



Special Edition
2022

New Apostolic
Church

Divine Service
Guide

Page

Doctrine and practice

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Conferring ministerial authority and the ministerial mandate on women

1 Introduction

The Apostles are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4: 1). As such, they have the duty to see to the proper proclamation of the gospel and the proper dispensation of the sacraments, as well as to ensure the order within the congregation (CNAC 7.4.1). It is incumbent on the apostolate, led by the Chief Apostle, to inquire into the current order within the congregations and, through the activity of the Holy Spirit, find sound responses consistent with the Bible. Especially when it comes to issues for which there is no clear biblical answer, it is up to the apostolate to arrive at sound decisions with the help of the Holy Spirit and reason. This is the only way to ensure that the life of the Church and the congregations is shaped and developed in a manner appropriate to the time.

The question of whether men and women are equally worthy to receive ministerial authority and a ministerial mandate is one of those questions that the apostolate must answer and decide for the future. The question of ordaining women is directly related to previous considerations and decisions pertaining to our understanding of church, sacrament, and ministry.

1.1 A brief review

During his term of office, Chief Apostle Fehr made a variety of suggestions for clarifying and sharpening the doctrine of the New Apostolic Church. He initiated the composition of a book in which the teaching of the New Apostolic Church could be presented in an authoritative manner. The result of these efforts was the Catechism, which was published in 2012—that is, during Chief Apostle Leber’s term of office. In connection with this project, there was a major revision of the Ten Articles of Faith in 2010, which included a commentary outlining the doctrinal positions of our Church.

It was in the Catechism of the New Apostolic Church that the New Apostolic understanding of church was developed. Here the distinction between the visible and imperfect churches and the one invisible and perfect church of Jesus Christ plays a decisive role. The development of an understanding of church and a doctrine of the sacraments was unprecedented in the history of the New Apostolic Church.

However, it was not yet possible to present an actual doctrine of ministry in the Catechism. Nevertheless, the Catechism did describe some essential aspects of a future doctrine of ministry and open up some possible ways of thinking about it. As an example, the following explanations of the Fifth Article of Faith make a distinction between ministry and service, and mention essential elements of ordination:

“The human being, as expressed in the Fifth Article of Faith, bears his ministry on the basis of divine will and not human decision. This is executed or implemented by the Apostle ministry. The ministry and the apostolate are inseparably linked to one another. Consequently, where the Apostle ministry is active there is also a spiritual ministry (see 7). In the church of Christ there are also various other functions which aid in proclaiming the gospel and serve to the benefit of the believers, which can also be performed without ordination. ... The ordination to a spiritual ministry incorporates three aspects: authority, blessing, and sanctification. Especially for priestly ministries, the element of authority is of decisive importance, because they are authorised to proclaim the forgiveness of sins by commission of the Apostle and to consecrate Holy Communion. The priestly ministries share in the proper dispensation of the sacraments through the Apostles. The proper proclamation of God’s universal will to save also occurs through the authority bestowed through the apostolate. Through the blessing, both the priestly ministries and the Deacons are assured of the divine support and help of the Holy Spirit in the exercise of their ministries. Sanctification points to the fact that it is God Himself, in His holiness and inviolability, who seeks to act through the ministry” (CNAC 2.4.5).

It was in 2014 that work began on the formulation of a New Apostolic concept of ministry. In the year 2019, an essay entitled “The New Apostolic understanding of the spiritual ministry” appeared, which was published in Special Edition 2/2022 of the *Divine Service Guide*. Among these statements pertaining to ministry, the terms ministerial authority and ministerial mandate are of essential significance. These will be briefly explored in the following.

1.2 Summary

The apostolate—which is comprised of the Apostles in oneness with the Chief Apostle—has the task of ensuring the timely order within the congregations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The question of whether men and women are equally worthy to receive ministerial authority and a ministerial mandate is one of those questions that the apostolate must answer and decide for the future.

2 Definition of ministerial authority and the ministerial mandate

The Catechism already emphasises that “the element of authority is of decisive importance” (CNAC 2.4.5). The Catechism likewise describes the commission or mandate: “Ministers discharge their ministries within the framework of the authority issued to them. To this end they receive a commission from their Apostle, who assigns them a working area” (CNAC 7.8). On the basis of a resolution passed by the District Apostle Meeting, the aforementioned essay on the understanding of ministry incorporates the following binding statements:

“A ministry comprises both ministerial authority and a ministerial mandate. The ministerial authority is of a theological nature, while the ministerial mandate is of a canonical nature.

- Definition of ministerial authority: Ministerial authority constitutes the right to act and speak in the name of the triune God, which is founded upon Jesus Christ and issued through the Apostle by way of ordination in the power of the Holy Spirit. Ministerial authority is issued through ordination. It ends when the Apostle accepts the resignation of the minister, the minister is dismissed from his ministry, or at the time of the minister’s death.
- Definition of ministerial mandate: In the ministerial mandate the minister is assigned the right and responsibility to fulfil his tasks in the ministerial authority he has received, within a framework that is limited in terms of both duration and location. The ministerial mandate ends when the minister moves outside the area for which his mandate applies, when

he retires, after the Apostle accepts his resignation, when the minister is dismissed from his ministry, or dies.”¹

Among other things, ministerial authority relates to the dispensation of the sacraments, the right to ordain, and to proclaim the word of God. The ministerial mandate regulates the context in which this ministerial authority is to be exercised, be it in the congregation, the district, or the Regional Church. Therefore it is appropriate to understand the ministerial mandate as a canonical—and thus pragmatic—dimension.

Neither the Catechism nor the later explanations pertaining to the concept of ministry explicitly state that ministerial authority and a ministerial mandate can only be conferred upon men.

2.1 Summary

None of the literature on our Church’s understanding of ministry contains any theological justification for restricting ordination to men alone. The question therefore arises as to whether this practice of limiting the spiritual ministry exclusively to men—which is rooted in a general Christian tradition that dates back to the second century—is still tenable, given the biblical testimony. The problem in question cannot be properly resolved merely on the basis of the equal rights enjoyed by both men and women in society—a principle enshrined in the constitutions of many states—but only on the basis of an appropriate theological evaluation of the biblical testimony. In this context, the biblical reference that man is created in the image of God—as found in the accounts of the creation—is of crucial importance.

3 Humankind in the image of God

The two accounts of creation found in [Genesis 1: 1–2: 3](#) and [Genesis 2: 4–25](#) constitute the most important theological foundations for any discussion of man as part of the creation.²

¹ *Divine Service Guide Special Edition 2/2022*: “The New Apostolic Understanding of the spiritual ministry”, Neu-Isenburg, 2022, pp. 26–27.

² *Divine Service Guide Special Edition 2/2021*: “Man and woman in the image of God”, Neu-Isenburg, 2021, pp. 4–12.

While the first account of the creation appears rather abstract, the second account has a pronounced and vivid narrative character.

3.1 The first account of creation (Genesis 1: 1–2: 3)

The formulation that human beings are created in the image of God is found in [Genesis 1: 26–27](#). We also read of human beings in the image of God in [Genesis 5: 1–2](#) and [Genesis 9: 6](#).

The first account of creation portrays God as the one who orders or constitutes all of reality in six days—that is, in six time periods—through His word alone. In the concluding phase of the creation event—on the sixth day—the animals living on the ground are the first to be created ([Genesis 1: 24–25](#)). And once the various animals have come into being, God turns His attention to the creation of mankind: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” ([Genesis 1: 26–28](#)).

The creation of man is distinct from that of all other things and creatures. This is already evident from the fact that God does not utter the rather neutral statement: “Let there be...”, as was the case with the other works of creation, but rather seems to be talking to Himself, as it were: “Let Us make man...”.³ This appeal to Himself to make man is expanded—and even intensified, so to speak—by the fact that God relates Himself directly to man—after all, man is to be created “in Our image”. God thereby places Himself into an enduring relationship with man. By the same token, man is thereby incorporated into just as enduring a relationship with God.

Following this, God fulfils what He has set out to do in [Genesis 1: 27](#): He creates man “in His own image”—and He makes man “as a plural entity consisting of man and woman”⁴ (Stinglhammer). At first, the word “man” is used as a generic term, and is only given a concrete meaning later on through the biological specification “man and woman”. From the start, human beings created in the image of

³ “In dogmatic tradition, this sentence is interpreted as a reference to the Trinitarian nature of God: all three divine persons are all equally responsible for the creation. (“Man and woman in the image of God.” *Divine Service Guide Special Edition 2/2021*, Neu-Isenburg, 2021, p. 5).

⁴ Stinglhammer, Hermann: *Einführung in die Schöpfungstheologie* [An introduction to creation theology]. Darmstadt, 2011, p. 31. God likewise constitutes a plural entity who is three persons in Himself and therefore His own eternal counterpart.

God thus incorporate both genders in terms of substance. “Man and woman together reflect the glory of God, and together propagate God’s creation... The only one superior to him [the human being] is God. Thus he stands between God and the world.”⁵ Man or woman—that is, man in general—are both equally created in the image of God. Both stand in an identical—namely a direct and unconditional—relationship of dependency to God. As a result, man and woman have received the same task in the creation, namely to have dominion over it and to represent God in the creation. Beyond that, this plural entity also indicates that human beings cannot truly exercise their humanity—that is, the fact that they are created in the image of God—in a state of egocentricity or chosen isolation. The plural entity only “becomes concrete once both make the transition to the reciprocal use of the address ‘you’”.⁶ Man and woman, woman and man, therefore belong together because mankind has been created for fellowship from the outset. Man—in the form of man and woman—is blessed by God, addressed by Him, and assigned a mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.” Man is commanded to reproduce. In so doing he is to fulfil God’s mandate to represent Him in the creation and subdue the earth throughout the course of history.

3.2 The second account of creation (Genesis 2: 4–25)

While the first account of creation focuses on the world as a whole and divides its development into six distinct stages, the second account of the creation takes the form of a story with characters who act and react to one another. Schüle stresses that although the description of the first account of creation is a closed narrative it seems made “to be continued”. The second account of creation now constitutes this “continuation”, even though it was composed at an earlier point in time and stems from a different line of tradition. The two accounts of creation do not exist in isolation from one another, but are combined to form a new entity. The “Eden narrative regards itself as a commentary on, and even a correction of, the narrative concerning the creation of living creatures in general, and mankind in particular.”⁷

Genesis 2: 7 relates that man is formed by God from the dust of the earth. Like a potter, God creates a figure out of the dust. The designation “Adam” here refers to mankind in general, without making any differentiation of gender. The word “Adam” refers to *adamah*, the earth, the ground, from which man was created. It is of note

⁵ Haag, Herbert: “Schöpfungsbericht”, in: *Bibel-Lexikon* [“The account of the creation.” In Bible lexicon]. Second edition, Einsiedeln/Freiburg/Cologne, 1968, column 1554.

⁶ Stinglhammer, Hermann: *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷ Schüle, Andreas: *Die Urgeschichte* [Primeval history] (Genesis 1–11). Zurich, 2009, p. 53 et seq.

that the idea of being created in the image of God—which is of such fundamental importance for the creation of man in [Genesis 1: 27–28](#)—is missing here. However, there is a corresponding action of God, namely the fact that God breathes into man in order to give him the breath of life. The figure that God has formed of the dust of the earth receives its breath of life directly from Him. God turns to man in a binding—indeed intimate—manner, an action He does not take with any other creature. The breath of life that the moulded clay receives not only results in its physical vitality, as it is inherent in the animals, but also creates the necessary conditions for its personhood. The breath of life is, at the same time, the breath of God—and thus the reason for the uniqueness of man within the creation. So it is that “the Eden narrative likewise associates the creation of man with the notion of being created in the image of God”. The special status of man, his function as the image of God within the creation, is thus also brought to expression in the second account of creation.⁸ Man becomes a “living being”, someone who can and should shape his environment: “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” ([Genesis 2: 15](#)). Tending and keeping are both constructive actions which are assigned to man. Here we find a clear parallel to the dominion assigned to man in [Genesis 1: 26](#) et seq.

[Genesis 2: 18](#) brings a fundamental principle to expression, namely that human life is always to unfold in the context of fellowship or community: “It is not good that man should be alone.” The helper that is to be created for the man is to correspond to him. In literal translation, the second part of [verse 18](#) speaks of “a helper as a counterpart to him”. Schüle points out that this counterpart qualifies the help, so to speak: “Man is to have a counterpart who is not only with him and near him, but who also meets him at eye-level, and in whose presence Adam recognises himself.”⁹

[Verses 22 and 23](#) discuss the entity that corresponds to the man, the entity that is his counterpart. This counterpart is not created from the dust of the earth, but rather from the flesh of the man. The rib from which the woman is created symbolises that the body of the man and that of his counterpart are of the same kind and of the same substance. The physical unity between the man and his counterpart is emphasised: “This is now bone of my bones and

⁸ Schüle, Andreas: *ibid.*, p. 61.

⁹ Schüle, Andreas: *ibid.*, p. 69. In this connection, Schüle goes on to point out an interesting linguistic commonality between the second part of [Genesis 2: 18](#) and [Genesis 1: 26](#): “It is worth noting that the expression ‘as a counterpart to him’ is structured in the same grammatical fashion in Hebrew, and that it also sounds very similar to the expression ‘in His image’ as used in [Genesis 1: 26](#): both cases have to do with a kind of correspondence and similarity that defines the partners involved in their counterpart.”

flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Adam, the man—who had until that point existed without any gender specification, and in whom the potential for sexuality had been inherent, so to speak—is now able to describe and recognise himself as “Man” and the other as “Woman” in the counterpart who is like him. There is a physical unity between them. They are made of the same material. Man and woman are equally formed and shaped by God. In both cases, they are formed from an already existing material and owe their existence to the direct actions of God.

Any notion of hierarchy between man and woman is only suggested in [Genesis 3: 16](#), following the account of the fall into sin ([Genesis 3: 1–24](#)). The rulership of the man referenced after the fall into sin—which can therefore also be regarded as a consequence of sin—finds its first direct expression in that Adam gives the woman a name: “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” ([Genesis 3: 20](#)). This assignment of names is to be understood in parallel to [Genesis 2: 20](#): “And Adam gave names to...every beast of the field.” The woman is now subordinate to the man.

3.3 Summary

The close relationship between God and man is expressed in both of the Old Testament accounts of the creation. Adam—that is, humankind in the form of both man and woman—receives the mandate to have dominion ([Genesis 1: 26 et seq.](#)) and to tend and keep the creation. There is a physical unity between them. They are made of the same material. Any notion of hierarchy between man and woman is only suggested in [Genesis 3: 16](#), following the account of the fall into sin ([Genesis 3: 1–24](#)).

4 Man and woman in the image of God: theological implications¹⁰

The conclusions that can be derived from the fact that man has been created in the image of God are listed and described in the following.

¹⁰ These remarks are based on the essay “Man and woman in the image of God” (*Divine Service Guide Special Edition 2/2021*, Neu-Isenburg, 2021, pp. 4–19).

4.1 Man and woman are of the same dignity

On the basis of the biblical testimony, man and woman, woman and man, are equally created in the image of God. Martina Bär quite rightly remarks that Genesis 1 “guarantees the fundamental equality of man and woman on the basis of the creation”.¹¹ When the Catechism states that man and woman are different, this refers to their differing biological constitutions, their distinct genders, and not any sort of inequality affecting the person as a whole. “Being human in a concrete gender form signifies being a protagonist, an individual with intellectual abilities and talents, who possesses freedom and language, the ability to act, a story of one’s own, and the ability to live and love in relationships.”¹² Man and woman are thus partners of equal dignity, even though they are biologically distinct from one another.

4.2 God reveals that man is the image of God

The discussion of man in the image of God is not intended, by any means, to level out the infinite qualitative difference between God and man. The Catechism clearly references how impossible it is for human beings to fathom the nature of God: “That man has been created in the image of God does not imply, however, that one can draw any conclusions about God’s nature from human nature. This is only the case with Jesus Christ” (CNAC 3.3.2). Any discussion of man in the image of God can only occur with reference to God.¹³ Man as the image of God can only be recognised and understood by way of reference to the God who reveals Himself and speaks. The self-declaration of God is the prerequisite for properly understanding man, his creatureliness, his nature, and his mandate in the world.

4.3 Man and woman have the same mission

The Catechism expressly points out that man and woman have both received the same mandate to “have dominion over the earth, in other words, to shape and protect it” (CNAC 3.3.2). In terms of substance, the dominion of man and woman is not in any way distinct. Therefore they do not each have their own assigned “domains”, as a traditional understanding of gender roles might

¹¹ Bär, Martina: *Mensch und Ebenbild Gottes sein. Zur gottebenbildlichen Dimension von Mann und Frau*. [Being man and the image of God. On the male and female dimension of likeness to God]. Würzburg, 2011, p. 285. Also similar: p. 289: “The statement that man is created in the image of God refers to mankind as a whole, and thus also to both man and woman without distinction.”

¹² Bär, Martina: *ibid.*, p. 299.

¹³ Gerhard Ebeling rightly points out: “The existence of man in the image of God is based upon him being God’s counterpart, and can thus only be conceived of as the existence of man in the presence of God.” (Ebeling, Gerhard: *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens, Bd. 1* [Dogmatics of the Christian faith, Vol. 1: “*Der Glaube an Gott den Schöpfer der Welt*” [Faith in God, the Creator of the world], Tübingen, 1979, p. 384).

suggest. It is not as though God has defined that the whole wide world is reserved as the man's sphere of influence and activity, while that of the woman is confined to the microcosm of home, work, and family. Having been created in the image of God, the full potential of the earthly creation as a whole has been entrusted to both genders, even if this is not always realised due to cultural and religious traditions. It can only be protected and shaped by both of them together. It is thus impossible for any one individual to fulfil God's mandate to have dominion over the earth. This can only be achieved in community and solidarity.

The act of protecting and shaping comes to its first concrete expression in the cohabitation of the genders or in the raising of children. Matrimony and family life are defined and supported by man and woman in equal measure. Beyond that, part of the mandate to protect and shape the earthly creation is that both man and woman accept responsibility equally. Refusal to perceive, deal with, or participate in social reality also contradicts the commandment to love one's neighbour, which has been given to all people. Ultimately, both man and woman are called upon in equal measure to be aware of their responsibility to protect the creation, which includes the plants and animals, and to exhibit corresponding behaviour.

4.4 Summary

The New Apostolic Church teaches that both woman and man are created in the image of God and are therefore of the same nature and dignity. Both have been equally called to have dominion: they are to protect and shape the creation. The fact that man is created in the image of God is therefore an element of the order of creation, because it constitutes man's irrevocable orientation to God.

The mandate to protect and shape the earthly creation also entails that women and men assume equal responsibility.

5 New Testament statements on the position of women in the church

The fact that human beings are created in the image of God is the foundation for the essential identity of man and woman. It is on the basis of this finding that both can be equally entrusted with ministry and service, both in the church and in the respective local congre-

gation. No clear picture emerges if one looks at the New Testament record. The role of women in the church is quite diverse in the course of the first century, that is, in the New Testament period.

5.1 Women in the gospels

The Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) and the gospel of John alike relate that Jesus spoke with women, taught them (Luke 10: 38–42), healed them, and took care of their needs. Luke 8: 1–3 relates that, in addition to the men in Jesus' immediate surroundings, there were also several women. Jesus had healed some of them, but there were also many others, that is, those who had been persuaded by His preaching about the nearness of the kingdom of God, who had joined the community of His disciples, and who supported Him out of their own means.

John 4: 5–42 even relates that a Samaritan woman with whom Jesus had a conversation professed her belief in Jesus as the Messiah not only to Jesus but also to the Samaritans who lived in her town. It is expressly emphasised that many of the Samaritans came to believe on the basis of this woman's preaching (verse 39).

Several women belonging to the community of the disciples were also present at the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27: 55–56; Mark 15: 40–41; Luke 23: 49). The gospel of John relates that, rather than observe the crucifixion and death from a distance, the women stood in close proximity to the crucified Christ (John 19: 25–27).

Women were also witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, and it was they who first reported this event to the disciples. Within the accounts of the resurrection, women are assigned a significant task, namely to spread the proto-Christian kerygma of the resurrection of Jesus. The message of the resurrection of Jesus is the essential prerequisite that allows the church to emerge with its preaching of the gospel.

5.2 The activity of women in the early Christian congregations: the testimony of the Pauline epistles

It is of note that men and women are equally mentioned and greeted in the closing of the letter to the Romans (chapter 16). The first to be mentioned is "Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea" (Romans 16: 1). Phoebe is a servant of a congregation and is also an important person who has helped the Apostle and the church.

In Romans 16: 3, Paul asks the Roman congregation to extend his greetings to two fellow workers, Priscilla and Aquila. Paul praises both of them for having risked their own necks for his life (Romans

16: 4). They presided over a house church (Romans 16: 5). Both of these individuals are also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16: 19, on which occasion Paul extends greetings both from them and their house church.

In Romans 16: 7, greetings are likewise addressed to both a man and a woman—presumably a married couple in this case as well: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the Apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”¹⁴ This passage has attracted a lot of attention in recent times, especially because several exegetes are of the view that Junia was a woman, who is designated here as an Apostle.

The aforementioned examples make it clear that women certainly played an important role in the Christian churches with which Paul had contact: they held congregational leadership functions and were actively involved in preaching the gospel among the Gentiles.

The first epistle to the Corinthians contains statements pertaining to the proper conduct of both men and women in divine service. According to these, both men and women are active within the service: they pray and they speak prophetically. Prophetic speech plays a significant role within Paul’s argumentation against purely ecstatic glossolalia, which is incomprehensible in itself and in need of interpretation: “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men...but he who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Corinthians 14: 3–4). Prophetic speech has a similar function to that of the sermon, namely to impart the gospel in a comprehensible manner.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Wolfgang Schrage notes: “Since 1 Corinthians 12: 1 et seq. deals primarily with the activity of the Spirit, who bestows gifts indiscriminately to all Christians..., this has nothing to do with offices to be delegated or denied, or even their gender-specific divisions, [therefore] any differentiation between specific functions of the man and the woman are completely foreign. Nowhere before is there even any suggestion that specific talents and criteria can only be for men.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Marlies Gielen remarks as follows concerning this: “Strangely, the masculine first name Junias is not recorded in any literature or inscriptions anywhere. By contrast, the feminine form, Junia is widely attested.” (Gielen, Marlies: *Frauen in den Gemeinden des Paulus. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 1. Jahrhunderts* [Women in the churches of Paul. From the beginnings to the end of the first century]. In: *Salzburger Theologische Zeitschrift* [Salzburg Theological Magazine] 6, 2002, p. 184.

¹⁵ Schrage, Wolfgang: *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* [The first epistle to the Corinthians] (1 Corinthians 11: 17–14: 40). Zurich/Düsseldorf, 1999, p. 484.

5.3 Rejection of women's activity in the early Christian congregations: the positions of the Pastoral Letters

The Pastoral Letters, written at the end of the first century, seek to preserve the legacy of Paul and carry it over into the present. This clearly tends to diminish the role of women, who were by this point to be largely excluded from the activities of church life. The organisation of the congregation was now based on that of the Roman family, which was typically led by the father of the family, while the women receded into the background. At the same time, the intent was to combat the influence of heretics, because it was assumed that women, who sometimes also led house churches, were particularly susceptible to false teachings.

5.3.1 The commandment for women to keep silent

Curiously, an early piece of testimony reflecting criticism of female activity in the church is found in [1 Corinthians 14: 33–36](#). This passage, which requires women to keep silent in the church—and thus not help shape congregational life—appears to contradict the remarks found in [1 Corinthians 11: 5](#). Most New Testament scholars are in agreement that this passage was a later insertion.¹⁶ It is similar to the position taken in [1 Timothy 2: 11–15](#), a document of the later Pauline school.

The commandment for women to keep silent in [1 Timothy 2: 11–15](#) is similar to the one in [1 Corinthians 14: 34–35](#) and also takes up motifs from [1 Corinthians 11: 7–12](#). The text in [1 Timothy 2: 11–15](#) generally distinguishes itself by taking on a relatively rigid tone with regard to women: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.” It was with this reference to Eve, who was generally considered the first sinner, that women were excluded from many activities in the congre-

¹⁶ See, for example, Marlies Gielen: “This demand for women to keep silent in the congregational assembly, and thus also for them to be subordinate to men, is found in 1 Corinthians 14: 33–36, a genuine letter of Paul. Nevertheless, Paul cannot be held responsible for this. On the contrary, this passage corresponds exactly to the theological concept of the Pastoral Letters. ... The passage in 1 Corinthians 14: 33–36 is a post-Pauline insertion that was made under the influence of the developments represented in, and promoted by, the Pastoral Letters.” (Gielen, Marlies: *ibid.*, pp. 190 et seq.). See also Conzelmann, Hans: *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* [The first epistle to the Corinthians]. Göttingen, 1981, pp. 298 et seq.: “This self-contained passage is out of context: it interrupts the theme of prophecy and disturbs the style of the exposition. And in objective terms, it stands in contradiction to 11: 2 et seq., which presupposes the participation of women in the church... This injunction reflects the civic consolidation of the church, for instance on the level of the Pastoral Letters, in which the object was to adhere to the general customs of the surroundings. Therefore anyone who defends the position that this text is original will have no choice but to generate some sort of auxiliary construct.”

gation. In the context of the congregation they were not permitted to ask questions about faith. Women were to be instructed in faith outside of the congregation. Beyond that, there was discrimination against childless women. Women were also to ensure that their children did not turn away from the Christian faith. If this were to happen, then even their own salvation would be in question. It was forbidden for women to preach the gospel publicly. The men were the teachers, while the women were the recipients of their instruction.

However, a closer comparison of [1 Timothy 2: 11–15](#) and the passage in [1 Corinthians 11: 2–16](#) (women and men in divine service) draws attention to two essential differences: first of all, Apostle Paul does not argue on the basis of the temptation of Eve in [1 Corinthians 11](#), nor does he oblige women to remain silent in the congregation (as was admonished in the later Pauline school, according to [1 Timothy 2: 12](#)).

5.3.2 Did Eve bring sin into the world?

The author of the [first epistle to Timothy](#) positions himself with the apostolic authority of Paul: “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” This reference to the second account of the creation ([Genesis 2: 4–25](#)), namely to Adam and Eve, cements the role distribution as an expression of the immutable order of creation. While Paul only alludes to the second creation account in [1 Corinthians 11: 8–9](#), the mention of the names Adam and Eve makes this account the express focus. The relationship of subordination is justified with the statement that the man was the first be created, while the woman was created afterward. The ensuing argument shows that the thinking of Paul—as it comes to expression in the Adam-Christ typology of the letter to the Romans, for example—is rather foreign to the author of this letter: “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” ([1 Timothy 2: 14](#)). The first epistle to Timothy borrows from a late Judaic interpretative tradition of the fall into sin, in which the blame for transgressing the divine commandment is assigned to the woman.

Paul, on the contrary, states: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” ([Romans 5: 12](#)). For Paul, Adam is the collective image of mankind mired in sin and death, in which gender does not play any role.

5.4 Summary

The testimony of the New Testament is not clear. There are accounts that make reference to the intensive involvement of women in missionary work, congregational life, and even divine service activity. On the other hand, there are statements from the end of the first century indicating that women are forbidden to take an active part in congregational life. It was thus also impossible for women to participate in missionary work and divine service activities. Therefore, it is impossible to derive any clear standards for the present from these divergent accounts in the New Testament.

Accordingly, the District Apostle Meeting passed the following resolution in fall 2021: “Individual negative statements found in some New Testament letters concerning the active participation of women in divine service and the congregation cannot serve as sufficient grounds for excluding women from ministry. Consequently, the apostolate—which is endowed with teaching authority and charged with establishing the order of the Church—has a decision to make.”

6 The election of the twelve Apostles by Jesus

The Catechism of the New Apostolic Church points out that Jesus Christ “Himself directly gave His church only one ministry, namely the Apostle ministry” (CNAC 7.4). It goes on to supplement: “From among His disciples, Jesus Christ chose twelve men and appointed them as Apostles (Mark 3: 13–19; Luke 6: 13–16)” (CNAC 7.4.2). The apostolate therefore has a decisive function in defining the shape and meaning of ministry in the church. For this reason it is also necessary to inquire into the normative implications for ministry and church resulting from the fact that Jesus only called men to be Apostles.

Even though Jesus did not share the reservations of many of His contemporaries toward women, and even though many women followed Him and supported the disciples, He only called men to be Apostles. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—that is, the Synoptic Gospels—provide an account of the institution of twelve disciples as Apostles (Matthew 10: 1–4; Mark 3: 13–19; Luke 6: 13–16).

The question of why Jesus only elected men to be Apostles during His life on earth can therefore first of all be answered with a reference to the typological significance of the number twelve. The forefathers of Israel were also men, so in this respect as well a parallel had to be drawn between them and the “fathers” of the new and universal people of God—that is, the twelve Apostles.

However, some purely practical reasons for this election of men can also be identified, and these have to do with the societal conditions of the time. After all, the instruction to preach the gospel made it necessary, as it were, to entrust the office to men, especially since Jesus expressly commanded the Apostles when they were sent: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans” ([Matthew 10: 5](#)). They therefore had to confine their activity to the Jewish population and naturally also—as He Himself had done and as it was customary until the middle of the first century—proclaim the message of the imminence of the kingdom of God in the synagogues ([Mark 1: 39; 6: 1–2; Acts 13: 14; 17: 17](#)). Only men were permitted to participate in the service of the synagogue. Only they had the right to read from Holy Scripture and explain it. All of these things were impossible for women in the context of the Judaic community.

If one dispenses with such an assessment of Jesus’ election of men as Apostles in chronological, cultural-historical, and salvation-historical terms, one might just as easily demand that the apostolate should consist not only of twelve men, but of twelve Jews—and then it would only be possible for it to consist of twelve men and no more.

Even the personal occupation of the Apostle ministry that began in the nineteenth century would then be called into question. After all, one of Jesus’ requirements of those called as Apostles at the time was that they had to “be with Him” ([Mark 3: 14](#)), in other words, they had to be among those who had accompanied Him on His journeys through Palestine. If this requirement were also a hallmark of true apostleship, then not even Paul could have been considered a true Apostle any longer.

Jesus Himself did not provide any reasoning for the choices He made. Therefore, no normative conclusions can be inferred from this for the church.

6.1 Summary

In May 2021, the District Apostle Meeting resolved the following: “According to the testimony of the New Testament, Jesus called only men to be Apostles. It was to them that He entrusted the leadership of His church. We are not aware of any statement from Jesus concerning the question of whether a ministry can also be conferred upon women. From the words and deeds of Jesus it cannot be clearly inferred whether or not it is possible to ordain women. The decision is up to the apostolate which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is responsible for the order of the Church.”

7 Women in the New Apostolic congregation

In both the Catholic Apostolic Church and the New Apostolic Church, there were women who were active as Deaconesses. In the Catholic Apostolic Church the Deaconess was blessed for her service by the Angel—that is, the rector—of the congregation. They did not receive an ordination by the Apostle. It is presumed that Deaconesses were not ordained in the New Apostolic Church either, but rather that they also received a special blessing. It is not clear who performed these blessings. These Deaconesses were active in the congregation up until the 1950s, likely performing pastoral and charitable duties first and foremost.

Deaconesses were no longer mentioned in the 1952 edition of *Questions and Answers*. In the time following, the question of ordaining women to ministry was treated with great hesitation. In an announcement by the Chief Apostle on the Church’s understanding of ministry, published in 1999—that is, during Chief Apostle Fehr’s time—the concluding lines contain the succinct comment: “Women do not bear a spiritual ministry in the New Apostolic Church. In this matter, the Church orients itself by the example of Jesus and considers itself in harmony with the statements of Holy Scripture.”¹⁷

¹⁷ *Divine Service Guide 6/1999*, Frankfurt am Main, 1999, p. 96.

Over the following years, Chief Apostles Fehr¹⁸ and Leber¹⁹ simply stated that the matter of ordaining women was still an open question. There was no official or theologically justified announcement by the apostolate concerning the matter of women and ministry.

Today, women are active in many different capacities within the congregation. They teach Sunday School or Pre-Sunday School, provide Religious Instruction and Confirmation Instruction, and are also active in working with the youth. Some of these activities have to do with proclaiming the gospel and making it accessible to others. Together with ordained and non-ordained men, they sing in choirs and thereby bring to expression praise, worship, and supplications in the form of Bible texts and poetry. In this respect, there is a development here that certainly raises the question of whether women can be ordained.

The question of conferring authority on women also arises in light of the teaching that men and women are equally called to be firstfruits or part of the royal priesthood, and that they will all receive a new body like that of the risen Lord. The royal priesthood will reign with Christ in the kingdom of peace and proclaim the gospel. This eschatological vocation, which applies to the future, suggests that both men and women can already today serve for the salvation of their neighbour by way of ministerial authority.

7.1 Summary

Up until the first half of the twentieth century, women were entrusted with the Deacon ministry. This ceased to be the case in later years, without any justification having been provided. Today, women serve as teachers and youth leaders in the congregation. The question of whether ministerial powers can also be conferred upon women also arises in view of the belief that both men and women are equally called to be firstfruits and thus to the royal priesthood.

¹⁸ In a 2005 interview, Chief Apostle Fehr expressed the following remarks with regard to this subject: "Women in ministry? That's a hot iron! But perhaps one day we will come around to the way it was before when we had Deaconesses. Let's see what the future brings. But there will likely not be a female Chief Apostle any time soon." (*Our Lord is coming: The New Apostolic Church under Chief Apostle Richard Fehr*. Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 85 et seq.).

¹⁹ In an interview published in the 2005 Pentecost brochure entitled *One in Spirit*, Chief Apostle Leber remarked: "I think this is a matter of tradition. We refer first and foremost to Holy Scripture. There we read that only men were called to ministry. The question as to whether it must remain that way remains open."

8 Theological assessment of the New Testament record

An examination of the New Testament record from the perspective of ministerial authority and the ministerial mandate shows that it does not address the issue of ministerial authority and offers little argument as to why women should not receive this authority.²⁰ The few negative statements, which are mainly found in the Pastoral Letters, refer to the various activities in the congregation, and thus belong in the context of what the New Apostolic understanding of the spiritual ministry calls the ministerial mandate. The Pastoral Letters prohibit women from being active in the church without explaining why they cannot be entrusted with a ministry. The problem of ministerial authority is thus addressed neither explicitly nor implicitly in the New Testament context. This is surely also related to the fact that the New Testament usually does not make any detailed statements on doctrine. At best, it merely offers hints about the Trinity or our understanding of sacraments, church, and ministry. The development of these subjects into doctrinal positions only really began in the second century, that is, in the post-New Testament period.

A theological justification for the ordination of women into ministry can thus only be founded upon anthropological factors (that is, on the basis of human nature) and soteriological factors (that is, on the basis of the human need for salvation). The fact that man has been created in the image of God—this much should have at least become clear—is the hermeneutic key to the question of justifying the ordination of women. Being created in the image of God brings to expression the fundamental relationship of mankind with God and the relationship of God with mankind. Man and woman are both equally created in the image of God and are thus directly related to God Himself. In anthropological terms, this means that man and woman, woman and man are of the same dignity and have received the same mission from God. “God gave His most distinguished creation a life force and also permitted them to share in divine characteristics such as love, personality, freedom, reason, and immortality” (CNAC 3.3.2). Although man and woman are perfect creations of God in terms of their origin, the fall into sin has damaged both of them equally, so that they are mired in original sin and the inclination to sin. Man and woman are both sinners and are in equal need of God’s gracious care and of redemption. Woman

²⁰ Perhaps 1 Timothy 2: 14 can be considered an exception: “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” The author is borrowing from a late Judaic interpretative tradition of the fall into sin, which assigns the woman the blame for transgressing the divine commandment in order to thereby provide justification for the fact that she cannot play a role—or only play a subordinate role—in congregational life and the divine service event.

and man are thus also in equal soteriological need. God's devotion to fallen mankind applies to both: Jesus Christ died for men and women alike, and the salvation He has acquired applies to both of them together. If human beings can receive salvation irrespective of their gender, then they can also be involved in mediating salvation—insofar as this occurs through word and sacrament—irrespective of their gender.

According to Paul, there was no longer to be any distinction between Jews and Gentiles, nor slaves and freemen, nor man and woman in Christ ([Galatians 3: 28](#)). The fundamental fact that all the believers together form the body of Christ, as addressed here by the Apostle, must be clearly expressed as the principle and foundation of the church and of the mediation of salvation.

It must also be considered that the risen Jesus is neither man nor woman, because the resurrected do not possess the characteristic of gender, according to the words of Jesus ([Mark 12: 25](#)).

8.1 Summary

The New Testament statements that speak against the participation of women in divine service and congregational life do not provide any valid theological justification for this. Most of these texts are of an expressly pragmatic character and are bound to their time. It becomes clear that a theological justification for the ordination of women into ministry can only be founded on anthropological factors (that is, on the basis of human nature) and soteriological factors (that is, on the basis of the human need for salvation).

9 Doctrinal and practical implications

Following our theological evaluation of the biblical statements, we now turn our attention to the resulting doctrinal and practical implications.

9.1 Calling to service and to ministry

The essay entitled “The New Apostolic understanding of the spiritual ministry” explains: “The service incumbent on every Christian, which can also be performed without ordination, has an unmistakably priestly aspect. In [1 Peter 2: 9](#) the members of the congregation are even addressed as a ‘royal priesthood’. The

believers—who have been buried and have resurrected with Jesus in their baptism with water—will follow Him and profess Him as their Lord, and will be part of a universal priesthood of believers. This priesthood is realised by following Christ in word and deed. The priesthood that is based on divine election and imparted through ordination is to be distinguished from this priesthood, which has not been issued any sacramental authority.”²¹

These explanations, together with the above theological justification for the ordination of women into ministry from an anthropological and soteriological point of view, lead to the following conclusion: not only are women and men alike called to the universal priesthood of believers, but both can also be called to spiritual ministry. Therefore, women can likewise receive blessing, sanctification, and authority through the mediation of the apostolate.

9.2 Ordination of women and men

The Fifth Article of Faith, which—among other things—deals with the subject of ordination, states: “I believe that those designated by God for a ministry are ordained only by Apostles, and that authority, blessing, and sanctification for their ministration come forth out of the Apostle ministry” (CNAC 2.4.5). The explanations pertaining to this article of faith are of crucial significance for the present considerations: “God is the one who designates an individual for a ministry. Thus the ministry is not a human work, nor is it ultimately that of the congregation. Rather it is God’s gift to His church. The human being, as expressed in the Fifth Article of Faith, bears [this] ministry on the basis of divine will and not human decision” (ibid.). The article thus speaks of human beings in general terms—that is, without reference to gender—with respect to those who have been designated by God for a ministry. It can therefore be said that both women and men can be designated by God for a ministry.

9.2.1 Blessing and sanctification

The task of recognising the designated individual and ordaining him or her into ministry lies with the Apostle ministry. Both women and men alike can experience that blessing and sanctification are issued for the service for which they have been designated. Concerning this, the Catechism remarks as follows: Through the blessing, both the priestly ministries and the Deacons are assured of the divine support and help of the Holy Spirit in the exercise of their ministries. Sanctification points to the fact that it is God Himself, in His holiness and inviolability, who seeks to act through the ministry” (CNAC 2.4.5). Blessing and sanctification are necessary

²¹ *Divine Service Guide Special Edition 2/2022*: “The New Apostolic understanding of the spiritual ministry”, Neu-Isenburg, 2022, pp. 9–10.

for both women and men to properly exercise the ministry and the service conferred upon them.

9.2.2 Ministerial authority

The spiritual ministry for which God has designated them receives its character through authority.

The Catechism mentions three levels of ministry—Apostle, Priest, and Deacon—each of which is associated with a different degree of authority. Like men, women can be ordained into all of these levels of ministry with all their inherent powers.

The remarks contained in “The New Apostolic understanding of the spiritual ministry” explain the powers inherent in each of the levels of ministry.²²

Among other things, the ministerial authority of the Apostle includes the proper proclamation of the gospel, the proper dispensation of all three sacraments, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ, the ordination of ministers, as well as the dispensation of all blessings.

Priests and Deacons share in the powers of the apostolate in different ways. They are all sent by, and stand in oneness with, the apostolate.

Among other things, the ministerial authority of the Priest includes the proper proclamation of the gospel, as well as the proper dispensation of Holy Baptism with water and Holy Communion. Priests are authorised to proclaim the forgiveness of sins by commission of the Apostle and in the name of Jesus Christ. They have the authority to conduct divine services and dispense blessings.

The ministerial authority of the Deacon includes the proper proclamation of the word and the celebration of word services beginning with the Trinitarian invocation and closing with the dispensation of the Trinitarian blessing.

Both women and men can trust that they have been designated by God for a spiritual ministry. Powers that serve for the salvation of human beings and the benefit of the congregation can be imparted to both from the apostolate. Beyond that, the essay on “The New Apostolic understanding of the spiritual ministry” emphasises the following: “The selection of ministers to be ordained takes

²² *Ibid.*, p. 26 et seq.

into account that the competencies required for the fulfilment of services associated with the respective ministry are already present in them.”²³ Before being ordained, both women and men must “profess the content of the Ten Articles of Faith of the New Apostolic Church” and properly advocate the teaching of the Apostles as explained in the Catechism of the New Apostolic Church.

9.2.3 Ministerial mandate

The ministry is not an end unto itself, nor does it serve to reward or elevate anyone. Ordination into a ministry always occurs with the needs of the congregation and the requirements of the Church in mind. When women are ordained to the ministry, the matter of social acceptance must also be taken into account. In addition, due consideration should be given to their personal situations—as is the case with men.

The spiritual ministry stands in the service of Christ. This service is performed in the local congregation, the district, or the Regional Church. Women who receive a spiritual ministry perform their duties in the congregation. Beyond that, they can also be appointed and assigned to leadership functions in the congregation, district, and the Regional Church. The remarks pertaining to the appointment and assignment of ministers in the essay entitled “The New Apostolic understanding of the spiritual ministry”, section 6.2.2 (“Appointment”) and section 6.2.3 (“Assignment”) also apply to them.

9.3 Summary

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 addition, women can be appointed to leadership functions in the congregation, the district, or the Regional Church, or assigned to services associated with a ministry. Nevertheless, the associated ministerial mandate is only to be issued in places where it will find acceptance in the congregation, and where social consensus as well as the law allow for it.

²³ Ibid., p. 29.

10 Notes on the introduction of ordination for women

In June 2022 the International District Apostle Meeting made a binding declaration: “Women can be entrusted with ministerial authority and a ministerial mandate on the basis of gender equivalence and equality before God.” Furthermore, it was decided that it will be possible to ordain women as of 1 January 2023.

10.1 Election to the spiritual ministry

Since it is God Himself who designates a person for ministry, it is equally true for both men and women that they can bear a ministry “on the basis of divine will and not human decision”²⁴. Considering that “the spiritual ministry is, on the one hand, a service to God, and on the other hand, a service upon human beings,”²⁵ any sort of quota regulation is automatically out of the question as a selection criterion for a spiritual ministry.

Although the basic prerequisite for ordaining women or men is divine calling, the needs and requirements of the congregation, district, or Regional Church are also always taken into account in the case of a planned ordination.²⁶

It is also necessary to consider the competencies “required for the fulfilment of services associated with the respective ministry”.²⁷ Through the ordination, “available talents are awakened and consecrated for the exercise of the ministry” (CNAC 7.7). This means that “the good abilities and characteristics that this person possesses are placed into the service of ministerial exercise through the act of ordination”.²⁸ Both women and men alike bring their talents, specific abilities, and positive characteristics to the exercise of their ministries, and engage these for the benefit of the congregation.

10.2 Obligations associated with the spiritual ministry

Those who are called to ministry promise to teach in accordance with the testimony of Holy Scripture as it comes to expression in the Ten Articles of Faith and in the Catechism of the New Apostolic Church. They exercise their ministry in conformance with the *Guide for Ministers*.

It is true for both men and women “that the ministry and the person, the exercise of ministry and the person’s abilities, are

²⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

closely interwoven”.²⁹ At the same time, the minister, whether male or female, should be aware that it is not he or she, but Jesus Christ, who is Lord of the ministry: “The ministry is not transferred to the possession of the person, nor does it leave an indelible mark on the person, but is and remains a gift of Christ, which Jesus Christ controls, and which He can grant or deny.”³⁰

In order to be able to truly serve God and human beings, it is important for ministers, whether male or female, to take their ministries seriously. They bring this to expression, among other things, by striving to acquire the knowledge and abilities that are necessary for the proper exercise of their ministry. They are to avail themselves of the Church’s spiritual and theological training opportunities.³¹

10.3 Progression in the spiritual ministry

Through their ordination, men and women receive both ministerial authority and a specific ministerial mandate to be active within a congregation, district, or Regional Church. Women can be ordained as Deacons, Priests, or Apostles. Moreover, women—just like men—can be appointed or assigned to perform leadership functions in the congregation, the district, or the Global Church.

Since the ministerial mandate applies equally to both men and women, the same respective provisions on the exercise of ministry, retirement, leave of absence, resignation from ministry, and dismissal from ministry also apply equally to both.

Under certain conditions, ministers may be granted a leave of absence from the exercise of their ministries. The *Guide for Ministers* states that ministers may be granted a leave of absence from the exercise of their ministries for personal, professional, or health reasons.

The pregnancy of a female minister can also constitute grounds for such a leave of absence. The duration of a leave of absence should not exceed a period of three years.

The District Apostle Meeting also discussed the dress code for ministers, both male and female, and came to the conclusion that all ministers, both male and female, are to wear black and white in the divine service. Attire is to be modest and appropriate to the occasion. The regional conditions are to be taken into account accordingly.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

³¹ Ibid., p. 14.

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Publisher and responsible for the content:
Jean-Luc Schneider, Zurich/Switzerland

Verlag Friedrich Bischoff GmbH
Frankfurter Strasse 233 | Triforum A4
63263 Neu-Isenburg, Germany
Managing director: Jürgen Kramer

Printing and processing:
Print Media Group GmbH & Co. KG | St.-Reginen-Platz 5
D-59069 Hamm, Germany

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Published: October 2022
ISSN 1867-867X