



My dear brothers and sisters,

I bid you all a warm welcome. Thank you for taking the time to inform yourselves about important matters in our Church.

Today I would like to talk to you about an element of our New Apostolic understanding of ministry that has been open until recently: it has to do with the ordination of women into a spiritual ministry.

Why are we even talking about this subject?

Let us do a little review: during his time in ministry, Chief Apostle Fehr made a variety of suggestions for refining and clarifying the doctrine of the New Apostolic Church. Chief Apostle Leber continued in this endeavour. It was during his term of office that we further developed our understanding of the church and the sacraments. The result of these collective efforts was the Catechism, which we published in 2012.

However, our concept of ministry is only partially formulated there. In 2014, the District Apostle Meeting began to deal with some of the points that were still unresolved. These included questions such as, “What is a ministry?”, “What happens during the ordination?”, and “How does our Church configure its leadership functions?” In April 2019, I presented the results of these deliberations. And on Pentecost of that same year, these regulations came into effect.

Now that we have answered the “what” and the “how”, we must deal with the question of “who”. To date, our Church has only ordained men. There is no doctrinal reason for this in any of our literature. And so the question arises as to whether this traditional restriction is still justifiable. However, neither social debates nor national constitutions can provide the answer to a theological question. Only a proper evaluation of the biblical evidence can give us the answer.

Before we take a closer look at this, I would like to highlight one aspect of our concept of ministry that will be of ongoing importance as we go along: a ministry is comprised of both ministerial authority and ministerial mandate.

- Ministerial authority is the right to preach the gospel and dispense sacraments in the name of the triune God. Ministerial authority is based on the teaching of our Church. It is universally valid.
- The ministerial mandate defines the framework of duration and location within which the ministerial authority may be exercised. The ministerial mandate is part of the order of our Church. It takes into account the respective circumstances.



What does God want?

This is the first question we need to ask ourselves. The account of the creation shows us how God sees human beings. Here there are two different passages to consider.

In the first account of the creation, God creates “man in His own image”, specifically as “male and female”. Therefore both genders are part of the image of God right from the start. Man and woman—or “man” in general—are equally created in the image of God. Both exist in an identical relationship with God. Both man and woman also receive the same creation mandate, namely to represent God in the creation.

In the second account of creation, God forms a figure out of the earth. Here the designation “Adam” represents mankind in general, without any gender differentiation. It is from the latter’s “rib” that God creates a counterpart for this person. It is only from here on that there is any mention of man and woman. The woman’s creation from the “rib” is intended to symbolise that the body of both humans is of the same nature and essence. They are both created from the same “material”.

It is only after the fall into sin that a gradation between man and women emerges. The subordination of one gender to the other is not part of the good creation of God.

So much for the Bible. But what does this mean for the doctrine of the New Apostolic Church?

The New Apostolic Church teaches that man and woman are created “in the image of God”. They both possess the same nature and the same dignity. Both of them together are called to “have dominion”: they are to protect and shape the creation. This also means that both man and woman are equally responsible for it.

On the basis of this finding, both genders can be entrusted with ministry and service in the Church and in the local congregation.

What does Jesus Christ teach?

The gospels relate that Jesus taught women, healed them, and ministered to their needs. There were not only men in His immediate surroundings, but also many women. These women had joined the assembly of the disciples, and some of them even supported it financially.

Women also followed Jesus to the cross itself. Women were likewise the first witnesses of the resurrection, and they were the ones who told the disciples about it. By spreading this message, they were instrumental in enabling the church to emerge with the preaching of the gospel.



The example of Christ is of outstanding importance for the subject of ministry. He Himself only gave His church one ministry, namely the Apostle ministry. The apostolate, in turn, has the authority and the mission to develop the ministerial structure of the church.

And here we see that although Jesus did not share the reservations of his time towards women, he only called men into the circle of the Apostles. Why was this? Jesus Himself never provided any reasoning for this. He never said anything about it. We must interpret His decision.

We can assume that this choice also had some very practical and cultural-historical reasons: spreading the gospel was only possible in the synagogues at first. But only Jewish men were permitted to speak there.

Therefore, the selection that Jesus made has to do with aspects that, according to our current understanding of ministry, are not related to ministerial authority, but to the ministerial mandate. After all, it is not a question of whether ministerial powers can be conferred upon women, but of whether they would even have had the opportunity to exercise a mandate.

Anyone who concludes from Jesus' actions alone that only men can be ordained will run into a dead end: logically speaking, they would then also have to conclude that only Jews can be Apostles because Jesus only called Jews—or that only those who had personally accompanied the Lord could be His Apostles. By that measure, Paul could not have been an Apostle either. And the renewed occupation of the Apostle ministry over the last 190 years would be utterly questionable.

What can we learn for our present question? Jesus said nothing about whether a ministry could also be conferred upon women in His church. From Jesus' example we cannot clearly determine whether it is permissible to ordain women or not. Therefore, no binding conclusions can be drawn from this for the Church.

But let us take note of the following: neither the words nor the deeds of Jesus provide a clear reason as to why we should act contrary to the clear will of God as expressed in the creation with regard to the equality of men and women.

What do the letters of the Apostles teach?

This question is the next milestone on our way through the Bible. Here the New Testament paints a very contradictory picture from which no clear guidelines for the present can be inferred.

On the one hand there are statements that reflect the intensive involvement of women in missionary work, church life, and divine service. Women played an important role,



particularly in the congregations to which Paul had access: they held church leadership positions and were aggressively involved in the proclamation of the gospel among the Gentiles.

For example, the letter to the Romans mentions a woman by the name of Phoebe, who performed diaconal services, as well as a certain Priscilla, who led a house congregation together with her husband. And from the first epistle to the Corinthians it is clear that women were just as involved as men in the divine service in that they both prayed and prophesied. This “prophetic speech” has a similar function to that of the sermon, namely “to impart the gospel”.

On the other hand, there are later biblical references in which women are forbidden to play an active role in congregational life. Their involvement in missionary work had by then become impossible. These passages are primarily found in the Pastoral Letters. They include the commandment for women to be silent. And this is justified by the argument that sin entered into the world through Eve. However, this contradicts the letters of Paul, in which Adam, or man in general, is held responsible for this.

The few negative statements recorded in the Pastoral Letters relate to various activities in the church. Therefore, according to our present understanding, they do not belong in the context of ministerial authority, but rather of the ministerial mandate. The corresponding texts lack sound theological justification. They are bound to their time and most often have a decidedly practical orientation.

Thus it is clear for the New Apostolic Church: individual negative statements found in some New Testament letters concerning the active participation of women in divine service and the congregation do not constitute sufficient grounds for excluding women from ministry.

What does the Church teach?

In the Catholic Apostolic Church, as well as the New Apostolic Church, there were women who were active as Deaconesses. Presumably, New Apostolic Deaconesses were not ordained, but rather likewise received a special blessing—just as in the Catholic Apostolic congregations. Until well into the 1950s, these Deaconesses were primarily involved in pastoral and charitable duties. Then this tradition was abruptly discontinued—without any further explanation.

In the period that followed, the question of ordaining women to ministry was treated with great reserve—and only mentioned in marginal notes at best. To date there has never been an official and doctrinally justified pronouncement on the part of the apostolate with respect to the subject of “women and ministry”.

Allow me to summarize what we have discussed so far.



An examination of the biblical texts makes it clear that

- both women and men have the same dignity, the same value, and the same mission before God. We derive this knowledge from the accounts of the creation.
- neither the example of Jesus Christ, nor the teaching of the Apostles, nor our own tradition provide strong arguments against conferring ministerial powers on women.
- if there was ever anything preventing women from performing official duties, it was external circumstances alone.

What does this mean for us?

Now let us talk about the doctrinal reasoning behind this. And this is based on two fundamental elements: the nature of human beings on one hand, and their need for salvation, on the other hand.

The accounts of creation have already told us everything we need to know with regard to the nature of human beings: both man and woman are equally created in the image of God. They are of the same dignity and have received the same mandate from God.

Concerning the human need for salvation, it is clear that both man and woman are sinners and that both need the same measure of God's grace. Jesus Christ died for men and women alike. And the salvation He has acquired applies to both of them together.

Therefore: human beings must and can receive salvation—irrespective of their gender. But doesn't this also mean that human beings can impart salvation in word and sacrament—and isn't this likewise true, irrespective of their gender?

We find the answer in Apostle Paul's words to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,"—and here comes the main point: "there is neither male nor female"— "for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Word and sacrament, church and ministry—all of this revolves around Christ. And in Christ there are no men and women, but rather only human beings.

It is now the responsibility of the apostolate to make a decision about the future of the church. Jesus Christ gave the Apostles the authority to order and organize congregational life. And the Chief Apostle's authority to open up new insights on the basis of the Bible is part of the Petrine office.

We have deliberated on all these questions very intensively and in great detail in the District Apostle Meeting, and have discussed the answers with all the Apostles. It is against this backdrop that I hereby announce:



The apostolate—that is, the Apostles in oneness with the Chief Apostle—decide that women can be entrusted with ministerial authority on the basis of gender equivalence and equality.

In specific terms, this means that

- women can be ordained to all levels of ministry.
- women can be appointed and assigned to serve in leadership functions from the congregational level through to the Global Church.
- the associated ministerial mandate will be issued wherever it is accepted by society and the congregation.

Allow me to draw attention to some points that are very important to me:

- it is equally true for both men and women: God is the one who designates a person for ministry, not man.
- it is therefore not permissible to allot a specific proportion of ministries to men and women at the various levels. God's will is the deciding factor, not human will.
- on the one hand, ordinations into a ministry must take into account the needs of the congregation, the district, or the Regional Church, and the talents and characteristics of potential candidates on the other. This applies equally to both women and men. And it pertains to every level of ministry.

What are the next steps?

These regulations will enter into effect on 1 January 2023. This does not mean that women need to be ordained into ministry everywhere immediately. We will continue to be just as careful in dealing with ordination as we were before.

It is God who designates a person for a ministry. Gifts develop from the congregation for the congregation. Wherever these gifts are identified, the need to engage them in the service of God and the congregation will grow. It is our task to recognize this growth and, where necessary, apply these gifts to spiritual service. This requires time and is accompanied by a great deal of prayer.

I am well aware that this decision marks a significant shift in our tradition. And it is also clear to me that you will still have many questions now. Some of you may still have some questions about the doctrinal background. Others may already be asking follow-up questions as to how we will proceed in the future.

And yes, naturally, we have also already thought about the matter of attire: the attire should be black and white, decent and in accordance with regional conditions.



We will answer all your questions: in our media, in training courses, or in dialogue. We are already working on this:

- a Special Edition of the Divine Service Guide on the subject of “Conferring ministerial authority and the ministerial mandate on women” will be published soon.
- these explanations will also be published in simplified form on our internet portals and in the Church’s magazines.
- training courses for leading ministers are also planned in the individual Regional Churches, followed by introductory events for all interested parties.

Dear brothers and sisters, please give the locally responsible ministers some time to familiarize themselves with the details and background information. Up to this point, only the Apostles have been involved, because this was a decision for the apostolate. And it is so important to me that I wanted to make the results known to the Church as a whole.

Well, that’s all for now. I thank you very warmly for your attention and your patience, not only here today, but also over the past months. It was important for us to have sufficient time to gain clarity on this important question. After all, the answer is the result of exhaustive theological and spiritual reflection—and not a reaction to societal pressure.

It has been a journey for our Church: we have elaborated the Catechism, we have reflected on the church, the sacraments, and now on the ministry. One aspect of this is the subject of “Women and ministry”. It was extensive reflection on ministry from the perspective of faith that has led us to this decision.

Thank you very much for taking the time and for putting your trust in us.

Now I wish all of you God’s blessing and much continued joy in the service of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Goodbye!