctifies their sacrifice." Sanctification of the "sacrifice" may mean, for example, that one asks whether a life dedicated to materialism, extravagance and self indulgence is in agreement with a life committed to Christ. It may be necessary to change ones internal alignment. - RK



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What's your story?

STORIES OF THANKSGIVING

Last year, as Thanksgiving approached, a congregation in the St. Louis district had the idea to share experiences of faith that highlighted thanksgiving and thankfulness.

On the Sundays leading up to Thanksgiving Sunday, a different person in the congregation would come up after the divine service was finished and share their experience. Although the actually storytelling only took about five minutes, the conversations would always continue afterwards as people would share and reflect upon their own experiences.

Not only did the sharing of stories create a heightened awareness of thankfulness which built to a wonderful crescendo on Thanksgiving Sunday, but the stories also provided hope and reminded them that our gracious Father provides in His time and that He is always with us.

Although we're halfway through 2013 and the Year of Profession, there is still a lot of time to share and celebrate our history which is made up of all our stories.

How has your congregation integrated *What's Your Story?* into your activities? Please submit your ideas to communications@nac-usa.org.