

Health, growth, completion

Vision



New Apostolic Church USA

District News

www.nac-usa.org

Spring 2015

Dear brother and sisters,

For those in northern climates, approaching spring brings us the unique joy of warmth, revival, and light! For all Christians, the approaching celebration of Passion Week, Easter, Eastertide, and Pentecost also brings great joy; joy in the inner warmth of more deeply perceiving the love and sacrifice of Christ, the exultation of resurrection and the revival of spirit during this wonderful season. In such a beautiful environment, our young brothers and sisters can confirm their vow to Christ and seek His blessing.

Our Chief Apostle recently mentioned that we should search for wisdom in order to perceive the things that actually create lasting joy. Sometimes it may be worthwhile to first become aware of things that do not bring joy, simply so that we do not pursue them. Wisdom causes us to understand that satisfied wishes don't necessarily bring us joy and that we cannot buy it. If we become selfish instead of selfless, how can we truly find joy? Further, we recognize that we cannot really be joyful if our neighbor is unhappy, when our focus is on our "our own," and when we don't care about others outside our fellowship or even the next generation.

Wisdom shows us the right things to pursue, things aligned with our Heavenly Father's will which truly bring lasting joy. We realize a lot has to do with our relationships with Him and also with one another. We read of this in Acts 2:42-47. Here we see vital, vibrant congregations, brimming with bliss and excitement in the knowledge that Christ died and resurrected for them. They joyfully shared in deeper fellowship celebrating the fact that He made the treasures of heaven available to all.

May this be a good template for us to follow in our pursuit of joy.

With loving greetings,



CULTURE SHIFT

One of our fundamental objectives while on the journey toward healthier congregations is to create a culture of living and leading like Jesus Christ. This idea of congregational cultural change has been difficult to define and I would like to provide some additional clarity. Firstly, the use of the word itself may seem unusual. What do we mean by culture and why are we using it within a spiritual context? Here is an interesting definition:

A culture is a way of life of a group of people - the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

From this definition we can see that for something to become part of a group's culture, it must be understood and embraced by all the members of the group. It must be at their very core; it creates a common platform for communicating and making life decisions. It shapes their language, their way of seeing the world, their hopes and dreams and their way of doing things. Culture is not casual or superficial knowledge, but deeply felt.

What should be at the core of our New Apostolic culture? We believe we are part of His church. The Gospel of Christ is the common theme of both our New Apostolic Mission and Vision statements. Theoretically, how could our culture be based upon anything other than Jesus Christ and His Gospel?

But theory is not always reality. Take a moment to think of your own experience; your life, your family and your congregation. Can you and I honestly say that the Gospel of Jesus is so deeply understood and embraced that it has become our way of life? Does it shape our attitudes and form the basis for our decisions, actions, speech, and relationships? Has it become so instinctual that we react out of the Gospel without having to think about it? Is it so fundamental and enduring that we can pass it from one generation to the next despite an ever changing "pop culture"? Where God has called us to congregational leadership roles, do we lead others as a servant like Jesus did?

I hesitate to make broad generalizations because everyone's situation is different, but I feel it safe to say that we have room to grow further and that changes to our culture are needed.

Changing culture is difficult and time-consuming. It is an ongoing process requiring spiritual discipline, teaching and patience. Let me address two things that will help us.

We must identify the barriers that dilute, replace, or distract us from the Gospel of Christ.

What could they be? Certainly many things, but here are some common ones.

- **Personal preferences:** Sometimes a congregation will be influenced by a strong personality; perhaps that of a minister. Their

TO CHANGE IS NOT WRONG; IT'S FUNDAMENTAL TO SALVATION AND TO THE CHURCH.

likes and dislikes become generally accepted as though part of the Gospel. To conform to human preferences is an unnecessary obstacle to salvation. Jesus made it quite simple: I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. That's pretty definitive.

- **Ethnic values:** Every ethnic group has its own cultural preferences. They celebrate certain character traits that can be quite admirable. However, the danger exists once again when they become a pseudo requirement that is superimposed upon the believers. Growing up in a German household I learned to appreciate cleanliness, order, punctuality and respect for authority; all good traits! But they do not appear in the Gospel as requirements for salvation. I must be careful not to expect them from my brother and sister or to judge them if they see life differently than me. Jesus caused quite an uproar when He intentionally broke cultural norms and embraced all sorts of socially unacceptable people. He loved messy people with dysfunctional lives. He sacrificed His perfect life for them.
- **Old Testament Values:** This one can be confusing at times. We venerate the God fearing patriarchs and heroes of the Old Testament. We teach our children how they were blessed by God for their faith, loyalty and obedience. But their culture was not ours and we must make certain distinctions. In our Covenant, the New Covenant made possible by the merit of Jesus Christ, grace must replace judgment and love must replace (become) the law.

To change is not wrong; it's fundamental to salvation and to the church!

I'm often asked some variation of these questions: Why do you want the church to change? Does that mean we were wrong in the past? I thought that God is perfect and unchangeable? Think about the rich young man. He wanted to follow Jesus and have eternal life, and he seemed to be doing everything right in following all of the commandments. Yet, when Jesus asked him to sell his possessions and give to the poor, he could not do it and that was the thing that barred him from heavenly treasures. The rich young man still had some changing to do.

Let's start with God. He is perfect and He is unchangeable. He created the perfect plan to deal with our imperfection. His Son won the victory over sin and death and offers us eternal life through His church. His Gospel proclaims this truth to all mankind. He is the perfect part of His church as described in our Catechism.

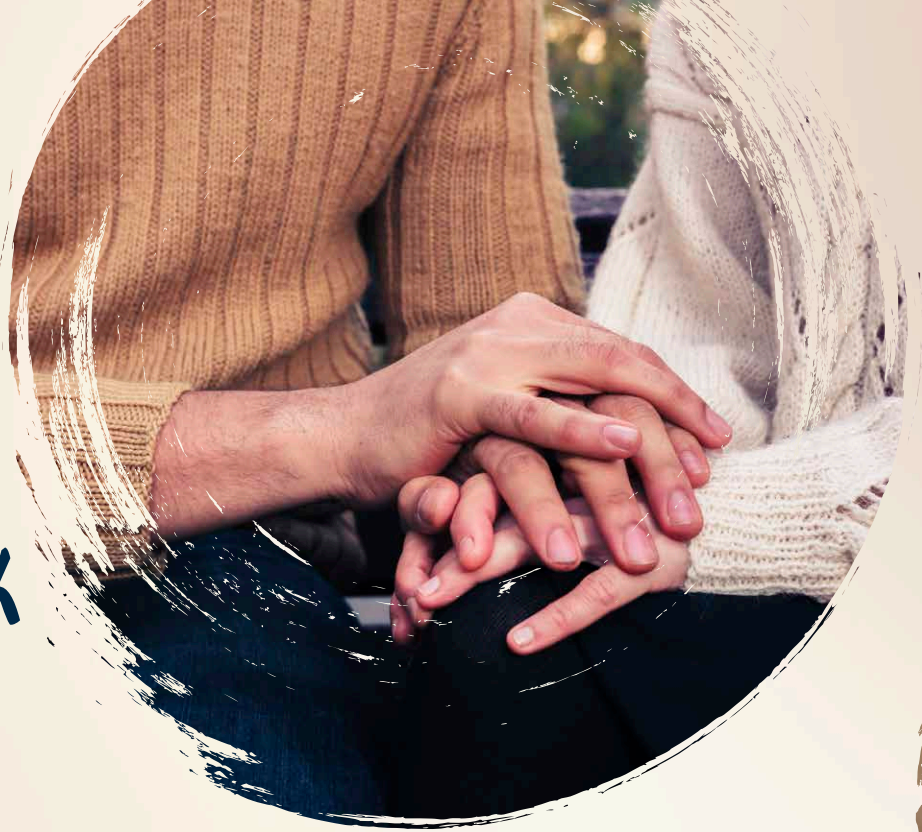
But now it becomes complicated. He placed His church into the hands of human beings, and as our Catechism also explains, we are the imperfect part of His church. But God wanted it that way. We struggle with our imperfection every day and continually work to adjust ourselves to the eternal truth of the Gospel and the urgings of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, change within the church should not be surprising, it is a requirement. For over 2,000 years the imperfect church has drifted from the Gospel and returned again, and it will continue to do so until the Lord returns. Despite this, in faith we cling to His church as the path to our salvation AND we strive to align ourselves to the Gospel as described in our Vision statement.

Let me conclude with an example from the early Christian church. Please read the story of Apostle Peter and Cornelius in the 10th chapter of Acts in its entirety. It is very entertaining reading and highly relevant today. When you have read it (no short cuts), please think about these observations:

- The first church retained Old Testament cultural beliefs that limited the Gospel.
- Christ's teachings on inclusion were clear from the beginning, but still misunderstood.
- God intervened and clarified His intent to Peter in an unmistakable fashion.
- The apostle had to help the church come back to the teachings of Jesus Christ; and it didn't happen easily or immediately.
- Cultural change is not new or unexpected; it is an ongoing task and a fundamental responsibility of the Apostle Ministry to the church. - **LRK**

Experience the Midweek



It has now been a little over a year since the new midweek experience was introduced to the USA. Reflecting on 2014 brought observations about what worked and what needs to work better. Even as you are adjusting to and discovering the possibilities with this still-new concept, I am doing the same, hoping that future scenarios can be created that will allow all to be engaged and feel closer to God.

It's hard to provide exact measurements of how successful the midweek experience has been so far. Attendance numbers cannot be the only measurement we look at. The less visible signs of success are in each one's soul, and this is what we want to focus on; not just numbers.

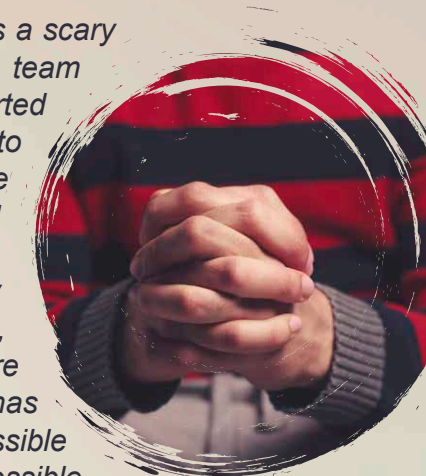
Acts 4:31 speaks about a group of people: *And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.* Every time we gather with one another, whether for a divine service or midweek experience, we want to be shaken by the Spirit. The midweek experience, through discussion of and digging deeper into our faith, should give us a renewed strength and understanding of who we are as disciples of Christ.

Many people have had experiences like this over the last year in the midweek experience format:



Small groups have been a huge success for us. Since our membership is spread over a wide area geographically, it was difficult for some members to make it to a midweek service at the church. We took the approach of setting up our small groups in different locations that made sense to where our members live. This has made it easier for some to participate than in the past.

I will never forget the feeling I was able to experience during our small group a few weeks ago. I was overjoyed when one of the men, whom I never thought would join small group, shared an amazing experience of faith with us. We never get a chance to talk together like this any other time and I was so touched that he longed to reach out and share his story! I truly feel that the health of our congregation is growing – we are learning so much more about our faith and about each other.



At first, the midweek experience was a scary concept, so our shared leadership team took a methodical approach. We started with word services that morphed into group discussions. By May 2014, we held all group devotionals. We trained facilitators and then made the move to small groups. Of course, we enjoy a traditional service once a month, but the rest of the Wednesdays are small groups. The entire experience has been unbelievable. It seemed impossible at first, but with God, all things are possible.

Transformation is a part of life and our church, so we cannot stand still. The intent is not to change what we believe, but to create a space for deeper understanding of God, His Son, and His teachings. We need to find the balance between the traditional and progressive, so that all members feel comfortable in their congregation, but also inspired and enlivened in their faith.

With this being said, the plan for the midweek experience in 2015 is the same with the options of word service, worship evening, group devotional, small group, and a traditional divine service once a month. What has been changed is the intentional focus on small groups, which foster deep and intimate discussions.

To do this, every week there is a Midweek Bridge Video that groups should use for discussion topics

and questions. As a bridge between the previous and following Sunday divine services, these videos make each Sunday service more approachable and applicable to you, allowing you to continually find value from them. They allow further time to delve into the Sunday services, keeping the topics and themes present and relevant throughout your week.

We hope that by providing these videos, small group discussions will allow everyone to be involved. To help accomplish this, facilitator and participant guides created especially for each week are provided to create further questions and discussion.

My wish is that the value of having small group discussions is felt by all. We can learn more about each other by learning about Christ together. **- LRK**



JOY IN FELLOWSHIP

Chief Apostle Schneider, in his video message to all in the beginning of the year, mentioned that fellowship in the Christian community is an experience that can give us Joy in Christ. A part of this fellowship takes place during Holy Communion. As we go into the season of Passiontide, the establishment of Holy Communion is very relevant to us as Jesus instituted it at the Last Supper.

How do we experience fellowship during Holy Communion?

The Catechism explains Holy Communion as a meal of fellowship and provides three different types of fellowship that we are able to experience if we truly believe in the strength and transformational power of Holy Communion. Let's take a deeper look at them.

1. The first experience of fellowship in Holy Communion is between Jesus Christ and His Apostles. Through the partaking and celebration of Holy Communion, Christ enters into fellowship with His Apostles. This experience is directly related to the original fellowship between Christ and the disciples at The Last Supper.
2. As believers who celebrate Holy Communion, we also enter into fellowship with Jesus. Our partaking and belief in this fellowship of Holy

Communion is necessary for salvation. As Jesus says in John 6:54, *"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*

3. Because we go up and receive Holy Communion individually, it might not cross our mind that it is actually an experience of fellowship with one another. By assembling as a congregation, we worship together and share each one's proclamation of faith and belief in salvation in the celebration of Holy Communion.

After examining these three avenues of fellowship during Holy Communion, we find that we have much cause for joy in Christ each time we come into His House.

Holy Communion also has what the Catechism calls an "eschatological character," which refers to the end-time when Jesus will come again. As a congregation joined together in Holy Communion, we are awaiting the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus made at the Last Supper: *"I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."* (Luke 22: 18) It is with this promise that we experience an intimate fellowship with the Lord and each other through Holy Communion. - **VAB**

WHERE ARE YOU LOOKING FOR JESUS?

LUKE 24: 5-6



2015 BELIZE HUMANITARIAN TRIP

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!

As in the past years, re Charitable Ministry, the church's affiliated charity, is offering interested volunteers the opportunity to immerse themselves in a week of charitable outreach with our partners in Belize, combined with devotionals and spiritual discussions related to the topic of loving and reaching out to our neighbor.

Since 2012, re Charitable Ministry has partnered with Kings Children Home in Belmopan, Belize, in order to help them complete their new home. In addition, we support the new Community Center in Hattieville, Belize, which will provide educational, health and other community services to those in need.

Making an impact in someone else's life can take many different forms. Since the start of our program, more than 40 dedicated volunteers have chosen this opportunity to make an impact in the life of others. In 2015, re Charitable Ministry again offers two, week-long opportunities in the second half of June for those interested to serve in this ministry.

Space is limited and volunteer applications are reviewed and decided on a rolling basis.

For more details and information please check out:

re.nac-usa.org
nac-usa.org

Applications for the 2015 Belize Project will be accepted until March 31.

RECOGNIZE
RESPOND
RELIEVE
RESTORE
RENEW



Amen

Amen is a Hebrew term, which means something is solid, true, faithful. When Jesus preached, He often said, “Amen, amen, I say to you,” which really means, “What I say is the true word of God.” He wanted to show that He is the Son of God, the truth, and His Father speaks through Him. Each amen we say in a divine service has a particular meaning and it is something we should understand.

We say amen at the end of the preaching to recognize that it is the word of God. It is a profession of faith and truth. When the congregation says this amen, they confirm it is really God’s word. In turn, this means we agree and believe what is said because it’s the word of God. We commit to do what was said in the sermon.

We also say amen after our prayers. This amen expresses that we want and need what was prayed for, and that God can provide it. Sometimes one prays and doesn’t really mean it. When we say the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive our debtors.” Forgiving others is not always easy, but we should be earnest in speaking and agreeing with those words by saying amen. The amen at the end of every prayer is important because it means we sincerely agree with each statement in the prayer.

Amen is said after the absolution, which means that we believe our sins are forgiven. Sometimes we don’t have enough faith that God really delivered us, but saying amen after the absolution means that we truly believe we have been forgiven. Not only do we proclaim our belief in the forgiveness of our individual sins, but also that my brothers’ and sisters’ sins have been forgiven.

When we say amen after receiving Holy Communion, it is a wonderful profession of faith. We believe that this is the body and blood of Jesus, that He died for me, and that He loves me. When you receive Holy Communion and say amen, it is a personal one; we say that amen alone. After the consecration, the whole congregation says amen, which is a profession of faith, but then comes the personal one. It applies to my life, to my soul, and it signifies my personal relationship with Jesus. We also say amen when the departed receive Holy Communion, which displays our belief that the departed really received the communion. The whole congregation believes that salvation is possible in the yonder world.

Amen is said twice in an ordination. The brother first says amen after his ordination, which means he believes he has received this new commission from God and that He will give him all he needs to fulfill it. Then the whole congregation says amen. They believe and agree that this man was commissioned by God and accept him as being sent by God.

When the congregation says amen after the blessing for marriage or for confirmation, it shows those who receive the blessing that the congregation believes God has blessed them and the congregation commits themselves to helping them enjoy the blessing.

*This article is based on Chief Apostle Schneider’s thoughts from the Venezuela Apostle Meeting in August 2014.



ENRICHING THE DIVINE SERVICE

VISUAL AID GUIDELINES

Over the past couple of years, some congregations have integrated televisions as visual aids into the divine service. It must be stressed that the use of this type of technology is not meant to change or transform the service into something that is focused on technology, but rather only to visually enhance the divine service experience.

To make sure that the visual aids are used in ways that enrich the divine service, there are some guidelines that should be followed:

WHAT CAN BE DISPLAYED:

Worship sequence (before, during, and after the service)

- Congregational hymns and numbers
- Titles to songs or hymns by choirs, ensembles, soloists, instrumental selections
- Lyrics to hymns played by instrumentals

Bible verses and service themes (before and during service)

Announcements (before and after the service)

Hymn lyrics when there are not enough hymnals (before, during, and after the service)

- Because of copyright issues, there are some restrictions for putting hymn lyrics on the TV screen because the Church does not have rights to all of the songs in the hymnals (the numbers for these specific hymns can be found on Music Companion by your worship leader or music director). Please note that this also applies to inclusion of hymn lyrics in song sheets/programs.

Copyright info. for copyrighted songs

- For each copyrighted song that you project lyrics for in your service, it's required that you display proper information. This can be done several ways. A popular method is to display it directly on the song slides (on the first slide or last slide). Another option would be to create a single slide with all of your song info to show at the end of the service or include this information in your bulletin/hand-out. Copyright info for each song should look like this:

"Hallelujah," words and music by John Doe
© 2000 Good Music Co. Used By Permission.



WHAT SHOULD NOT BE DISPLAYED:

Graphics that include news and current events

Cartoon graphics

Long Bible verses

During service - no video excerpts

- For occasional usage only, before and after service as appropriate

Sermon outlines

- The service is not a PowerPoint presentation

Content of the sermon

Copyrighted lyrics (without permission to display them)

- The lyrics to many songs, outside of hymns, are going to be copyrighted. In these cases, permission must be obtained from the copyright holder before the lyrics can be displayed. Note: just because a choir purchases sheet music for their choir members, this does not necessarily mean that the lyrics can be posted. Only if the lyrics are public domain can they be posted without permission.

WHO SHOULD CONTROL THE SLIDES:

The minister is to provide the Bible verses and their order.

The slides are advanced by the visual coordinator, not the minister.

The slides should not prompt the minister; rather, the slides should *follow* the minister.

The use of televisions and visual aids will not replace the quality of the sermon. The quality of a divine service should be just as good with the involvement of technology as a service without the use of technology. Because we want to focus on enhancing the divine service experience, we have to be careful not to use these things too freely. Used in the right way, visual aids have the ability to provide smoother transitions and more clarity in the order of the service. - LRK



NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF THE
NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH
3753 N. TROY STREET
CHICAGO, IL 60618-4594

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CHANGE IN CHOIR DRESS

I would like to address the matter of a choir dress. Over the past years, it has come up in a number of districts and congregations and we have discussed this matter in the circle of the apostles, bishops, and district leaders.

As our understanding of the Gospel deepens, we recognize with more and more clarity that our primary focus should be the condition of our relationships and changing our inner being to be more Christ like. Overemphasis on external matters will not bring us salvation and it can weaken our teaching because it is not based on the Gospel. For this reason, in the future, black and white dress for choir members will not be required in our normal Sunday divine services.

I realize this is a variation from our history. Let us recognize that a dress code is not a defining element of our Church, but rather we are defined by our relationship with our future Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and by our oneness, which is not achieved through externalities such as uniform dress.

Brothers and sisters, I encourage you to again step forward and not make this simple matter a stumbling block. Let's continue to focus on the true elements of preparing for the return of Christ. Since we are true believing Christians, such matters should not derail us nor rob us of our joy in Christ. - **LRK**